



Roger Meissen/The Hutchinson News

Jenny Williams reads an exhibit in the POW 'BUS-eum' Sunday in McPherson as tour guide and driver Irving Kellman tells of POW experiences. Kellman pointed out that Germans often made POWs wear wooden shoes at night so they couldn't escape in the night.

Tour of duty

■ 'BUS-eum' travels region to tell the story of soldiers held in Nazi Germany's prisoner-of-war camps.

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Des Moines was the destination for the postcard, dated the day after Christmas 1943 and bearing two stamps featuring the profile of Germany's fuhrer, Adolph Hitler.

"My Dearest, How's the one I love? Still mine? I hope. I am well, had a good XMAS, lots of memories and lots of hope," the message began.

Nazi Germany prisoner-of-war camps held a disproportionate number of American soldiers from the Midwest because of troop assignments in Europe and North Africa.

Information about those soldiers' experiences and memorabilia from their time behind barbed wire fills a Minnesota-based "BUS-eum" that travels the country's midsection. Often, some of the very soldiers pictured on the panels visit the exhibit.

The BUS-eum, which stopped in McPherson Sunday afternoon, won't complete its tour until shortly before Thanksgiving, but driver and docent Irving Kellman already has witnessed emotional moments.

In South Dakota, members of Pastor Oliver Omansen's congregation took turns having their pictures taken next to a photo of soldier Omansen, held captive for 19 months.

In Omaha, Bernard Shintker saw a photo of an altar he helped build from crates used by the Red Cross.

"The guards pretty well left them to their own devices," said Kellman, pointing out that POW camps were "totally different" from the murderous Nazi concentration camps.

The Red Cross, the YMCA and the Salvation Army were allowed into the POW camps, Kellman said.

"I'm a prisoner of war. Don't go jumping the gun and get married off

OTHER STOPS

The BUS-eum exhibit about American soldiers held in Nazi Germany prisoner-of-war camps is scheduled to be at the public library in Great Bend from 4 to 7 p.m. today.

After a trip to Abilene Tuesday, the BUS-eum will roll into Hutchinson on Wednesday.

The 40-foot-long converted school bus is slated to be parked from noon to 7 p.m. Wednesday in the west parking lot at Hutchinson Public Library, 901 North Main.

The exhibit and presentations inside the library are free and open to the public.

TRACES, a non-profit educational organization, created the rolling exhibit that includes photographs, documents, audio and DVD documentaries, and memorabilia.

While the bus exhibit focuses on Americans held captive, co-authors Lowell May and Mark Schock will give two presentations in Hutchinson Public Library's auditorium Wednesday on German

prisoners held in Kansas camps during World War II.

May and Schock collaborated on the book, "POWs in Kansas: 1943-1946." May also wrote, "Camp Concordia: German POWs in the Midwest."

May will bring a wood model of Camp Concordia, along with artwork and woodcarvings made by Germans who were held there, said Hutchinson Public Library's Annette Smith.

"I think it will be kind of interesting to compare," Smith said of the experiences in Nazi and Kansas camps — which included housing at the state fairgrounds in Hutchinson.

May and Schock will offer their presentation from 1 to 1:40 p.m. — people may bring brown-bag lunches — and will repeat the program at 7 p.m.

Hutchinson/Reno Arts and Humanities Council and the local public library are sponsoring the exhibit and program here.

— The News staff

again, ha, ha. I am well-treated. It isn't as bad as you would think," wrote Sgt. Jean Ray to wife Mary Ray, back home in Iowa with their baby girl.

But evidence of the rigors of camp can be seen, too. Crude wooden shoes ensured that prisoners could not run away, and one prisoner's weight fell from 175 pounds to 90 pounds in six months, Kellman said.

"Very fascinating, very humbling, very interesting," said Connie Hess, McPherson, after touring the BUS-eum.

"It's just amazing what they were able to do with what little they had," said Jenny Williams, another visitor from McPherson.

The prisoners performed music and plays and managed to produce a news-

paper: They squeezed beets and onions and recycled soot to produce watercolors for artworks.

Many soldiers didn't talk about their internment when they returned, Kellman said, and he has yet to meet a former POW who speaks warmly of Germany — unlike some German prisoners held in the U.S. who wanted to stay here after the war.

Dan Bied, of Iowa, captured in the Battle of the Bulge, is quoted as saying when the announcement of their release was made, some prisoners whooped while others fell to their knees in prayer.

"I pinched Ed Brewer, and he returned the favor, to make certain we weren't just dreaming about our liberation, as we had so many times," Bied said.