

# POWs in Nebraska During World War II

During World War II, the Allied forces captured millions of German and Italian soldiers. These prisoners of war were detained in camps behind the front lines until they were repatriated to their home countries after the cessation of hostilities. As the war dragged on, Great Britain no longer had the capacity to house and feed all of these prisoners according to the 1926 Geneva Convention which defined humane treatment of captured soldiers and civilians, so they asked to have some of the POWs transferred to camps in the United States. Over 450,000 POWs ended up in the United States, 12,000 of whom were held in camps in Nebraska. The largest prisoner of war camp in the state was located at Fort Robinson, but Nebraska was also home to two other base camps at Scottsbluff and at Atlanta in addition to dozens of smaller satellite camps. With the shortage of manpower caused by the war (all the young men were off fighting in Europe and Asia), POWs in Nebraska were allowed to work on local farms and factories for a nominal wage that could be spent at the camp canteen. For many, life in the camp was more comfortable than the difficult and desperate conditions facing those on the homefront in Germany and Italy. Escapes were rare and the spread of Nazism in the camps was minimized by isolating pro-Nazi POWs in their own camps. Many took the opportunity to learn English or to take courses offered at the camp for college credit.



## Primary Source

History Nebraska's Fort Robinson Collection

<https://history.nebraska.gov/sites/history.nebraska.gov/files/doc/Fort%20Robinson%20%28Neb.%29%20Reference%20Collection%20%5BRG1517%5D.pdf>

## Secondary Source

*Nebraska POW Camps: A History of World War II Prisoners in the Heartland* by Melissa Amateis Marsh