

Across Oceans, Across Time® ...

Stories from the Family History & Genealogy Center ...

PRISONER OF WAR

ADDRESS:

ADRESSE:

INDIRIZZO:



Written in Danish: H.

Mr. T.G. Muller Uncle.

Kimballton, Iowa

USA.

POSTAGE FREE



This stark image is a remnant of a nearly forgotten piece of history. It's from one of several letters that World War II POW **Hans Paulsen**, SWG 48333, wrote from Camp Livingston, Louisiana, and Fort Eustis, Virginia, to his uncle, Thorvald Muller, who had left Slesvig in the 1880s for Nebraska and later, Iowa. Linguistically and culturally Danish, Paulsen's family resided in the part of Slesvig that was not returned to Denmark after the 1920 plebiscite that effected the reunification of four North Slesvig counties, now referred to as Sønderjylland, with Denmark after 56 years under German rule. Hans appears to have reluctantly served in the German Army, but was captured by Allied forces early on. In two letters from the fall and winter of 1945 - long after V-E Day - he mentions having been filled with hope at the end of 1944, as news of Allied victories reached him, that the evil of Hitler's fascism would soon be overcome and that he would be released, and then the hopelessness of having to spend his third Christmas as a prisoner with no prospects of when he could return home. He also wrote of hopes that "old injustices" would be corrected, that southern Slesvig would cease to be "an occupied country" and be reunited with its "true homeland" in the post-war period. Hans Paulsen's circumstances as a prisoner appear to have been fairly good, despite his incarceration with "fanatic Nazis." He mentions working with the harvest on a farm in Louisiana and being able to see why his emigrant relations were so proud of their adopted country, having enough to eat and interesting work in Virginia. "However," he writes, "life doesn't consist merely of food and drink; there are also one's ideals, even if they do get trodden underfoot." We don't know the subsequent fate of this German soldier of Danish descent, but his hopes of a reunified Slesvig went unfulfilled. Today there is still a sizable Danish cultural minority in that part of Germany, represented by two seats in the Bundestag. Hans Paulsen's letters are part of the T. G. Muller file at the Museum.