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Table of Contents

Articles

The Mesilla Valley in 1877: A Newspaperman's View Robert Torrez.....	1
The Pershing Punitive Expedition of 1916-17: Mission Misunderstood James W. Hurst.....	9
The Life and Death of Albert Chase Fall, 1918-1944 Nancy Shockley	19
Roger B. Corbett and the Birth of a University William B. Conroy.....	47

Student Essays

Cotton Production from 1900 to 2003 in Doña Ana County Jordan L. Kruis	59
Doña Ana County: Home of the Chile Robin Cathey.....	63

Book Review

Wolfgang Schlauch, <i>In amerikanischer Kriegsgefangenschaft: Berichte Deutscher Soldaten aus dem Zweiten Weltkrieg</i> (Experiencing American Captivity:Accounts by German Soldiers in the Second World War) reviewed by Felix Pfaeffle	65
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The Mesilla Valley in 1877 - A Newspaperman's View

Robert J. Tórréz

New Mexico in the 1870s must have been an exciting place. By this time, the territory had been settled for more than two centuries, yet the population was small and vast areas remained unpopulated. The population in the mid-1870s had not yet reached one hundred thousand, much of it concentrated in settlements scattered along the Rio Grande and its tributaries from Taos in the north, to Socorro and the Mesilla Valley in the south. As late as 1880, less than twenty percent of the population lived in the southern and southwestern portions of the territory that constituted Socorro, Doña Ana, Grant, and Lincoln counties. Visitors and newcomers saw the vast unsettled portions of New Mexico as a land of opportunity, and some became zealous promoters.

Two of the most prominent promoters of that decade were Elias Brevoort and William F. M. Amy. Brevoort's book, *New Mexico, Her Natural Resources and Attractions...* (the title continues for several lines), was published in 1874,¹ and promotes the availability of inexpensive land in the form of Spanish and Mexican land grants in which Brevoort had significant personal interests. Amy, who may have been New Mexico's most ardent promoter, did not have the financial interests in land that Brevoort did, but acquired substantial knowledge of the frontier when he served as agent for several Indian tribes. Amy pointed out that some of the best land in the territory was reserved as Indian territory and advocated the removal of these Indians to reservations in areas that would not impede the opening of New Mexico's vast frontier to new settlement.²

To promoters like Brevoort and Amy, New Mexico's potential was limitless and the future bright. In the mid-1870s, the problems of the Colfax and Lincoln County wars were still in the future. In their eyes, the frontier was being made safe as the Indians were being removed to remote reservations. During the decade, numerous military surveys were conducted by the United States Corps of Topographical Engineers. These surveys were seen locally as the harbingers of expected progress and prosperity. Above all, the railroad was coming! Newspapers, civic leaders and promoters alike eagerly reported on these surveys and any news concerning the progress of the railroad. All predicted that it was just a matter of time before the railroad, recently arrived in southern Colorado, would be coming to **their** town.

Despite the best efforts of these promoters, however, reliable information about New Mexico and its resources remained relatively scarce. Newspapers took it upon themselves to promote their region and eagerly so-

licited and published letters and reports from anyone who wrote about New Mexico's resources. Santa Fe's *The Daily New Mexican* and its companion publication, the *Weekly New Mexican* were prominent in these efforts.

On 12 December 1876, *The Daily New Mexican* launched one of the most ambitious promotional efforts attempted to date. The previous day, 11 December, the *Daily* announced that William D. Dawson, a member of their editorial staff, would embark on a trip from Santa Fe to Silver City and report regularly on "his experience and observations." When Dawson left Santa Fe the morning of 12 December, his little caravan consisted of Sergeant M. Frost of the U.S. Signal Corps and William R. Smith, a telegraph operator.³ Over the next nine weeks, Dawson reported their progress through the communities they visited along the Rio Grande. He eventually remitted twenty four reports that provide us an interesting and informative view of the New Mexico of that time. This article will be limited to the two reports Dawson wrote about his visit to that part of New Mexico that would be of most interest to the readers of the *Southern New Mexico Historical Review* - the Mesilla Valley.

Dawson and his group arrived at Fort Craig on Christmas Eve and spent the holidays in the company of its hospitable inhabitants. On 30 December they proceeded through the Jornada del Muerto and arrived at Fort Selden the evening of 2 January, 1877. The following day, they continued south and spent the next several days visiting Las Cruces, Mesilla, and Doña Ana before leaving on the final leg of their journey westward to Silver City and the mines of southwest New Mexico. The following, without annotation or editorial comment, is the text of Dawson's observations of the Mesilla Valley:

The Daily New Mexican, January 15, 1877: From Fort Selden to Doña Ana, Las Cruces and Mesilla:

At Fort Selden we were politely accommodated at the post traders spacious residence, formerly the Fort Selden Hotel, by Mr. Edward Schiffer, who is with the proprietor, Mr. E. F. Kellser, now absent on a visit to Texas. Here we found Mr. Robert Reader, a member of the signal service.

Fort Selden is located on the east bank of the Rio Grande a short distance from the river on a second bench of sand and gravel, under the shadows cast by a short lone range of mountains which rise up on the east side of the river. The Fort is 4,250 feet above the level of the sea and latitude 32 [degrees] 32' north and longitude 107 [degrees] west. It is a two company post, substantially built, and is to the south

what Fort Craig is to the north of the Jornada, a great protection to the sparsely settled country around. The Fort is on a U.S. military reservation four miles square. Here we first saw the mezquit (sic) root piled in long rows which is the principle used at the post as well as along the river south where it is found in large quantities, and when dried makes a hot and lasting fire. Twenty-five miles west [sic] are the Organ mountains, which loom up in the distance and assume that peculiar shape of organ tubes which poetically gave rise to their name; on a nearer approach however, this idea is dispelled. At the distance named, looking through a field glass in the frosty atmosphere of a January morning we could almost imagine that we heard the weird music played by unseen hands on majestic keys whose tubes were playing hide-and-seek with the fleecy clouds that had settled low down on their points - a grand, gray instrument, fitted for the winds and hurricanes which break in soft and sonorous tones where the footsteps of man have never found a resting place.

The officers of this post are Capt. Henry Carroll, commanding; Lieut. W. Goodwin, Lieut. Wm. O. Cory, A.A. Q. M., and Dr. Lewis Kennon, formerly of Santa Fe.

Three miles through a bottom overgrown with under-brush and cottonwood, brought us to Lea's station. All that is left of a former village is the station where the mail changes animals, and that seems to be endangered by the gradual encroachments of the river.

About five miles from Lea's the two immense canals which supply the Mesilla valley with water for irrigation purposes commence; they are dug through an embankment about 20 feet in depth, and the mouths are protected by willow gabions to prevent caving in. Some few miles down and across the valley on a sand bluff stands the town of Doña Ana - said to be the oldest, and at one time the most populous, town in this part of New Mexico; it has sadly fallen into decay since the settlement of Las Cruces and Mesilla in 1850, and many are the wrecks of buildings which denoted its former prosperity. A mile south of Doña Ana on the main road, with the telegraph running in front, is the tasteful residence of John D. Barncastle, one of the California "column" who has

been residing here about seven years; his vineyard contains about 9,000 vines, and he made over 2,000 gallons of wine the past season; the wine is sweeter than that made up north, and is considered to be of superior flavor.

Here, properly speaking, commences the Mesilla valley, termed the garden spot of New Mexico, and what I have already seen of it does not belie its reputation. Eight miles further south brought us to Las Cruces, a place of about 1,500 population, containing a catholic seminary, a public school and mission school under the patronage of the M.E. church; the masonic organization have a fine hall in the store of Lesinsky's building, and a large walled cemetery near the town. We called at the office of L. Lapoint, publisher and editor of the "Eco del Rio Grande;" he is a veteran in the business down this way and is printing a 24-column paper in the interest of his town and democracy; the several little Lapoints seen around indicate that he has come to stay. Las Cruces lies at the base of the foothills of the Organ mountains, and is built mainly on two long streets parallel with the river, with the business principally on the first street; the valley extending west to the river is as level as a floor and dotted all over with vineyards and orchards. Mr. C. Duper has a good hotel, the Montezuma, which was thronged with guests when we arrived, as well as the streets, as it was one of the several days commemorative of the first settlement of the valley some 26 years since; flags were flying, a circus performing, and the people generally were in holiday attire.

In the various trades and professions Las Cruces is well represented. Many of the stores are large and well furnished, and notwithstanding the complaint of stringent times which has been doled in our ears all the way down there was a semblance of prosperity that was refreshing. Your friends Lesinsky, Cuniffe, Rosenbaum and St. John are the principal merchants who deal largely in Santa Fe and the eastern cities. We also meet here Mr. Ben Schuster, of Staab & Bro., on his way to El Paso, and Mr. S. H. Newman traveling agent of the Missouri Valley life insurance company.

For three miles south, except at the old bed of the Rio Grande which ran along here some twenty years since,

we passed along a walled roadway with fine lands on either side, until we reached the shaded avenue which leads into the plaza of La Mesilla, where we put up at the "Corn Exchange," kept by the widow of Mr. John Davis who died last summer, when I will leave you until my next. YOUR REPORTER.

The Daily New Mexican, January 17, 1877: Down South - La Mesilla

Mesilla with its orchards and vineyards, its wide spreading agricultural lands and wealth of shade trees, is the most southern point of our journey. The town of Mesilla, with a population of about 2000 is pleasantly situated on the east bank of the Rio Grande, at an altitude of 3000 feet above the level of the sea; several of the highways emerging from it are broad, level and planted on both sides with cottonwood trees. The banks of the old bed of the river are distinctly visible in the most thickly populated portion of the town, which it is said to have run through as late as 1862 when the river was turned farther west under the bluffs where it continues to remain, leaving the arable lands free from inundation.

Doña Ana county, of which Mesilla is the county seat, before the territory of Arizona was organized extended west as far as the California line; and although greatly curtailed of late years it still remains quite as large as some of the small New England States. The main cereal of the county is wheat (a great deal of which had already been sown,) but corn and barley are also grown. In fruit and grapes this valley is unexcelled, and the wine manufactured from the grape is a of (sic) very fine flavor, brings good prices and has a ready sale. Much attention has been paid to importing first class fruit trees by those who are able to do so. The most prominent of this class is Mr. Thos. J. Bull, 28 years in the country from California; he has about 500 acres of land under cultivation, in which there are 14,000 grape vines and 1300 fruit trees including every variety - among them some fine fig and almond trees which came to perfection last year. Besides Mr. Bull, Messrs. Jones and son, Col. Rynerson, Frank Fletcher, Akinback, Ramon Gonzales and A. J. Fountain are also largely interested in wine making and fruit culture. Mr. Bull's yield of wine the

past season was 100 barrels from his one vineyard besides a large quantity of grape brandy.

The weather for the past few days of our stay has been delightful, reminding us more of May than of grim, chilly January, and we learn that fire is seldom needed except for culinary purposes until after night-fall in the winter months, and that the heat of summer never exceeds 90 [degrees].

In a financial point of view Dofia Ana county is very solvent, and has a good school fund. There is a public school in Mesilla, and also a private school under the patronage of the protestant episcopal board of missions, with Mrs. Guyer, recently of Santa Fe, as the teacher. Rev. Henry Forrester has purchased an excellent building, eligibly situated for church and school purposes. There is also a catholic church with a resident priest. Your special friend, Ira M. Bond, Esq., is publishing a 28-column weekly, the largest paper in the territory, with an entire outfit of new material. Mr. Bond is also a land, mine and claim agent, deputy postmaster, and a very clever and courteous gentleman, and is deserving of a much greater prosperity than usually attends newspaper enterprises in New Mexico; he is a consistent republican, and is doing pioneer work for this naturally highly favored land and liberal minded people; one of the best indications of his and the community's prosperity is the large amount of local advertising found in the "Mesilla News." Mesilla is the centre of a trade that extends as far west as Arizona, and as far east and south as Texas and old Mexico - the products of Sonora and Chihuahua being frequently sold on its streets. The mercantile profession has some very heavy representatives of which Messrs. Reynolds & Griggs, Thomas J. Bull and Mariano Barela are the principals. The hotel business is represented by Mrs. Davis, widow of John Davis of the California "column," who keeps the Corn Exchange, a very commodious and well furnished establishment. Notwithstanding the great distance of Mesilla from the railroad, when it takes in winter months from 60 to 70 days for an ox train to make the trip, and at least 30 days for a mule train, we found the market well supplied with all the luxuries and necessaries. There is a good prospect of having a railroad from east to west in a very few years, and

that the one from north to south will approach very nearly to their doors. When either of these lines of railway shall be finished it will be difficult to predict the astonishing impetus that will be given to every branch of trade and industry as well as immigration.

The law is probably as well and ably represented in Doña Ana county as in any other portion of this western land, among whom we may mention John D. Ball, S.M. Ashenfelder, W.T. Jones, Jacinto Armijo and S.B. Newcomb. Hon. John S. Crouch, senator elect of this district, lives here. For medicine, Drs. O.H. Woodworth, G.H. Oliver and WW Blake are resident practitioners, with a healthy community to work upon. Mesilla is also the residence of Judge Warren Bristol, judge of the third district, who has just completed himself a fine residence. Daniel Frieze, former probate judge and for the past two terms county clerk, one of the oldest American residents in the valley has been very courteous and accommodating in imparting information and making our stay here pleasant. YOUR REPORTER.

On 7 January 1877, Dawson and his companions left the Mesilla Valley and its "widespread agricultural land and wealth of shade trees." After a brief stop at the Rio Grande to fill their water barrels they continued their journey west along what Dawson described "as complete a desert as ever was laid down." They inspected the mines around Georgetown, Silver City, and Pinos Altos for several days, then made their way back to Fort Selden for a few days rest and supplies. His concluding report on this southern portion of their journey would make any Chamber of Commerce in southern New Mexico proud. He remarked that the climate and scenery of the region,"for evenness, mildness and healthfulness... cannot be surpassed. Glorious dawns, blue middays, golden tinted sunsets and starlighted nights! Fair Italy cannot compare with it."

Dawson apparently began the trip north from Fort Selden on 3 February, arriving in view of the snow-shrouded capitol early the morning of 14 February. In nine weeks Dawson and his companions traveled more than one thousand miles. His reports provide us with a vivid and welcome addition to our understanding and knowledge of what New Mexico looked like 1877. However, these reports have some troubling omissions. The Mexican, or Hispano, people of New Mexico, are conspicuous by their absence. Dawson mentions a few prominent individuals such as Felipe Chavez of Belen, and

Estanislado Montoya's hospitality and business enterprises at San Antonio and Fort Craig. But these are exceptions to what Dawson set out to accomplish by his tour of New Mexico. His words were addressed to potential emigrants and investors from "the states" and Europe. His view on the future of New Mexico, typical of the time, is elegantly expressed when Dawson described the open, unsettled nature of the countryside south of Belen. "Oh," he waxed poetically, "for a railroad along this beautiful river to bring population and infuse new life and energy among the quiet inhabitants along its banks."⁴

Robert J Tórrrez was the New Mexico State Historian from 1987 until his retirement in 2000. His on-going projects include a book length manuscript on William D. Dawson's trip through New Mexico in 1876-1877.

Endnotes

1. Elias Brevoort, *New Mexico, Her Natural Resources and Attractions...* (Santa Fe; n. p 1874). For a biography of Army, see Lawrence R. Murphy *Frontier Crusader - W. I. M. Amy* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1972).
2. William F M. Amy, *New Mexico: Its Agricultural, Pastoral and Mineral Resources* (Santa Fe: Manderfield and Tucker, 1873).
3. Maximilian (Max) Frost later became an editor and owner of *The New Mexican*. He also held several positions in the territorial government, including Adjutant General under Governors Lionel Sheldon and Lew Wallace. He may be best known for his campaigns against lawlessness in northwest New Mexico in the early 1880s.
4. "From Belen to Sabinal," *The Daily New Mexican* (Santa Fe), 26 December 1876.

The Pershing Punitive Expedition of 1916-17: Mission Misunderstood

James W. Hurst

On 10 March 1916, the day after Francisco Villa's raid on Columbus, New Mexico, the White House issued the following press release:
An adequate force will be sent at once in pursuit of Villa and with the single object of capturing him and putting a stop to his forays. This can and will be done in entirely friendly aid of the constituted authorities in Mexico and with scrupulous respect for the sovereignty of that Republic.¹

Newspapers across the United States posted variations on the New York *American's* powerful headline: "FUNSTON TOLD TO GET VILLA DEAD OR ALIVE!"²

On the same day, Major General Frederick R. Funston, United States Army, Commanding General of the Southern Division at San Antonio, Texas received the following orders:

You will promptly organize an adequate military force under the command of General J. J. Pershing and will direct him to proceed promptly across the border in pursuit of the Mexican band which attacked the town of Columbus...These troops will be withdrawn to American territory as soon as the de facto Government of Mexico is able to relieve them of this work. In any event the work of these troops will be regarded as finished as soon as **Villa's band or bands are known to be broken up.** [emphasis added].³

Thus began in the minds of the American people the confusion over the Punitive Expedition's mission that has persisted to this day.

On 13 March the following telegram was dispatched by the War Department:

The President desires that your attention be especially and earnestly called to his determination that the expedition into Mexico is limited to the purposes originally stated, namely **the pursuit and dispersion of the band or bands that attacked Columbus, N.M.** [emphasis added].⁴

At about 12:20 AM on 16 March 1916, the West Column of the Punitive Expedition crossed into Mexico from Culberson's Ranch in the New Mexico Bootheel to be followed shortly by the East Column, which crossed at Palomas, Mexico. The two columns consolidated at Colonia Dublan, Chihuahua and began preparations to carry out their orders.

Following his retreat from Columbus, Villa had halted at the Boca Grande River near Vado de Fusiles to assess his losses. By Villa's own count, about one hundred men were unaccounted for as killed, wounded, or missing. Another twenty-six wounded had been carried away.⁵ By 12 March Villa and his scattered forces, three hundred and eighty men, were reunited at Corralitos Ranch.⁶ The indifferent attitude of the de facto government, or Carranzista,⁷ forces in the vicinity allowed Villa to continue his southward movement, grazing his horses, slaughtering cattle, and on occasion impressing men into his ranks.⁸

On 27 March Villa divided his newly organized force of four hundred and fifty men and launched a three-pronged pre-dawn attack on Carranzista forces in Guerrero, Minaca, and San Ysidro. The Minaca garrison was caught sleeping and surrendered; the Guerrero garrison engaged the Villistas for five hours before surrendering. At San Ysidro, the numerically superior Carranzistas easily repulsed the attacking force of some sixty men and launched a counter-attack. Villa led his reserve force of forty Dorados in a successful charge against the Carranzistas, who retreated in the belief that they were faced with a numerically superior force. Returning from the charge, Villa was wounded in the left leg between the ankle and the knee and taken to a suburb of Guerrero in the company of ten Dorados.⁹

The Villistas' victory celebration the evening of 28-29 March was cut short by the appearance of three hundred and seventy American troops of the Seventh Cavalry under Colonels George F. Doss and James B. Erwin. The sudden arrival of the American cavalry resulted in the division of the Villista force into three detachments¹⁰ each with orders to find its own way to Arisiachic. In the fighting that followed, the Villista forces lost fifty-six killed and thirty-five wounded; the American casualties were five wounded.¹¹ The fight at Guerrero marked the beginning of the disintegration and dispersal of Villa's forces. A contemporary weekly, *Outlook*, reported:

It is evident that Villa has been harder pressed than he expected. He has left his wounded behind him, has strewn the road with dead horses, and has forced into his service unwillingly Mexican young men from the villages through which he has passed.¹²

Villa, unable to ride, was carried from one hiding place to another until 13 April when he was taken to a house in Santa Cruz de Herrera, where he would remain until 31 May. Between Guerrero and the end of May, in eight engagements with Expedition unit¹³ Villa's forces lost two hundred and seven killed and one hundred and fifteen known wounded.¹⁴ Many of Villa's

top officers were killed or incapacitated through wounds. By late June, the Punitive Expedition was concentrated in the vicinity Casas Grandes and had suspended "...all active operations in pursuit of the Villistas...There were no organized Villista bands for which to search."¹⁵ The Expedition had executed its orders successfully: Villa's band or bands were broken up and in hiding along with their chief.¹⁶

In regard to the Villistas who had attacked Columbus, Pershing's report summarized the Expedition's work as follows:

Of the total number of 485 Villistas who attacked Columbus, N.M., March 9, 1916, two hundred and seventy three have been reported killed; one hundred-eight wounded who were not captured; nineteen are held in confinement by U.S. troops; and one hundred and fifty six are still at large, of whom sixty have been amnestied by the de facto government, leaving thirty-seven unaccounted for.¹⁷

Why, then, in view of the competent manner in which the Expedition carried out its orders, has it been so widely judged a failure?

At least five reasons suggest themselves: 1) as we have already seen the mistaken belief that the Expedition's sole mission was to capture Villa; 2) the Expedition's long (eight month) period of inactivity and the subsequent impression that it could, in effect, do nothing against Villa's bandits; 3) the fiasco at Carrizal; 4) Villa's resurgence; and 5) the subsequent growth of the "Villa Legend." At least three of the reasons suggested were tied to President Woodrow Wilson's political philosophy and to his domestic political circumstances.

President Wilson's political position was vulnerable. For two years he had led America on the path of neutrality in the European War of 1914, and he believed strongly in each nation's right to determine its own destiny, by revolution if necessary. But 1916 was a presidential election year, and as only the second Democrat elected since Buchanan in 1856, Wilson was acutely aware of how precarious his hold on the White House really was. He would find it impossible to run on the slogan "He kept us out of war!" should the United States find itself in a war with Mexico.¹⁸ After Columbus pressure came from Congress and throughout the country to do something. Under a favorable interpretation of the reciprocal crossings agreement, troops under the command of General John J. Pershing crossed the border.¹⁹

Wilson's commitment to a policy of intervention on the one hand, but of limited military action on the other, goes far to explain the public's perception of failure on the part of both Pershing and his Expedition. Few

at the time understood how direct Wilson's control over the Expedition really was and how determined he was to avoid a war with Mexico's de facto government.²⁰ It was Wilson's decision to limit Pershing in his pursuit of the Villistas and to withdraw the Expedition into northern Chihuahua. He hoped this strategy would preclude any further encounters with either Villistas or Carranzistas and thus reduce the likelihood of war.²¹ In so doing, however, Pershing had "...recast Pershing's mission from the pursuit of Villa into a means of pressuring Carranza."²² Unfortunately the limits placed on Pershing's command resulted in a resurgence of Villa and his followers:

When Villa learned that [Wilson] had hobbled the American Army he came out of hiding, called his scattered forces together, marched at will and unopposed through the State of Chihuahua, even capturing the capital city, and grew stronger than he was at the time of his attack on Columbus....²³

Pershing's presence in Mexico, albeit now a passive one, was Wilson's gambit in his hope "...to gain concessions from the Carranza government [and] for assurances on the protection of property and a claims commission..."²⁴

The increasingly strained relations between the Wilson administration and Mexico's de facto government resulted in a hostile clash between Expedition forces and de facto troops at Parral 12 April 1916.²⁵ On 16 June 1916, General Treviño, Commander of de facto troops in northern Mexico, informed General Pershing that American troops would be attacked if they moved in any direction other than north. Informed of rumors of eight to ten thousand de facto troops near Villa Ahumada, about one hundred miles northeast of Durban, and threatening his lines of communication, General Pershing ordered cavalry to reconnoiter in that direction.

Troops C and K, Tenth Cavalry, were dispatched and on 21 June what should have been a routine patrol turned into a deadly confrontation at Carrizal, about ten miles from Villa Ahumada. Two of the three American officers were killed, the third wounded; seven troopers were killed, twelve were wounded, four were missing, and twenty-four were taken prisoner.²⁶ The tactical conduct of the fight on the part of Captain Boyd, the officer in charge, was indefensible; the political result was to bring the United States and Mexico to the brink of war.²⁷ Fortunately the de facto government freed the prisoners on 28 June and the following month a Joint High Commission was established to wrestle with the problem of American troops in Mexico. Villa, emboldened by the restrictions placed on the Expedition and the fiasco at Carrizal, began to harass Carranzista garrisons. By July his wounded leg no longer hampered his mobility and at the head of a thousand

men, he pressed northward raiding, looting, and augmenting his ranks with fresh recruits. By mid-September he claimed Chihuahua City and when Pershing requested permission to attack Villa's forces, his request was denied by the Secretary of War. Villa boasted that he would drive Pershing out of Mexico and that he would "...make a gap between the countries so wide and deep that no americano will ever be able to steal Mexican land, gold or oil."²⁸ Villa's resurgence and the apparent impotence of the Expedition went far to create the Villa Legend. While calling on all Mexicans to join him in the fight, in reality he "...dedicated most of his resources to war against Constitutionalist forces and religiously avoided confrontation with Pershing's men."²⁹ Any attempt to assess the effectiveness of the Expedition finds that the legends have created roadblocks on the path to the truth and distorted history in portraying Pershing's strategy as inept and ineffective.

The Villa Legend was made possible by the fact that Villa's early life witnessed the advent of the typewriter, the telephone, linotype, the automobile, the Kodak camera, the first motion pictures, wireless telegraphy, the airplane, and the radio.³⁰ Each in its way would contribute to Villa's legend, and oddly enough it was the American press that was responsible for most of the early legend. In the days before his defeat at Columbus and the subsequent routing of his bands by the Punitive Expedition, Villa had a coterie of journalists wherever he traveled, and he went to great lengths to secure their comfort. In return they provided him with what today would be called "good press," and American public opinion was shaped in a generally favorable direction.

Cartoonists from the Peoria *Transcript* and the Newark *Evening News* portrayed a frustrated Uncle Sam trying to swat a flea named Villa. In the New York *Tribune* and the New York *Evening Sun* an equally frustrated Uncle Sam unsuccessfully chased a Mexican jumping bean labeled "Villa." Editorial cartoons from around the country portrayed a frustrated and confused Army: in the Brooklyn *Eagle* a cavalryman attacked a cactus patch with his sword looking for a Villista; a singing Uncle Sam poured a ladle of water labeled "U.S. Army" on the raging inferno of Mexico. For a time the European War had a competitor in the American press and that competitor was not Carranza or the Mexican Revolution, it was Villa.

The early tales of his banditry and cattle raiding provided stories to be told and exaggerated by the peons of Chihuahua. Anecdotes of his violent temper and terrible vindictiveness both horrified and fascinated listeners, and narratives of his sexual athleticism were told and retold with much gusto.³¹ In addition to the newspaper press, both Mexican and American books extolled

Villa's role as a legendary hero. A photographic record unparalleled in the annals of bandit-heroes spread the legend, and motion pictures gave an unprecedented boost to his notoriety. In Mexico hundreds of *corridos* celebrated Villa as the hero of the common people, and of the four battle hymns of the Revolution two, *Adelita* and *La Cucaracha*, are associated with Villa and the Division of the North. In the *corridos*, the Legend grew: "The hero of humble origin is raised to a pinnacle of success and then dogged by repeated calamities which end with that final indignity—the despoiling of the hero's grave."³²

In more recent decades as the twentieth century drew to a close, Villa has been characterized as a romantic hero, a vengeful bandit, and as a social idealist. His latest biographer presents Villa as a patriot who, in his attack on Columbus, attempted to sabotage an agreement he believed existed between President Wilson and First Chief Carranza that would have made Mexico an American protectorate.³³ The myths, the legends, and the folklore now surrounding Villa have made of him either a hero or a villain for all seasons: one is free to make of him what one wants him to be. And herein lies the difficulty in assessing the Punitive Expedition.

Stripped of the myths and fables of *corridos* and folk tales, however, the story is a far different one:³⁴ "The naked truth is that Pershing harried Villa closely, killed his chief officers as well as most of his men, and kept him on the run. Only in folklore did Pancho Villa personify the Lion of the North."³⁴ According to Ana Maria Alonso, the Expedition had serious consequences in Villa's heartland, the mountains of Chihuahua:

it helped destroy the Villa movement there, dispersing the local *villista* bands, killing key leaders such as Candelario Cervantes, and occupying former *villista* strongholds, including Namiquipa. By mobilizing former *villista* sympathizers in *anti-Villista* militias, American intervention contributed to the destruction of Villa's bases of support in the *pueblos*.³⁵

Alonso's study also illuminates a part of the Expedition's story so often overlooked: the success Pershing had in securing the goodwill and cooperation of the Mexican people with whom his forces came into contact. In March the rural population of Chihuahua was hostile and uncooperative; by April attitudes had changed, and in Namiquipa the *namequtpenses*, as well as other peasants throughout the Santa Maria Valley, were collaborating with the Americans, selling them supplies and, more importantly, providing

military intelligence which aided U.S. forces in dispersing *villista* bands and capturing *villistas* who had gone to Columbus.³⁶

In addition to the cooperation just described, in May the *Namiquipa defensa social* was formed with one hundred and fifty-five members and a similar peasant militia was formed in Cruces. *Namiquipa's* civil guard contained a significant number of *jefes de familia* and actively assisted American forces in arresting a number of local *Villistas* who had been among the raiders at Columbus.³⁷

Perhaps the best answer to the question of the Expedition's military effectiveness was written several decades ago by Clarence C. Clendenen:

Legend and myth to the contrary, Pancho Villa... did not play fast and loose with the Americans. Far from being clever warriors who made the Americans seem ridiculous, Villa's men proved in fact to be inept soldiers who were surprised with almost monotonous regularity—and with disastrous results for themselves. By the end of May 1916, there was not a single *Villista* band remaining with more than a handful of men. They were scattered, without central direction or leadership, and thoroughly demoralized. The Punitive Expedition had carried out its orders and accomplished its assigned mission in little more than two months.³⁸

President Wilson, on the other hand, had failed in his attempt to use the Expedition as a lever to gain the de facto government's acceptance of his policies toward revolutionary Mexico. First Chief Carranza's government steadfastly refused to discuss policies of securing border stability, compensation for American financial losses, and the future formation of a commission to discuss issues of mutual concern until American troops were withdrawn. President Wilson's desire to gain some degree of control over the direction of the Mexican Revolution was successfully impeded by First Chief Carranza's strong message of Mexican nationalism.³⁹

Shortly after his reelection in November, Wilson decided to withdraw American forces from Mexico. In January 1917 the Constitutionalist victory over Villa at Torreón gave the President his opening. He announced that First Chief Carranza had the situation in hand and ordered that preparations be made to withdraw the Expedition. Finally, with the problems of the European War pressing in, Wilson ordered the troops home. He had succeeded in avoiding a war with Mexico, but just two months after the last units of the Expedition crossed the border into the United States, a reluctant President asked Congress for a declaration of war on Germany.

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Endnotes

1. Arthur S. Link, *The Papers of Woodrow Wilson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 38:287. Hereinafter PWW.
2. New York *American*, 11 March 1916."The State Department, being most solicitous that the expedition should not appear directed against the *de facto* government of Carranza, gave an impression to the newspaper men that its purpose was to catch Villa, which led to the 'Catch Villa' slogan of the headlines, with its man-hunt zest." Frederick Palmer, *Newton D. Baker. America at War* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1931), 1:13.
3. PWW, 36:285-86.
4. Col. Frank Tompkins, *Chasing Villa: The Last Campaign of the U. S. Cavalry* (Silver City, N. Mex: High Lonesome Press, 1996), 218.
5. Major-General John J. Pershing, *Report of the Punitive Expedition* (Hereinafter RPE) Colonia Dublan, Mexico, 10 October 1916 (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College Library), 100. Villa's casualties at Columbus amounted to just over twenty-five percent of his attacking force. Among the wounded carried away were General Pablo Lopez and Lt. Colonel Cruz Chávez. The afternoon of 10 March Chavez died at Acensión, Chihuahua.
6. *Ibid.*, 100-01.
7. On 26 March 1913 Venustiano Carranza became *Primer Jefe* (First Chief) of the *Ejército Constitucionalista* (Constitutionalist Army), hence the name Carranzista for forces loyal to the *de facto* government.
8. General Pershing would later report: "The local Carranzista commanders are doing little or nothing to save their country from the ravages of this bandit. The fact [is] that these northern commanders... do not appear to want peace established. They...form a clique to run things in Chihuahua themselves. They collect the taxes and dispose of the products of the mines and ranches for their own benefit. They make only a flimsy pretense of hunting bandits..." Pershing to Funston, 2 November 1916. Quoted in Tompkins, *Chasing Villa*, 217.
9. *Ibid.*, *passim*, 105-106. "Villa might have been shot by one of the recruits he had forced into his army. Later some soldiers claimed that they wanted to kill Villa and join the Constitutionalist forces. The blame for Villa's misfortune, however, could not be traced. Villa would certainly have retaliated had he known of a conspiracy." Joseph A. Stout, Jr., *Border Conflict: Villistas, Carranzistas, and the Punitive Expedition 1915-1920* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1999), 111 n. 17 [quoting Frederico Cervantes, *Francisco Villa y la revolución*, 541-

- 42.]
10. The division was as follows: Colonel Cervantes with two hundred men; General Beltran with one hundred and seventy men; General Fernandez, Villa's escort, the wounded, and Villa with one hundred and thirty men. *Ibid.*, 107-108.
 11. *Ibid.*, Appendix, 94.
 12. *Outlook*, 5 April 1916, 772.
 13. The engagements were Agua Caliente (1 April), Agua Zarca (7 April), La Joya (10 April), Verdi River (20 April), Tomochic (22 April), Ojos Azules (5 May), San Miguel de Rubio (14 May), Alamillo Canyon (25 May), and Santa Clara Canyon (9 June). *Ibid.*
 14. *Ibid.* Six American were killed and nineteen wounded.
 15. Clarence C. Clendenen, "The Punitive Expedition of 1916: A Re-Evaluation," *Arizona and the West* 3 (Winter 1961): 319.
 16. When asked during an interview in Juarez in 1965 how Villa managed to survive Pershing's pursuit, his last wife, Señora Soledad Señez de Villa, replied: "He had no place to eat or nothing to eat. The Americans came so fast, he was never able to sleep a full night. His followers were finally reduced to seven. Villa had told his men that as the chase increased they must save their Own hides. They suffered much from weariness and hunger Haldeen Braady, *The Paradox of Pancho Villa* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1978), 72.
 17. *Ibid.*, Appendix M, 97.
 18. Wilson was beleaguered throughout the campaign of 1916 by critics who questioned his slogan, given the presence of troops in Mexico, and by those who wanted a more vigorous approach to the pursuit of the Villistas responsible for the attack on Columbus. See Linda B. Hall and Don M. Coerver, "Woodrow Wilson, Public Opinion, and the Punitive Expedition: A Re-Assessment," *New Mexico Historical Review* 72 (April 1997): 191.
 19. The policy of reciprocal crossings dated from the nineteenth-century Indian wars. It permitted both American and Mexican army units "in hot pursuit" of hostile Indians to cross the international border without first securing permission. For a more thorough discussion of the question, see J. Fred Rippy, "Some Precedents of the Pershing Expedition into Mexico," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 24 (April 1921): 292316, and James B. Scott, "The American Punitive Expedition into Mexico," *American Journal of International Law* 10 (April 1916): 337-40.
 20. Hall and Coerver, "Woodrow Wilson," 186. 21./*ibid.*, 191.
 22. Andrew J. Birtle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency and Contingency Operations Doctrine 1860-1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, U.S. Army, 1998), 208.
 23. Tompkins, *Chasing Villa*, 219.
 24. *Ibid.*
 25. Losses at Parral were two Americans killed and six wounded; forty Carranzistas were killed and an unknown number wounded. *RPE*, Appendix J, 94. Following Parral, Pershing requested authorization from Wilson to take control of the state of Chihuahua, but Wilson refused and ordered Pershing to fall back to Dublan. After just a month of hunting Villistas, the campaign was effectively over. Bittle, *U.S. Army Counterinsurgency*, 204.
 26. *PWW*, 38: 379. Pershing's report placed American casualties at nine killed, twelve wounded, and three missing; Mexican casualties were

- placed at forty-two dead and fifty-one wounded. *RPE*, Appendix J, 94.
27. Karl Young, "A Fight That Could Have Meant War," *The American West* 3 (Spring 1966): 23.
 28. Haldeen Braady, *Pershing's Mission in Mexico* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1966), 60.
 29. Stout, *Border Conflict*, 122.
 30. Nancy Brandt, "Pancho Villa: The Making of a Modern Legend: *The Americas* 21 (July 1964): 146
 31. *Ibid.*, 146-47. Brandt quotes Martin Luis Guzman on Villa's philosophy: You must never do violence to women. Lead them all to the altar; you know these church marriages don't mean a thing... And what could be better than an easy conscience and a nice friendly understanding with women you take a notion to? Don't pay any attention if the priest objects or grumbles; just threaten to put a bullet through him." Guzman, *The Eagle and the Serpent* translated by Harriet de Onis (New York 1930), 310.
 32. Haldeen Braady and John H. McNeevy, "Francisco Villa in Folk Songs," *Arizona Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1954): 16.
 33. Friedrich Katz, "Pancho Villa and the Attack on Columbus, New Mexico," *American Historical Review* 83 (February 1978), *passim*. Katz admits that there was no such agreement, but that a plot along similar lines had been developed by Mexican conservatives, American businessmen, and the U.S. State Department. When aired at a Cabinet meeting in Washington, both President Wilson and Secretary of State Bryan rejected it. Katz, "Communications," *American Historical Review* 84 (February 1979), 306. See also Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
 34. Braady, *Myths*, 195.
 35. Ana Maria Alonso, "U.S. Military Intervention, Revolutionary Mobilization, and Popular Ideology in the Chihuahuan Sierra, 1916-1917," Daniel Nugent, Ed., *Rural Revolt in Mexico and U.S. Intervention* (San Diego: Center for Mexican-U.S. Studies, 1988), 225.
 36. *Ibid.*, 216.
 37. *Ibid.*, *passim*, 218-19.
 38. Clendenen, "The Punitive Expedition of 1916," 318.
 39. See Mark T. Gilderhaus, *Diplomacy and Revolution: US-Mexican Relations Under Wilson and Carranza* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 32-52, *passim*.

The Life and Death of First Lieutenant Albert Fall Chase 1918-1944

Nancy E. Shockley

For the past year, I have been researching the life and death of First Lieutenant Albert Fall Chase. The journey started with a three-inch collection titled the Albert Fall Chase Papers, 1941-1951 in the Rio Grande Historical Collection at the New Mexico State University Library. Albert's sisters, Emadair Chase Jones of Las Cruces and Mary Chase Roberts of Alamogordo have been gracious in sharing memories with me about their brother's life and have filled in some critical gaps as my research progressed. Researching Albert Chase has led me to Albuquerque and St. Paul, Minnesota where I have met and talked with several veterans who knew Lieutenant Chase in the Philippines both prior to and after the surrender on Mindanao on 27 May 1942. In particular Fred Fullerton of Tyler, Texas, who was with Lieutenant Chase at Iligan and Davao, has been incredibly helpful in his personal recollections and attention to detail. All survivors speak respectfully of Chase's leadership and fondly of his humor and humanity. While Lieutenant Chase's story opened up a previously unknown area of scholarship I have also come to appreciate the history and dignity of the people of southern New Mexico who honor and cherish their history.

On 9 December 1941, Alexina Fall Chase wrote a letter to her children reflecting the anxiety that all parents were experiencing in the aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Glued to the radio for the previous two days, Mrs. Chase had been listening for any mention of what was going on in the Philippines, where her eldest son, First Lieutenant Albert Fall Chase, had been stationed since June. She wrote, "You would think that you were the only boy who ever went to war from this part of the country from the way people are inquiring about you the first thing every one asks, is where is Albert?"¹ The letter was returned with RETURNED TO SENDER SERVICE SUSPENDED stamped on the front of the envelope.

Albert Fall Chase was born on 10 May 1918 in Anaheim, California

while his parents, Clarence and Alexina Fall Chase, were visiting friends. A telegram arrived that afternoon from his aunt Jouette Fall Elliott (affectionately called "Bug") of Pueblo, Colorado proclaiming that,"with a name such as that the sky should be his limit."² Albert was the second of five children and the oldest son. The Chase family lived in El Paso, Texas, as well as in Tularosa and Ruidoso, New Mexico. As with many children during the Depression, Albert matured at a young age, taking on responsibilities for his younger brothers and sisters. As a southern New Mexican, he was raised to be self-reliant, responsible and to respect the land. Summers were spent at his grandparents' Three Rivers Ranch horseback riding and exploring the mountains and basin area. While his grandfather's library provided him with hours of reading, ranching life taught him how to put things together and make them work.

Albert's father, Clarence Chase, owned and operated a cotton gin in Tularosa until 1937³, when he entered into the real estate business in Ruidoso with his cousin, Mahlon Everhart. Their plan was to turn the mountainous area into a resort where people could get away from the summer heat in the basin and enjoy the winter snows. His mother spent time in El Paso, Texas taking care of her father, Albert Bacon Fall, whose health and fortune had deteriorated in the years following his imprisonment after the Teapot Dome trial. She also helped her mother, Emma Fall, with running two businesses in El Paso and at Three Rivers.

Those who lived in rural areas during the depression endured long bus rides to schools which served ranching and farm communities. Mary Chase Roberts, Albert's younger sister, remembered how he would get the pot-bellied stove started early in the morning in order to get everyone ready for school.⁴ Sisters Emadair and Mary remember that whenever someone needed information they always asked Albert.

A 1936 graduate of Tularosa High School, Albert was well-liked by his classmates and participated in many school events. He studied Spanish and won the Governor's Essay Award for his description of the Carlsbad Caverns. Family and friends remember one particular sentence from the essay that read,"The caverns could sober up an intoxicated man and intoxicate a sober man."⁵ Albert also participated in two school musicals, one in which he portrayed a Cossack soldier in the chorus.⁶ He developed a wry sense of humor which gave him a realistic outlook on situations, partnered with an optimistic nature that would get him through some of the tougher times ahead.

Albert spent his summers working in cowboy camps or in the mines in Sonora, Mexico through his father's business associates. In an 8 May 1937 letter to a friend, Chase wrote that "Albert speaks Spanish well, having studied

it in High School. He has spent considerable time with cowboys on the range in the Three Rivers country and has been left for weeks at a time by himself in an isolated outpost line-camp. He is a better than average cook in either camp or kitchen, and is ready to tackle any job that comes along.”⁷

In 1936 Albert began his studies in civil engineering at New Mexico Agriculture and Mechanical Arts College in then State College, New Mexico (now New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico), Albert wrote to his parents, “If I can only get a good start I know I can make a go of it. I’d hate to have to lay out a year because everyone has said I could make it.”⁸ Albert also participated in the college’s Army ROTC program.

Charles (Charley) Graham and Gerald Greeman became two of Albert’s best friends during his college years. Greeman would become the personnel officer for New Mexico’s Two Hundredth Coast Artillery, surviving both the Bataan Death March and slave labor in Japan. Graham, a Staff Sergeant in the U.S. Army, was stationed at Buckley Field in Colorado during the war and would go on to provide vocational counseling for soldiers receiving medical discharges from the Army.⁹ Due to the exorbitant cost of \$7.50 a month for dorm living, Albert moved into the rooming house Charlie Graham’s mother ran in Mesilla Park in order to save money. Graham later wrote to Albert’s parents that during that year, he and Albert became close friends. Sometimes they went to the William Beaumont General Hospital to visit Albert’s grandfather.¹⁰

In order to stay in school, Albert took on jobs through the college engineering department mostly in connection with the construction of new buildings. He also earned twenty-five cents an hour cleaning buildings and worked briefly in a Las Cruces law office. At the end of his first semester, Albert wrote his “Aunt Bug,” “Like all college students I need money to live on until I can get in enough work to justify borrowing some from the college. I’ve been getting practice as a Santa Claus up here. You know - coming down chimneys and things -. Last Saturday, I drew the job of removing the brick lining from the inside of a forty-foot smokestack out at the college and I don’t envy Santa any.”¹¹

When not working or studying, Albert was involved in several campus



Albert Fall Chase, Swastika, New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts Yearbook, 1938, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University Library.

activities, ranging from The Engineering Club to the chartering of the Sigma Alpha Omicron fraternity. The front page of the 12 January 1938 edition of the campus newspaper, *The Roundup*, shows a photograph of the fraternity's "founding fathers."¹²

Albert began his final semester in college in the fall of 1939 as Hitler's armies invaded Poland. Assured that his position in ROTC did not immediately transfer as service in the United States Army, he continued to pursue his studies in civil engineering. A long-standing member of The Engineering Club, Chase was elected as president of the D.B. Jett Chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineering. As chairman of that year's Engineer's Ball, Albert was quoted in the 6 March 1940 edition of *The Roundup* saying, "It will be something unusual and different."¹³

But in a letter to his mother, Chase confessed his frustration with college, "This last year has been the darndest thing to keep up with that I ever saw. At times I felt like I was on top of the world, at other times I've been so darned blue and discouraged that it's funny to think about."¹⁴

On and off campus, faculty and students were involved in peace meetings while others warned that noninvolvement, particularly in Europe, would result in dire consequences for the young men and woman currently enrolled. In *That All May Learn*, Simon Kropp wrote, "A nation-wide poll indicated that ninety-one percent of the students hoped the Allies would win the war, but ninety-six percent opposed America's entrance into the war."¹⁵

Unfortunately the money ran out, and Albert was unable to graduate that spring. Passed on 30 August 1935, Public Law No. 408, an amendment to the National Defense Act, authorized the President to "call annually, with their consent, upon application to and selection by the War Department, for a period of not more than one year for any one officers, not to exceed at any time one thousand Reserve officers of the combatant arms and the Chemical Warfare Service in the grade of second lieutenant, for active duty with the Regular Army."¹⁶ Then Senator R.E. Thomason of El Paso, Texas had introduced the Thomason Act while serving on the Committee on Military Affairs.¹⁷ Albert elected to commission out and while waiting to be called up worked in Mexico and then briefly with the Soil Conservation Service. Commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the reserves, Albert entered service in the U.S. Army in April 1941.

Second Lieutenant Albert Fall Chase trained at Fort Bliss, Texas and Fort Huachuca in southern Arizona. After a brief visit home, Albert sailed on 6 June 1941 at 3 p.m. from San Francisco on the USS *Pierre*, which was chartered by the U.S. Army. In a letter written aboard ship, he confessed to being

seasick by 7 p.m. There were nine hundred men and about a dozen women aboard, including a grizzled cavalry officer named Ramsey who talked with Albert about Bud Hickman, a well-known polo player. Albert's cousin had dated Hickman at one time. At the end of a long letter to his mother, Albert confessed that he would have loved to enjoy the moonlight over the ocean but sharing that with a grizzled cavalry officer did not conjure up romantic notions.¹⁸ The *Pierce* docked in Honolulu on the evening of 11 June. The following day, Albert sent a postcard with three hula dancers on the front to his mother with the following observation, "Dear Mom it ain't like I figured. The people wears clothes, live in houses and talk English. This is the nearest thing to a grass skirt I could find. Love, Albert."¹⁹

The Philippines

The seven thousand islands of the Philippine archipelago spread from north to south for a thousand miles. In 1941 the 17,000,000 people of the Philippines were mostly of Malayan stock. In that year, Cebu and central Luzon were the most heavily populated areas, and Manila, with 684,000 inhabitants, was the largest city. There were nearly 30,000 Japanese nationals in the Islands, more than two-thirds of whom were concentrated in Davao, the chief port of Mindanao. The 117,000 Chinese constituted the largest foreign group in the Islands; on Luzon there were almost nine thousand American civilians. There were over sixty-five dialects spoken, including Tagalogs and Visayans.²⁰

The original 1907 War Plan Orange was expanded in the late 1930s to utilize the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in waging offensive air and sea operations against Japan in order to restrict its economic lifelines. The United States Army, the majority of which was stationed on the main island of Luzon, would be able to engage in a limited defensive role based on the ability of those troops to move quickly to the Bataan Peninsula at the onset of war ensuring the defense of the harbor until relief forces arrived. Since 1936 time had been spent in organizing and training permanent army contingents. Each military district had its own commander and cadre staff stationed at designated mobilization centers whose sole purpose was to induct and train one division of the Philippine Army.²¹ With Hitler's forces waging blitzkrieg across Europe, the threat to Great Britain grew, forcing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to decide that any troops or supplies needed to defend the Philippine archipelago would be scant and slow in coming. Reinforcements for the Pacific were routed through Pearl Harbor but were slow in arriving. By the summer of 1941, there were 10,000 troops stationed throughout the Philippines.²²



1st Lt. Albert Fall Chase, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University Library, Era Rentfrow Papers, Ms 221.

Lieutenant Chase arrived in Manila on 21 June 1941 and was assigned to the Forty-fifth Infantry at Fort McKinley where he quickly acclimated to his new responsibilities. In a letter dated 26 June 1941 Albert wrote that longtime family friend Father Albert Braun was also stationed there as the chaplain for the Forty-fifth. A World War I veteran and pastor at the Mescalero Apache reservation outside Tularosa, Father Braun had known Albert since he was a child.²³

On 26 July 1941, the United States Armed Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) was formed with Gen. Douglas MacArthur recalled to active duty by President Roosevelt to the rank of lieutenant general. Its mission was to mobilize

and train the newly formed Philippine Army (PA) in preparation for an anticipated invasion by the Japanese. MacArthur assured his officers this would not happen until the spring of 1942.²⁴ Their training would make them ready to “defend the beaches” by 15 October.

Newly promoted to the rank of First Lieutenant, Albert Chase was transferred to the Visayan-Mindanao Force (VMF) as part of the Seventh Military District on the island of Negros, which was located southeast of Luzon. Under the command of Major Robert Vesey (later promoted to Lieutenant Colonel), Chase was one of fifteen American officers assigned to be an “instructor” in the Philippine Army from 1 September to 30 November 1941. At first he was stationed at Mambucal, a resort area located on the northern end of the island of Negros. Later, Albert would be transferred again to Camp Magallon where he would serve under Captain Stephen M. Byars, Jr.

Although the instructors were responsible for mobilization and training, they were not in command, so tact and diplomacy were necessary. A ten-week master schedule, similar to the thirteen-week schedule used at that time in the United States, was adopted for use by the instructors for the two months of training. From the master schedule, weekly schedules were made by unit commanders and “instructors,” such as Lieutenant Chase, supervised the training.²⁵

If supplies were needed, they were ordered through the Philippine Army. In theory there was enough initial supply and equipment for the mobilization of troops. The function was transferred to the American supply agencies, the quartermaster departments, in mid-October. Their main objective was to establish advance-depots throughout the archipelago. This was never accomplished for the Visayan-Mindanao Force.²⁶

On 27 August Lieutenant Chase wrote to his parents about his transfer and new duties, "Got my orders yesterday I am going to the island of Negros south of Luzon to receive into the service of the United States a couple of companies of the Philippines Army and supervise their instruction. Keep sending my mail as it will get to me eventually."²⁷

By 1 September all of the regiments, including the Seventy-third, were inducted into the newly formed Eighty-first Division. According to the plan, thirty-two cadre camps were to be set up throughout a six-island group in the Visayas and on Mindanao. Albert wrote a lengthy letter to his parents on 8 September describing his responsibilities, "Things are sure moving fast over here. We're running on a nine hour training schedule with all administration coming after hours. It all winds up as a twelve or 14 hour day. I am training a cadre of officers of the PA here. I have two Co. or about 160 men and am running a regular miniature Ft. Benning, Ga. School. I was very lucky in receiving this assignment as the officers are all fairly intelligent and can speak English."²⁸

Colonel Sharp and his staff began conducting inspection tours to determine how the training was proceeding and what if any difficulties the officers were encountering. The most significant difficulty was in the language barriers. Tagalog officers who commanded Visayan outfits encountered difficulties which were never solved while a large proportion of the officers from Luzon did not speak the Visayas dialect prevalent on Negros. Albert, who was attempting to learn Tagalog, referred to this situation in a letter dated 25 October 1941.

An order has to go through channels, the enlisted talk in Visayan, while the officers talk Tagalog and a smattering of English. We talk English. Order has to be translated by some Philippine Scout non-coms from English to Tagalog, then issued by Philippine Army officers to noncoms in Tagalog and translated back into Visayan. The men then discuss everything, oblivious of officers and non-coms. I'm cussing them in Spanish and English, Philippine Army noncoms are cussing them in Tagalog and Visayan while they continue to discuss,

then straighten out and finally get moving. All adds up to a very happy madhouse in which no one takes anything seriously.²⁹

Compounding the situation was a severe lack of adequate supplies and equipment which made practical instruction nearly impossible. Military clothing and equipment was too old and unfit, signal equipment was unserviceable, and what rifles they had had no spare parts. There were no antitank guns, hand grenades, gas masks or steel helmets, no guns for field artillery regiments, no small arms ammunition, and no adequate range facilities. Training officers were only allowed to distribute ten to twenty rounds of ammunition per man. When training began, it was obvious that beyond close order drill the newly inducted troops had no proficiency. By 1 December 1941, only half the force had been trained and mobilized.³⁰

Although poorly equipped and trained, the Philippine Army, had grown to ten reserve divisions with two-thirds mobilized. Within a week after the outbreak of war it numbered over 100,000 men. By 12 December MacArthur had organized his forces, but still needed to place them on a war footing. Most of his requests had been approved by the War Department and men and supplies were already on their way or at San Francisco awaiting shipment. The record of accomplishment was a heartening one and justified the optimism which prevailed in Washington and in the Philippines over the capacity of the Philippine garrison to withstand a Japanese attack.³¹

Just after noon on 8 December 1941 (7 December at Pearl Harbor) the Japanese bombed Davao on the southeastern end of Mindanao and landed a small force there on 20 December 1941. General Homma, commanding the Japanese invasion forces, was forced to limit his operations to mostly air and naval reconnaissance with periodic bombings at the Del Monte airfield and various harbor locations over the next four months. The invasion of the larger island to the north, Luzon, and the ensuing siege of the Bataan Peninsula and island of Corregidor caused a substantial delay in the Japanese plan to overtake the entire archipelago within fifty days. Having received much-needed reinforcements by 1 April, Homma finally had a large enough force to invade the southern islands. On 10 April, as the surrendering forces on Bataan were beginning their death march, the attack began.³²

On Christmas Eve General Sharp received a letter from MacArthur ordering him to move his headquarters and one division from the Visayas to Mindanao and that no further aid could be expected from Manila. On New Year's Day 1942, the Eighty-first Division, including Lieutenant Chase, moved during the night by boats from Negros to Mindanao. The Seventy-third Regi-

ment was assigned to the northwest Lanao Sector under Brigadier General Guy Fort, with First Lieutenant Chase still reporting to Colonel Vesey. Chase was designated as Commanding Officer (CO) of the regiment's First Battalion. Their objective was to defend the beaches in the vicinity of Iligan, which was on the northern coast, and to cover the roads to the south.³³

The American and Filipino forces found that there were no railroads and only two highways on the island when they arrived. Both highways were somewhat passable but the best means of transportation was by boat, either around the coast or using the two rivers, the Agusan and Mindanao. When organized resistance broke down, General Sharp was to divide his forces into smaller guerrilla units which would operate throughout the southern islands. Any supplies that were not moved inland for these purposes were to be destroyed. What they did not have enough of was equipment and ammunition.³⁴ Lieutenant Chase, calling on his experience with making something out of nothing, came up with primitive grenades for his troops to use. In a letter to Albert's parents after the war, Father Andrew Cervini, who was a Jesuit missionary in Iligan, wrote, "We had no hand grenades - but Al conceived the idea of taking a piece of bamboo about a foot long - pack it with shrapnel and powder - to use it - one would light the fuse with a match and throw it immediately These were approved and used to effect."³⁵

The Fight for Mindanao

In early March, the Japanese occupied Zamboanga, due west of the Lanao sector. Their plan was to launch a coordinated attack from three different directions, with the objective of meeting in a centralized location. One unit would move northwest along Route 1 from Dagos on the Davao Gulf while two others made amphibious landings at Cotabato and Parang on the Moro Gulf (western coast). These units would move to the northwest along the Sayre Highway (Route 1) around Lake Lanao then directly towards the Lanao sector forces. Movement of the Japanese forces began in late April.³⁶

During the time spent in the Iligan area, Lieutenant Chase formed friendships with Father Cervini and Sergeant Fred Fullerton. Cervini was originally from Brooklyn, New York while Fullerton was from Tyler, Texas. Albert's battalion bivouacked in a coconut grove that adjoined the cemetery connected to Father Cervini's church. Fullerton described the area as a large square surrounded by the church; a school; a building which four lieutenants moved into, including Lieutenant Chase, and Cervini's home where they ate their meals, played cards, listened to music and read books from his library.³⁷

Father Cervini's letters, written during the fall of 1945 while recover-



Morton, Louis. *The War in the Pacific: The Fall of the Philippines*. Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1953, Map 24, 508.

ing from his imprisonment during the war, provided the Chase family with a vivid and memorable documentation of Albert's experiences leading up to and immediately after the surrender. On 17 August Cervini wrote:

Whenever the Col. had any difficult mission to perform he somehow always chose Al and his battalion to do it. For instance a trail had to be blazed between our sector and that of Maj. Gen. Sharp's so that we could move back to them or they to us depending on whom the Japs hit first. Al and his battalion were chosen to make this march. It was about 75 miles over mountains and through forests. They did. Many a night I would spend with Al down on the pier watching for any approaching ships. It was an all night job for the Officer on Duty. I would leave him about midnight. Go back to the house and bring him a thermos bottle of coffee. How I loved

your son. He was good to me.- In that battle (May 4th at Bacolod Grande) Al did wonderful work. Really he was loved by all his men and officers.³⁸

Lieutenant Chase used his civil engineering education from New Mexico A&M College when he engineered a bridge over the Agus River near Lake Lanao for Father Cervini to use in order to get to the troops to say Mass. Cervini wrote, "it was placed about a mile above the Mona Christina water falls. At the point when Al built the bridge, the rapids are at their swiftest and roughest. It was an engineer's bridge. And could carry the weight of a good Army truck loaded."³⁹

In his final letter, dated 11 October 1945, Father Cervini left a lasting impression of Lieutenant Chase when he wrote, "Al would take a rocker and stretch his six feet plus and with a book from my library spend an hour or two reading before going to his command post."⁴⁰

While Father Cervini described Chase as relaxed and in good spirits, Sergeant Fullerton described him as all business when it came to his men. Countless letters and memories of Lieutenant Chase's actions on Mindanao are consistent in their praise of his steadiness, leadership and ability to save lives under combat conditions. That he was awarded both the Purple Heart and Bronze Star posthumously speaks of the respect his commanding officers and men had for him.

With the 12 March 1942 departure of General MacArthur from the Philippines, the War Department placed General Wainwright in command of all troops in the Philippines. When Bataan fell on 9 April, the Japanese continued to move their invasion south through the Visayas islands.

In a letter dated 16 April, S. M. Byars of Cordele, Georgia, whose son Captain Stephen M. Byars, Jr. had served with Albert on the island of Negros and was now at Iligan, responded to a letter from Alexina Chase with information about the possible whereabouts and situation for both their sons. He reassured Albert's mother that all was well,

From the information we have been able to gather our son is probably located on Mindanano. Since he censored your son's (Albert's) letter it must mean that they are still together. They have been training the Moros or headhunters and I think have done a good job of it. It is my opinion, reached from various sources of information, that these Americans have taken their command of natives to the hill and are fighting guerilla warfare and doing a pretty fair job of it. They most likely will not risk an open encounter with the Japs but will

follow out the plan of raiding them and harassing them on every possible occasion. It is evidence that these young officers have little equipment or supplies and their contact with the other Allied forces if not constant. These fellows seem to be on their own resources and must be short of funds.⁴¹

On 22 April Colonel Vesey received a warning of an impending Japanese attack on the Lanao Sector and relayed this to his battalion officers, who had been assigned to cover the two vital approaches to Dansalan and Lake Lanao from the Malaybalay and the Iligan coast. They had five hundred effectives with no artillery unit or Air Force support. About 150 men were affected with malaria.⁴²

On 29 April the Japanese landed at Cotabato on the Seventy-third Regiment's flank. By 1 May they had gained control of all of Route 1 as far north as Lake Lanao. Lieutenant Colonel Robert Vesey's Seventy-third Regiment was the only remaining intact force between Lake Lanao and the advancing Japanese forces. Two battalions were placed in the vicinity of Lake Lanao at Bacolod Grande, while the third was stationed to defend the beach to the north.

The First Battalion, under the command of Lieutenant Chase, was ordered at 3 a.m. to move forward to Ganassi on the southwest corner of Lake Lanao. Vesey hoped to hold the town in order to prevent the Japanese from gaining access to either the eastern lakeside road or Route 1 which continued to run north. At 8 a.m., the Seventy-third Regiment made contact with the Japanese. Vesey determined that the town could not be defended and pulled his troops back to Bacolod Grande where the First Battalion defended the right, and the Second Battalion the left, extending to the shore of the lake. Once in position, a bridge was destroyed for protection and cover.⁴³

On 3 May the enemy approached the Seventy-third Infantry positions at the destroyed bridge in a motorized column preceded by four tanks. Colonel H.W. Tarkington of the United States Army Field Artillery described the action in his postwar memoir, *There Were Others*,

On May 3rd a renewed Jap advance began near Bacolod. About 8 AM a motorized formation, spear-headed by four tanks, approached the 73rd's positions. Two of the tanks essayed the crossing of the stream around the blown bridge. A well-directed shell from Price's one truck-mounted 2.95 howitzer caught the leading tank, putting it out of commission and throwing the column into considerable confusion. Nips poured out of the stalled trucks into a withering cross-

fire from the defending troops, which made up in its concentration at point-blank range what it lacked in accuracy. Apparently resolved upon a break-through regardless of cost — which was later admitted by those to have been seven truckloads of dead in this initial assault — the enemy brought up their artillery. Directing the fire of their light and medium artillery by aerial observation, they harassed our positions during the entire day.⁴⁴

Vesey's small force held off the Japanese attack for four and a half hours against overwhelming odds. By noon Colonel Vesey gave the order to withdraw. A series of withdrawals kept both sides engaged throughout the day. By midnight, the Seventy-third Regiment was back in the hills about 4 kilometers from Dansalan. For his leadership during this action, Lieutenant Chase received the Bronze Star posthumously. The following day, Japanese forces occupied Dansalan.⁴⁵

On 7 May Wainwright broadcast a message instructing all American and Filipino soldiers to surrender within four days. He informed General Sharp that Colonel Traywick, who arrived on 9 May, would aid Sharp in negotiating the surrender on Mindanao. The following day Albert celebrated his twenty-fourth birthday as the Eighty-first Division headquarters moved forward except for the wounded. General Sharp pledged that the Visayan-Mindanao Forces would surrender; although he did not say when. After two more weeks of deliberation, the order for surrender was issued on 22 May with the stipulation that no desertions would be tolerated.

At approximately five o'clock on 27 May, remnants of the Eighty-first Division, including the Seventy-third Regiment, walked down the road from Lake Lanao and into the town square at Dansalan and surrendered.⁴⁶ "The Japanese staff met us in a large park in the center of Dansalan, where we threw our rifles in one pile and our side arms in another. The Japanese commander gave us a speech in broken English - he said something about our not being prisoners but, rather, "guests of the emperor!"⁴⁷ The military was housed in a two-story building with officers on the second floor and the enlisted men on the ground floor.

At surrender, prisoners of war experience a strong feeling of "this can't be happening to me" counteracted by an extreme sense of danger, total vulnerability, helplessness and being powerless to fight or flee. They look upon their captors as powerful, hostile, threatening and most of all, unpredictable.⁴⁸ Hope becomes the most crucial factor in survival. In *American POWs of World War II: Forgotten Men Tell Their Stories*, author Tom Bird explores



American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor. History of the Defenders of The Philippines, Guam and Wake Islands Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1991, 11.

the importance of hope, which can be rooted in many things: religious beliefs, being part of a close family as a child or adult, feeling a strong sense of group with fellow hostages, deep feelings of patriotism, righteous cause, etc. He asserts that individuals find strength to cope in sources outside of themselves, balancing their own diminished coping skills and eroding self-esteem that they “strive to reduce hopelessness and a diminished sense of self by retaining previous roles while in captivity regardless of modification”⁴⁹

At the same time, Albert’s parents began receiving letters from the War Department in response to a telegram they had sent regarding their son’s status. At that time the War Department informed her that his name had

not appeared on any casualty lists but that there was no more definite news.

“The Japanese Government has indicated its intention of conforming to the terms of the Geneva Convention with respect to the interchange of information regarding prisoners of war. At some future date this Government will receive through Geneva a list of persons who have been taken prisoners of war. Until that time the War Department cannot give you positive information.”⁵⁰ Throughout the remainder of 1942, Albert’s parents continued to request information from the War Department.

On 14 June Lieutenant Chase and the other prisoners were moved across the Agus River from Dansalan into Camp Keithley, which had been a constabulary camp near The Dansalan Inn.⁵¹ They were told that their commanding officer, company commander, and first sergeant would be executed in the event of any escapes. Two weeks later, the prisoners learned they were to be transferred to the main prison camp located at Malaybalay in north central Mindanao.⁵² Late in the afternoon of 1 July 1942, four men failed to report back to the barracks after completing the day shift. Colonel Mitchell, commanding officer of American prisoners as appointed by the Japanese

commander, reported the men missing. In response the guards were ordered to surround the barracks and loot them for evidence. The following day four men, who had slept near the escapees, were taken across the river to the Inn, which was the Japanese headquarters and questioned. They were returned later in the afternoon and the order went out that the Japanese had cut the food rations and tightened restrictions on prisoners.

On 3 July a Japanese interpreter came to the barracks and escorted Colonel Vesey, Captain Price (who had been in command of the escapees), and First Sgt. Chandler to headquarters for questioning. They never returned, having served as bayonet practice dummies while still alive. The night before, Vesey had advised his officers that in order to survive they should do what they were told, work, and stay away from anyone attracting attention to themselves through words and behavior. Vesey also emphasized that as officers they still bore responsibility for the lives and safety of their men and should continue to conduct themselves as such. Vesey had volunteered to replace Mitchell, because the Japanese liked him and more importantly he could be more helpful to the remaining Americans.

The Japanese celebrated the Fourth of July by ordering a forced march of twenty-five miles to the port of Iligan in order to transfer the POWs to the camp at Malaybalay. Lieutenant Chase and the rest of the Americans were arranged four abreast into a column with the lines adjusted between the guards on each side of the column so that the distance stayed even between the files. The Filipinos were marched in front of the Americans. Japanese soldiers followed the group in a truck with a mounted machine gun. The prisoners were given a ten-minute break every hour but no water until the following morning.⁵³ Those who could not keep up were removed from the line and shot. At six o'clock that evening, Albert Chase and the other prisoners arrived in Iligan and were placed in a two-story schoolhouse. Allowed to rest the following day, the guards selected several POWs, including Chase, to set up an outdoor kitchen from which the prisoners were fed rationed rice and turnip greens boiled in plain water. At night the prisoners were shaken down and their remaining money and personal belongings were taken. They were allowed to keep twenty pesos.⁵⁴

On 9 July the Americans were placed in the hold of the forty-foot launch *Tito Maru* at the port of Iligan. They arrived that afternoon at Cagayan where they were removed from the ship, loaded onto trucks. By dusk there they were in Malaybalay. The guards searched the men, after which they were given a small can of fish for each three men and a sardine can of water. One Japanese officer performed a mock decapitation while another made



One of six benches for 2,000 POWs at Davao. Nordin, Carl S. *We Were Next to Nothing: An American POW's Account of Japanese Prison Camps and Deliverance in World War II*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1997, 76.

them stand at attention for a major. They were kept there until August, when a hundred of the POWs were sent to Formosa and Pusan while the remaining thousand, including Lieutenant Chase, sailed on 18 August on the *Maru 760* from Cagayan to the harbor at Davao. Their final destination was Camp No. 2 - the Davao Penal Colony:⁵⁵

Davao Prison Camp

While corresponding with other POW parents during the war, Clarence Chase, in a letter dated 23 August 1942, offered a description of Albert's ability to survive his situation in the Philippines. "He went to the Philippines with his eyes open as to what might be ahead and we feel sure that he has no idea of letting the Japs chase him home."⁵⁶

The Davao Penal Colony (Dapecol) was an existing self-sufficient prison colony when Lieutenant Chase and the other thousand Mindanao POWs arrived in late July 1942. The march from the port at Davao was difficult and long. Carl Nordin, in his memoir, *We Were Next to Nothing*, described the environment where they would exist for the next two plus years.

The penal colony occupied thousands of acres set in a very dense, almost impenetrable jungle of the most malaria-infested area in the Philippines. The main compound was triple-fenced with barbed wire. A company street ran from east to west, lined on one side by the kitchen and eight barracks. Back of the barracks and about five meters from the fence on the back side of the compound were three latrines, each one having about twenty holes for sitting on. In the corners of the main compound were guard towers that were manned with armed guards twenty-four hours a day. The area was floodlit during all periods of darkness. Each barrack could accommodate about 250 men. There was no glass and a center

walkway was a raised platform. Each side was divided into bays, or sections which accommodated eight to ten men and had its own bay leader. Constructed of wood, there was one low wattage bulb for minimum illumination.⁵⁷

During an oral history conducted in Albuquerque on 24 May 2003, Fred Fullerton, remembering the six benches and more than two thousand men at Davao, said, “imagine never being able to sit down the entire time you were in high school.”⁵⁸ He also stated that the only opportunity for being alone was when you were asleep at night. There was one spigot for drinking water close to the entrance gate in the camp. The prisoners dug three wells with decks around them behind the barracks to use for bathing and washing clothes.⁵⁹ Roll call, or *tenko*, was held at six a.m. and again at seven p.m. The prisoners’ days were filled from dawn to dusk with roll call, labor in the rice paddies or saw mill, mealtimes and unexpected events. Lights in the barracks had to be out by nine p.m. and the guards patrolled the front and back of the barracks throughout the night.

The guards had been trained to hate Americans, especially prisoners of war. Some had attended school in the United States prior to the war and had experienced racism. They tended to be a hard, embittered group whose behavior was unpredictable. This meant that as a POW you were never at ease. In *Voices from Captivity*, Robert C. Doyle presents the argument that “in the resistant event-scenario, captors become identifiable personalities whose task is to destroy their prisoners’ sense of community. In the process, POWs faced basic choices: cooperate and survive, or resist and die. From a sense of duty, personal pride, religious faith, or institutional code-based mandates, the resisting POW can not allow himself to cooperate fully; hence, the war between captors and POWs continues unabated from the battlefield to the prison pen.”⁶⁰ In the case of American POWs in the Pacific, active or hard resisters learned quickly that any effort to strike back met with harsh punishment or execution. Passive resisters either shunned or made attempts to deceive their captors while avoiders seemed to blend into the surrounding environment. On the night before his execution, Colonel Vesey may have unknowingly advised his men to be passive captives.

In early November a thousand POWs, who had survived the Bataan Death March and Camp O’Donnell earlier in the year, arrived from Cabanatuan. For Albert Chase, their arrival brought a welcome sight when Father Albert Braun walked through the gates. Father Albert, as he was affectionately called, had survived the Bataan Death March and saved several lives at Camp O’Donnell, including Gerald Grecman. He would become a guiding force as

senior chaplain at Davao.

Major Maeda, the camp commandant, allowed the prisoners to celebrate Christmas with a dinner and program. Father Braun led the service with assistance from the Episcopal and Presbyterian ministers. When the Chases found out that their son and Father Braun were in the same camp, there was some relief to the anguish they were experiencing.

In a 1 December 1945 letter to Albert's parents, Father Braun wrote: I was with Albert from November of '42 till March of '44 when he went with a detail of 60 to Lasang. Sunny (Sonny) was at Davao before I came down. When we met it was like meeting of brothers. We spoke of all the family and looked ahead to the time when we would meet again in El Paso....Albert bore prison life with an even mind, courageously. He could absorb a lot of suffering without being disturbed. Had he not gone down with his ship he would have come through prison life none the worse for the wear and tear; in other words he could take it and did take it. I know it will console you to know that he didn't let prison life make him unhappy and that he was very philosophical about whatever was in store for him.⁶¹

In January 1943 the Japanese transmitted the names of American POWs in the Philippines to the International Red Cross and finally allowed the POWs to send their first form cards home. Fullerton remembered that throughout their incarceration at Davao, they never received any mail from home which further damaged their morale who did not know if their families or loved ones knew of their fate. Preprinted form cards, typed by the Japanese guards, were sent with twelve carefully chosen words as a message. Their health was always underlined as "excellent" or "good" even though most or all were sick on and off throughout their imprisonment.

On 13 May the Chases received a Western Union telegram with the following information,

REPORT JUST RECEIVED THOUGH THE INTERNATIONAL RED CROSS STATES THAT YOUR SON FIRST LIEUTENANT ALBERT F CHASE IS A PRISONER OF WAR OF THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT LETTER OF INFORMATION FOLLOWS FROM PROVOST MARSHAL GENERAL=ULIO THE ADJUTANT GENERAL.⁶²

It was the first news Albert's family had received in over a year. Beginning on 23 May Clarence Chase began writing a series of

monthly letters to ‘Sonny,’ as he was affectionately called, letting him know that they had received notification that he was a prisoner of war of the Japanese Government. The letters contained family news, including how his grandfather, Albert Bacon Fall, was doing while living at the Hotel Dieu, a hospital in El Paso. Each letter closed with “Keep your chin up Old Boy” an endearment which had been shared between father and son for a number of years.

At the same time, Clarence Chase also began corresponding with other parents of POWs who had been stationed with their son in the Philippines, including Captain Stephen Byars’ father. The group would grow to four sets of parents, all sharing news, frustrations, and sorrows both during and after the war. In a letter dated 7 September, Clarence Chase wrote Byars that they had received two form cards from Albert on which he told them that he had received the Red Cross packages, wished them well and inquired about “Dandy’s” health. “Dandy” was the affectionate nickname Emadair had given their grandfather as a young girl. Along with Albert’s signature, which appeared in the upper left corner on the front of both cards, this meant he was alive and well.

The 29 September letter was returned by the censor with information that the Japanese Government refused delivery of any mail to American prisoners of war unless it was twenty-five words or less, typewritten in block letters, with personal information only. Clarence Chase began sending the prescribed postcards on 25 October with succinctly typed “all are well much love” messages. By December, they had received postcard numbers three and five. The year 1944 brought wishes for the New Year and greetings to Father Braun. Always the question, “do you get our letters?” was asked. In January, the Chases received the last form card from Albert.⁶³

The 7 February edition of *LIFE Magazine* published the accounts with drawings and photographs of the escape by ten men from Davao the previous April.⁶⁴ On 10 February Clarence Chase wrote to Captain Samuel C. Grashio, one of the escapees, inquiring for any information about Albert. In a letter dated 29 March Grashio explained that any information he offered had to be treated as strictly confidential. All of the POWs who had escaped from Davao had been asked to keep silent about conditions in order to avoid any repercussions on those remaining in POW camps in the Philippines. Grashio wrote,

Even though I did not have the opportunity of becoming very well acquainted with your son, I can give you a little information which may help to relieve some of the anxiety

which you are naturally enduring. I can remember seeing Lieutenant Chase around prison camp #2 and have often been on work details which he was assigned to. The last time I had the opportunity of seeing your son was on April 4, 1943 in prison camp #2 from where I was fortunate enough to escape. At that time he was truthfully amongst those who were enjoying the finest health prison camp conditions will permit, and his morale was excellent.⁶⁵

He also acknowledged knowing Father Braun as one of the finest individuals he had ever met. Chase responded assuring Grashio that the contents of his letter would remain confidential.

By 31 March the fourth postcard finally arrived from the camp and in his answer, his father expressed a wish to see his son before year's end. Clarence sent a last postcard to Albert from Ruidoso on 26 May 1944, well after Albert had begun work on the Lasang airfield detail.

Lasang Airfield Detail

Article 31 of the Geneva Convention stated, "Labor furnished by prisoners of war shall have no direct relation with war operations. It is especially prohibited to use prisoners for manufacturing and transporting arms or munitions of any kind or for transporting material intended for combatant units."⁶⁶ On 2 March the prisoners were assembled on the parade ground where Major Maeda promised them that if they worked hard they would soon return to Davao. Assembled and placed on open trucks with a large contingent of guards, the 650 men, who had been selected by prison camp doctors, were transported to Lasang. Upon arriving, they realized the conditions were far worse than Davao. From his memoir, *Soldier Priest*, John Morrett remembers:

There were four rectangular barracks, a kitchen sink, two latrines and one well where we bathed behind the buildings. The barracks were crudely constructed with two-by-fours, plywood siding, and corrugated tin roofs. Not long after we arrived, the Japanese officers had our latrines moved between the barracks because they did not like the smell reaching their quarters. There was a guardhouse at the entrance of the compound, a double barbed wire fence, the usual lights shining in and around the compound at night and a single guard tower. There were no trees or shrubbery, only some grass and weeds in the compound.⁶⁷

Every day the POWs walked 3.5 miles to the work site where they were divided into work groups. Civilians from the surrounding area, including women, children and elderly, were also assigned to the work detail.⁶⁸ The airstrip was a single coral runway about 1,600 feet long with six Japanese transport planes, ten fighter plans and six bombers parked along it.

The prisoners refused to work for several weeks during which their rations were steadily cut back. The routine of each day remained the same - early breakfast, march to the airstrip, review the daily contract and not work. A month after arriving at Lasang, the guards took their shoes away making the work on the gravel and coral very difficult.”When a person has to walk over gravel or sharp coal the tendency is to keep the head down. This had a psychological effect on increasing our sense of being defeated. In fact, it created a slave mentality.”⁶⁹

Colonel Rufus S. Rogers, designated as the prisoners’ commanding officer, recommended to the Japanese that they reconsider the use of American POWs as labor on the airfield and return them to Davao. They refused and promised extra rations if the POWs completed the job in six weeks. In response Rogers called a meeting at which the officers agreed to stage a work slowdown. During the meeting, one officer expressed what everyone was feeling, “We’re going to work. We’re going to work hard, and it’s going to take more co-operation and teamwork than they realize to convince the Japanese that we are working. Every man when he is using a pick must raise it above his head and try to hit the hole that he made the last time”⁷⁰ Four weeks later only a few yards of runway had been built so the Japanese placed a double guard on the detail. None of the prisoners were beaten for not working simply because they appeared to be working very hard. Nothing was being done or accomplished.

Sometime in the early days of August, a lone American bomber flew over the Lasang airfield, indicating that Allied forces were nearing the Philippines. Air-raid alerts occurred on a nightly basis with Japanese guards, with bayonets, standing at the entrance to each of the four barracks near the field. Work on the airstrip was halted and the POWs were restricted to the compound. Their rations were cut to one meal of a single cupful of rice with boiled camote (a sweet potato) peelings every twenty-four hours which forced the prisoners to start “grazing” the compound for weeds and any bits of vegetables thrown away by the Japanese. At the end of two weeks, the 650 men would once again find themselves back at the harbor at Davao where, for some, their final journey would begin.

The Shinyo Maru

Early on the morning of 20 August, the Lasang POWs, including Albert Chase, were bound together and marched through the jungle to the Tabunco pier at Davao where they were loaded onto the *Erie Maru* for transport by sea to the harbor at Zamboanga. There they would be transferred to the *Shinyo Maru* for their final voyage to Japan.

In the 3 March 1945 article in Collier's *The National Weekly*, repatriated prisoners of war Captains Gene Dale, John Morrett, and Bert Schwarz recounted that final journey starting with the *Erie Maru*.

Four hundred men were crowded into one hold, three hundred and fifty into the other. The Japs loaded several tons of baggage in the hold with us, and there was hardly room for us to sit down, let along stretch out and sleep. The heat was terrific, and there was no ventilation except the sides of the hatch covers; and the Japs piled sacks of vegetables on these, cutting off the air still more. Within an hour, we were running sweat, and we stripped off everything we had and stood packed like animals, gasping for breath.⁷¹

The following day, an American bomber flew over and dropped several bombs. The Japanese guards closed the hatch covers cutting off all ventilation causing most of the men to become unconscious and dehydrate. Colonel Rogers shouted to the guards for air after a couple of hours and the hatch covers were removed. Over the next three days there would be several more instances of the hatch covers being closed for sometimes up to ten hours. At the end of the three days, they arrived at Zamboanga which lies on the southwest coast of Mindanao.

For ten days they were kept on the ship while anchored in Zamboanga Harbor. Allowed on deck twice, the prisoners were hosed down with sea water only to be returned to the hold again. August passed into September and on 4 September they were transferred at night to the *Shinyo Maru*. Dale, Morrett and Schwarz wrote, "Two hundred and fifty of us were jammed into the small afterhold, the remaining five hundred were placed in the larger hold at the bottom of the ship. Most of the men never left that second ship."⁷² Again their ship was strafed and bombed while anchored in the harbor. Men who had endured the months of bombing of the Malinta Tunnel on Corregidor screamed covering their ears while most prayed for a direct hit.

On the morning of 5 September, the *Shinyo Maru* sailed from Zamboanga Harbor on a zigzagging course up the western coast of Mindanao. No longer allowed on deck, the prisoner's latrine cans had to be hoisted

out of the hold resulting in the men being covered in their own excrement. With each alert, the hatch covers were closed and tarpaulins thrown over them cutting off the air. With no water or food, men wiped the sweat from their bodies to try and hydrate themselves.



Japanese merchant ship, Shinyo Maru. Photo found on Japanese website <http://membertifty.ne.jp/jpnships/meiji02/meiji02_hokubei2.html>

Late on the afternoon of 7 September, a Japanese bugler sounded an alarm and machine guns began firing at an unknown target. The USS Paddle was on her fifth war patrol having left Fremantle, Australia on 22 August. She was scheduled to return on 25 September 1944.

In survivor's accounts there is some conflict as to what happened in those few seconds before the torpedo hits the *Shinyo Maru*. Clem Overton wrote, "Suddenly, the Japanese



American submarine, USS Paddle (SS263) <<http://www.subnet.com/fleet/ss263.html>>

pulled the hatch covers off and dropped hand grenades down in there and then turned machine guns down the hold. Well just about the time they started that, there was this explosion. What had happened was that a torpedo had hit the ship. Personally, the only thing that I remember was that I saw a flash, and everything turned an orangish colored red. No feeling, no nothing. Everything just turned a solid color. I don't know if the grenades went off first or the torpedo because it all meshed together."⁷³

John Morrett recalled, "The first torpedo struck with an explosion like the end of the world. Before we could gather our senses, there was a second and even bigger explosion, and the water rushed through a gaping hole in the side of the ship. Everywhere there was debris and thrashing arms and legs. Mangled forms floated in the water all around us, and the hold was full of the screams and groans of dying men. The hatch cover was blown off in the explosion."⁷⁴

Morrett further explained that he was in the afterhold when the

torpedo struck. Hit in the head by a flying beam, he regained consciousness finding himself pinned under dozens of bodies. There was cement dust in the air making it difficult to see. The Japanese guards were firing into the hold while tossing grenades down among the Americans who were struggling to get out. Morrett tried to aid a lieutenant who was pinned under a beam but was unable to free him.

The *Shinyo Maru* sank in six minutes. Of the 750 men who were loaded aboard at Zamboanga, eighty-three made it to shore where one died. They were found by Filipino guerrillas and taken to various villages where they were given medical care, clothing and food. The thirty who gave themselves up to the Japanese while in the water were executed on the deck of one of the surviving ships the following day. They were lined up and shot in the back of the head. One prisoner, who hid in the anchor chain, later found his way to shore to tell his story.

On 29 September the *Narwhal*, another American submarine, picked up the survivors and took them to Australia. The men who were able to get off the ship, mostly by swimming through the torpedo hole, eluding Japanese machine gunners, depth charges being dropped from Japanese planes, sharks, oil and gas in the water, and climbing over the coral reef to shore, carry various physical scars as a result of that afternoon. The following month, U.S. Navy planes began bombing Manila harbor. Upon returning to the United States, the *Shinyo Maru* survivors were brought to the White House to be greeted by the president and then sent on a nationwide war bond drive.

In October Albert's mother suffered a small stroke while in Alamogordo, and though she was informed of her father's death in November, the news of Albert's death was kept from her until final notification was received in a letter dated 19 February 1945 from the War Department. "It is with deep regret that I must now inform you that your son is among those listed as lost when that sinking occurred. The War Department regrets its inability to entertain a probability of his survival and must now consider him to have died in action 7 September 1944."⁷⁵

Epilogue

Beginning in early 1942, Era Rentfrow, the College's long-time registrar, began to keep records of how ex-Aggies were contributing to the war effort. At that time 150 ex-Aggies were serving as Army officers, including Albert Chase. Throughout the war, Rentfrow published a regular column in *The Roundup* keeping students, faculty and family apprised of where ex-Aggies were serving and what news had been received. By the end of the 1942

spring semester, more than five hundred ex-Aggies were serving in all theaters of the war and college enrollment was declining due to the draft. With the surrenders at Bataan, Corregidor and Mindanao, the magnitude of the losses was felt as news came in about New Mexico's Two Hundredth Coast Artillery and other units.

By spring 1943 more than fourteen hundred ex-Aggies were serving in the armed forces. By spring commencement 1944, the number of those serving had risen to eighteen hundred with thirty-nine casualties reported. By the end of the war, Rentfrow released a report stating that more than two thousand had served in all branches of the military. As prisoners of war were liberated, the death toll reached 124, including First Lieutenant Albert Fall Chase.⁷⁶

At war's end, veterans returning under the new G.I. Bill began to populate the campus beginning that fall, but the memories of those who had served and died remained. A wall of remembrance in the Student Union had displayed photographs of those ex-Aggies who had served and died throughout the war.

On 1 March 1945 Station KOB, Albuquerque presented a remembrance of Albert Chase during its 8:45 p.m. broadcast and the following day the campus flag at New Mexico A&M College was flown at half-staff in his memory.

The Chases lost their two oldest sons to "friendly fire" during the war. Their second son, William, had been killed in a training accident at Fort Sam Houston in January 1943, a fact which Albert never learned of. On 10 September 1946, at Fort Bliss, Texas, Clarence Chase was presented with his son's Bronze Star. His younger daughter, Mary Chase, and only living son, Clarence, Jr. also attended the ceremony. The citation read,

"First Lieutenant Albert E Chase, on Cebu, Philippine Islands, on or about 4 May 1942, when the flank of his battalion was enveloped and the ammunition supply nearly exhausted, succeeded through his cool judgment and determined efforts in rallying a large portion of his forces. Lieutenant Chase's superior leadership served to extricate his men from possible rout and facilitate their withdrawal to a new position."⁷⁷

Nancy Shockley is the recipient of the New Mexico State University Alumni Association Fall 2003 Outstanding Master's Degree Award. She is currently employed at the university and working on a biography of Lieutenant Chase.

Endnotes

1. Alexina Chase to children, Ruidoso, N. Mex., 9 Dec. 1941, Albert Fall Chase Papers, Ms 023, Box 1: Folder 1, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, New Mexico.
2. Jouett Fall Elliott to Albert Fall Chase, telegram, Pueblo, Colo., 10 May 1918. Emadair Chase Jones Private Collection.
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Roger B. Corbett and the Birth of a University

William B. Conroy

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Introduction

This article is based primarily on an unpublished manuscript entitled “Memories and Opinions” by Roger B. Corbett, New Mexico State University’s longest serving president, who held that office from 1955 to 1970. This manuscript proved to be a compelling read, not just because of Dr. Corbett’s longevity as president, although serving in that challenging position for a decade and one half was remarkable in itself, but because under Dr. Corbett’s leadership the small New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts became New Mexico State University, beginning its emergence as the large, dynamic research university that it is today. I wanted to learn what Roger Corbett himself had to say about his background, how he happened to come here, and about his leadership role in the transformation of our institution.

Also enlightening were his comments in an interview during the last year of his presidency by a staff member of the *New Mexico Aggie*, the predecessor of the *Aggie Panorama* publication.

The man who was to lead the transformation of a small college into a major university was born in Morgantown, West Virginia in 1900. His father, a Cornell graduate, taught horticulture there at West Virginia University. When Roger Corbett was five, his family moved to Washington D.C., where his father became the horticulturist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. While there the family lived in a rural area outside Washington, and summers were frequently spent on the family farm in Virginia and later on his grandparents’ orchard and grape farm at Seneca Lake, New York. During his formative years, Corbett’s parents taught him and his two younger brothers that the way to succeed in life was through hard work, thrift, and education. “We were taught,” Corbett said,

“that nothing takes the place of work and drive We were taught to be careful with money, to pay out our debts on time, and to save for the future. We were always saving to go to college.”¹ These lessons were apparently learned well by Roger

Corbett. In his memoir he recalls a student leader telling Regent Jess Richardson that “I must be working to be governor because I put in such long hours”²² On being thrifty with money, Corbett states that his wife once said that “the true reason” why he retired from NMSU in 1970 was because his “cap and gown were worn out and I was too tight to get a new one!”²³

After graduating from high school, Corbett entered Cornell University as his father had before him, and earned three degrees there in agriculture, including his Ph.D. in 1925. He then embarked on a successful career that would include faculty and administrative assignments at several northeastern universities. Interspersed with these positions were assignments with the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the Great Depression, which led to his first encounter with communist sympathizers, and also service with agricultural organizations. It was while he was secretary-treasurer of the American Farm Bureau in the 1940s that he met Delmar Roberts, president of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau. It is likely that this contact was instrumental in his being offered the presidency of the college in 1947, when Hugh Milton was leaving to head up the New Mexico Military Institute. Corbett recalls, “I flew a DC3 from Washington, D.C. to El Paso, where General Milton met me and brought me to the campus. It was dark and I hadn’t changed my watch. By the time he finished showing me around and explaining the job to me, my watch said 4 a.m.”²⁴ In spite of the late evening tour, Corbett said he was tempted to accept the job, but after returning to Washington and thinking it over he declined for family and professional reasons. He said, “The death of my (first) wife (Faith in 1939) had changed the lives of my children greatly, and I didn’t want to upset them any more than I had toThe other reason ... was ... that the population (of New Mexico) was too small and the number of four year colleges too great. Too many colleges were competing for too little money, and I thought the battle to get funds would be tough.”²⁵

But Roger Corbett was remembered in New Mexico, and in 1954, while serving as Agricultural Counsel for the National Association of Food Chains in Washington, D.C., he was once again contacted by Delmar Roberts, who had recently been appointed a Regent of New Mexico College of A&MA. Corbett relates, “His question was, would I be interested in being the Dean of Agriculture with an understanding that in two years I would be President?”²⁶ Corbett responded, “No, thanks. I had been a ‘crown prince’ before, and it was not a desirable spot”²⁷

But Roberts didn’t give up, and called Corbett again a few months

later, “and this time asked if I would consider becoming President of the New Mexico College of Agriculture Mechanic Arts.”⁸ Although he still was not really interested in the position, having been out of higher education for some time, Corbett did not reject the new offer outright. He met with Regents Roberts and Richardson and was ultimately invited to Las Cruces for a visit during the Christmas-New Year’s holidays of 1954-55. Corbett said, “I came thinking that I wouldn’t take the job, but they had said. “Come on out and we’ll have some fun anyway. You will enjoy the trip.”⁹



Roger B. Corbett, Mathieu Studio, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

During his second visit to Las Cruces and the college, several factors worked together to persuade Corbett to accept the presidency. He had a pleasant meeting with the Regents as they identified the challenges facing the small school, which had started to grow slowly once again following the decline in student numbers brought on by the graduation of World War II veterans on the GI Bill. The Regents also supported his desire to build an educational program of Americanism to offset the goals of American communists to subvert America’s democracy and free enterprise system. The early 1950s were a time of heightened concern about communists in our midst, especially in Washington D.C., where the year before Dr. Corbett came to Las Cruces, the notorious Senator Joe McCarthy chaired the Army-McCarthy hearings as part of his campaign to expose communists in government and elsewhere among our citizenry.¹⁰ Another persuasive factor cited by Corbett was the weather, and he relates: “We were standing on Delmar Roberts’ small back porch during a sunset. It was a beautiful evening at the end of a gorgeous day. Johnny (Augustine) pointed out how clear and ‘soft’ the pleasant air was and stated that the humid part of the country could not have this. He was correct. New Mexico’s clear, soft, and in January, pleasantly crisp air is a great asset that has become greater, for me, during the years I have enjoyed it”¹¹

And so, in spite of one meeting with some deans and other high level administrators which he characterizes “not a particularly pleasant one, because ... the general atmosphere was one of standoffishness, even antago-

nism,”¹² Roger Corbett accepted the presidency of New Mexico A&MA. He commented that “After I had accepted, I realized I had long wanted to be a university president.”¹³ He committed to assuming his new position in Las Cruces on 1 July 1955, a date that had to be bumped to 15 August when he was struck by a serious illness requiring sixty-seven days of hospitalization and two operations.

He commented that the doctors in Washington were reluctant to let him go to Las Cruces so soon, “but I was restless and ‘pushy’. They were probably correct. I wish I might have had those first years again without the handicap of a prolonged illness just ahead of them.”¹⁴ But whatever the illness and its after effects may have been, they didn’t seem to slow him down once he arrived on the campus.

Dr. Corbett related that “The mass of work facing me was tremendous. Decisions that went back into April had been kept for the new President to make. With no background, no knowledge of relationships between persons and places and no personal acquaintances, the task was difficult. It would have been virtually hopeless if it had not been for the help of Mrs. (Flora) Hamiel, who had been secretary to presidents at the college for more than 30 years”¹⁵

“Almost from the beginning,” Corbett said, “my calendar was filled from 8 a.m. and frequently earlier, until well towards 10:00 at night, and there was always work to be done after that. There was preparation for meetings and constant preparation of talks to be made both on and off campus A few times ... talks were made without preparation because I didn’t get to it. .. Sometimes after these speeches I felt like the story of the preacher who had dinner at the home of one of the parishioners. He politely refused to eat because he was to speak almost immediately afterwards. The mother of the family did not go to church because of the extra work of having a guest. When her teenage son returned from the service, she asked how the (preacher’s) sermon was and the boy answered: ‘He might as well have et.’”¹⁶

Even with all the work facing him on campus Corbett said, “I decided to give top priority to a week’s visit to each ‘quarter’ of the State. I had great need to know the State geographically, the people ... and how they felt about their land-grant college”¹⁷ Relying on county extension agents to set up meetings for him, he observed that “The miles between Las Cruces and Albuquerque were more than those between Washington, D.C. and New York City and New Mexicans thought little about distances—they just took off. It was a jolt to learn that gasoline stations were sometimes seventy-five miles apart.”¹⁸ He also observed that “Many persons in New Mexico had little knowledge

about their land-grant college and [this] was particularly true in the largest city, Albuquerque. The generally held opinion was that only agriculture was taught at A&MA¹⁹

Corbett also said that while visiting the northern part of the state, I mentioned in a talk that the current ratio of boys to girls [at the college] was about seven .. to oneAfter the talk, I was invited to the home of a senior girl in the local high school. She asked [me] if she had heard correctly that there were 7 boys to 1 girl. When I replied in the affirmative, her eyes twinkled as she said: 'I'm coming down.'²⁰

President Corbett was ambitious to build the small two thousand student campus of 1955 into a large and great university, and when he saw opportunities to move towards this goal he took advantage of them. During his first year, steps were taken to establish a school of teacher education (later to be called the College of Education) to succeed the smaller, less visible education department in Arts and Sciences. This contributed to a greater enrollment of women. Within a few years, the ratio of seven men to one woman that so impressed the young lady from northern New Mexico went down to three to one, which Corbett commented created a "much more healthy"²¹ social situation on campus.

Also under his leadership during his first year, steps were taken to establish a graduate school to take over from a committee the oversight of master's degrees in several fields and the growing number of graduate students enrolled in them. Corbett wrote "It seemed clear that the establishment of a graduate school would be a step forward. This would have importance in combating the widely-held attitude that the college was stagnant, with virtually no progress being made."²² But even more important for the future of the college, Corbett went to Santa Fe to seek permission of the Board of Educational Finance, the predecessor of the present Commission on Higher Education, for New Mexico A&MA to offer doctoral degrees, which at that time were considered to be the exclusive right of The University of New Mexico. The impetus for Corbett to seek this authorization was a phone call from Colonel Howard Coleman, second in command at White Sands Proving Ground. Colonel Coleman stated very directly that this facility "had to make available work for doctor's degrees, or lose many of its best men to competing installations, where such opportunities existed."²³ He further stated that if the New Mexico College of A&MA "could not offer this opportunity, the Proving Ground would have to obtain some other university, such as the University of California, to offer this work. These were challenging words."²⁴ Corbett said, and he told Colonel Coleman that if he would "keep his shirt

on, we would soon offer some doctoral work. I did not know what it took to get approval within New Mexico, nor did I have a clear understanding of what it took in the way of additional manpower and finances on campus, and ... I was most hazy about accreditation of such degrees by the North Central Accrediting Association If I had known what I should have known, I probably would not have been so confident-or is the word 'brash.' But, Corbett relates, "Colonel Coleman's challenging demands could not be ignored nor could they be refused, so the commitment to act was made."²⁵

Soon thereafter Dr. Corbett made a trip to Santa Fe with Regents Richardson and Roberts to seek approval for offering doctoral programs. "The key to getting the doctoral program approved was Dr. John Dale Russell, the chairman of the Board of Educational Finance,"²⁶ who had a strong UNM bias. As Dr. Russell arrived at the Santa Fe airport from an out-of-town trip, Corbett and the Regents picked him up. Corbett and Dr. Russell sat in the back seat of the vehicle on the trip into Santa Fe. Corbett relates, "I explained to Dr. Russell what we wanted to do and the fur started flying. The harder we argued the slower Jess (Richardson) drove. When we got to Dr. Russell's home Jess was driving only 15 miles an hour and Dr. Russell was still not convinced. He thought all doctoral programs should be given at UNM."²⁷

But shortly thereafter at a meeting of the State Board of Finance in the Governor's Office, when Dr. Russell was called upon to present his view on the proposed NMSU doctoral degrees, he reversed himself and expressed his "100 percent"²⁸ support for the proposed New Mexico College of A&MA degrees. Dr. Corbett concluded that two of the three members of Russell's own board who had been contacted by phone by him and the Regents beforehand had convinced Russell to change his mind.²⁹ Corbett relates that then "all we had left to do was convince some of the people on campus that it could be done."³⁰ Dr. Corbett credits Dr. George W. Gardiner with largely resolving the practical problems of implementing the new doctoral degrees in physics, mathematics, and engineering.

The first year of his administration, when Corbett felt he had to do so much personally to get the college moving forward, the year of "no delegation"³¹ as he described it, "Reports persisted that a number of faculty and staff members were ... criticizing every new move." Corbett was taking these initiatives because "I had thought that the big problem" (at the college) "was stagnation and all were agreed that this was the situation that needed changing." And so, he said, "The decision was made to have a general faculty meeting and face the situation squarely. The heart of the meeting was to be a list of actions, new developments, and changes that had been accomplished or were

underway. The chief purpose was to emphasize that New Mexico College of A&MA was on the move, and then to point out that everyone could help the college ... by being builders in contrast to critics, and to reiterate that the future of the school and their own future depended on development.”³² The list of initiatives handed out to faculty and others as they came in the door was an impressive one, including the financing and start of construction of three new buildings for chemistry, engineering, and physics-mathematics. But what was also very significant was a major planning effort that was begun later as a follow up to that meeting. Known collectively as the ‘Big Plan,’ it involved everyone in planning for the future of the college through service on a number of committees, each with a particular aspect of the college about which to make recommendations. Corbett observed, “It was a learning experience for all of us. Guidelines for the future were established It brought us closer in our understanding of the work that needed to be done and the morale greatly improved.”³³ He also observed “that a giraffe is the result of committee work, but sometimes the giraffe produced is secondary to the values obtained through working on the giraffe.”³⁴ Indeed, through the Big Plan, Dr. Corbett raised the sights of the campus community and its vision of what their college could become.

The most difficult challenge that Dr. Corbett faced in his goal of transforming New Mexico A&MA into a university was changing the institution’s name. Corbett wrote, “If you desire to make enemies rapidly and in large numbers find an institution of higher learning with the word ‘agriculture’ in its name and try to change its name omitting the word agriculture.”³⁵

As well described in Gerald Thomas’ book, *The Academic Ecosystem*,³⁶ and in Simon Kropp’s history, *That All May Learn*,³⁷ the idea of changing the name of the college had come up before, and had been hotly debated the year prior to the arrival of Dr. Corbett to assume his duties as president. Agricultural leaders insisted on retaining the word “agriculture” in the school’s title while others, including the Alumni Association’s Advisory Committee, opted for a name change to New Mexico State University, similar to land grant colleges in a number of other states.

Dr. Corbett soon became convinced that the name change to New Mexico State University would give the school a title which much more appropriately described the many kinds of programs offered, and so he became a vigorous advocate for the new name, which was strongly opposed by the Directors of the New Mexico Farm and Livestock Bureau and others in the agricultural field. In his own defense Corbett wrote, “With my background, training, and prejudices, it was and is impossible for me to deliberately downgrade or injure American agriculture and the men and women on farms and

ranches. I have been willing throughout my life to mount the nearest 'soapbox' and give an hour-long ... speech in defense of American agriculture."³⁸

Corbett persisted in promoting the name change because he felt it was so important to realizing the vision he had for the college, and it was ultimately approved in a close three to two vote by the Board of Regents in compromise form-New Mexico State University of Agriculture, Science and Engineering. From there the name change went to the legislature, where it was opposed by the UNM lobbyist, who wished to keep the word "university" exclusively, for his school. Nevertheless, Corbett wrote, "When all the smoke was cleared, the final vote was for 'New Mexico State University' without the tail."³⁹ The new name was then approved by voters in the state as a constitutional amendment, effective in 1961.

Corbett said, "Probably no single action did more for our University than this one" He also said it was to his "great satisfaction that many ... on the faculty of the College of Agriculture, including Dean Leyendecker, came to me in the next year or two and volunteered their belief that ... agriculture had been helped by being a part of a growing university."⁴⁰

Another initiative taken by Dr. Corbett to build the great university he envisioned was to acquire more land for it to grow on. In an interview he said that one of his major challenges on land came early in his administration, when he learned of the State Highway Department's plans to construct Interstate 25 "about 200 yards east"⁴¹ of Rhodes, Garrett, and Hamiel Halls and the difficulty of getting the Interstate moved to its present location so future campus growth would not be constrained. In the same interview he also described the difficulty he had in obtaining land next to the campus that had been offered in 1910 to unsuspecting Easterners in tiny lots. Corbett commented that "Nowhere else in New Mexico could you have found 600 acres of mesa subdivided in 25 foot lots. The land, adjacent to the campus on the east mesa, was covered with greasewood and mesquite, and had been sold earlier to eastern 'suckers' who had been told they could grow citrus fruit on it The lots were sold for \$5 and \$10 each. Byron Darden (the university attorney) and I found about eight El Pasoans who owned lots, so we agreed to pay them back their original \$5 or \$10, plus any cash they had paid in taxes. Then we started crisscrossing the country, looking for people who owned lots. A few of the owners gave us the property..."⁴²

"There were no registered owners for many of the lots, so we took steps to condemn the property. I believe it was the largest title search ever made in the state."⁴³ In this and other transactions Roger Corbett and Byron Darden obtained land to accommodate NMSU's future growth, ensuring that

it would not one day find itself in a straightjacket, as other universities in the nation have found themselves, with nowhere to expand. In his memoir are statistics which indicate that NMSU's land holdings increased from 692 acres in 1955 to 6,250 acres at the end of his administration in 1970.

Besides getting out in the state to promote NMSU, forming a graduate school and breaking the UNM monopoly on offering doctoral programs, creating a college of education (which encouraged more women to enroll), spearheading the successful effort to change the college name to NMSU, starting an ambitious, successful building program, and acquiring the land needed for future college expansion, Corbett and his team did many other things to build for the future. He pushed for upgrading the academic credentials of faculty. He fought for equitable state funding for NMSU to replace the favoritism shown to UNM and Eastern New Mexico University. He supported the establishment of a college of business; he supported building research ties with defense and other federal agencies and facilities, especially White Sands, including contracts that employed large numbers of NMSU students, thus enabling them to finance their own educations; he increased the number of off-campus instructional centers and agricultural science centers; he promoted enrollment growth and on-campus housing for married as well as unmarried students; he encouraged ventures into international programs, and he supported intercollegiate sports, not only because of the positive effect sports could have on young people, but because of the recognition and visibility that winning teams, such as the football team of 1960, brought to the university.

In his memoir, Dr. Corbett clearly states that all these accomplishments involved the hard work and leadership of many others besides himself, and he singles out a number of individuals, such as his secretary, Florence Martin, and Academic Vice President Bill O'Donnell, for special praise. He was also very fortunate to have the help and support of his wife Betty, whom he married in 1963.

Roger Corbett retired from the presidency of NMSU in 1970 after fifteen years of service. During his tenure he succeeded in getting people to 'think big' about NMSU's future. He also succeeded in setting NMSU on a course of growth, development, and excellence that would continue under his successor, Gerald Thomas, and other presidents to come. In Corbett Center, the student union constructed during his administration and still perhaps the most heavily used building on campus, there is a large mural, described by its creator, Ken Barrick as "a jigsaw puzzle of the diverse elements Dr. Corbett brought together to make a university from a small agricultural college."⁴⁴

This mural is a fitting tribute to Roger Corbett, the master builder of New Mexico State University.

William B. Conroy is President Emeritus of New Mexico State University. While at NMSU he served as Executive Vice President (1985-1997), Interim President (1994-1995), and as President (1997-2000). In the last year of his presidency the Board of Regents of NMSU voted to name the William B. Conroy Honors Center for him.

Prior to coming to NMSU Dr. Conroy served in faculty and administrative positions at Texas Tech University, The University of Texas at Austin and the University of Washington. During his career he published numerous articles and books in his field of geography.

Dr. Conroy received his bachelor's degree in history from Notre Dame University, and both his master's degree in education and PhD in social science (with his major field in geography) from Syracuse University.

He and his wife Patty have five children, ten grandchildren and one great grandchild. He and Patty live in Las Cruces.

Endnotes

1. "The Corbett Years 1955 - 1970: *New Mexico Aggie IV* (1970): 4.
2. Roger B. Corbett, *Memories and Opinions* (Unpublished Memoir, Archives and Special Collections Department, New Mexico State University Library, Las Cruces, New Mexico, 1972).
3. Ibid.
4. "The Corbett Years 1955 - 1970: 7.
5. Ibid.
6. Roger B. Corbett, *Memories and Opinions*.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. "The Corbett Years 1955 - 1970," 10.
10. Dr. Corbett was among those who believed that communists were behind the student protest movement and related campus unrest at American Universities. This contributed to what some of his campus contemporaries considered his over reaction in dealing with protests and with criticisms of the NMSU Administration and with the individuals associated with them in the later years of his presidency. The many pages of his memoir which he devoted to this subject suggests the extent to which these activities troubled him.
11. Roger B. Corbett, *Memories and Opinions*.
12. Ibid.
13. "The Corbett Years 1955 - 1970," 10.
14. Roger B. Corbett, *Memories and Opinions*.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
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27. Ibid.
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29. The three Board members were Oscar Allen (a graduate of New Mexico College of A & MA), Lillburn Holman (a graduate of the University of New Mexico), and Morgan Nelson (a graduate of New Mexico College of A & MA). During the telephone calls, Allen and Holman told Corbett they would support the doctoral degrees proposal. Nelson said he wanted to talk to Dr. Russell before he decided how he would vote. These three men were the only BEE members at the time since Governor Sims had not appointed anyone to fill vacant positions on the Board. Roger B. Corbett, *Memories and Opinions*.
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Doña Ana County: Home of the Chile

Robin Cathey

Have you ever smelled the air in Doña Ana in late summer, when it is filled with the sweet aroma of roasting chiles? Chile is a key part of our culture. Everywhere you look you see posters, paintings, ristras, and food with chiles. We even have festivals in celebration of chile, including The Hatch Chile Festival and The Whole Enchilada Fiesta. The Hatch Chile Festival, a celebration of harvest, has been held on Labor Day every year since 1976. The festival is filled with contests, food, and entertainment. The Whole Enchilada Fiesta, a three day celebration of traditions, people, and food, is centered around the making of the world's largest enchilada. Since 1980 the fiesta has brought in money to feed the local economy and provide money for schools and scholarships. But how did we come to love this food we call chile?

The ancestry of chile is not clearly known, but surprisingly it is not native to Doña Ana County, New Mexico, or North America. Archaeologists and horticulturalists speculate that chile evolved from an ancestral form found in the Bolivia-Peru region of South America. Their research indicates that the people of that area were growing chile plants between 5200 and 3400 B.C. This evidence indicates the chile was probably one of the first cultivated crops in the Americas. If it is not native to Doña Ana County, then how did it get here and when did it get here? Some theorists speculate that Toltec traders, wandering up from Mexico, introduced chile to the Anasazi and subsequently their descendants the Pueblo people were growing it when the Spaniards arrived. Further research, however, indicates that it is more likely that the Spaniards introduced the Pueblo Indians to chile rather than the indigenous peoples introducing it to the Spaniards. As quoted from the journal of Baltasar Obregón, a member of the Antonio Espejo's expedition in the Southwest during 1582-83, "They have no chile, but the natives were given some seed to plant. "The most accepted theory of how chile migrated to Doña Ana County is that it was introduced by the Spaniards as they traveled north from Mexico. Based on the writings of the Spanish historian Bernardino de Sahagún, who lived in Mexico in 1529, the Aztecs plant breeders had developed dozens of varieties of chiles when the Spanish explorers arrived. Sahagún, in his descriptions of the agricultural products grown by the Aztecs in Mexico, reports there being "hot green chiles, smoked chiles, water chiles, tree chiles, beetle chiles, and sharp-pointed red chiles." Who specifically introduced chile or when exactly it became a cultivated product in Doña Ana County still is an unknown. It is known from Don Juan de Oñate's journals that chile has been a cultivated plant in New Mexico for more than four hundred years. The writings of his

expeditions show that in 1598, with irrigation from the Chama River of northern New Mexico, chiles were grown.

Although chile has been grown in New Mexico and Doña Ana County for more than four hundred years, not until the twentieth century was it bred for certain heats and sizes. Although Sahagún described the dozens of varieties of chiles developed by the Aztec horticulturalists, until modern chile development and plant research, chile plants were unpredictable producers of pods of all shapes, sizes and heat levels. Professor Fabian Garcia, a horticulturist at the New Mexico State University (NMSU) Agricultural Experiment Station, changed chile in Doña Ana County and the world forever. Professor Garcia certainly did not create the first chile, but in the early 1900s he produced a new pod-type, "New Mexico 9," the first variety of chile with dependable size and heat. This product of his early research opened the commercialization of New Mexico Chile and established the chile food industry. Since Professor Garcia's early research many more varieties of chiles have been developed. Roy Harper's released New Mexico 6 in 1950. Roy Nakayama's developed New Mexico 6-4 in the late 1950s and bred of Nu-Mexico R-Naky in the 1980s. From those early days of cue breeding by the Aztecs with their dozens of varieties, we now produce several hundred varieties of chiles in New Mexico. Interestingly, despite vast trait differences, nearly all chile grown in New Mexico belong to one species, *Capsicum annum*.

With New Mexico producing 60 percent of the chile grown in the United States, Doña Ana accounts for 34 percent. Although Doña Ana County is one of the largest producers of chile, it has only 8,200 acres in chile, falling behind its 19,500 acres of cotton and 18,000 acres of pecans. In these 8,200 acres there are five different chiles produced: New Mexico green, New Mexico red, paprika, cayenne, and jalapeños. Although it is produced in Doña Ana, most of the chile is exported to other states and other countries. Only about 20 percent of the chile grown here is sold fresh, roasted, and dried at farmers markets and roadside stands, while the rest is grown under contract for processing. At harvest, Doña Ana County's chile is worth \$20,400,000, but after processing this quadruples. Most processing plants are also in southern New Mexico, making this key to Doña Ana's economy.

As Lou Biad, a Mesilla Valley processor, has been quoted: If someone wanted to bring an industry to New Mexico that was worth more than \$200 million and generated exports that provide a net benefit to the state economy, we'd pay attention. Chile production and processing is already here, and we're a proven industry that fits with the culture, land

and economy. We're worth keeping.

However, those involved in the industry such as Mr. Biad reached a sobering conclusion in 1998 that the chile industry faced an emergency. If changes in the industry from cultivation to processing were not made, it would likely disappear from Doña Ana County, if not the United States. One of the recognized areas for improvement, following standardization of the product, has been the harvesting process. Historically harvesting of chile, like many other crops such as cotton, was done by hand. Hand-harvesting accounts for up to 60 percent of New Mexico chile growers production costs, currently. New Mexico growers and processors have been aware of the manual labor differential between the United States and other countries for many years, but the recognition of the magnitude of the crisis became most apparent in the 1990s when fresh chile imports from Mexico dramatically increased from 2,600 to 22,000 metric tons. Because of high labor costs, harvesters see machines as the way to stay cost-effective in order to compete in a global marketplace. For the last forty years, harvesters have been working on mechanizing the process. Machines may be costly at first, but in the long run save money and time. The goal of mechanical harvesting is to produce a product that is clean enough to satisfy processors. Hughs, a research leader and agricultural engineer with United States Department of Agriculture's Southwestern Cotton Ginning Research Laboratory on the NMSU campus, has made the analogy that the chile industry in it's production and processing is at the same place the cotton industry was almost fifty years ago. He has further noted that it was not until the 1960s that more cotton was machine-harvested than hand-harvested. Mechanical harvesting has been slow because of the variety of shapes and sizes, as well as the small acreage in cultivation as compared to other field crops such as cotton. The engineering development, however, is not the only barrier to transition from the historical method of manual cultivation to mechanical cultivation. Convincing the grower that mechanization is ultimately a more effective means has also been an up-hill task. One example of the difficulties in convincing the growers is shown in the comments of a farmer in Anthony, New Mexico, "the problem with mechanical harvesting is that before 1 plant the crop, I've already paid for the harvest. Once you buy the machine, the money is gone." After losing a crop recently, he has never used the harvesting machine again. Despite the difficulties in implementation of mechanical harvesting, researchers at New Mexico State University College of Agriculture continue to lead the world in development of the tools and philosophy for this effort. Through their efforts, although green chile is still picked by hand, almost every jalapeño is machine harvested. And significant progress has

been made in the development of machine to pick red chile effectively.

Though chile historically is not a native plant to Doña Ana County, it has significantly impacted the traditions and culture of this area for over four hundred years. Chile is of such significance culturally and economically to this valley that no true home is without its chile ristra and freezer full of chile. It's impact is reflected in the annual celebrations and fiestas which celebrate its importance. Doña Ana County consistently is the largest producer of chile in the United States. This position as a leader in chile production is an outgrowth of NMSU and its tradition in development of the commercial chile and the procedures and equipment for cultivation and processing. The future of New Mexico chile should continue to be bright as new uses of chile are continually found. As NMSU's former president James E. Halligan said, "Chile is what gives (Doña Ana County) its national identity."

Robin Catbey was a student in the eleventh grade at Las Cruces High School when this winning essay was written.

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Cotton Production from 1900 to 2003 in Doña Ana County

Jordan L. Kruis

Sharecropper in 1900 could not have imagined the changes in production of cotton within 20th century! How could he conceive that one-day a machine would do that same work with a very small fraction of the labor? Could he envision that later altering something called a gene, which he had never heard of, would help the cotton grow better?

In 1889 the United States Department of Agriculture was raised to cabinet level. The first thing it did was to develop and dispense information to increase crop production. Later it started marketing products and supporting prices. In 1974 the federal government started a plan to help cotton farmers. Under this plan the government sets a target price, if the market price is less than the target price the government makes up for the difference.

In 1938 the National Cotton Council (NCC) was formed to promote cotton and cotton product use through advertisement and research. The NCC helped pass The Cotton Research and Promotion Act in 1966 and the amendment to that act in 1977, enabling collections from farmers for research and promotion purposes.

In the early twentieth century, most farms were privately owned by families. Some were owned by the wealthy who had sharecroppers do the hard, backbreaking work. Now, sophisticated farmers with lots of (usually borrowed) money own the majority of cotton farms. Before, in the early 1900s, farmers could be uneducated but hard working. In the twenty-first century a farmer has to be college educated especially in biology and mathematics so they can know what is wrong with their crops and “balance the books.” Farmers have to keep learning what new advances are going to help the crop and buy equipment accordingly.

Many farms were small in the early 1900s. Now there are only a few large ones because small businesses do not have enough money to stay “alive.” From 1940 to 1960 more than one million farms were forsaken. The number of cotton farms is falling in Doña Ana County. In 1997 there were 23,000 acres of cotton grown, in 2001 there were only 16,000 acres. The reasons for this are mainly pests (the boll weevil and the pink bollworm) and that the cotton price is very low. Cotton farmers have to pay an assessment on the cotton for eradicating pests. Farmers who stop growing cotton usually start growing other crops.

Before World War II farmers plowed using animals to pull the plow. The cotton farmers dropped in the seeds by hand. In the twenty-first century, they use large machines, which put in fertilizer and herbicides while sowing the seeds. Fertilization has matured much from 1900 to 2000. In the early 1900s compost and manure were used. Now, in the twenty-first century, chemicals with higher concentration of the substances plants require are used.

In Doña Ana County picking was all done by hand in 1945. In 1960 half was done by hand and half by machine. By 1965 all picking was all done by machine. Doña Ana County has used Elephant Butte water for irrigation since the early 1900s. In the early 1900s community ditches were used. Different communities built and used their own ditches. The Bureau of Reclamation owned the Elephant Butte Irrigation in 1920. By doing this, they could unite the community ditches. In January 1992 Elephant Butte Irrigation was owned by private owners.

One of the best advances in cotton development is the alteration of genes. The first patent on a plant created by genetic modification was issued in 1986 by The US Patent and Trademark Office. BT cotton is a cotton that has a special organism in the seed. When the bollworm devours the cotton, the organism reproduces, killing the worm. In 1993 a cotton plant was genetically engineered so that it's foliage was lethal only to a type of cotton-eating caterpillar.

In Doña Ana County a lot of research is done on cotton genetics at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Acala 1517 cotton is a cotton that NMSU produced. It is well known and widely used because of the strength, fineness, and staple (length) of the cotton fiber.

Cotton does not need a great deal of water, so it is very good crop for Doña Ana County. Cotton is also extremely important for the field rotation of both chile and alfalfa crops. There are not as many pests if the fields are rotated because the chile-alfalfa pests will die of starvation if they get cotton instead of chile or alfalfa.

It is amazing how so many changes have been made since the early 1900s. It is hard to imagine having to pick cotton by hand. Who knows, someday cotton might be picked by robots.

Jordan Kruis was a sixth grader at In Him Rejoice Home School when this winning article was written.

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[Click for Table of Contents](#)

[Click for Book Review](#)

Book Review

In *amerikaizischer Kriegsgefangenschaft: Berichte Deutscher Soldaten* years the interest for the events of World War II is as great in Germany as in the United States. Wolfgang Schlauch was just nine years old when American tanks rolled into his small village in southern Germany in the spring of 1945. Retired as professor emeritus of modern history, he now he lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico. There he volunteered as a consultant for an exhibit at the New Mexico Farm and Ranch Museum entitled “Well Done-Work of POW’s in New Mexico agriculture during WW II.” This exhibit emphasized the important accomplishments of German, and to a lesser degree, Italian prisoners of war in the time period 1943 to 1946. These POWs contributed significantly in the cotton harvest of the remote Southwest during the last years of and immediately after the war.

Las Cruces was one of the most infamous of the more than five hundred camps in America in which roughly 350,000 German soldiers were kept. The camp commander here dealt out especially harsh treatment to his charges, which only improved after inspections and protests by Geneva Convention representatives. Nevertheless, one of the inmates of that camp experienced enough positive moments of his time there that he was moved to return to Las Cruces on three separate occasions in order to refresh contacts made during that time.

Thus it is made evident, what this book is all about. Namely the vast range of experiences German prisoners of war were exposed to during that difficult time. Those who were lucky, could describe there existence in certain camps as “heaven”, whereas others found themselves, at least for certain periods, in “hell.”

More than thirty German POWs provided the author of this work their notes, diaries, and documents of all kind. From them Professor Schlauch arranged a collection of lively descriptions of their experiences and impressions of that long passed but not forgotten period.

The book tells, often in passionate stories, how German soldiers experienced their capture; how they were shuttled through various camps where they experienced vastly different treatment. Food, work assignments and how they were dealt with by guard personnel are shown in vivid terms. The discrepancy between individual camps and the attitude of the civilian population of diverse regions are presented well.

Whereas German POWs transported to the United States had a relatively good experience after their internment, those who were captured after the war in Europe had entirely different stories to tell. Immediately after the fighting ended, the situation for German prisoners of war often became devastating. The difference between conditions in POW camps in the

United States and the infamous “Rheinwiesenlager” (open pasture camps along the right bank of the Rhine River) was indescribably large. More than three million German soldiers suddenly found themselves in Allied custody. American Forces were totally unprepared for the logistic demands of such numbers and often had to cope with places where inhuman circumstances prevailed.

The book also touches on stories of German POWs who, after two and three years of confinement in America and thinking they were on their way home, were instead diverted to additional years as prisoners of the British or French as “reparations”.

The book does its part to close the gap in WWII literature dealing with prisoners of war in American captivity. The work is richly furnished with photographs, drawings by captives, and in its appendix lists the Geneva Convention for the treatment of POWs, interesting documents, poems and newspaper clippings concerning the subject matter.

In amerikanischer Kriegsgefangenschaft is an exceedingly readable account that explains life behind barbed wire to new generations as well as helping those who experienced those days to work through those traumatic memories.

Felix Pfaeffle
Las Cruces, N. Mex.

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