

Dear Mr. Tinsley,

I am very much pleased by your letter and I appreciate an American young man's intention to report on the war and the prisoners of war. It is my pleasure if I can help you with my memories.

As a 19 year old son of a farmer I had to become a soldier in 1942. After a three months' very rough training for the military service I was moved to Sicily, then to Italy mainland where I was wounded at Salerno. After a sick stay at length in a military hospital I was transferred to Italy once more for another military operation. During a military manoeuvre at night I fell into British imprisonment together with 6 comrades. After several days the English troops delivered us to the American Army and we were transferred into a well guarded collecting camp. From here we were embarked in the port of Naples three weeks later. She was a liberty freighter of 10,000BRT/GRT (gross registered tons).

As the hold of the ship offered very little space for us we were given wood and thus constructed beds of two and three stories. The ship's route was via Palermo, Sicily to Algiers, Africa with a three days stay at each port. Having travelled from Naples for eight days we passed the Gibraltar channel into the open sea. Only two days later a strong storm arose, appr. 80% of the German prisoners of war got seasick, not a pleasure to look at.

On the ocean a convoy of appr. 120 - 150 ships formed including the combat ships like destroyers and battle ships which protected the convoy against possible attacks by German submarines. That was when we understood - even the strongest optimists among us - that the war was lost for Germany against this immense military force of the USA that was already known to us as land-forces.

For food-supply on the boat we received the US Army C-ration.

Having sailed for 30 days we arrived in America in the port of Norfolk, Virginia. After disembarkation we were deloused, the hair was shaved and after a nice comforting shower we received new clothing. Next we were taken to a waiting passenger train. In a two days journey we travelled to the POW camp Forrest, Tennessee. We arrived at night being heartily welcomed by the POWs already present who were captured in Africa. That was on 3 October 1944.

The internal living of the camp was led by Germans, and so was the kitchen! The next morning the view of the breakfast table opened our eyes in surprise. Inexpressible our emotions! Towards the rich supply of food on the tables. Additional to the normal plentiful breakfast such as bread, butter, jam, milk and cornflakes the comrades had baked big tarts, one each per 10 persons - a real delicacy after all our experience. We were allowed resting and getting accustomed for two days. The third day we were appointed to different labour such as corn harvest, tobacco harvest and others, I worked also as a mechanic assistant.

It was in November 1944 that we were transferred to Camp McCain in Mississippi next to Drew near Cleveland. Same as at Forrest some prisoners from the German Corps Africa were already there. They lived in timber houses. Tents for 6 persons each were erected for us to live in. Here we had to work in the cotton harvest. For the plucking experience we were allowed a qualifying period of two days time. We were obliged to pluck 100 pounds per day. The farmers had to pay \$4.50 per prisoner per day. A native plucker received plucking wages of 4.5 cents per pound, that meant we had to pluck 100 pounds per day. For one day we were paid 80 cents. Plucking cotton was not a very strenuous but laborious and monotonous work. Many of the prisoners were not used to physical labour and had a rough time; therefore, some comrades helped others to manage the set quantity. Furthermore, some comrades and myself were employed in a cotton warehouse in Cleveland, Miss. for pressing cotton. By means of machines the cotton was pressed into bales and fixed with steel-tape as preparation for the transport. <sup>pick</sup>

On 24 December we spent a pleasant Christmas feast. The ancient Christmas story was performed, poems recited and we joined in carol singing. Our thoughts were at home and our eyes filled with tears. The commander and some relatives of the US camp leaders took part in our feast.



On 24 January 1945 we moved to Camp Wheeler, Georgia. There we were appointed to forest work for a short period of time. In February we were transferred to Camp Blanding, Jacksonville and from there we were distributed into 4 branch camps. Together with 50 comrades I came to Leesburg. Same as in the other camps we were welcomed from prisoners captured in Africa and led to our lodgings. These were not tents but nice timber houses with sufficient room for us. As usual we were given two days time to make ourselves accustomed.

The sanitary facilities were very good and neatly attended to. Kitchen and mess at their best. Same as in the other camps already known the internal organisation such as leading the kitchen, distribution into labour units - according to the Americans' wishes -, the cleaning of the camp and everything else that had to be done within the camp was taken care of by prisoners. We called it German camp leading.

On the third day we were appointed to the orange harvest. Before the working process we were informed by an American soldier that we would have to perform our labour correctly; in order to learn plucking quickly each plucking unit was accompanied by one experienced prisoner who had been there for some time already. The labour units mostly consisted of ten men. Each ten-head-unit had one American guard with them. Units larger than ten men had two guards.

At 6 o'clock in the morning our daily life began. 7 o'clock breakfast, plentiful and good.

Again we had milk and cornflakes (by the way, nowadays I still begin my breakfast with milk and cornflakes) and furthermore bread and plentiful other food.

At 8 o'clock we were picked up for plucking by farmers with trucks. Every man received a ladder, a pluckbag and 30 boxes to be filled with oranges. 100 pounds fitted into one box. An American plucker earned 15 cents for 100 pounds. Therefore, our daily standard was to fill 30 boxes in order to reach \$4.50, which amount the farmers had to pay for us per day. 30 boxes of oranges is quite a lot. Actually, during the first days it was difficult to reach such a quantity. But soon with more experience it was no longer a major problem for many of us. In case the fruits were tightly growing in the trees most of us

were through ahead of time. Until we would be picked up by 17 o'clock we spent our time leisurely under the trees with conversation etc. and also assisted other comrades who had difficulties with plucking. We had to pluck 30 boxes in case up to 22 rungs of the ladders reached high enough to the tree tops. However, if the trees were higher and thus more rungs of ladders necessary - in my time in Florida there were still very old and high trees - the plucking norm was reduced to 20 - 15 boxes per day according to the height of the trees and possibly thinner hanging of fruits. The oranges must not be torn off by hand but had to be cut with a clipper in order to save the orange stem, not to damage the orange and thus to ensure a longterm endurance. Partly the plucking had to be achieved while wearing protection gloves because of the differently thorny constellation of the trees. In those days Florida with its many lakes was an original natural country. Every now and then snakes happened to be in the trees and we were forced to remove them. Some of the snake-skins I brought home for souvenir.

Our daily food supply - bread and tea - we took along from the camp. During orange-plucking we were allowed to eat fruits as many as we wanted. Especially delicious were those very ripe oranges lying on the ground.

When we returned to the camp in the evening we were counted, the arrival registered and many a time we were also investigated by feel in order not to take anything forbidden into the camp. Having passed the guarded entrance gate we went to our living-barracks, removed our labour clothing and had a shower. It was wonderful to have this possibility as a POW.

From the camp Leesburg we were also appointed to other labour, such as road works as hands for shoveling sand and other necessary manual labour. However, my major occupation was to work on the Zellwin Farm on the shore of Apopka. To be able to work on this vegetable farm as a young German farmer was quite an experience! By means of an earth dam the farm was a separated part of lake Apopka. The soil was almost pure humus. The watering resulted from a system of canals i. e. the individual fields were surrounded by water trenches, the water level could be lowered or raised by means of pumps, i. e. individually adjusted to the needs of the plants, the seed. If the soil was used for sowing the water level was lowered for drying. After the sowing the water level was raised again etc.



Altogether: the excellent soil, the sun of Florida, the water exactly adjusted to the needs of the plants - it was a greenhouse without a roof, a paradise! The machinery was also of most modern standard, everything necessary was at hand. The harvest, the transport, the classifying, the packing of the different kinds of vegetable, partly for longterm transports bedded into minced ice for keeping quality! - Everything was well thought of. Our work here was very many-sided, whatever was necessary, like removing of the weeds from between the young vegetable by hacking and pulling. However, most of the time we were busy in the harvest of the different kinds of vegetables.

Here as well as elsewhere during the harvest a set quantity had to be accomplished. It was based on the American plucking wages. Our work had to result in the amount of \$4.50 per day, e. g. harvest of 75 boxes of celery, 25 baskets of potatoes to be pulled out by hand and picked up. On account of the high temperatures we needed to drink a lot. I remember one time that our camp commander came to the fields to examine if we had enough fresh water.

In our leisure time we went in for sports. Within the camp different sports appliances were available. Outside the camp in Northern direction a sucker field was at our disposal. From different groups teams were founded. Thus games and contests were performed quite frequently.

During my time off I also occupied myself with learning the English language. We were not in direct contact with the people of Leesburg - our camp was fenced and guarded - but it was really useful to be able to make oneself understood with farmers, guards, people in connection with work. Moreover, in the evenings cultural events were organised in the field of history, songs and reciting of poems.

In the camp we could buy different goods from our wages, 80 cents per day. And coming back from work, returned to the camp, having enjoyed the daily shower we liked to buy some icecream and to enjoy it in the shade under some tree. Other goods for sale were cookies, lemonade, coke, stationery, toilet articles, cigarettes and different small matters.

I was in Leesburg when the end of the war occurred on 8 May 1945. Knowing that this war from the German side was conducted for sheer despotic desire and was prolonged without any reason, the lives of many people sacrificing in an unscrupulous way for such a tyranny, I had been desiring this day for a long time. The thoughts went homewards, in what way the war had been passing there? I had no word of my mother ever since I was captured. The next day we were shown fotos and films of the German concentration camps. It is true, however, that we knew about the existence of such camps but I felt very much depressed and ashamed to see and hear that such incredible cruelties had happened. These pictures were to be seen all over America with the headline „This is why we fight“.

Our commander had kept us in the camp for some days, I think for good reason. Afterwards we were appointed to work again and to my delight I happened to return to Zellwin Farms together with several comrades. At that time celery and beans were harvested. Then, after the war, we had new food rations. All the food was removed from the camp and new rations were distributed, strongly reduced. With suchlike food-supply we found it difficult to work efficiently but soon the food rations increased again and circumstances went back to normal.

The direct post-war time with all its events were the dreariest days of my captivity! During the hot summertime in the Leesburg area the need for hands was a reduced one and we, initially come there for harvesting labour, were transferred to Orlando and were appointed to different kinds of work, so in an airbase. Cleaning work in a navy camp at Sanford, road works and other assistant work, in October forest work.

The 15 November 1945 happened to be an especially happy day for me. A sister of my mother paid me a visit; since she had immigrated to USA after world war 1 she had been living in Amityville N. Y. I was allowed to spend two hours each during two days. We had plenty to tell.

Christmas 1945. Here in Orlando a priest was among us prisoners and often he celebrated services. Due to his presence Christmas time was especially solemn. In this camp seminars on American history were arranged for voluntary participation; also we could take part in lessons on „American Civics“ as a political preparation for the situation in our home country. The participation in these seminars were confirmed by certificates. I received both of the documents. I am attaching copies.



I am keeping nice memories of a trip from Orlando to Jacksonville to our main camp Blanding. Two guards took me to the doctor as I suffered from tooth ache. We had good relationships with the guards and on the trip to Jacksonville we passed nereby the „biggest tree of Florida“. The two guards were so friendly as to take me there. It was a pleasant experience for me to see a superb large tree like this. It always stayed in my memory. During my last visit in Florida together with my wife and daughter I told this story to our hosts Mrs. and Mr. Lou and Tom Staley, the former leader of Zellwin Farm. On a trip to Cape Caneveral they took us along to the biggest tree of Florida. This was a moving memory to me. A 'thank you!' to the two guards - even 55 years later.

On 7 January 1946 my name was called during mail distribution! I received mail of my mother. The first word of my home. My mother had overcome the war in good health and was waiting for her two still living sons' return. Nearly at the same time as myself my brother had been captured into Russian war-prisonship.

1 March 1946: The first 100 prisoners of war leave the camp homeward.

15 March 1946: Depart also for me from Orlando to Jacksonville. We were to go home.

2 April 1946: Depart from Jacksonville by rail.

4 April 1946: Arrival in Camp Shanka, New Jersey N. Y.

10 April 1946: Embarkation and depart from America.

Good bye.

18. April 1946: Arrival at Liverpool, England.

We did not go home but we were delivered to England and were taken to Scotland by rail and distributed into different camps. I came to Laurencekirk near Montrose and was appointed to agricultural work again such as cultivating sugar-beets and potato fields, harvest of grain and beets and potatoes. At the end of the harvest and processing work in Scotland myself and a group of other POWs were transferred into an English barracks building at Peterborough in the middle of England. Mostly we were appointed to cleaning. It was my duty to take care of the coke heating appliance and to keep the toilets clean in an officers' building.

In spring and summer 1947 I was South of London in the county of Kent, worked there on farms, fruit and vegetable. From the middle of the year 1947 onwards we were allowed to move about outside of the camp at certain times and in a certain zone. We were also allowed to use public traffic. Once I was in London with several comrades. There were no problems with native people. Whenever we asked for information we always received answers and good advice and sometimes even small presents.

In September 1947 we were transferred to Billingham, Sussex, Here we got discharge-numbers. The number related to month and year of the imprisonment. I got number 19 and in December 1947 I came to a discharge-camp in Germany near my home village in the French sector. After precise examination of my past I was discharged; finally, a couple of days before Christmas I could hug my mother.

The next day I inspected our farm. There was plenty of work for me to do. - My father died when I was three years old. Mother had leased out the farm for 12 years, she only worked the vineyards herself and with the help of others, hoping to run the farm again on her own account with me present. In order to develop a good education as a young farmer I attended a high school in agricultures and came to the farm in spring 1939 having passed the examination. On 1 September the war broke out and - as I said - I had to become a soldier in 1942. My mother had to go through a hard time to keep the farm going while I was absent but she made it.

1949 I met my wife and we got married in December 1949. 1954 I enrolled for the master qualifying examination. I was able to satisfy all the conditions except for a period of apprenticeship. I wrote a report on my agricultural labour during my captivity in America and England but especially about the experience with modern working methods that I had practised on Zellwin Farm. I could absolve my master qualifying examination as a farmer.

The main subject of our farm is the wine-growing with production and improvement of the wine to the final bottling. But also in the matter of field farming I wanted to approach ways and means on the basis of my experience on the Zellwin Farm. However, for lack of water that would have been vital for the watering I could not grow vegetable in the same way. Whereas the climate



and the soil were well appropriate for the production of vegetable seed. Therefore I grew vegetable for several seed-companies with good success and also flower seed according to demand. I am mentioning this because I mean to say that most certainly I would not have had the same motivation without my work on Zellwin Farm. A year ago I got a very bad message. The government of Florida decided for the sake of environment to shut down and flood the Zellwin farm. Inexplicable to me! The fact that this was done makes me very sad. When I was with friends I often talked about 'my' farm.

At the end of my report I would like to say: To be a POW is of course not a most pleasant situation but I consider best to have passed that time in America and England instead of any other country.

Enclosed please find the report on the period when I was a POW in America and England. Thereby I am thinking and hoping to have given you an impression of our everyday life and conduct as POW.

Enclosed are some copies:

- 1) Title-page of contest by YMCA in May 1945. Selection of poems.
- 2) Two Certificates of Achievement, American History and American Civics.  
The participation in American Civics was of great help to me in everyday life after my discharge and in the regional political life especially at the time when we were administrated by the French government.
- 3) A Prisoner of War Index Card of my period in England.
- 4) A payment order on \$78.60.

After the war our wages of 80 cent per day were partly withheld in order to have some money at the day of discharge to be paid in Germany. However, in Germany these money orders were exchanged only by 1:1 in the currency RM (Reichsmark = German currency unit 1924-48). I waited for the currency adjustment in June 1948 hoping to receive an exchange into DM by a 1:1 rate. But even then my money order would have been exchanged as RM, i. e. 1:1 into RM to begin with and afterwards into DM by 10:1. That means I should have received no more than DM7.86 or converted \$1.87 on the currency basis of \$1.00 = DM4.20 at that time. I kept my original cheque for memory.

*If you have another Question and I can help  
you I will do it.*

*My best regards*

*Fritz Fitting*



# GIEDICHTTAUSWAHL

Ownership verified by .....

KRIEGSGEFANGENEN-LAGER  
BLANDING-FLORIDA Leesburg

# PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

CAMP BLANDING, FLORIDA

*This* **Certificate of Achievement** *is awarded to:*

FITTING, Fritz

WHO HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A COURSE IN

**American Civics**

FOR PRISONERS OF WAR CONDUCTED AT

POW Branch Camp, Orlando, Florida

IN WITNESS THEREOF, THE UNDERSIGNED HAVE SET THEIR

NAMES THIS 25 DAY OF January 194 6

Alfred F. Corwin  
NAME RANK  
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE OFFICER

E.D. Smith Jr.  
NAME RANK  
CAMP COMMANDER  
E.D. SMITH JR. Capt. CMP

Walter Koehler  
NAME GRADE  
PW DIRECTOR OF STUDIES



# PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

CAMP BLANDING, FLORIDA

*This* **Certificate of Achievement** *is awarded to:*

FITTING, Fritz

WHO HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED A COURSE IN

## American History

FOR PRISONERS OF WAR CONDUCTED AT

POW Branch Camp, Orlando, Florida

IN WITNESS THEREOF, THE UNDERSIGNED HAVE SET THEIR

NAMES THIS 25 DAY OF January 1946

Alfred F. Cowin  
NAME RANK  
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE OFFICER

E.D. Smith Jr.  
NAME RANK  
CAMP COMMANDER  
E.D. SMITH JR. Capt. CMP

Walter Koellerauer, Jr.  
NAME GRADE  
PW DIRECTOR OF STUDIES

# PRISONER OF WAR INDEX CARD

PRISONER OF WAR No. B 23758  
 FULL NAME FITTING Fritz RANK Capr.  
 (BLOCK CAPITALS)  
 NATIONALITY German AGE 24  
 ARM OF SERVICE Army

## IDENTIFICATION

(a) Colour of Hair Black (e) Weight 145 lbs.  
 (b) Colour of Eyes blue (f) Teeth 5 fail  
 (c) Complexion Fresh (g) Distinguishing marks ✓  
 (Tattoo, Birth Marks, etc.)  
 (d) Height 6'8 1/4 inches (h) Dress   
 (Decorations, Badges, etc.)

SPECIAL REMARKS:—



PHOTOGRAPH



CERTIFICATE

Certified above particulars are correct.

Date 3 JUN 1947

(5389) Wt. 57131/5435 850m. 3/45 C.&Co. 745(8)

W. Blake Capel  
 Signature of Camp Commandant.

P.T.O.



THE DISBURSING OFFICER  
CASHING THIS PAYMENT  
ORDER MUST FORWARD IT  
TO THE  
TREASURER OF THE  
UNITED STATES  
OF AMERICA  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.,  
FOR DEPOSIT

71, 142, 888

22 MAR 1946

# Military Disbursing Officers of the United States

WILL CASH THIS PAYMENT ORDER

IN THE SUM OF

~~SEVEN~~ 78 DOLLARS AND 60 CTS

~~SEVEN~~ 78.60

ONLY FOR Fritz Fitting

81G 263997

TO SECURE PAYMENT THE PAYEE WHOSE  
NAME APPEARS HEREON MUST SIGN IN  
THE PRESENCE OF THE CASHING DISBURS-  
ING OFFICER OF THE ARMY OR NAVY.

AND THE TREASURER OF THE UNITED STATES  
WILL CHARGE MY ACCOUNT

RECEIVED PAYMENT:

*67 James*  
DISBURSING OFFICER, U. S. ARMY

213-180, ~~12611~~