

The United Tribes Educational Technical Center: Historical Perspective

Editors Note: This is the third in a series of articles on the history and projections of the United Tribes Educational Technical Center.

The Historical Significance of Fort Lincoln, ND

The reference to the Italians referred to 466 crew members of an Italian liner that were seized by the government at the beginning of World War I. Part of the men were sent to Fort Missoula in Montana, others, including German seamen, were to be sent to Fort Lincoln. [Bismarck Daily Tribune, April 14, 1941.] The internees were to be kept in an area that was fenced in with a ten-foot high fence topped with barbed wire pointing inward. Little was regarded as necessary in the way of conversion of barracks and the like for the interned sailors, nor was it anticipated that the C.C.C. would be phased out in the early period. By the end of May, preparations were made for the arrival of 200 German seamen and the fencing

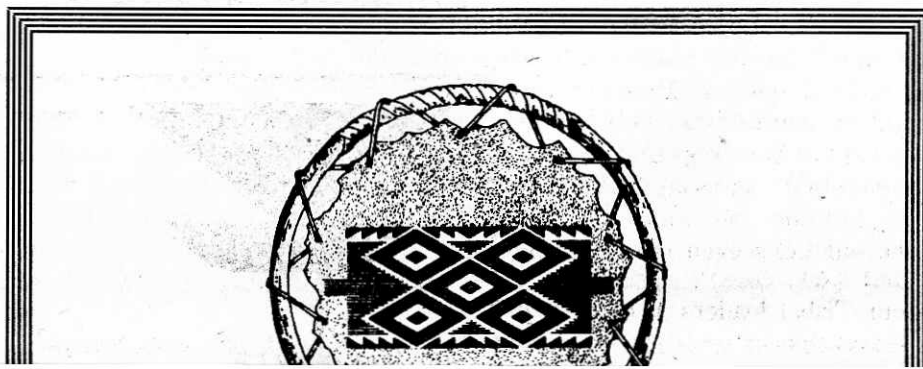
more German seamen were sent. It was anticipated that there would be 1,000 in all. On August 1, it was announced that the Army was abandoning the post, leaving the C.C.C. and Border Patrol in charge. The fort no longer was to have a garrison of the United States soldiers. The Germans seemed to settle in very well, baked their own pumpernickel bread, and made themselves at home. Escapes continued, but the fugitives were

aliens were as content as anyone can be under the circumstances and on March 9, 1942, requests were made for increased funds to continue and expand the work at the alien camps.

The aliens under interment made certain items for sale to the community, did wood carving and paintings that still exist in a few of the buildings on the base. The Japanese were segregated from the Germans and intermingled very

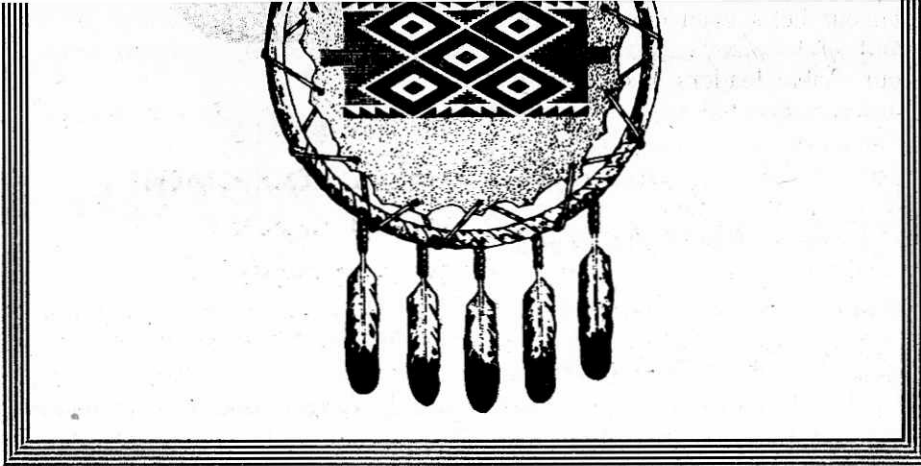
many of them were of Latin American origin and had been picked up because they worked on German ships. As time went on, more and more were released--sometimes on an individual basis by legal action.

By early 1946, the community realized that the interment was rapidly coming to an end and they suggested the use of the facility as a possible source of public housing. Fifty trailers has been purchased by the city of Bismarck and the city fathers surveyed the interment barracks and found them good. [Fargo Forum, January 11, 1946.] February 3, 1946, the United Press reported that the interment camp at Fort Lincoln would be closed in March. There were only some 400 prisoners still at the fort



By the end of May, preparations were made for the arrival of 200 German seamen and the fencing went on at an accelerated rate. Less than twenty acres of the nine hundred acre post were to be used for the internees and on the second of June, 1941, 220 German seamen and officers arrived to make up the first major contingent who would stay at the fort. Although civilians were not allowed on post immediately, an open house was planned as soon as the sailors were settled into the four large barracks which were capable of holding 200 men apiece. (Bismarck Daily Tribune, June 2, 1941.) One of the seamen, Werner H. Krausel, quickly wrote a letter to the editor of the Bismarck Tribune stating how glad everyone was to be at Fort Lincoln and remarking how it looked like the "Old Country across the ocean." (Bismarck Daily Tribune, June 6, 1941.) Despite all this, numbers of internees tried to tunnel their way out and many succeeded only in becoming lost in the Missouri bottoms where they were quickly rounded up. A local informant states that all kinds of tunnels still exist in the interment area and that these show up occasionally when heavily loaded trucks sink into them.

As time went on, more and



captured very quickly. In December, 110 enemy aliens of German descent were sent into the camp. One official remarked that they were, "a more sullen, grim, and harder collection" than the original group. At the same time, the camp was being enlarged to handle more detainees. (Bismarck Daily Tribune, December 20, 1941.) On February 9, 1942, 415 Japanese enemy aliens arrived at Fort Lincoln to join the more than 400 Germans already there. Apparently most of them came from the West Coast and were part of the removal connected with wartime hysteria. Still more Japanese were rounded up around the harbor of Los Angeles and 700 of them arrived on February 26, 1942, increasing the numbers interned at the fort to approximately 1,500 internees. (Bismarck Daily Tribune, February 26, 1942.) But by and large it seems that the

little with them. The German internees received money from their national government while the Japanese did not and it seems likely that the former had a better living standard.

By 1945, numbers of Japanese were being sent home. Approximately 360 Japanese aliens left Fort Lincoln to return to Japan on Christmas Day of 1945. Most of them were American-born Japanese who had renounced their American citizenship while others were illegal entrants into the country. Many of those who left were described by W.C. Robbins, the officer in charge of the camp, as "troublemakers." The shipment left approximately 150 Japanese and somewhat more than 200 Germans still at the camp. (Bismarck Daily Tribune, December 26, 1945.) Most of the Germans who were left claimed that they were never Nazis and pointed out that

camp at Fort Lincoln would be closed in March. There were only some 400 prisoners still at the fort and these were expected to be evacuated very shortly. Information was hard to come by because the interment program was held under strict wartime censorship and the majority of the American people knew nothing about it. (Fargo Forum, February 3, 1946.) The commander of the fort confirmed the story that stated that all the aliens would be removed to Ellis Island, New York, by the first of March. The many Japanese aliens were to be shipped to Los Angeles for repatriation to Japan. (Fargo Forum, February 3, 1946.) All in several died of natural causes, but not one escaped permanently. (Mandan Daily Pioneer, February 21, 1948.) There was some violence in the camp on occasion but it never approached the point of being very serious. Tunnelling did continue throughout the entire war, but little was accomplished by it except perhaps for exercise provided. In some ways the camp was popular which is indicated by the fact that at least six of its German members returned and settled in Bismarck. Yet, the story of this phase of the fort brought little glory to the United States although it may have been a wartime necessity.