



**James R. Ruchti**  
**German POW Collection**

Franklin D. Schurz Library  
Indiana University South Bend

The James R. Ruchti POW Collection contains part of what must have been one of the world's most unusual libraries—the POW Library at Fort Getty. What made this library so unusual was its mission to support the German POW re-education programs at Fort Getty and Fort Wetherill, Rhode Island and Fort Eustis, Virginia.

Before the fighting in Europe was finished, the allied powers planned for the surrender of Germany. The big three—Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States—agreed Germany would be occupied and de-Nazified. German war criminals would be placed on trial. Germany itself would be divided into four zones of occupation with the British, Russians, French, and Americans each administering a zone. The U.S. Army realized that in order to efficiently administer their zone of occupation, the U.S. military government would need the assistance of trustworthy Germans.

With this in mind, early in 1945 a plan was developed by the Special Projects Division of the Office of the Provost Marshall General to re-educate German POWs so they might assist the U.S. military government's operations in Germany. Two special schools were established to train a select group of German POWs in the administration and policing of the U.S. zone of occupation. A second, unstated goal of the project was to create a nucleus of German POWs who would play a role in rebuilding a democratic Germany.

It was important that the project be kept secret from the American public, our allies, and the Nazi government for several reasons. First, it was believed that if the American public learned of the project, there would be charges of special treatment for German POWs when some American POWs held by the Germans suffered horrific camp conditions. Second, the United States wished to keep the project secret from her allies for fear these allies would denounce the project as contrary to the Geneva Convention. Finally, it was important to keep the project secret from the Nazi government for fear the Nazis would retaliate against American POWs they held. Thus, the Special Projects Division needed an isolated spot for these two schools. Fort Getty and Fort Wetherill were located in Narraganset Bay in Rhode Island. Both were coast artillery forts used early in the war to protect Narraganset Bay from German submarine attacks. After the threat of German U-2 boats diminished, the forts were abandoned. Their locations were ideal for the Special Projects Division's schools as they could only be reached by ferry or a single small road, partially flooded at high tide.

In the Spring of 1945 10,000 German POWs from various U.S. camps were screened by individual camp re-education officers and sent to Fort Devens, Massachusetts. In order to weed out all Nazis and communists, each POW at Fort Devens went through a paper screening. If a POW passed the paper screen, he was sent through a third and final screening interview. The project was interested primarily in POWs who favored a democratic government for Germany and opposed a totalitarian government of extremists. If a POW passed the final screening, he was asked to participate in the project. Each POW asked to participate agreed to two conditions: 1) to give up all privileges of rank recognized by the Geneva Convention and, 2) to return to Germany after the war at the request of the U.S. military government in the American occupied zone and offer his service to them.

In order to prepare these POWs to aid the U.S. military government in Germany, a two-month education program was created at Fort Getty. This program consisted of four subjects: English; the procedures, rules, and regulations of the U.S. military government; U.S. history with an emphasis on the development of democracy; and German history with an emphasis on democratic elements in German society. A similar program was started at Fort Wetherill but placed major emphasis on public safety and security. U.S. military government officials were greatly concerned about providing safety and security in the U.S. occupied zone in Germany after the war. Fort Wetherill was to provide a core of reliable Germans prepared to assist the U.S. military government with policing and public safety. This program was a late starter and trained a much smaller number of German POWs than Fort Getty.

To support the programs at Fort Getty and Fort Wetherill, a library was created. James R. Ruchti was asked to head the library in addition to teaching American and German history. In organizing and running the library, Mr. Ruchti was assisted by a German POW and former librarian, Georg Hammer.

The library collected materials in three areas: 1) English books about U.S. history, government, and the military; 2) German books including German literature, books banned by the Nazis, and German history with emphasis on the development of democracy in Germany; and 3) a periodical collection. The books came from public and university libraries in New York, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The periodical collection included many current U.S. newspapers such as *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Life*, and *Look*. It also included three German language

newspapers, *Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, *Aufbau*, and *Der Ruf*. *Staats-Zeitung und Herold*, published in New York, was the most widely circulated German language newspaper in America. *Aufbau*, also published in New York by German immigrants, was a liberal German newspaper. *Der Ruf*, written and published by German POWs at Fort Kearney, Rhode Island, was distributed throughout all German POW camps in America.

Use of the Fort Getty library was heavy, especially by the German POWs. The American staff used the collection for reference, especially for material about U.S. military government rules and regulations. The German POWs used the library for several reasons. First, they used the library for reference and instructional activities relating to the program courses. Secondly, it was one of the few forms of recreation available. Finally, POWs were very interested in what was happening in Germany and Europe. By the time the projects had started, the war in Europe was over. The POWs knew they would soon be returning to Germany. They wanted to learn what they could of conditions in Germany and of the Allied powers post-war plans for Germany and Europe. The library's periodical collection helped the German POWs fulfill this need for knowledge. The POWs also had a great interest in books, such as Walter Lippman's *U.S. War Aims*, which discussed Allied foreign policy and post-war interest in Europe and Germany. German history books, such as George Shuster's *Germany: A Short History* and S.H. Steinberg's *A Short History of Germany* were heavily read by POWs. These books, written by Americans in the mid-1940's, were of special interest because they had not been censored by the Nazi government. Mr. Ruchti remembers two other books in the Ruchti POW Collection which were in great demand by POWs—R.T. Clark's *The Fall of the German Republic* and Alexander Gerschendrom's *Bread and Democracy in Germany*.

After the Fort Getty and Fort Wetherill projects were completed, Mr. Ruchti and the library left for Fort Eustis, Virginia to serve another special POW re-education project. This project was created to circumvent an agreement made between the French and General Dwight D. Eisenhower which allowed German POWs in American hands to be turned over to the French after the war to help rebuild France. An exception in the agreement provided that any German POW who received special training by Americans would be exempt from this service. Previous screenings of German POWs throughout the U.S. had created a group of POWs that the Special Projects Division wanted treated differently from the run-of-the-mill German POW. Since this group was favorably disposed to the U.S., the Special Projects Division

wanted these POWs shipped directly to Germany. This re-education project at Fort Eustis, which ran from January-April 1946, was a large-scale program. It consisted of one week of training and processed around 40,000 German POWs.

Mr. Ruchti has donated materials from the Fort Getty, Fort Wetherill, and Fort Eustis projects to two other institutions—the U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania and the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Mr. Ruchti's donation to the U.S. Army Military History Institute includes a complete set of German editions of *Der Ruf*, and documents about the U.S. military government and the re-education projects.

Scott Opasik  
November 1997

## James R. Ruchti POW Collection Bibliography

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## BIOGRAPHY

James R. Ruchti spent his adulthood serving the U.S. government as both a military and foreign service officer. Upon graduation from the University of Wisconsin in 1943, he joined the U.S. Army. In June 1945 he was commissioned as a 2nd Lieutenant, Field Artillery. Mr. Ruchti was assigned to the German POW Special Projects Division at Fort Getty where he served as instructor of American and German history and director of the Library. After completion of the Fort Getty project, he served as an instructor for the Special Projects Division's Fort Eustis, VA project. At the end of this project in April 1946, Mr. Ruchti was released from active duty and assigned to the U.S. Army Reserves. He remained in the reserves until 1974 when he retired at the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.



**James R. Ruchti**

President Harry S. Truman appointed James Ruchti to the U.S. Foreign Service in 1947. His first assignment was to a consular post in Canada during 1948-50. Between 1950-59 Mr. Ruchti served as a Political and Economics Officer in Berlin and Bonn, Germany as well as an Intelligence Specialist in Washington D.C.

During the 1960's he turned his professional attention towards Africa. He served in a variety of positions including Assistant to the First Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (1960), Deputy Chief of Mission, U.S. Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, (1963-67), American Consul for the Seychelles Islands (1963-67) and Political-Military Advisor to the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs (1967-69).

Between 1970-74 Mr. Ruchti was American Consul General in Stuttgart, Germany. In 1975 he returned to Washington, D.C. where he served as Senior Inspector of the Foreign Service (1975-76), Reports Coordinator, Office of the Deputy Undersecretary of State (1977-78), and on the Senior Staff of the Presidential Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies (1979). Mr. Ruchti retired from the Foreign Service in 1980 at the rank of Minister-Counselor, the equivalent of a U.S. Major General.



Since 1980 Mr. Ruchti founded and served as chairman of the Senior Retired Foreign Service Officers' Group (1980-83). He also became a charter member of the Friends of the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. Since 1993 he has been a member of the World Affairs Council of Michiana.

Mr. Ruchti was born in Janesville, Wisconsin where he graduated from high school in 1939. He earned a B.A. in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin, Madison in 1943, majoring in international relations. He studied German and Germanic studies at Columbia University, New York (1951-52) and attended the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (1975-76). Marrying Helen Louise Bostwick on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 1945, they raised three children: Dr. Randal C. Ruchti, professor of Physics at the University of Notre Dame, Jefri J. Ruchti, Senior Editor for Oceana Press, and Jamie Ann Hester, linguist for the Department of Defense. Mr. and Mrs. Ruchti have five grandchildren.

