

War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Coldwater, Ohio

Age: Not given

Memorial Day brings back memories of my time spent at the Harbor Point 4-H Camp, east of Celina, where I served as the County 4-H Program Assistant. To this day, campers and staff sleep in the very buildings that housed the 70 American soldiers the summer of 1944. American GIs guarded the 300 German prisoners of war once they arrived by train from New Orleans, LA.

The prisoners resided in tents placed in rows in the middle of the camp and were surrounded by the cabins. They took their meals in the dining hall where the same silverware and other items 4-H'ers used were engraved with US army. Cots, green wool blankets and other left over supplies were utilized by campers in the 70s and 80s.

My late Uncle Charlie Dock, a Coldwater native and longtime Englewood resident, served as a medic at the camp along with a German medic named "Hans." The two became friends and corresponded for a few years. He said the German prisoners were just as "docile as lambs." "They were nice guys and we had good rapport with those people." They were young men around 17-18 years of age and although they preferred to be in Germany, they accepted their time in Mercer County. Uncle Charlie commented that there was no need for high fences and barbed wire as the POWs knew they were well cared for and had no desire to escape.

The plan was for the soldiers to work in the agricultural field, as the area was short on workers because our young men were serving overseas in the war. A *Daily Standard* article reported on July 8, 1944: "Officials of Crampton Canneries Inc. of Celina and Beckman and Gast of St. Henry said that should the prisoners be brought here, they would use them." They were paid 80 cents per day and received 10 cents per day when they were not working. Locals remembered watching the POWs being transported on the beds of Army trucks to their work sites. They were described as "good looking young men." The POW's returned to Germany in October of 1944. The camp was returned to the 4-H'ers and is still being used as a 4-H Camp for local youth each June.

Charlie Dock admitted that his was an easy job as a medic and he was able to hitchhike home to Coldwater to spend the night and return the next morning via the same routine. This is almost impossible to imagine these days. He never made a big deal out of this time at the POW camp but I feel it is important to remember and thank our members of the armed forces each Memorial Day. Especially as our country is at war and we have many local young men and women serving for our freedom.



Medic Charlie Dock at the POW Camp