

good on parade,” an Army observer commented, “but they must be pretty good to have knocked out that outfit”⁽¹⁾.

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Camp Livingston, developing in 1942 as a large divisional army training base, was first used for the internment of the Japanese, including U.S. citizen children of aliens. More than 1100 Japanese internees were removed from the camp in June 1943 to make way for the Germans. Included in those moved was the first Japanese captured by the U.S. in World War II, Lieutenant Kazue Sakamaki, taken when his mini-submarine ran aground during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Joining him in the transfer were sixty-one other Japanese POWs, all naval personnel and including a commander, who had been captured during the Battle of Midway and the Aleutian Islands campaign. **Later visitors to Camp Livingston inevitably commented on the fine landscaping and garden work done by the Japanese internees. Even today, rose bushes proliferate among the ruins** ⁽²⁾.

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The site included Italian prisoners captured in Africa—a **total of about three thousand Italians were imprisoned in Louisiana as a whole during the war** ⁽³⁾. The national, racial, and ethnic mix of Louisiana life during the war years provides a fascinating study of prejudice and stereotyping on the part of Americans and the alien enemy. The Germans and the preponderance of American officer personnel **viewed the Italians with contempt**. For no other reason than the American stereotype of them as shoe repairmen, five hundred Italians were stationed at Livingston, the site of an army shoe repair plant ⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

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Prisoners, not paid in dollars, exchanged army script for items from the canteens, which they managed on a profitable basis. Their accounts along with that of individual thrifty POWs were credited in dollars by the army. In early 1943 the Livingston canteen showed a balance of \$72,831. Profits were spent by prisoners for camp furnishings and recreational facilities. Monies were also raised for the relief of widows and orphans in Germany ⁽¹⁰⁾.

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The greatest disparity of opportunity experienced by POWs at the side-camps, compared to their comrades at the base camps, was the lack of educational activities and facilities. A library of a hundred or so volumes and classes offered in the English language were typically available at the former. By contrast, in the spring of 1945, the Livingston library contained 10,000 books, mostly German language text books. Hundreds of POWs were enrolled in classes in languages, science, math, business, geography, history, music, and arts. Prisoners at camps big and small received credit for college correspondence courses of American universities, the credits of which were accepted by German universities ⁽¹³⁾.

It was a duty, recognized on both sides, for POWs to attempt to escape. An incomplete survey of Louisiana camp records of officially investigated escapes includes scores of cases occurring during a period of about eighteen months from Arabi, near New Orleans, to Barksdale, near Shreveport.... Newspapers reported a “sensational case” of a pair of POWs who cut through the barbed wire at Livingston, caught a train to Shreveport, but were soon arrested in front of the downtown Majestic movie theater by a suspicious police officer. **The officer had confirmed his suspicions by ordering them in a commanding voice: “Attention and march!”** One immediately snapped to, a good example of his German discipline and also a dead giveaway of his identity. ⁽¹⁴⁾.

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Over one of the compounds, a homemade Nazi flag was raised daily, and quickly burned each time by the authorities. Army efforts to discover how the flags were produced were consistently frustrated ⁽¹⁵⁾.

- *Bayou Stalags: German Prisoners of War in Louisiana*, by Matthew J Schott and Rosalind Foley / 1981

Ask any Louisianan about the internment that occurred in the state during World War II and you will most likely hear tales of the German POWs held in various areas across Louisiana. However, most are unaware of the internment of Japanese aliens at Camp Livingston, twelve miles outside of Alexandria, Louisiana. Read [here](#) for more information.

- “Louisiana’s Camp Livingston and Internment: A Hidden History,” by Hayley Johnson and Sarah Simms, 14 Sept 2017