PRISONERS OF WAR in the camp near Moorhead

Prisoner of War Employment in Minnesota During World War II

Edward J. Pluth

THE PRESENCE of some 426,000 Axis prisoners of war in the United States during World War II is a rarely noted part of the war's history.[1] Yet many of these prisoners played a significant, if indirect, role in the American war effort by helping alleviate a manpower crisis. Initial planning within the War Department concerning the employment of prisoners on contract labor was undertaken in late 1942 following the decision to intern Axis prisoners in the United States. With the development of manpower shortages in early 1943, the War Department, in co-operation with the War Manpower Commission (WMC), the War Production Board (WPB), and the War Food Administration (WFA), initiated a prisoner employment program that, after a slow start, expanded rapidly. Although the War Department established an allocation system, by 1945 the army received requests for more prisoners than it could supply. Because agriculture, food processing, and logging (pulpwood and lumber products) received the highest priority for private contract labor, most prisoners worked in those industries.[2] In Minnesota prisoners worked primarily in food processing and agriculture, but a significant number were engaged in logging, and a few were employed by small industrial firms.

Byron Fairchild and Jonathan Grossman, in their study of manpower problems during World War II, conclude that "The extent to which prisoners of war were

[1] The figure includes over 371,000 Germans, 50,000 Italians, and 5,000 Japanese interned in over 300 camps in the United States. See George C. Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776–1945*, 91 (Washington, D.C., 1955). The *New York Times* (September 13, 1945, p. 5) gives the number as slightly more than 417,000 prisoners.

[2] Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 87–91, 102–08, 125–26. This is the only published account of prisoner of war employment and has a lengthy discussion of the World War II program.

Mr. Pluth is an associate professor of history at St. Cloud State University. He wrote his Ph.D. dissertation on the administration and operation of German prisoner of war camps in the United States during World War II.

used in specific industries and in particular localities depended more upon the limitations laid down by the Geneva Convention, on community sentiment, and upon the attitude of labor unions than it did upon the available supply of civilian labor. . . . Prisoners of war were most extensively used in agriculture, which was not unionized and in which the prisoners could be put to work in relative isolation."[3] This article will examine the prisoner of war employment program as it developed in Minnesota between 1943 and 1945, with some attention given to determining the validity of the Fairchild-Grossman conclusion as it applies to this state.

Even before Pearl Harbor the expansion of industrial production had begun to draw labor from the nation's farms. With American entry into the war, agriculture suffered growing manpower losses as the result of ever-mounting military requirements and the attraction of higher wages in the burgeoning war industries. The promise of higher agricultural prices may have encouraged farmers to plan for greater output, but the growing farm worker shortage, combined with gasoline and rubber shortages, the rationing of farm machinery, and higher labor costs, threatened to curtail farm production goals. Although the farm lobby won favorable selective service legislation in the fall of 1942, the farm labor scene grew increasingly bleak.[4]

Minnesota farmers experienced their first labor crunch in 1942, but delayed induction of needed farm workers, recruitment of local emergency help, and employment of migrant labor eased the problem. Governor Harold E. Stassen, impatient with what he considered haphazard efforts of the WMC to develop an effective farm manpower program, concerned about the impact on state farm operations, and with an eye on the approaching gubernatorial election, implemented an eleven-point program designed to alleviate the state's agricultural labor problem until such time as the federal plan took shape.[5] Although the governor's proposal was too late to be of much assistance in 1942, it helped lay the groundwork for a more formal program in 1943 that under WMC auspices served the needs of Minnesota's farmers for the remainder of the war.

The machinery for planning and co-ordinating a state-wide farm help system was set in motion in late February, 1943, with the appointment of Paul E. Miller, director of the University of Minnesota's Agricultural Extension Service, as chairman of a nine-member Farm Help Coordinating Committee.[6] Miller structured the farm help program around the assumption that the labor shortage comprised a number of separate local problems whose solution primarily lay with the local community. Miller also believed the effectiveness of the program depended on strong grass roots involvement, and he developed a decentralized system of community- and county-level committees, with his committee providing direction and co-ordination. Local offices of the United States Employment Service (USES) and the Agricultural Extension Service provided the administrative mechanism for manpower recruitment in the local areas. The plan called for utilization of all available help, including local businessmen, town and city youth, women, and the elderly. As these sources proved insufficient, the Farm Help Committee explored the availability of other emergency labor sources including, by midsummer of 1943, prisoners of war.[7]

Prisoners of war became available for contract labor in agriculture in March, 1943, but administrative problems, the concentration of prisoners in a relatively small number of isolated camps, and initial public resistance to the idea hampered their widespread utilization by the nation's farmers until the following fall. In order to facilitate employment of prisoners, the army established branch camps in areas where their labor was requested. However, certain conditions had to be met before such camps would be approved. War prisoners could only work where civilian labor was clearly unavailable. Employers who wanted prisoners had to secure a certification of need from either the county agent or the area WMC director and also provide adequate housing if no camp were nearby. As an additional safeguard to civilian labor, persons employing prisoners were required to pay the army the prevailing wage rate in the area for the type of work performed. When these requirements had been met, a detailed contract, specifying work hours, pay

---

[3] Byron Fairchild and Jonathan Grossman, *The Army and Industrial Manpower*, 193 (War Department, *United States Army in World War II*, serial 1, vol. 4 — Washington, D.C., 1959).

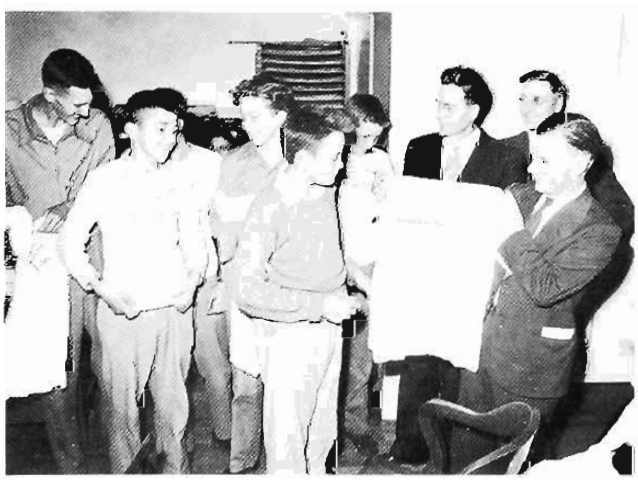
[4] *New York Times*, January 3, 1943, section 3, p. 5; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 22, 1942, p. 9; *St. Cloud Daily Times*, August 25, p. 2, October 10, p. 1, 1942. For a discussion and analysis of wartime farm problems, programs, and accomplishments, see Walter W. Wilcox, *The Farmer in the Second World War*, 83–101 (Ames, Iowa, 1947).

[5] *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 14, p. 11, July 22, p. 9, October 10, 1942, p. 1; *New York Times*, October 10, 1942, p. 1; transcription of telephone dictation by Stowe E. Elliott, n.d., Minnesota Emergency Manpower Agency, Briggs file, 1940–43, Office of Civilian Defense, in Minnesota State Archives, hereafter cited as Briggs file, OCD.

[6] University of Minnesota, Agricultural Extension Service, Farm Labor Program Annual Report, 1943, in office of director, Extension Service, St. Paul campus; state-wide reports are also in federal extension service records, National Archives, Record Group 33; *Minneapolis Tribune*, March 1, 1943, p. 13.

[7] *St. Cloud Daily Times*, December 21, 1942, p. 3, February 25, p. 2, February 26, p. 5, March 18, 1943, p. 3; radio script for WCCO's "Farm Journal," May 29, 1943, p. 2–4, Minnesota Emergency Farm Help Program, Farm Manpower, Briggs file, OCD; Minnesota Farm Help Coordinating Committee, Newsletter (St. Paul), March 14, 1943 (in MHS library); *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 20, p. 6, May 15, p. 3, June 13, 1943, Minnesota section, p. 5.

WOMEN and children were recruited to ease the manpower shortage in agriculture. Above, women from Walker and Cass Lake stop in Minneapolis in July, 1943, en route to southern Minnesota where they were to detassel corn. Below, youthful Victory Farm Volunteers from Clarkfield show off their tee-shirts in this 1943 photograph.



scale, and other conditions of employment, was drawn. The numerous regulations reflected the War Department's desire to adhere to the Geneva Convention of 1929, prevent displacement of civilian workers, avoid adverse publicity, and ensure orderly administration of the program. The Geneva Convention permitted privates — not officers — to work for the benefit of their captors, but they could not be employed in unhealthful or dangerous jobs or jobs directly related to the war operations.[8]

THE IMMEDIATE background for the consideration of prisoner labor in Minnesota lay in the steadily worsening farm help situation. Short-term seasonal labor was in great demand in commercial truck garden areas, during the pea and sweet corn pack in central and southern Minnesota, during the potato and sugar beet season in the Red River Valley, and throughout the state's grain regions at harvesttime. As the food processing areas also were major grain producers, peak demands were heaviest there. Help was usually recruited locally but was becoming more difficult to find.[9] Miller underscored the concern in April, 1943, when he declared that "All customary sources of farm labor have been dried up." Surveys of manpower needs indicated that Minnesota farmers would require 40,000 additional workers by the end of July. John F. McGovern, president of the Minnesota Canners Association, estimated that canning companies would need 3,000 workers above the local supply to assist in harvesting and processing crops. By August the situation had reached a point where state manpower officials were claiming "the most acute shortage of labor in [the] history of the wartime farm help program."[10]

Meanwhile, in late June, Miller received word from the War Department that prisoners would be available if a local need existed, provided the presence of a camp was acceptable to the community and did not reduce the demand for free labor. If Miller had any expectations that prisoners could be widely used in the grain harvest, he was soon disappointed. The War Department limited them to areas devoted to more specialized crops such as potatoes, sugar beets, and commercial vegetables where labor demand would be sufficiently concentrated to permit daily transportation from work camps. This left

[8] Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 66–67, 101–14, 120, 126. Administrative problems included disputes over wages, lack of clear employment guidelines, undue concern over security, and ineffective internal administrative channels. For more discussion of the Geneva Convention as it applied to prisoner employment, see Maxwell S. McKnight, "Employment of Prisoners of War in the United States," in *International Labour Review*, July, 1944, p. 47–64.

[9] To a certain extent, weather conditions determined the amount of help needed. Normally the processing of peas was completed before the corn pack began, but early or late ripening of either crop could mean a heavy demand for labor because of overlap in processing. A rapid ripening of corn or peas also might necessitate a double shift of workers. In the Red River Valley, a cool growing season or late rains, delaying the maturation of the harvest of sugar beets or potatoes, could demand an unusually large labor force to harvest the crop before a killing frost. About 10,000 workers were normally required for canning the pea crop, and 15,000 for the sweet corn pack, in addition to the thousands needed for general farm work. See copy of radio script, KSTP's "Land O'Lakes Program," July 6, 1943, in Farm Manpower Program, news releases, Briggs file, OCD.

[10] *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 20, p. 6 (first quote), August 4, p. 1 (second quote), June 13, 1943, Minnesota section, p. 5; *St. Cloud Daily Times*, June 17, 1943, p. 5.

A SIGN on the door of a Deer River camp building is in both English and German.

SNOW BLANKETS the camp at Deer River, above, left. Below, prisoners at the camp near Moorhead work on the roof of one of the barracks.

significant sections of western and southern Minnesota still eligible, however. Miller asked interested persons to contact him even though the Farm Help Committee did not formally discuss the use of prisoners until its July 22 meeting. At that time the committee, with no apparent enthusiasm, agreed that the possibilities should be looked into.[11]

The first formal application for war prisoners was submitted to Miller's office on July 23 by Odin J. Odegard, who operated a 700-acre potato and vegetable farm near Princeton. The possibility of using prisoners in the area had been under discussion since late June in response to an "acute need" for farm help in Mille Lacs County. Within a week of its inspection of the work area, the army approved Odegard's request for 100 prisoners of war. A group of Italians captured in Tunisia arrived from Camp Clark, Missouri, on September 5, amid much local curiosity. They remained until October 30, working at the Odegard warehouse in Princeton and loading trucks in the field.[12]

Princeton area residents voiced no opposition to the use of war prisoners, but the attempt to establish a camp in the East Grand Forks area was abandoned when strong protest developed from the Grand Forks Trades and Labor Assembly. Although the prisoners had been requested for the purpose of completing construction of a warehouse in time for the potato season, erroneous first reports indicated that they would be used at the True Foods dehydrator plant. The labor protest initially came in response to that information. R. H. Myers, president of the assembly, asserted "There is no place here for war prisoners," and indicated that employees "would not work next to men they are buying bonds to fight." John L. Whitnack, president of True Foods, claimed the labor and storage situation was serious and, while he preferred not to use prisoners, he believed "something must be done quickly" in order to successfully handle the potato crop. Major William Moiselle, who investigated the application, acknowledged the need for construction workers, but the labor opposition, and perhaps other factors, persuaded him to deny the request.[13]

Negotiations also had been under way to establish a

---

[11] Minnesota Farm Help Coordinating Committee, press release, June 23, 1943, copies in MHS library; Farm Help Committee minutes, July 22, 1943, p. 3, Farm Manpower Program, Briggs file, OCD.

[12] Odegard obtained fifty additional prisoners in early October after school officials, fearing loss of state aid, refused to let students out of school to work in the fields. *Princeton Union*, July 1, p. 1, July 29, p. 1, September 9, p. 1, November 4, 1943, p. 1; *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 24, 1943, p. 5; Extension Service, Mille Lacs County Annual Report, 1943, p. 20.

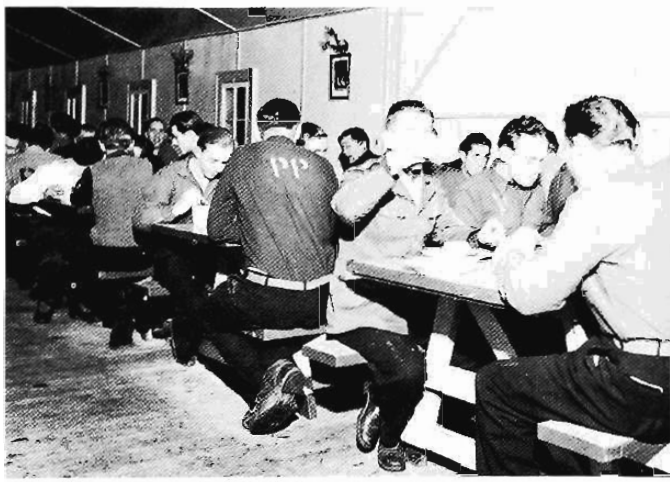
[13] *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 4, p. 1, August 6, 1943, p. 16 (first and second quotes); *East Grand Forks Weekly Record*, August 6, 1943, p. 1 (third quote); *Grand Forks Herald*, August 5, p. 10, August 6, p. 5, August 7, p. 8, August 14, 1943, p. 8; A. E. Mercher to M. C. Wilson, August 7, 1943, NARC 33.

camp at Olivia following application for 100 prisoners by the Rogers Seed Company, a hybrid seed corn producer. Community approval of the camp was obtained at a public hearing called to determine the prevailing wage rate. Italian prisoners arrived during the first week of September and left Olivia on October 25.[14]

Although of short duration, Minnesota's experience with prisoner of war labor in 1943 did have some beneficial results. Both employers expressed satisfaction with the prisoners as workers and acknowledged their economic worth. Ralph Grant, Mille Lacs County extension service agent, referring to the prisoners who worked for Odegard, called them "life savers." Prospective employers in other areas of the state, as well as the Farm Help Committee itself, drew significant lessons from the experience. By mid-September, 1943, Miller was convinced that, properly handled, prisoners were a "very important potential supply of labor."[15]

The small number of prisoners employed during 1943, in contrast to 1944 and 1945, probably can be attributed to generally adequate labor resources, the limited availability of prisoners, the newness of the program, and, possibly, reluctance by the committee and employers to utilize prisoner labor. Agricultural workers were scarce in 1943, but for the most part, farmers and food processors obtained sufficient help through intensive local recruitment programs, use of federal troops, a stay of induction for farm volunteers, and assistance from imported foreign workers. Consequently, Minnesota's use of war prisoners in agriculture in 1943 was largely experimental. It seems evident from Farm Help Committee discussions and from statements by Miller that development of the program was directed more towards planning for agricultural demands in 1944 than meeting immediate needs.[16]

MEANWHILE, in the pulpwood and logging areas of northern Minnesota, a persistent and somewhat disturbing situation assumed more threatening dimensions, creating an emergency that led to the state's first use of German war prisoners. By the fall of 1943, pulpwood and paper production, in decline since the first part of the year, began a rapid drop that soon reached critical proportions. Industry, war production and manpower officials, and congressmen expressed grave concern. According to Frank M. Rarig, WMC regional director, Minnesota pulpwood inventories as of August 31, 1943, were 28 per cent less than at the same time in 1942 and pulpwood production for the first eight months of 1943 was down 48 per cent compared to the same period in 1942. Similar problems troubled the lumber industry, also vital to the war. Throughout the Great Lakes region lumber production in August, 1943, was 30 per cent behind 1942; other logging regions reported similar declines. Concerned about the falling production and mill



MEALTIME in the camp near Deer River

inventories in Minnesota and other pulpwood regions, the American Newspaper Publishers Association sponsored a twenty-seven-state campaign, beginning in August, to urge farmers and wood lot owners to cut pulpwood. The campaign proved successful in increasing production, but it only indirectly dealt with the key issue, which was labor.[17]

---

[14] *Minneapolis Tribune*, August 7, 1943, p. 14; *Olivia Times-Journal*, August 12, p. 1, October 28, 1943, p. 1.

[15] Extension Service, Mille Lacs County Annual Report, 1943, p. 20–21 (first quote); Renville County Annual Report, 1943, p. 9; *Olivia Times Journal*, October 28, 1943, p. 1; *Princeton Union*, October 7, 1943, p. 1; Farm Help Committee minutes, July 22, 1943 (second quote), Briggs file, OCD.

[16] Farm Help Committee minutes, July 22, September 19, 1943, Briggs file, OCD; *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 6, Minnesota section, p. 5, June 22, p. 20, June 27, p. 1, July 2, p. 9, July 4, p. 4, August 2, p. 9, October 3, 1943, p. 1. Italian prisoners were not to be used again in Minnesota until 1945, and then only briefly at Wells and Warren. Italians may have been employed in 1943 because they were considered more "acceptable" and less of a security risk than Germans. After Italy's surrender in September, 1943, Italian prisoners were formed into Italian Service Units and used to a large degree in direct war work rather than in agricultural employment. See Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 93–100.

[17] United States Civilian Production Administration, *Industrial Mobilization for War: History of the War Production Board and Predecessor Agencies, 1940–1945*, vol. 1, *Program and Administration*, 694–95 (Washington, D.C., 1947); *New York Times*, May 11, p. 11, June 6, business section, p. 12, July 28, p. 27, August 6, p. 20, October 15, 1943, p. 27; *Publishers Weekly*, 143:2026 (May 29, 1943); *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 22, 1943, p. 12; *Business Week*, August 14, 1930, p. 19; Timber Producers Association, Bulletin no. 74, July 1, 1943 (in MHS library); Rarig, "Use of Prisoners of War for Lumber and Pulpwood Production in Northern Minnesota," November 28, 1943, Correspondence of the Governor, 1943–44, in Minnesota State Archives. Pulpwood was not only used to make paper, but also explosives, shipping containers, cellophane, and other important military and civilian goods.

The crux of the problem lay in the critical shortage of manpower in the woods rather than in any lack of mill capacity or standing timber. Low wages in the industry, the unattractive nature of the work, and, to a lesser extent, the draft, cut sharply into the ranks of the timber workers. Minnesota manpower officials estimated that as of November, 1943, from 3,500 to 4,000 additional loggers were needed in the state. The anticipated transfers of farmers, seasonal agricultural workers, laborers released with closing of the lake shipping season, and others would not meet the shortage. New sources of labor quite obviously had to be located in order to prevent further diminution of Minnesota's pulpwood and lumber production.[18] Concern over the situation persuaded war production and manpower officials to consider using prisoners of war. The War Department had not authorized their employment in the logging industry until September 1, but the possibility had been under discussion with government and industry representatives since May.[19]

State WMC authorities met early in October, 1943, with Minnesota timber producers and union representatives. The discussions revealed some reluctance by both groups to employ war prisoners, but despite this initial hesitancy, Rarig believed prisoner labor was needed and pushed the program "in hopes of getting action in the immediate future." Not long afterwards, timber operators from Becker and Hubbard counties met in Park Rapids, and on October 23 the area WMC director approved their request for war prisoners. As a consequence of this decision, pulpwood and timber producers were invited to meetings at Bemidji and Duluth where army representatives described the employment program.[20] Two things resulted from these meetings: the establishment of several camps and the threat of a strike by the timber workers union.

The first Minnesota contracts to employ prisoners in logging were negotiated with timber operators from Osage, Laporte, Park Rapids, Morris, and Orr in November, 1943, but these were suspended when union opposition forced the WMC to abandon temporarily efforts to obtain war prisoners. New contracts were signed in January, but they never received final authorization, apparently because the army did not approve expenditures to establish a camp at Park Rapids. In the meantime, other certifications were granted and contracts signed with timber operators in Beltrami, Cass, and Itasca counties, where prison camps were located on old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) sites near Remer, Bena, and Deer River. Arrival of the first prisoners in February and March, 1944, stimulated more requests, but an antagonistic and vigilant union made WMC officials exercise caution in approving new applications.[21]

Local 29 of the International Woodworkers of America, led by firey Ilmar Koivunen, violently opposed the employment of prisoners of war and threatened in November, 1943, to call a strike of all lumberjacks if prisoners were used. Koivunen denied the existence of a real labor shortage and regarded the request for prisoners as a union-breaking tactic. Higher wage demands, better working conditions, and union stability, not the prisoners, were the real issues in the controversy. While these grievances were legitimate, the manpower shortage also was genuine, and the union admittedly could not fill the demand. The dispute ultimately was resolved in Washington when the War Department ordered the prisoners to be used despite the union's objections.[22]

A peace of sorts prevailed after Rarig and Koivunen reached an understanding that prisoners would not be certified to operators with union contracts unless the union concurred. Since the union remained adamantly opposed in principle to any use of prisoner labor, the arrangement represented a concession, but it also meant

---

[18] *Business Week*, October 30, 1943, p. 19–20; *New York Times*, June 12, p. 19, August 13, 1943, p. 23; *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, December 30, 1943, p. 2; *Duluth News-Tribune*, December 20, 1943, p. 2; *Midwest Labor* (Duluth), January 7, 1944, p. 1, Rarig, "Use of Prisoners for Lumber," November 28, 1943; Dreng Bjornaraa to Rarig, January 19, 1944, in War Manpower Commission records, NARG 211.

[19] *New York Times*, June 12, p. 19, August 13, p. 23, August 19, 1943, p. 29; *St. Cloud Daily Times*, October 13, 1943, p. 13; Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 132; *Business Week*, August 14, 1943, p. 19–20, *Monthly Labor Review*, 58:529–30 (March, 1944). Complicated contractual agreements, financial risks, the inefficiency of prisoner labor, and union disputes tended to discourage widespread use of prisoners in woods work. James W. Deppa to H. E. Holman, April 21, 1945, W. J. Bailey to Curtis Hutchins, April 3, 1945, Hutchins to Clifton Housley, May 31, 1945, in War Production Board records, NARG 179.

[20] *Bemidji Sentinel*, November 12, p. 1, December 3, 1943, p. 1, *Walker Pilot*, December 2, 1943, p. 1; *Duluth Herald*, November 8, p. 1, November 11, 1943, p. 1, Timber Producers Association, Bulletin no. 79, December 1, 1943; Rarig, "Use of Prisoners for Lumber," November 28, 1943; Rarig to Raphael Zon, October 7, 20, 1943 (quote), NARG 211.

[21] Bjornaraa to Rarig, January 13, 20, February 4, 14, December 27, 1944, Rarig to Major W. L. Wolcott, December 20, 1943, January 14, 1944, Rarig to Vernon McGee, September 14, 1944, Don Larin to Rarig, January 3, 1944, Rarig to Bjornaraa, June 22, 1944, NARG 211; *Walker Pilot*, December 24, 1943, p. 1; *Bemidji Sentinel*, December 3, p. 1, December 24, p. 1, February 4, 1944, p. 2; *Bemidji Daily Pioneer*, December 27, 1943, p. 1; *Park Rapids Enterprise*, November 25, 1943, p. 1. As of February 14, 1944, requests for over 1,300 prisoners had been certified in Minnesota, but only about 600 were actually contracted for during the year.

[22] *Minneapolis Tribune*, November 28, 1943, p. 7; *Midwest Labor*, November 19, 1943, p. 1, February 11, 1944, p. 1; *Duluth Herald*, November 30, 1943, p. 1; Rarig, "Use of Prisoners for Lumber," November 28, 1943; Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 134; memorandum for chief of staff, December 5, 1943, memorandum for assistant chief of staff, December 17, 1945, in War Department General Staff records, NARG 165.

GERMAN PRISONERS load logs on a sled at the Deer River camp in this 1945 photograph.

the union could ensure that no prisoners would be used by union operators. As a consequence, no prisoners were used in the heavily timbered and more unionized northeastern part of the state. The union's opposition to prisoner employment persisted throughout 1944 and into 1945 but remained chiefly a political weapon wielded in an effort to secure better wages and stronger regulatory legislation in regard to lumber camp conditions.[23]

Pulpwood production for the first half of 1944 showed a noticeable increase over 1943. Nevertheless, industry officials expressed growing concern that the continued manpower shortage, deterioration of equipment, and an uncertain winter could bring about a further drop in production. Receipts did decline in the last quarter of 1944 and the first months of 1945, although not entirely for the reasons given. Because of that decline, together with an increased demand for pulpwood and lumber products, and the persistent labor shortage (about 20 per cent in February, 1945), German prisoners continued to be employed in the woods during 1945. After April, however, only the Deer River and Bena camps remained, with the latter operating on a gradually reduced basis.[24]

THE LABOR shortage also was of paramount concern to agriculture during 1944 and 1945. In March, 1944, Miller warned farmers that "so far as a shortage of farm labor is concerned, Minnesota hasn't seen anything yet." During March and April, the Farm Help Committee held several lengthy discussions on the "availability and advisability" of using prisoners. In the end, the committee authorized Miller to "make every effort to obtain for Minnesota war prisoners to be assigned to agricultural labor." But perhaps with the timber dispute in mind, or recalling the previous year's difficulty in East Grand Forks, committee members urged Miller to keep local unions fully advised of negotiations to establish camps.[25]

Representatives of the Minnesota Canners Association met with state extension service and WMC officials in January to discuss labor recruitment plans for 1944 and agreed that an effort should be made to obtain prisoners of war. The canners estimated they would need more than 31,000 workers in 1944 and could employ at least 3,000 prisoners for field and factory operations, a figure later revised upward. The companies were anxious to place applications early in order to guarantee farmers a labor supply and obtain acreage commitments from them. Some uncertainty existed at first as to whether prisoners would be available at all and there was doubt that they could be certified months in advance of actual use. After several meetings and exchange of correspondence with government and military officials, how-

[23] Harry Phinney to Bjomaraa, September 4, 1944, Ilmar Koivunen to Phinney, September 18, 1944, Rarig to McGee, September 14, October 18, 1944, Rarig to David Winton, September 28, 1944, NARG 211. The union's policy created some controversy when, in early September, 1944, it sought an injunction against the Carl W. Manners logging firm, which had requested prisoners. The union claimed that the request constituted a breach of contract. The suit was withdrawn following Rarig's rejection of the certification, but the whole incident brought some criticism of Rarig's policy from War Production Board officials in Washington, who were more concerned about timber production than union issues. See Curtis M. Hutchins to W. S. Wilding, October 12, 1944, James L. Madden to Hutchins, September 30, 1944, Rarig to Henry Paul, September 7, 1944, Mathias Niewenhaus to Harold Boeschenstein, September 19, 1944, "Factors Affecting Lumber Production, Lakes States Region-Minn.," February 24, 1945, NARG 179, Hutchins to Bardsley, October 11, 1944, NARG 211.

[24] *New York Times*, September 4, p. 26, November 28, 1944, p. 34, May 23, 1945, p. 27; *Publishers Weekly*, 146.2239 (December 9, 1944); *Business Week*, January 27, 1945, p. 22–32, *Duluth News-Tribune*, December 15, 1944, p. 7; *Grand Rapids Herald-Review*, January 17, 1945, p. 1; James S. Killen to Kenneth Abel, July 17, 1944, "Factors Affecting Lumber Production," February 24, 1945, NARG 179; POW Strength Reports, NARG 211.

[25] *Owatonna Daily People's Press*, March 23, 1944, p. 4 (first quote); Farm Help Committee minutes, March 8, 1944 (second quote), March 22, 1944 (third quote), Farm Help Advisory Committee, Correspondence of the Governor, 1945; Farm Help Committee minutes, September 19, 1943, Manpower, Correspondence of the Governor, 1943–44; *Minneapolis Tribune*, February 28, p. 16, March 9, 1944, p. 9; War Manpower Commission, news release, March 20, 1944 (copies in MHS library); *Minnesota Farm Bureau News* (Grand Rapids), April 1, 1944, p. 1.

ever, the canners received the assurances they considered necessary.[26]

In March, at the request of local nurseries and canning company officials, army officers inspected possible housing facilities for prisoners at Owatonna and Faribault, and an advance unit of Germans arrived in Owatonna on March 23 to prepare a camp. During April, the army inspected work sites at Fairmont, Sleepy Eye, Ortonville, Arlington, Le Sueur, and Cokato following requests by canning companies there. In addition to the Owatonna camp and one in Moorhead which opened in late May, branch camps were located in or near Ortonville, New Ulm, Fairmont, Faribault, Montgomery, and St. Charles during June and July. Additional camps were later placed at Howard Lake, Bird Island, and Hollandale, but these remained open only about two months.[27]

A cool and wet spring had aggravated the tight farm labor situation by delaying planting and forcing some shifts in crop patterns. As a result, manpower officials intensified their efforts to recruit emergency help. On June 5, Miller announced that some 2,800 foreign workers, chiefly from Mexico, Jamaica, and the Barbados Islands, and "about 1275" German war prisoners had been allocated to Minnesota. He doubted that this number would "anywhere meet the demand," but intense local recruiting efforts, supplemented by the imported labor, prevented any serious problems in 1944.[28]

The continued drain of manpower from farms and rural communities moved Miller to warn that the outlook for 1945 was more serious than at any other time in the war. Farm help officials indicated that most of the needed labor, as in the past, would have to be recruited from the surrounding area. Except for prisoners who remained over the winter at Owatonna, Fairmont, and New Ulm, most were returned to base camp at Algona, Iowa, following completion of their labor contracts in the fall, to return again the next spring. Colonel Arthur T. Lobdell, commander of the Algona camp, urged state manpower representatives, at a meeting in January, 1945, to consider using prisoners in critical areas by forming labor pools. Prospects brightened in April, 1945, when Miller received assurances that some 3,200 foreign workers and about the same number of war prisoners would be available. Officials also anticipated — prematurely, as it turned out — that the return of war veterans from European theaters and workers released from war industries would help alleviate the labor shortage. By mid-April some prisoners had been transferred to St. Charles and Faribault, although most of the camps in the other communities did not reopen until midsummer. One new branch camp was established at Wells in July.[29]

The weather again proved to be a significant factor in creating an abnormal demand for workers, especially

PRISONERS carry logging tools into the woods near Deer River.

[26] Bjornaraa to Rarig, January 19, 20, 1944, Rarig to James H. Bond, February 21, 1944, Rarig to Vernon McGee, April 10, 1944, Minnesota Canners Association to Rarig, February 25, 1944, Don Larin to John T. McCullen, February 19, 1944, Col. B. J. Finan to Major William Moiselle, February 10, 1944, Rarig to R. L. Wilson, February 16, 1944, Rarig to Wolcott, February 16, 1944, NARG 211.

[27] Rarig to Wolcott, March 14, 1944, Wolcott to Rarig, April 25, 1944, Bjornaraa to Rarig, March 18, 1944, Rarig to Bjornaraa, May 30, 1944, NARG 211; *Owatonna Daily People's Press*, March 25, 1944, p. 4, *Ortonville Independent*, May 18, 1944, p. 5; *Winnebago Times*, March 9, 1944, p. 1; *Bird Island Union*, August 31, 1944, p. 1; *Howard Lake Herald*, August 3, 1944, p. 1; *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, June 5, 1944, p. 6.

[28] *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, November 16, 1943, p. 2; *Montgomery Messenger*, June 9, 1944, p. 8 (first quote); *Cass County Pioneer*, June 9, 1944, p. 5 (second quote); *Minneapolis Tribune*, May 7, 1944, p. 5.

[29] *Owatonna Daily People's Press*, February 8, 1945, p. 6; *Minneapolis Tribune*, January 7, 1945, Minnesota section, p. 4; *Moorhead Daily News*, April 3, 1945, p. 2, *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, March 20, p. 6, April 12, 1945, p. 3; Extension Service, Minnesota Farm Labor Annual Report, 1944, p. 7–12, Annual Report, 1945, p. 1–9; Faribault County Annual Report, 1945, p. 42; POW Camp Labor Reports, in Seventh Service Command records, NARG 389; Karl Teufel, "History of Camp Concordia from Site Survey to Inactivation," chapter 3, n.p., n.d., in Federal Records Center, Kansas City, Missouri.

during the summer pea pack and the fall sugar beet and potato harvest. Canners, most of whom had prisoners already under contract for the season, were able to obtain additional assignments to help with the unexpectedly large pea crop. Beet and potato growers in the Crookston-East Grand Forks area, on the other hand, had generally relied on local sources and migrant workers. However, rainy weather in September delayed the potato and sugar beet harvests until the normal supply of seasonal labor was gone. Growers, fearful of loss due to frost, urgently applied for help, and with the assistance of the governor, county agents, community groups, and the army, they obtained more than 750 Germans and Italians. During the month the prisoners worked in the area, they were housed in Crookston, Ada, and Warren, Minnesota, and in Grafton and Grand Forks, North Dakota.[30]

The war prisoners in southern and western Minnesota were employed primarily by commercial canning companies and a few independent commercial vegetable growers, but the need for farm harvest labor also was a factor in their allocation to the area. Because the prisoners were under contract to the processors, they were available for general farm work only when their labor was not required in the canneries. Company officials were co-operative, however, and with the assistance of the local camp commanders, county farm help committees, and area farmers, a system was worked out, within War Department guidelines, whereby farmers could obtain prisoner labor. Local variations existed, but in general, following certification of need for labor by the county agent, farmers secured prisoners either directly through the canning company or organized committees that subcontracted for prisoners. Farmers had to apply for the prisoners, pay (usually in advance) for their labor, provide transportation, and guarantee a full day's work. Local farm or trade center committees usually collected payments, arranged transportation when necessary, set up an advance registration system, and handled the distribution of prisoners to local farms. Despite the fact that many of the prisoners were not familiar with the work, the demand for their labor was so great, especially in 1945, that the camps usually could not fill the requests. As far as can be determined, prisoners worked on farms in only seven counties in 1944 as contrasted with twenty-four counties in 1945. The difference can be explained by the greater demand for labor, a more flexible prisoner program as a result of Germany's surrender, the availability of more prisoners, increased acreages, and the vagaries of weather.[31]

EXCEPT IN northern Minnesota, most of the prisoner of war camps established in the state during 1944 were opened without protest; local employees and communities voiced no concerted opposition. The protests that occurred generally originated with organized labor and may be attributed to the position of the national organization, the local union situation, unfounded rumors, or misconceptions about the prisoner employment program. When the misgivings that lay behind the opposition were allayed, the unions often withdrew their objections. Organized labor prevented the use of prisoners of war only in Mankato and Rochester, and even there the evidence is not conclusive that such opposition was the main deterrent.

At Rochester, an inquiry by St. Mary's Hospital into the possibility of hiring prisoners to work in the hospital laundry provoked Local 515 of the State, County and Municipal Workers to charge that use of prisoners would create resentment among employees and people of Rochester and "not add to the prestige of the community." After consideration of the request, the local WMC director, George L. Sergeant, decided not to act on it. Whether the union objection was a factor in his determination is not clear. Sergeant's public explanation, that lack of facilities to transport prisoners from Owatonna or St. Charles made their employment unfeasible, seems weak, since in 1945 Germans from St. Charles were brought to the Reid, Murdock Canning Company in Rochester.[32]

Industrial labor shortages in the Mankato area persuaded officials of the Carney Rock Wool Corporation, the Little Giant Foundry, and the North Star Granite Company to investigate possible use of war prisoners, but American Federation of Labor opposition to the proposal effectively barred the way. In other communities, however, prisoners were successfully employed in such industries as brick, tile, and concrete products, poultry

[30] *Le Sueur News-Herald*, March 7, 1945, p. 3; *Wells Mirror*, June 14, 1945, p. 1; Extension Service, Minnesota Farm Labor Annual Report, 1945, p. 1–9; Norman County Annual Report, 1945, p. 50–51; Polk County Annual Report, 1945, p. 11; Marshall County Annual Report, 1945, p. 32–38; Kittson County Annual Report, 1945, p. 19–20; *Norman County Index* (Ada), October 11, 1945, p. 1; *Crookston Daily Times*, October 3, 1945, p. 2.

[31] Memorandum from Major General Styer to service commands, May 6, 1944, NARG 389; Rarig to R. L. Wilson, February 16, 1944, NARG 211; General Philip Bruton to Russell Smith, September 19, 1944, in War Food Administration records, NARG 224; Extension Service, Minnesota Farm Labor Annual Report, 1944, p. 6–12; 1945, p. 6, 8–9; Brown County Annual Report, 1945, p. 17–20, Faribault County Annual Report, 1945, p. 41–42; Winona County Annual Report, 1945, p. 44; Big Stone County Annual Report, 1945, p. 10–14; Steele County Annual Report, 1944, p. 73–76; *St. Charles Press*, July 13, 1944, p. 1; *New Ulm Daily Journal*, July 27, 1945, p. 1. War prisoners aided mainly in shocking and threshing grain, but they also helped fill silos, shock corn, bale hay, and build fences.

[32] *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, March 14, 1944, p. 5, September 21, 1944, p. 9, September 22, 1944, p. 5; Extension Service, Winona County Annual Report, 1945, p. 48.

[33] Rarig to Bjornaraa, September 12, 1944, Bjornaraa to Rarig, September 13, 1944, William Schoenberg to W. B. Lee, August 30, 1944, Lee to Schoenberg, September 1, 1944, certifications for prisoners in various correspondence, NARG 211. Rumors circulating in northern Minnesota in early 1944 that prisoners might be used in the iron mines brought inquiries and opposition from several United Steel Worker locals and denials from the WMC. Concern over unfounded rumors in the Twin Cities in 1943 prompted Rarig to address the Minneapolis American Federation of Labor business agents and explain the prisoner employment policy. See draft of speech by Rarig, October 5, 1943, Resolutions of United Steel Workers, CIO, district 33, March 8, 1944; Rarig to Wayne Kumpula, March 16, 1944, Rarig to Colonel Norman D. Dean, March 30, 1944, Harry Phinney to Bjornaraa, April 5, 1944, NARC 211; *Minnesota Union Advocate*, April 26, 1945, p 6.

processing, and commercial ice and fish operations. Union or employee opposition was either nonexistent or of no substance.[33]

Local unions at Owatonna, Fairmont, and Faribault objected to employment of prisoners, but their protests were ineffectual. The substance of their position was similar to that of the timber workers: The use of prisoners was a scheme by employers to thwart organized labor and keep wages low. The Fairmont union withdrew its objections on assurances that prisoners would be used only when all "free white labor" was employed. At Faribault the United Packinghouse Workers, asserting that the use of prisoners was "unnecessary and unwar-

". . . IT TAKES TIME TO GET USED TO THAT NAZI SALUTE . . ."

The following is an excerpt from a report of a visit made by Irving S. Anderson, rural industries supervisor, to the prisoner of war camp at Remer, February 25, 1944. The document is from the War Manpower Commission records, in National Archives Record Group 211.

The camp at Remer has 247 prisoners quartered in an abandoned CCC camp. The quarters are very satisfactory. There is plenty of room for sleeping quarters, and the kitchen and mess hall accommodate the number of prisoners interned there very nicely. There are eighteen guards stationed at this camp. The food served to the prisoners is the same as that served on the camp commander's table. German prisoners do all the cooking. The detail employed about the camp is probably larger at this time than it will be later. At present, about thirty or forty prisoners of war are engaged in cleaning up the grounds and making the place comfortable. The cold storage room had an abundant supply of pork loins and rounds of beef. We ate the regular chow served the prisoners of war, which I commended, with the exception of the potatoes. They have a way all their own of rolling the mixture of boiled and raw potatoes together into a sort of dumpling — not too bad if eaten with plenty of strong gravy.

The morale of the prisoners seemed to be exceptionally high. I'll admit that it takes some time to get used to that Nazi salute, which is used when greeting U. S. Army officers — the same as is used when they meet their own officers. However, it is their way of saluting, and our officers return the salutation with the conventional U.S. Army regulations salute.

There are three German officers in this camp — two lieutenants and one captain. One of the lieutenants, who has been appointed the Transportation Officer, took Lt. Fanning, Mr. Moore and me to the place where the pulpwood cutting was in progress. He was a very amiable sort of fellow, but showed the true Nazi characteristic of giving a civilian the part the military didn't want. In other words, farmers with teams straddled the edge of the road in the ditch while he blew his horn and roared down the road. I had a feeling his pace was a little too fast for the footing, and eventually we went into a dandy skid. He pulled the car out of this one all right by some dexterous maneuvering but did not profit by the experience, and a little later the car went into another skid which ended up in the ditch. Luckily a large truck was near by loaded with pulpwood, which pulled us back on the road. This little experience seemed to humble our speed-driving Nazi officer enough so that the rest of the trip gave us an opportunity to at least count the lakes as we went by. . .

Many of these boys spoke broken English, and I have reason to believe they were telling the truth when they said they liked it in northern Minnesota mostly because it was "shust like Germany"

Looking over these boys from a physical standpoint, I fail to see where the "superman" comes in. I would say their average height is about 5'9"; they are somewhat swarthy; and they seem quite devoid of the snappy military bearing about which so much has been said.

Another thing I noticed was the absence of guards with rifles. Either these men were concealed at strategic points at a distance, or the prisoners of war were given full privileges of the honor system. To the casual observer, they were working much the same as any other lumber camp employing free labor. . .

ranted and a detriment to the community, to the working people and to the peace of mind of the residents," apparently dropped the issue following the city council's denial of jurisdiction over the controversy. Pressure from the area WMC director, the Better Faribault Association, the Rotary Club, and the Rice County Farm Help Committee may also have convinced the union to abandon its protest. The United Construction Workers of Owatonna claimed area employers were using prisoners in an effort to replace local labor. Rarig tried to allay the union's suspicions by assuring it that civilian labor "should always have preference" over prisoners. At the same time, he asked that the union understand and accept the necessity for prisoner of war labor in the face of manpower shortages.[34]

Prisoners were employed by the Ochs Brick and Tile Company of Springfield without union objection until the local Teamsters council became embroiled in a wage dispute and demanded withdrawal of the prisoners if the company failed to negotiate. Observers for the WMC determined that the prisoners were not part of the actual dispute, and they continued to be used by the firm.[35]

A negative union attitude was by no means the only factor which prevented employers from receiving prisoners. Other circumstances frequently played a more decisive part. A number of nonunion timber operators were denied prisoners because they had not seriously tried to recruit regular labor, were not good financial risks, maintained substandard facilities for their civilian employees, or for other reasons. Other employers received certification but either withdrew it or had their applications delayed or returned for corrections. The contract for the Andrews Nursery of Faribault was delayed because the prisoners were needed for higher

[34] Hodson to Rarig, April 4, supplement B to memo from John T. McCullen to Harry Wold, May 3 (first quote); Rarig to Hodson, April 8, 1944 (third quote), W. A. Nelson to Bjornaraa, November 22, 1944, Bjornaraa to Rarig, November 24, 1944, NARG 211; *Faribault Daily News*, March 16, p. 3, April 8, p. 3, April 13, p. 9 (second quote), May 24, 1944, p. 1, *Minnesota Labor*, April 21, 1944, p. 4, Extension Service, Rice County Annual Report, 1944, p. 48–50.

[35] W. A. Nelson to Bjornaraa, November 1, 1944, V. W. Nobles to Harry Wold, December 2, 1944, NARG 211.

A GROUP of prisoners at the camp near Moorhead gathered to pose for this casual photograph.

priority work. Officials of the Minnesota Valley Canning Company at Blue Earth returned their certification for 500 prisoners in June, 1944, when they obtained Mexican labor after determining that the cost of preparing housing for the prisoners would be prohibitive. A labor shortage in Dakota County in 1944 moved farm help officials and vegetable growers to consider establishing a camp near Castle Rock, but since the prisoners would not have had continuous employment through the season, the growers agreed to use them only for the fall harvest. They later decided to rely solely on local help and did not use prisoners in 1944.[36]

In another case the A. J. Pietrus and Sons poultry processing plant of Sleepy Eye withdrew its certification after the application was held up because of inaccuracies and lack of evidence that the firm had exhausted all possibilities of recruiting free labor. Army officials rejected the initial request of Ochs Brick and Tile because the contract would not cover the costs to the government and the work had a low priority rating. With the exception of the Ochs company, which obtained prisoners later in 1944, the employers described above whose certifications were withdrawn, withheld, or returned, requested and received prisoners in 1945.[37]

MOST OF THE prisoners were housed either within communities or on the outskirts at county fairgrounds, on cannery property, or in empty buildings. Only in northern Minnesota and at St. Charles, where the prisoners were housed at old CCC camps, were they located some distance from the nearest town. Military authorities warned local residents to stay away from the camps and not "communicate, consort with, give aid or comfort" to the prisoners, but this caution was not always an effective deterrent. Community residents, on the whole, accepted the presence of the prisoners and many came to sympathize with their plight, recognizing that the prisoners, too, were victims of war and not the "supermen" of the German Nazi stereotype.[38]

Great curiosity usually attended the initial arrival of prisoners in a community but the excitement gradually declined almost to the point of indifference. For some persons, of course — those living near the camps, employees working with prisoners, those with war dead — the prisoners were more evident and stirred different emotions. Occasional incidents, such as escape attempts, prisoners singing on the way to work, dropping propaganda leaflets, or painting a swastika on a barn, served as reminders that the prisoners were still enemy soldiers. Rumors and complaints, most of them the result of ignorance of regulations governing the treatment of war prisoners, posed public relations problems rather than serious threats to the program. Most camp commanders conducted active public relations programs that not only helped defuse local rumors but also maintained a favorable community atmosphere.

By 1945 the communities had adjusted to the prisoners and, above all, acknowledged their economic value so that any real objection to utilization of their labor was practically nonexistent. As prisoners completed contract work in logging and agriculture, the camps were gradually closed. The last prisoners of war left Minnesota in late December, 1945.[39] Except for rare escape attempts, a few brief slowdowns, and the normal difficulties associated with using untrained and unmotivated help, Minnesota experienced few problems with the prisoners. Indeed, their contributions considerably outweighed any shortcomings.

Without question the employment of prisoners in Minnesota's timber, agriculture, and food processing industries was of significant economic value, although the value in monetary terms to the individual employer is difficult to assess. It was not the intent of the program that employers profit by using prisoners rather than other labor. In fact, most employers incurred additional costs, especially the expense of preparing adequate housing, even though they were entitled to certain allowances or adjustments in the contract. Moreover, prisoners were frequently less efficient than regular labor, particularly in logging. Food processors, farmers, and timber producers profited from the employment of prisoners,

---

[36] Wolcott to Miller, June 10, 1944, Rarig to Bjomaraa, June 13, 1944; *Blue Earth Post*, March 23, p. 9, May 18, 1944, p. 1; *Faribault County Register*, May 30, 1944, p. 1; Extension Service, Dakota County Annual Report, 1944, p. 116. After inspecting the facilities in which Minnesota canneries proposed to house German prisoners, the investigating army officer wrote that, "While the available housing that was inspected is suitable for Mexican and Jamaican labor due to their substandard living conditions we will not be a party to a violation of the Geneva Conference by placing the personnel in such quarters." See Capt. Richard D. Harding to Big Stone Canning Company *et al.* [April, 1944], NARG 211.

[37] McCullen to Wold, April 20, 1944, Lt. George Gilead to A. C. Ochs Co., May 3, 1944, NARG 211, *Sleepy Eye Herald Dispatch*, April 19, p. 1, June 14, 1945, p. 1.

[38] Notice from Lt. Col. Arthur T. Lobdell [1944?], (quote) in NARG 389 (the Minnesota Historical Society manuscripts division has a microfilm copy); *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, September 6, 1944, p. 1, July 6, 1945, p. 1; *New Ulm Daily Journal*, June 7, p. 1, June 9, 1944, p. 1, July 25, 1945, p. 1.

[39] *Winona Republican Herald*, June 9, 1945, p. 3; *Deer River News*, May 3, p. 1, May 10, 1945, p. 1; *Grand Rapids Herald-Review*, May 2, 1945, p. 1; Extension Service, Winona County Annual Report, 1945, p 48, POW Camp Labor Reports, NARG 389; *Owatonna Daily People's Press*, December 21, 1945, p. 8; *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*, December 12, 1945, p. 1; *Deer River News*, December 20, p. 1, December 27, 1945, p. 1. Pressure from farm congressmen and agricultural officials forced President Harry S Truman to delay repatriation of some German prisoners for sixty days so they could provide needed agricultural labor, but none were used in Minnesota in 1946. See *New York Times*, September 13, 1945, p. 5, January 26, 1946, p. 5.

but only because, in the absence of other workers, the prisoners helped prevent economically damaging timber and crop losses.[40]

The Minnesota Canners Association estimated that prisoners and foreign labor were "instrumental" in harvesting and processing 63 per cent of the 1944 corn and pea production, while in 1945 prisoners were credited with saving 65 per cent of the record-breaking pea crop, representing, in monetary terms, over 9.8 million dollars. The Owatonna press observed that "hundreds of thousands of dollars of farm and canning crops were saved that otherwise could never have been processed for commercial use." Local newspapers and county extension reports indicate the thousands of acres of grain shocked and threshed by prisoners that might not have been harvested without their help. As one paper commented, the prisoners "rendered a distinct service to the agriculture of this area." During the fall, 1945, emergency in the Red River Valley, officials estimated that the prisoners saved much of the potato crop and 34 per cent of the sugar beet crop worth over 1.5 million dollars.[41]

Prisoners were less effective in timber and pulpwood production, but they nonetheless helped cut thousands of cords of pulpwood and several million feet of saw logs, poles, ties, and other forest products vitally needed for military and civilian purposes. Moreover, this additional production may have kept some lumber and pulp mills operating at full capacity and thereby saved the jobs of regular employees who otherwise might have been laid off.[42]

Fairchild and Grossman conclude that "Without [prisoners of war and foreign labor], American farmers would have been hard put on occasion to harvest their crops and certain industries would have had greater difficulty in meeting production schedules."[43] The evidence indicates that this was certainly true in Minnesota. As to what determined where prisoners were successfully employed, the significance of different factors seems to vary with the situation. The Geneva Convention was the primary limiting factor in all instances. Its provisions, as interpreted by the War Department, determined the nature of the work that could be performed by prisoners. The civilian labor supply was also somewhat of a constant, since only with a formal certification that such labor was not available could employers obtain prisoners and this requirement was closely adhered to. There is no evidence, at least in Minnesota, that prisoners of war displaced civilian labor. The manpower shortage in logging, agriculture, and food processing may in part have been caused by low wages and poor working conditions in the industries, but the shortage nevertheless was real.

The role of community sentiment as a determinant is difficult to measure. As previously noted, communities

PRISONERS pause to have their photograph taken near a tractor on the Henry R. Peterson farm near Moorhead.

[40] The federal government sought to avoid loss on the prisoners of war. No contracts were permitted if the expected income from the contract was less than the amount it cost the government for expenses and any contract allowances. Prisoners on contract work received 80 cents a day from the government, but employers paid the government the prevailing wage rate in the area. For example, in 1944, the hourly wage was 50 cents an hour in Martin County, hand-packing operations at the California packing plant at Sleepy Eye paid 60 cents an hour, and ordinary labor at Ochs Brick and Tile in Springfield was 55 cents an hour. Much of the work in logging was on a piece-rate basis, union scale.

[41] Minnesota Canners Association to Harold C. Hagen, November 17, 1944 (first quote), NARG 33; "Use of Prisoners of War," January 8, 1944, NARG 211; "Factors Affecting Lumber Production," February 24, 1945, NARG 33; *Le Sueur News-Herald*, August 8, 1945, p. 1; *Owatonna Daily People's Press*, December 21, 1945 [p. 8] (second quote); *New Ulm Daily Journal*, August 2, 1945, p. 4; *Norman County Index*, November 22, 1945, p. 1; *Crookston Daily Times*, November 10, 1945, p. 2; *Clinton Advocate*, October 17, 1945, p. 1 (third quote).

[42] Lack of skill in timber work, absence of any incentives, inability of many operators to use more than a small fraction of the prisoners in a camp are among the major reasons prisoners were less effective. See "Utilization of POWs by Minnesota Forest Products Producers as of February 24, 1945"; "Factors Affecting Lumber Production," February 24, 1945, NARG 179; *Deer River News*, December 20, 1945, p. 1.

[43] Fairchild and Grossman, *The Army and Industrial Manpower*, 196.

generally accepted the prisoners once they had arrived. Outside of labor unions, no organized opposition seems to have existed, but had any appeared, it is unlikely prisoners would have been brought into an area.[44]

Although military and government officials expressed concern over the attitude of organized labor, opposition by unions to the employment of prisoners does not appear to have prevented their use in Minnesota. Despite the most strenuous and prolonged opposition, the timber workers union only succeeded in limiting prisoner employment in logging, not preventing it. In Faribault and several other communities, union objections had little effect, except perhaps to delay negotiations until the basis for the opposition could be determined and the dispute resolved. Union opposition seems to have been at least one factor in preventing employment of prisoners in East Grand Forks, Rochester, and Mankato, where prisoners would have worked on construction, in laundry, or in industrial labor. The fact that these industries were unionized should be noted, but not overemphasized. Security considerations and the Geneva Convention also limited the use of prisoners on construction or as industrial labor. It must be concluded then, that except for the few instances noted above, the union role in affecting employment of prisoners was negligible. For Minnesota, the evidence suggests that the shortage of manpower and favorable community attitudes were the major factors in determining where prisoners of war would be employed and located.

[44] Interviews by the author with people in Deer River, Remer, Bird Island, Howard Lake, Springfield, and other communities have uncovered no evidence of community resentment toward the prisoners. A plan to house prisoners in Moorhead was jeopardized temporarily when residents in the vicinity of the proposed camp opposed it, but selection of a different site resolved that controversy. See *Moorhead Daily News*, May 23, 1944, p. 1. No similar situation seems to have occurred elsewhere.

PHOTOGRAPHS on pages 290, 293, 300, and 302 are from the collection in the Moorhead Regional Research Center. Photographs on page 292 and those of the Deer River and Remer camps on 293, 294, 296, and 297 were taken by *Minneapolis Tribune* photographers and are now in the Minnesota Historical Society audio-visual collection. The picture on page 303 is published through the courtesy of the *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*.

TWO OF THE nine barracks at the camp near Fairmont as they looked in 1975 shortly before they were to be torn down.