



United States Army

Aliceville Prisoner Of War Camp

In 1940, Aliceville in Pickens County, Alabama was an isolated, rural small town with a population of around 2,000 located in West Central Alabama. Starting in the summer of 1943, the population swelled to almost 10,000 in one year.

Military Corner

During WWII the United States government was faced with the task of where to house a large influx of German prisoners after an overwhelmingly decisive victory at the Battle of El Alamein and in North Africa in November 1942.

Allied forces under General Bernard Montgomery devastated Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's famous Afrika Korps, which resulted in the surrender of nearly three hundred thousand Axis soldiers. The U. S. Provost Marshall Generals office looked for sites to build internment camps for the prisoners and Aliceville as well as three other sites were chosen to house the prisoners in Alabama.

The Aliceville Internment Camp held up to 6,000 German prisoners of war in 1943. The camp received its first prisoners in 1942 and closed in 1945. The majority of the prisoners were captured in 1943 from the German Afrika Korps. Under the supervision of Major Kark H. Shriver, Corps of Engineers, the Aliceville camp in Pickens County, Alabama was rapidly erected in the fall of 1942.

Up to \$75,000 per week was pumped into the Aliceville economy that fall with rooming house filled to capacity and by Christmas, the town experienced nearly total employment. The camp with 400 frame barracks was activated on December 12, 1942. However, the camp remained empty until the spring of 1943.

Colonel F. A. Prince was the commander of the Aliceville camp. Many of the prisoners had suffered from scant food and were severely malnourished so the commander made the decision to open the mess hall that night. At 2 A.M., the first night, the prisoners sat down to their first substantial meal in months. Some of the prisoners thought the abundance of food was a trick, an edible form of propaganda that would soon end, but they soon discovered this was not the case. As the camp population grew, 21,000 meals were provided daily to the 6,000 prisoners.

Life in the camp was governed by the third Geneva Convention. Early on, the United States and Britain had pledged that all their POW camps would strictly adhere to the Convention, initially adopted in 1929. This convention (treaty) defined humanitarian conditions for prisoners of war by providing a list of what was and wasn't acceptable treatment. Shortly after the prisoners arrival in Aliceville, an unknown respiratory illness occurred among the prison population and some prisoners began to die. The medical staff was at a loss as to what the illness was until doctors Captain Stephen Fleck, Captain John Kellam and Major Arthur Klippen solved the respiratory mystery.

Prisoners received 80 cents a day for their labor, wages that could be spent on "luxury items" in commissaries within the camps. "Life within the camps was so comfortable that one German prisoner wrote his family and described his temporary home as a "golden cage" and, conversely, some Alabama residents resented what they perceived as the POWs' pampering while they endured rationing. Few POWs attempted to escape, and several of those who did were killed in the attempt. The comforts of camp life discouraged most escape attempts, however." [<http://www.alabamapioneers.com/aliceville-wwii-internment-camp/>]

