

San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, June 15, 1943

## A REPORTER VISITS ANGEL ISLAND

IN THIS CAMP FOR WAR PRISONERS HE FINDS THE NAZIS FRIENDLY, BUT THE JAPS---THEY ARE ANOTHER MATTER

By TEDD THOMEY

Japanese prisoners from the Pacific or men who raced across the sands of Egypt with Rommel's Afrika Korps stop at Angel island in San Francisco nearly every week--or live there--as prisoners of war.

Quietly they pass through: silently, they work and play there.

Until the War Department gave permission for publication of facts on their internment life, few San Franciscans even suspected that three miles from their homes live men who not long ago grimly sought after the lives of members of the Allied forces.

Their prison is just one building at Fort McDowell on the island. Some German soldiers are there now. But since last March many Japanese and Nazis have passed through. The camp, as you have gathered, is a dispersal center from which prisoners are sent to inland internment places.

Life for the inmates at Angel island is routine.

Those that have stayed live in one of nature's wonderlands, atop that green and gold mountain, surrounded by jade waves of San Francisco bay.

Grass, trees and flowers flourish in rich greens, purples and yellows. To the west looms a giant streak of orange--the Golden Gate bridge. South are the bay bridge and San Francisco's skyline stretching cleanly to blue sky and whipped eggwhite clouds.

To us, that island, those bridges, San Francisco and the bay are triumphs of Nature and man.

On all sides they see beautiful waves which contain murderous riptides and eddies; on all sides threaten muzzles which will spit destruction; and everywhere they see scrawled on the backs of the shirts of their friends the letters "PW"--prisoner of war.

## WILFONG COMMANDS

Commanding officer of the camp is Major Albert E. Wilfong. He has been there since last September when the prison held only dangerous enemy aliens. Incidentally, it was set up December 7, 1941, a few hours after the Japanese smashed Pearl Harbor.

Major Wilfong is with the Ninth Service Command of the Army, which has headquarters at Fort Douglas, Utah, with him we toured the internment camp.

The Germans are good looking boys. They're men in experience, but boys in age. With one exception the men who have passed through have all been from 19 to 26 years old. That exception was 31.

Germans from Rommel's Africa Korps have made up nearly all the groups. The Japanese who entered the United States all went through Angel Island. No Italians have gone through.

The Germans are intelligent, healthy blonde fellows with long straight hair and fair skins. They are not big and average in height about the same as American soldiers.

"They are excellent soldiers," said Major Wilfong. "They are very self reliant and, except for their teeth which are poor from eating too many concentrated foods, are physically fit. They are amazingly free from all venereal diseases, not even showing signs of ever having had them."

Security regulations prevented Major Wilfong from explaining how the Germans are brought to the Bay Area, but he readily told how they are processed through the Angel Island camp and gave minute details of their life there.

"You see," Wilfong declared, "this is really a small camp. It is a clearing house. Many of the men who come here are wounded or ill from disease. Those we send to Letterman Hospital at the Presidio. We send the majority inland, keeping a few odd ones here."

## THEY HAVE RADIOS

Major Wilfong's crew photograph, fingerprint and clothe the men. This is done with the help of interpreters who speak Japanese, German, Czechoslovakian, Polish and Austrian.

"All the men are given radios and newspapers and some of them can speak English," Wilfong explained. "Some of the Germans still feel it will be only a matter of time until Germany conquers Russia and then turns on the United States and Britain."

"Apparently, all the Germans are pretty well educated," said Wilfong. "They seem to be happy here and well they might since they have the same food and clothing American soldiers do and their treatment is considerate. We don't make them work hard, either."

Most of the Germans are friendly, but the Japanese are another matter.

"Japanese are like posts," Wilfong declared. "They are inanimate; they will not smile and they radiate no personality. Those we had here were simply unknown quantities."

All of the Germans who have gone through Angel Island were enlisted men. But some of the Japanese were officers. Some of the Germans could speak English. (One German claimed he picked up the language while ill at Letterman Hospital). Most of the Japanese were able to speak English. The Japanese officers used perfect diction and their grammar was flawless.

"They were quite disgusted with us," said Wilfong, "and haughtily told us that we did not speak correct English."

## ESCAPE "IMPOSSIBLE"

The internment camp is located on the eastern side of the north end of Angel island. It consists of one two-story building propped on the steep side of the island.

No war prisoner has ever even tried to escape from the island. The internees become convinced escape is impossible in the first days of their internment, Wilfong said, when they are taken on a five mile march around its boundaries.

On their arrival at the island, the prisoners are issued regular GI clothes. The brass buttons are stripped from the U. S. uniforms and all other insignia is unstitched. Most of the Germans have adopted their new clothes enthusiastically, but a few still wear parts of their Afrika Korps uniforms.

The men keep pretty well up on the war's trend through their radios, newspapers, magazines and books. They are encouraged to write home through the International Red Cross. The International YMCA supplies them with books written in German.

"We try to keep up their morale as much as possible," said Wilfong.

Wilfong has noted that the Germans are just as appreciative of American girls as are U. S. soldiers. They carefully cut out all girls' photos in magazines and newspapers which catch their eye and plaster them on the walls of their rooms.

## TYPICAL DAY

A day in the war prisoner's life runs along the same hours of that in the U. S. Army. Here's a typical one:

6 a. m.--They arise.

6:30--Breakfast.

7:30 to 9--Clean up barracks and take care of clothing and equipment which needs mending.

9 to 11--Physical exercise. They either play in their recreation lot at horseshoe or volleyball, march around the island or work at cutting the grass, or tilling the Post's victory garden.

Noon--Dinner.

1 to 2 p. m.--Rest period.

2 to 4--Two hours of exercise as in the morning.

5:30--Supper.

The rest of the evening they devote to playing games, studying, writing letters and listening to the radio. At 9 p. m. the lights go out.

None of the German soldiers has been married. Most are Lutherans and a few are Catholics.