



Perwin Knutson: He spent 10 months in a German prison camp during World War II.



Virgil Johnson: American troops remained disciplined during captivity. "We sometimes had close-order drill and Saturday inspections."



Charles Dawes: "I'll never forget what it was like to be held behind barbed-wire fences."



Ken Morris (far left) is photo of him today; at left is photo while he was a prisoner of war in 1944; during 3½ years as a prisoner of the Japanese during World War II, he lost about 30 pounds, dropping to a weight of 109.

"Ken"



N.J. "Bud" Reiser (far left) is photo of him today; at left is photo while he was a prisoner of war in 1945; "We were hit by flak and our plane caught fire, and we had to bail out — use our parachutes — before the plane blew up and crashed. I met the pilot after I got on the ground. He and I were captured trying to get back to our lines."

MY DAYS IN MUNICH

We started on the tractors
They got us up very early
There wasn't a one of us in a hurry
To be working under a Jerry.

We climbed up in the box cars
And was it hell a-riding.

You freeze your toes and frost your nose
But we kept sight on a-riding.

We truly arrived in Munich
Our shovels and spades were waiting.
With pockets full of soap and tea
When we were busy trading.

When the watches said three-thirty

We threw the shovels away.
Climbed back up in the box cars
And started back our way.

Your notion of soap was wasting
And we easily put it away.
Stacked our boxes in the rooms
And went to sleep on the hay.

I dream of good of South Dakota
The land of the sunshine state.

Soldier puts
his feelings
to words

"Charles"

We

Ex-prisoners unlock memories

By ROE SWENSON

HJ. "Bud" Reiser remembers the nightmares he would have in Germany. He dreamed he was being held in a Sioux Falls detention camp. The ring of the cash register would wake him up.

Ken Morris also has memories of hunger. He remembers fellow captives bringing in frogs and snakes to eat from Philippine rice gardens. "You weren't used to eating rice three times a day... that guy killed a cobra. Anything like that was edible," Morris said.

Morris, 64, and Reiser, 65, were among the 14,127 American soldiers who served time as prisoners of war during World War I, World War II, the Korean War or the Vietnam War.

Both U.S. Army Air Force veterans from World War II, Reiser and Morris also are members of a group of ex-POWs from the Sioux Falls area who meet the third Tuesday of each month to discuss club business, pass along information about veteran programs and activities, and just socialize. Three years ago, they started the Sioux Land Chapter of American Ex-Prisoners of War Inc., a national veterans organization which also has chapters in Pierre and Rapid City. The Sioux Falls chapter has about 50 members scattered throughout eastern South Dakota.

Members of the Sioux Falls club share a common experience with about 80,000 living Americans, including 80 South Dakotans who belong to one of the state's three ex-POW clubs.

Members of the local chapter write and joke now when they talk about their war experience, although it wasn't all easy time. "I'll never forget what it was like to be held behind barbed-wire fences," Charles Dawes, 83, former Lt. Col., said. Dawes, 51, a former infantryman, spent five months in a German prison camp during World War II.

Shortages of warm clothing and

weight of 108. During 25 years as a prisoner of the Japanese, Reiser lost 155 pounds. He was dropped from 181 pounds to 118 pounds during about three months of captivity that started in late January 1945 while he was serving a guard on a B-17 flying over Germany.

"We were hit by flak and our plane caught fire, and we had to bail out — use our parachutes — before the plane blew up and crashed. I met the pilot after I got on the ground. He and I were captured trying to get back to our lines," Reiser said.

Reiser, commander of the Sioux Falls area ex-POW chapter, said he was given one cup of barley soup a day during his first week in captivity and varying rations of potatoes and bread after that.

"I got to the point where I thought if I could just have a garbage can from the United States, I'd live like a king," Reiser said. He said allied troops weren't alone in their suffering. "Some of 'em... The German guards didn't have food either. They were hungry — not as hungry as us — but hungry."

Morris said he thinks the federal government could do more to help veterans. But Perwin Knutson, 61, 2819 E. Sixth St., said he has no complaints about how he has been treated. Knutson got to about 120 pounds in a German prison camp during World War II.

The Rev. Virgil Johnson, 61, 2115 W. 21st St., who also put in 10 months in a German prison camp, said, despite shortages, enemy captors were humane and that American troops remained disciplined.

"We sometimes had close-order drill and Saturday inspections." Johnson said prisoners at his camp carried different parts of a radio, which was assembled in bits to receive messages. He said he gets an inner feeling on "Veteran's Day," which is Friday, that he can't explain.

For Dawes, Veteran's Day underscores the need to protect liberty.

Having for the day when I'll be back
And eating some hamburger steaks.

I'll be a home lover soon.
With a padlock on my door.
Hard all my dollars to the Red Cross
And the feel with all the draft boards.

Written by Charles Galus Dawes while he was a prisoner during World War II.