

Letters from the “Fritz Ritz”: German POWs in America during World War II

Abstract

During the Second World War, more than 400,000 German soldiers were incarcerated as Prisoners of War (POWs) in the United States. Little remains of the POW camps themselves and memories of the German POWs have almost completely faded. However, their letters, diaries, and other personal effects remain and have the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the historical experience of these German POWs in America. Analysis of letters, diaries, and other personal writings, as opposed to previously collected oral histories, removes the potential for post-war reflections by the participant. This project has sought to clarify the experience of the German POWs through the analysis of the personal writings of two German soldiers, Private George Kellermann and Sergeant George Füssl, who were incarcerated in the American South and Southwest. Their stories, told through these sorts of documents, provide a unique perspective on life on the American Homefront during the Second World War while demonstrating that further inquiry into the daily lives and experiences of the German POWs has the potential to revolutionize our understanding of the war itself.