

1942-46. World War II Italian and German prisoners of war housed in Utah worked mostly in the agriculture and non-essential defense industries. PHOTOS COURTESY FORT DOUGLAS MILITARY MUSEUM COLLECTION AND UTAH STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

WWII POW CAMPS IN UTAH

WORK, ACTIVITIES FILLED PRISONERS' TIME

The United States had been at war with Germany for over two years before the first of more than 8,000 prisoners of war set foot in Utah. Between January 1944 and June 1946, POWs were transferred into and out of the state as 12 different locations were used at various times to accommodate them.

Utah POW camps were located on military installations adjacent to the state's most populated area along the Wasatch Front: Bushnell Hospital, south of **Brigham City (3)**; the **Ogden Defense Depot (4)**; **Clearfield Naval Supply Depot (5)**; **Hill Field** near Layton **(6)**; **Fort Douglas** in Salt Lake City **(7)** Camp Warner at **Tooele (8)**; **Dugway** in the west desert **(9)** and **Deseret** located in Rush Valley, south of Tooele **(10)**.

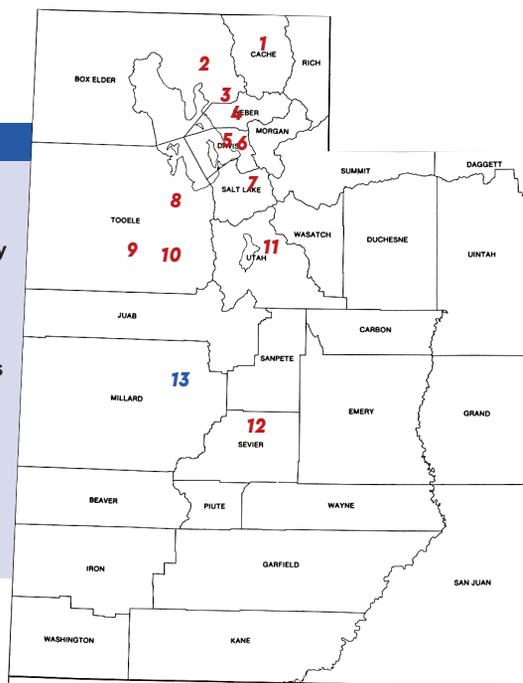
Four temporary agricultural camps were established **Logan (1)**, **Tremonton (2)**, **Orem (11)** and **Salina (12)**. The Topaz Camp in **Delta (13)** only interned Japanese Americans, however, many volunteered for similar work assignments and crossed paths with POWs.

Several army administration policies helped set decision making that affected all prisoners of war in America including fair treatment; a no-work, no-eat discipline; use of a number of guards; use of prisoner labor in a variety of ways that didn't conflict with the civilian workforce; and location of POW camps where prisoner labor was needed. These objectives were to make captivity a winning situation for both the U.S. and the individual prisoners. But nothing could erase the fact that they were confined prisoners and ultimately subject to the will of their captors.

Living conditions were better than most prisoners had found as soldiers and even better than some had known as civilians. The hours and days were occupied by work and free-time activities. POW labor became a highly prized opportunity for Utah's sugar beet farmers and fruit growers because military service and high-paying jobs in war industries had drastically reduced the number of available agricultural workers. Other prisoners were employed at military installations where they worked in warehouses, repair shops and offices. Ogden Defense Depot was the largest and longest operating POW camp in Utah, and served as a base for other camps throughout the state.

One advantage for those assigned to the military installations was free-time activities that included sports, hobbies, music and theatrical groups, libraries, classes and movies. Although free-time activities

1. Logan
2. Tremonton
3. Brigham City
4. Ogden
5. Clearfield
6. Hill Field
7. Fort Douglas
8. Tooele
9. Dugway
10. Deseret
11. Orem
12. Salina
13. Delta



were not as diverse for prisoners engaged in farm work, they did have a greater opportunity to see and experience America and Americans up close as they worked the fields and orchards and met the farmers and their families, who were both curious about and appreciative of the POWs. Despite official policy to the contrary, friendships developed and a few romances blossomed between Americans and the POWs.

Work and other activities filled the prisoner's time, but home filled their thoughts. It was difficult for many to live with the fears that their homes were destroyed and loved ones killed by Allied bombings and the Russian occupation of their villages and cities. At war's end, nearly half of the 371,000 prisoners in the U.S. were sent to work camps in Europe where another two years would pass before they made it home.

Despite minor shortcomings, the treatment of POWs in America was commendable, and in the long run, advantageous in the dividends that came through the positive feelings about the United States that former prisoners carried back to Europe where they began to restructure their lives and joined millions in rebuilding their homeland.

LEARN MORE ABOUT UTAH WWII SITES

1. FORT DOUGLAS MILITARY MUSEUM

32 Potter Street, Salt Lake City

801-581-1252, fortdouglas.org

Noon – 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday

Founded in 1862 and decommissioned in 1991, Fort Douglas sits next to the University of Utah. The Museum shares Utah's rich military history and how it has shaped our state, nation and the world through preservation of artifacts, education through exhibits and storytelling. The historic cemetery has tales of its own from Civil War troops to World War II POWs.

2. HISTORIC WENDOVER AIRFIELD MUSEUM

352 E. Airport Way, Wendover

435-665-7724, wendoverairbase.com

Check for dates and times. Free.

Airfield has numerous restored historic buildings including the air tower, hangars and firehouse highlighting the Enola Gay and Bockscar, both used in the development and deployment of the atomic bomb dropped on Japan. Museum resides in restored John T. Brinkman Service Club. Several exhibits and memorabilia displays emphasizing training of bomber crews. Private tours of buildings on request.

3. THE MUSEUMS AT UNION STATION

2501 Wall Avenue, Ogden

801-629-8672, ogdencity.com/1562/Union-Station

10 a.m.-5 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Cost.

Union Station houses four museums: Utah State Railroad Museum, John M. Browning Firearms Museum, Browning–Kimball Classic Car Museum, and Utah Cowboy Western Heritage Museum and two art galleries: Gallery at the Station and Myra Powell Gallery. In addition, Union Station contains a research library and photographic collection.

4. OREM HERITAGE MUSEUM

777 South State Street, Orem

801-225-2787, ext. 1030, scera.org/oremheritagemuseum

Check for dates and times. Free.

Unique collection including WWI to Korean War displays of uniforms, equipment and weapons; WWII POW camp display and historic memorabilia from Geneva

Steel Works. The Lindon Harley Davidson store is made mostly of recycled parts from the old Geneva Steel Works.

5. TOPAZ MUSEUM

55 West Main, Delta

435-864-2514, topazmuseum.org

Check for dates and times. Admission by donation.

Visit the museum before going to the original internment site and watch two introductory films narrated by people who were in Topaz. A self-driving tour of the Topaz site is available.

6. CCC & POW SALINA CAMP

598 East Main Street, Salina

435-529-7304, [facebook.com/CCCPOWCAMP/UT/](https://www.facebook.com/CCCPOWCAMP/UT/)

Hours are Tuesday through Friday, 4 to 6 p.m. and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Group tours can also be made by calling or by appointment. Donations.

Reconstructed barracks and guard tower showcases WWII POW headquarters and motorpool, as well as the headquarters for the Civilian Conservation Corps. Museum tells the story of the worst WWII massacre on American soil – 9 POWs killed and 20 others wounded – in rural Utah. The nine German POWs are buried in the Fort Douglas Historic Cemetery.



A JB-2 is inspected by USAAF personnel at Wendover, AAF, 1944. Photo courtesy of National Archives.