

CAMP BRECKENRIDGE

In 1944 my Brother, Ralph L. Swope, got a contract from the Red Cross to take pictures of the German prisoners at camp Breckenridge. The purpose was they wanted pictures to send home to Germany. These were individual pictures of each prisoner. I was 16 and he enlisted my help for the project. My brother was 12 years older than me. He was listed as 4F, one leg was short.

My brother was a photographer and did camera repair. Therefore he had a lot of contacts in the photography business. I guess through these contacts he managed to get this job. He had two Speed Graphic cameras, a 4 x 5 and a 3 1/4 x 4 1/4. Film was in short supply and because of that he was forced to use cut film. Film packs would have much more desirable but were unavailable. He had the film developed in Evansville and two prints of each. I guess one to send home and one for the man.

Using the two cameras he set us up to take the pictures. The prisoners would come in and sit on a stool. There were some that would make comments about the Zeiss lenses on the cameras. As I remember it went very quickly. Some of the prisoners had the uniforms they were captured in. A few were in sailor uniforms. Others had on coveralls with POW painted across them. Some of the men would hold the coveralls so the POW would show and some would try and hide the POW. We would take turns taking pictures and changing film in the cut film holders. They had us set up in the security building, (jail house). There was a closet we were using as a dark room to load the film.

They had a German officer with us, he was well educated, spoke English just as good as us, or better. I can't remember what collage he said he went to, but he went to collage here in the Midwest before the war. He knew the area well, probably better than us. He had on his dress uniform; he must have been captured in a field office. Most of the time we were working he would be the only one with us. Very seldom would we have an American guard with us. We were told that the American guards were men that had fought in Europe and had returned. One time we went down to work and we could not. It was during the time of the battle of the bulge and the German officers had all the prisoners on the parade ground goose stepping. I have no recollection of how many trips we made to get all of the pictures.

We ate lunch with the prisoners. It was quite a treat. I was eating food that I hadn't had in three years. I especially remember the bowl of fruit salad, didn't have that at home. Don't remember much else but I remember the good food.

Paul Swope
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