

WHEN THE AFRIKA KORPS CAME TO TEXAS

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Early morning in a small town, not unlike any rural town during World War II. People are eating breakfast, businesses are opening their doors for their first customers, and traffic is coming to life. In the distance one suddenly hears the crisp, guttural commands of military German, and busy townspeople stop, shading their eyes against the bright morning sun, to stare at the columns of tanned, uniformed young men, singing in cadence as they march through town to local farms and small businesses in the surrounding area.

A small town in Germany? Old-timers in Texas know better. This scene could have taken place in Tyler, Mexia, Paris, Hearne, Kaufman, Bastrop, Brownwood, Marfa, White Rock Lake, Abilene, Mineral Wells, Palacios, or a hundred other towns and hamlets across the state.

When America went to war in December 1941, the question of caring for enemy prisoners was among the last considerations on anyone's mind. The military had to be mobilized to fight against both the Germans and the Japanese, industry needed to be organized and harnessed to the war effort, and the public had to adjust to a blizzard of new alphabet-soup organizations such as the OWI (Office of War Information), OSS (Office of Strategic Services), OPA (Office of Price Administration), WMC (War Manpower Commission), FEPC (Fair Employment Practices Commission), and dozens of others. Families across the nation faced the fears of separation or relocation or, for 435,000 combat victims by the end of the war, death at the hands of the enemy. Millions of women were thrust into the unfamiliar role of breadwinner for their family. Who thought about prisoners of war?

But prepared or not, the nation suddenly found itself on the receiving end of massive waves of incoming enemy prisoners. Just a year and a half after the attack on Pearl Harbor that embroiled America in the world war, more than 150,000 German prisoners poured in after the surrender of the Afrika Korps in the spring of 1943. After that, an average of 20,000 POWs arrived each month, and following the Normandy invasion of June 1944, the numbers soared to 30,000 per month. During the last months of the war, prisoners poured in at the astonishing rate of 60,000

per month. By the end of the war, the United States found itself holding more than 425,000 prisoners of war: 372,000 Germans, 53,000 Italians, and 5,000 Japanese. Some 90,000 spent their war years in Texas.

But where to put them? The United States had never held large numbers of foreign war prisoners before. The War Department moved fast and together with the Corps of Engineers began scouring the country for temporary camp sites. County fairgrounds, auditoriums, abandoned Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camps, and hastily erected tent cities were held in readiness. At the same time, in mid-January, 1942, Washington DC commissioned a study for potential sites for large, permanent camps, although it frankly did not know if the prisoners were going to be enemy troops or so-called "Enemy Aliens"—dangerous German or Italian or Japanese citizens living in the United States. (Indeed, within months, three separate government programs would evolve, each with its own network of camps: the Justice Department's Enemy Alien Program, which rounded-up some twenty-four thousand enemy citizens and their families; the War Relocation Program, which arrested a whopping 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans, largely from the West Coast and Hawaii; and finally, the Prisoner of War program, under the control of the Army's Provost Marshal General's Office).

When considering places to construct POW camps, Washington looked to the South. First, there was lots of available land in the southern United States, more than could be found in the crowded North. Second, Texas, in particular, was located far from the critical war industries on the East and West Coasts. Also, the mild climate assured minimal construction and operation costs. Eager Texas businessmen and farmers lobbied vigorously for camps in their labor-starved state, with the idea of using the incoming prisoners to fill the huge gap left by the military's needs. Finally, there was the precedent of the Geneva Accords of 1929. Created after World War I, the Geneva Accords established the rules of war, and contained guidelines on matters ranging from the prohibition of explosive or dum-dum bullets to the care of prisoners of war. Of interest to the War Department were the passages that guaranteed prisoners' treatment equal to the conditions of the army in charge, and the recommendation by the Geneva Accords that prisoners be taken to a climate similar to that in which they had been captured. Since the climate most similar to that of Tunisia, where the Afrika Korps surrendered in early 1943, was the American South and, in

particular, the state of Texas (although dozens of camps sprang up in Louisiana, New Mexico, and surrounding states), construction began in the Lone Star State.

Now the criteria for their locations were hammered out. The camps had to be far from vulnerable defense industries but near major railroad lines and highways, as well as water lines, gas, and electricity. Most important, they had to be close to large agricultural areas where the prisoners' labor would be useful to Texas's farmers, foresters, and fruit growers. The Corps of Engineers settled on six places. The first was Camp Huntsville, on a one thousand acre tract near Highway 19, a comfortable eight miles east of the city of Huntsville. Construction began immediately, since the government was already looking over its shoulder at the first boatloads of arriving Germans. On September 18th, the Army announced to the bewildered people of Huntsville the completion of the previously unknown government project on the edge of town. A bit melodramatically, perhaps, the authorities kept the actual purpose of the "structure" officially classified, although there are few secrets in a small town.

Work now turned to building Camp McLean on an 800 acre pasture three miles northeast of the city of McLean, and Camp Mexia, where the Army allocated one million dollars to clear 1,375 acres three miles northwest of the town on land previously owned by the Depression-era Farm Security Administration. In September 1943, work also began on Camp Brady, on 200 acres of flat, treeless cattle pasture, two miles east of the town of Brady on the south side of the Old Rochelle Road. When the camp construction was completed, the public relations-savvy American commander invited Brady's citizens to an open house, and hundreds attended. They were very impressed with what they saw. The new camp had 217 buildings, a 150-bed hospital, excellent roads and athletic fields, a well-equipped canteen, better than average food, and exceptionally good laundry and sanitation facilities. The first prisoners, German non-commissioned officers (NCOs), mostly sergeants, arrived in October. Camp Hereford, in the Panhandle, was chosen because a local landowner, one Loyal B. Holland, bypassed the bureaucracy and wrote directly to the War Department. He offered to lease his 330-acre farm to the government as a possible camp site for five thousand dollars a year. The government accepted and construction began immediately.

It took more aggressive lobbying to interest the government in Camp Hearne. As soon as the government's call went out for available land to be converted into POW camps, Hearne city leaders saw the economic potential of a large government facility in the neighborhood, and the Hearne Chamber of Commerce sprang into action. The Town Fathers initiated a letter-writing campaign to their local Congressman, Luther A. Johnson, and Senators O'Daniel and Tom Connelly who, in turn, pressured the War Department. The Army responded to the political pressure and work began. Construction material poured in, contracts were awarded, truckloads of laborers arrived, and the city of Hearne experienced the first housing shortage of its history. The townspeople beamed.

The construction of the new standard POW camps was directed by the War Department, the Corps of Engineers, and the Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO). A new POW camp usually had four separate compounds, each surrounded by chain-link or barbed wire fences. Essentially, the compounds were camps within the camp. Inside each compound were numerous barracks for seventy-five to one hundred men, a mess hall, workshop, canteen, and recreation hall. The barracks had space for cots or double-decker beds with straw sacks for mattresses, footlockers, and a potbellied stove. Outside the compounds, in a central area, stood a hospital, chapel, post office, administration building, warehouse, utility area, and showers that benefitted the camp at large. A wide, flat area served as a combination inspection ground, processing center, and soccer field. Walkways and gravel roads spread throughout the camp. All in all, the POW camp looked like any normal Army training center, except for the security. Two ten-foot high single chain link fences, eight feet apart, surrounded the entire camp, and a single chain-link fence surrounded each individual compound within the camp. Watchtowers equipped with searchlights dotted the fence rows, and some camps adopted a so-called "Death Line" eight to ten feet inside the fence where sentries could shoot anyone who strayed too close to the main fence. Being a prisoner of war could be serious business.

Nearly all six permanent camps were finished and ready for occupancy by January 1943. Each was expected to hold about 3,000 men, with the possibility of expanding the number up to 4,500. Admirable as this early planning and construction was, it quickly became evident that six permanent camps, holding between 3,000 and 4,000 POWs would not account for even a quarter

of the incoming prisoners. The War Department decided to authorize a second type of POW camp on sections of existing Army bases. The advantages were many: these POW sections could be easily guarded since sentry towers and fences were already in place; the prisoners could be used to help maintain the bases, thus freeing numerous American soldiers for shipment overseas; and nearby communities would be calmed to know that the thousands of possibly hostile enemy captives were surrounded by many more thousands of armed American soldiers.

Four military bases in Texas were enlarged to receive POWs in 1942—Camp Swift (Bastrop), Camp Bowie (Brownwood), Camp Fannin (Tyler), and Camp Maxey (Paris), with the largest having the whopping capacity of nearly 9,000 men. Three more camps were authorized in 1943: Fort Sam Houston (San Antonio), which was little more than a tent-city with 170 six-man tents for both POWs and their American guards; Camp Howze (Gainesville); and Camp Hood North (Killeen). With the expected invasion of France in 1944 and the prospect of many thousands of new prisoners, seven more POW camps were built on military bases in 1944, at Camp Wolters (Mineral Wells), Camp Wallace (Hitchcock), Camp D. A. Russell (Marfa), Fort Bliss (El Paso), Camp Crockett (Galveston), Camp Barkeley (Abilene), and tiny Camp Hulen (Palacios), which could hold only 250 POWs. In 1945, German POWs were farmed out to work in Harmon General Hospital in Longview, Ashburn General Hospital in McKinney, Camp Cushing in San Antonio, Biggs Air Field in El Paso, Ellington Air Field in Houston, and in work camps in Lubbock, Childress, Amarillo, Dumas, Big Spring, Pyote, Alto, and Dalhart. Even after the war was over, in August 1945, one last camp was created at the Flour Bluff Army Air Field in Corpus Christi.

Together, the fifteen camps could hold an impressive 34,000 enemy prisoners, but there was still not enough space for the arriving thousands. The problem of overcrowding was solved by creating satellite camps attached to the major camps, which served the additional purpose of bringing the POWs closer to the agricultural worksites where they were most needed. There were more than thirty satellite camps in Texas. Most were located in the coastal rice-producing area in an arc reaching from Orange County to Matagorda County, and in East Texas. Branch camps sprouted up in Kaufman, Princeton, Navasota, Alto, Chireno, Humble, Denison, Milam, Kirbyville, Liberty, Orange, Anahuac, Alvin, Rosenberg, Angleton, Forney, Wharton, El Campo,

Ganado, Eagle Lake, Bannister, Patroon, Kenedy, Mont Belvieu, Center, China, Lufkin, Bay City, and Garwood. Even remote Paso County hosted four agricultural branch camps at Ysleta, Fabens, Canutillo, and El Paso.

The five largest camps in Texas, in POW capacity and peak count, were:

<u>Camp</u>	<u>Capacity</u>	<u>Peak</u>
Maxey	9,000	7,458
Mexia	6,000	5,958
Huntsville	4,816	4,840
Hearne	4,992	4,700
Swift	3,000	3,524

By early 1943, the camps were ready, the satellite camps were under preparation, and the bureaucratic hierarchy established, from the Provost Marshal General's Office in Washington, down to the individual camp commanders and their staffs and MP guard units. Now there was nothing for the townspeople of each community to do but nervously settle in to await the arrival of the first trainloads of prisoners.

Texans didn't have to wait long. The Afrika Korps surrendered in April 1943, and the first POWs from North Africa arrived aboard Liberty ships the following month. The prisoners were unloaded at Camp Shanks, New York, and transported on heavily guarded trains southwest across the country to their new homes. When they arrived at their camps, entire towns turned out to watch. For example, on June 4, 1943, the anxious residents of Mexia, Texas, lined Railroad Street to stare open-mouthed at the 1,850 Afrika Korps veterans as they jumped down from railroad cars and marched in orderly rows to the camp four miles west of town. Young men had become a rare sight since the war began, and suddenly here were several thousand tanned, healthy enemy soldiers marching in defiant cadence down the main street of town. Moreover, they weren't even all Germans. The incoming prisoners contained Frenchmen, who had been pressed into the German Army, and a platoon of Arabs from the North African campaign. Among the rest were three hundred naval officers, almost one thousand German Army officers,

an admiral, and four generals.

Val Horn's exclamation probably expressed the collective thoughts of the crowd. "Holy cow! . . . We were a town of only 3,500, and we had just seen our population increased by 50 percent, and they were foreigners on top of it!" As if to mock Mr. Horn, within months the camp population increased to 6,000, thus doubling the town population. The huge camp, sprawling over seven hundred acres, was bulging at the seams, and it quickly became clear that more branch camps would be necessary. Some 300 German captives were moved midway between Mexia and Mineral Wells to Cleburne, where they were held on the old Johnson County fairgrounds in scattered stone buildings and sixty-five electrically lighted tents. These men spent the war working for local farmers. Camp Mexia's second branch camp was located at White Rock Lake, in Dallas. Four other branch camps quickly sprang up.

Camp Hereford had a different experience. The Hereford camp was designated strictly for Italian prisoners, all captured during the African campaign. From early June 1943, until its closing in mid-February 1946, Camp Hereford was home to some 850 Italian officers and an average of 2,200 enlisted men. Italian POWs were also held in Fort Bliss, Dalhart, and various other camps. While they were no less troublesome than the Germans, nor particularly good agricultural workers, or less likely to escape, the Italians were in a peculiar position. Italy changed sides in the middle of the war, and its leader, Mussolini, was shot. Technically then, the Italian POWs in America were no longer enemies. Yet many were dangerous fascists whose loyalty to Mussolini and fascism remained undaunted. The solution depended largely on the experiences of each American camp commander: some Italian POWs were shifted from camp to camp to prevent trouble; others were worked as before; and still others were given wide latitude to take college correspondence courses, participate in escorted sight-seeing day trips to nearby cities, and even hold dances and social events with local women's groups!

While the three thousand German POWs in Fort Bliss lived in Spartan conditions and were mistrusted by the guards and American and Mexican populations, the one thousand Italians at the nearby Coliseum branch camp, near El Paso, swam in the Washington Park pool, attended Mass, consumed record amounts of beer, and chatted with girls at the fences. Young girls often threw

notes wrapped around stones over the fences, until such antics prompted the passage of a city ordinance prohibiting "loitering within one hundred feet of the enclosure of the El Paso war prisoner sub-camp, or throwing or passing any object into or against said enclosure. . . ." Very few Italians left America after the war with complaints.

Texas had only a few hundred Japanese prisoners; most of the five thousand soldiers brought to the U.S. for interrogation were held at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, and Camp Clarinda, Iowa. However, the best-known Japanese captive, referred to as "POW No. 1," was interned at Kenedy, Texas, in an old Depression-era CCC camp which held three separate groups: Germans, Japanese, and civilian Alien Internees. Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki had commanded a midget submarine, part of the attack force at Pearl Harbor. His submarine was damaged and he swam ashore at Waimanalo Beach on Oahu. Sakamaki was grabbed by patrolling American MPs and went into the history books as the first American POW of World War II. Other Japanese prisoners were also held at Kenedy, Camp Huntsville, and Camp Hearne.

One of the first German POWs to arrive in Texas, Werner Madeja, stepped off the heavily-guarded train into the bright sunlight at Bastrop, and joined the first procession of nearly 1,500 other Afrika Korps veterans as they were marched several miles to a heavily-guarded section of Fort Swift. His POW number—8WG20591—explained the story of his capture. Decoded, his number indicated that he was assigned to the Eighth U.S. Military District (8) by the War Department (W); the country he served when captured was Germany (G); and his individual, sequential number was 20591.

Within two months of their arrival the Germans had decorated their mess halls with paintings, chandeliers, and Christmas ornaments, and had adorned their walls with family photographs. They transformed the appearance of the camps by planting grass, adding attractive flower beds, constructing beer gardens, staking out soccer fields, and making picnic tables. At Camp Hearne, Texas, the prisoners even constructed a complicated concrete fountain and a waist-high castle, complete with turrets and a moat, which still exists today.

In some camps, POWs even kept pets, something harmless that they had found in camp or

smuggled back from a work detail. And the food! From their first meals, the incoming prisoners sat down to see foods that most of them had not tasted in years: meat, eggs, tomatoes, green vegetables, milk, and real coffee—sometimes even ice cream. Not only that, but they found that cigarettes and, in some camps, beer and wine were available at the camp PX, purchasable with the canteen coupons with which the government paid their military salaries and wages for daily work.

On April 14, 1945, for example, the following food was served to the POWs at Camp Fabens, near El Paso:

Breakfast: milk, cornflakes, coffee, bread

Lunch: eggs, sausage, soup, tomato salad, tea

Dinner: meatballs, potatoes, cabbage, fruit, coffee.

Perhaps not gourmet food, but certainly nutritious and augmented by soft drinks and junk food at the camp canteen.

Many camps tried to maintain a regular Sunday chapel program for Catholics and Protestants, although, because of language difficulties and boycotts by the Nazis in the POW population, attendance was disappointingly low. More successful was the authorized publication of mimeographed German-language POW newspapers in many camps, most quite sophisticated, with in-depth articles, soccer scores, and even classified ads. Washington generally encouraged these newspapers for two reasons: the German prisoners experienced freedom, many for the first time in their young lives and, at the same time, the American authorities could gauge mood in a given camp by monitoring these weekly newspapers: Camp Hearne's was called *Der Spiegel* (*The Mirror*); Fort Crockett's POWs published *Wille und Weg* (*The Will and The Way*); Camp Hood had *Neuland* (or *The New Land*); Camp Bowie had two newspapers, *Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*) and *Der Lagerspiegel* (*The Camp Mirror*); Camp Fannin's paper was a bi-weekly paper of fourteen pages called *Der Aufbruch* (*The Departure*); Camp Huntsville's paper was called *Die Fanfare*; and Camp Maxie's prolific prisoners published three newspapers: *Das Echo* (*The Echo*), *Der Texas Horchposten* (*The Texas Listening Post*), and *Die Deutsche Stimme* (*The*

German Voice). In addition to these individual camp newspapers, a popular newspaper called *Der Ruf* (*The Call*) was available in every camp in America, although it was viewed by the prisoners as being suspiciously pro-democracy. In addition, most camps were permitted to maintain subscriptions to American newspapers, magazines, and a New York-based German language paper called the *Neue Deutsche Volks-Zeitung*, unless the camp was being punished for refusal to work or for excessive Nazi activities.

As if the good food, religious services, and newspapers were not enough to preoccupy the enemy prisoners, most camps offered educational courses taught by qualified experts among the POWs. If there was a strong demand for a course about which few prisoners were knowledgeable, say, American history or politics, the course might be taught by an approved civilian living or teaching nearby. Prisoners could enroll in basic courses in physics, chemistry, history, arts, literature, carpentry, foreign languages, mathematics, veterinary medicine, and stenography, depending on the size of the camp. In traditional German style, the professors required examinations, conducted classroom discussions, issued final grades, and gave graduation certificates. At Fort Russell, for example, prisoners could enroll in any of twelve different courses and, by January 1945, a total of 314 POWs had done so. Many German prisoners returned home after the war with mimeographed graduation certificates from "The University of Howzie" or "The University of Wolters"—which, since the courses were taught by German experts, were accepted for full credit by German universities.

The War Department even arranged for extension courses through local universities for POWs who wanted courses that were not available inside their camps, a program which benefitted both the POWs and cash-strapped colleges. A sampling of the camps and their extension university partners are:

Camp Barkeley	Abilene Christian College
Camp Bowie	Howard Payne College
Camp Brady	The University of Texas
Camp Fannin	Southern Methodist University
Fort Bliss	The University of Texas School of Mines

Fort Crockett	Rice University
Fort D. A. Russell	Sul Ross State Teachers College
Fort Sam Houston	St. Mary's University
Camp Wolters	Texas Christian University
Camp McLean	West Texas State Teachers College

Numerous graduates of these college arrangements rose to become prominent political, artistic, and industrial leaders in post-war Germany.

Sports were especially popular. Smaller camps might boast only a circular track and perhaps a volleyball court and a high-jump bar, while larger camps maintained a breathtaking array of athletic programs. Camp Brady, for instance, had an outdoor bowling alley, four regulation handball courts, a track, twelve regulation volleyball courts, and more—all built by the prisoners themselves. But large or small, every camp was crazed about soccer. Team try-outs were anxiously awaited and the games themselves became weekly holidays. Guards bet on their favorite teams, and it was not unusual for local Texas families out on a Sunday drive to pull up along the fence and cheer the teams on. Some camps held yearly Olympics. The scores for each game were listed in the weekly POW newspapers, together with comments about the players and the prospects of each team's progress toward a championship match.

Non-sport recreation involved everything from painting and carpentry to music. At Fort Russell, a theater group performed elaborate plays with men playing the parts of women to the hoots and whistles of their comrades. Prisoners could also participate in a men's chorus or a thirteen-piece orchestra. The orchestra at Camp Fannin numbered twenty-four POW musicians including a violin concert master and a classical pianist.

The carpentry shop was also popular, and POWs busily made handicrafts like inlaid cigarette boxes, picture frames, attractive tables, and an occasional eagle and swastika, all out of old C Ration crates and lumber pilfered from the walls and ceilings of their own barracks. These were regularly sold to the guards as souvenirs or given as gifts to local farmers. No doubt the carpentry shops were used to make escape tools, and in at least one camp, Camp Hearne, the

prisoners constructed a raft to escape down the nearby Brazos River, then onward to the Gulf of Mexico, where they hoped to flag down a passing Germany-bound ship. That they were picked up a mile downstream probably only sent them back to the carpentry shop with new ideas.

Mail could be freely sent and received and, at one point, the prisoners at Camp Brady received twelve thousand cards, letters, and parcels in a single week. Radios and phonographs, donated by the YMCA or purchased by the prisoners themselves, could be found in every camp, and their favorite record, Bing Crosby singing "Don't Fence Me In," could be heard well into any evening. Almost every camp maintained a library of donated books and magazines, some large enough to do justice to an average high school. Camp Fannin, for example, maintained a well-stocked library of over 2,500 books with an 80 percent circulation rate. Movies were shown on Saturday nights, often the same film for weeks, and several hundred POWs would recite the well-known lines from favorite Western movies or break into cheers and wolf-whistles if the movie had a scantily-clad, or for that matter, any reasonably attractive female.

On Galveston Island, a section of Fort Crockett was allocated for the German prisoners. It was built along the present boundaries of Avenue Q on the north, Seawall Boulevard on the south, 53rd Street on the east, and 57th Street on the west, an area about four blocks wide and eight blocks long. The compound fence went across Seawall Boulevard, across the beach, and into the water. Galvestonians sweating in mid-summer frequently watched the German prisoners cavorting in the surf.

Overall, the POWs were relieved and cautiously delighted with their temporary homes in America. They were out of the fighting and, contrary to their possible treatment at the hands of the Russians, seemed to have everything they needed. Little wonder that many Americans, disgruntled over the growing scarcity of goods and skyrocketing prices, dubbed the POW camps outside of town as The Fritz Ritz.

To make sure that conditions in the POW camps remained adequate, teams of Swiss inspectors and International Red Cross representatives visited each camp every several months. The inspectors usually stayed for a day or two investigating POW complaints and checking basic

services. The American camp authorities were understandably anxious about these visits since the Swiss reports were forwarded to the German authorities and might jeopardize the treatment of the ninety thousand American POWs in their hands. The prisoners on the other hand, used these inspections to vent their spleens and elevate petty concerns, but the resulting reports were generally fair to both sides, and most camps passed their inspections with flying colors.

Ultimately, the conditions in each camp as well as the attitude and cooperativeness of the POWs, depended largely on the American camp commandant. At Camp Mexia, for example, one commander was so lax that he allowed prisoners to wear civilian clothing, to eat and drink in their barracks, to post Nazi signs on the outside walls of their barracks, to censor the incoming mail of other prisoners, and to ignore military courtesies to American officers. He was eventually transferred to another camp, where he presumably continued the same practices. A different commander at the same camp was a no-nonsense career military man who eventually had four POWs brought up on morals charges (the exact nature of their crimes is not known), court-martialed, and sentenced to five years in the penitentiary. For the prisoners at any camp, it was the luck of the draw.

Townspersons were not always pleased to have the camps right outside of town. Every Texas town had a small minority who were understandably disturbed at the thought of having "dangerous" Nazis in their midst while their sons and husbands were overseas fighting Nazism. What if they escaped? Or murdered decent Americans in their sleep? People locked their doors and fathers warned their daughters to be on their guard. Over time, however, most people grew cautiously optimistic about having a prisoner of war camp in the neighborhood, especially since the camps and their American staffs relied heavily on local carpenters, repairmen, grocers, gasoline stations, florists, and taverns—funneling welcome money into local economies. As the war progressed and the humanness of the nearby prisoners became evident, even the nervous minority came to realize the logic of taking care of the German prisoners as a way of protecting American captives in Germany. Where POW labor was available, farmers grew dependent on the nearby camps and actually protested their closing at the end of the war.

The use of POW labor started soon after their arrival. The labor shortage had reached crisis

proportions since every able-bodied young American man was in the military, and there was no one to plant or harvest. By the peak harvest season of 1943, Texas had a shortage of over three hundred thousand workers. The War Department, after serious consideration about issues like potential sabotage, escapes, and the effect of our policy on American captives in Germany, finally authorized the use of POWs. Tens of thousands of German prisoners were mobilized to work in hundreds of Texas industries, factories, hospitals, and state agencies, but most important, in agriculture. Texas farmers were delighted. The Germans chopped cotton, harvested fruit in the Rio Grande Valley, cut sugar cane, and tended fields all over the state. Enlisted men had to work but sergeants, NCOs, and officers were not required to do physical labor, and only about 7 percent volunteered. Enlisted POWs who refused to work, whether as a political protest or out of adolescent defiance, quickly felt the weight of Washington's "No Work-No Eat" policy.

When a few POWs refused to work, punishment was routine: loss of privileges, time in the brig, suspension of pay—but when the sit-down strike involved a large part of the prisoner population, camp officials had to become resourceful. Punishment for all was common, with the hope that the cooperative POWs would force the others back to work. Sometimes the working POWs were rewarded with a truckload of watermelon or a barrel of ice cream, while uncooperative POWs looked unhappily on. Most often, the offending prisoners were simply marched to the open soccer field and forced to strip down to their underwear. There, under a boiling sun, there were made to contemplate the seriousness of their cause. Usually, after only a few hours of sitting in the hot Texas sun, they reconsidered and went back to work. At Camp Wolters, the commandant created a fenced-in pen, where protesters were dutifully marched to sit in view of their happier (working) fellow prisoners.

The initial exuberance of Texas farmers faded rapidly when they encountered the federal bureaucracy. To obtain POW labor, farmers first had to show that they had tried to hire local workers. Failing to find sufficient workers, farmers then had to turn to the Texas Extension Service (TES) and Texas A&M College which administered the POW work program. What followed was a blizzard of forms and reports involving district agents, county agents, weekly reports to the Extension State Farm Labor Office about local labor needs, and back down the Army chain of command to the relevant POW camps. When it became clear that a serious

agricultural crisis was looming, the requirements were relaxed. In September 1943, Texas Congressman Albert Thomas even persuaded War Department officials to waive the rule that barred the use of POW laborers near the coast, and thousands of prisoners went to work harvesting rice.

By 1944, informal arrangements and a telephone call or personal visit to the County Agent's office started the process. All the farmer had to promise was a sandwich lunch for the POWs and the current "free labor" wage, payable to the government, not the prisoners. The POWs were then paid eighty cents per day in canteen coupons since the government felt that giving the prisoners actual cash might enable them to pool their money to bribe a guard or purchase a train ticket. However, lest one today sneer at eighty cents a day, it should be remembered that in those years beer sold for five cents a bottle and cigarettes for five cents a pack. The thrifty could deposit their coupons in a government savings account, which was paid out in cash when they left the United States. (Many prisoners returned to Europe with several hundred dollars in their pockets). The POW work program was nearly self-maintaining. That is, the farmers paid the prevailing wage in cash to the government (twenty-five cents per hour for general farm work, and three dollars per day for rice harvesting), and the government, in turn, issued the prisoners printed canteen coupons of eighty cents per day. The way the labor program worked was that after arrangements were made with the local County Agent, or sometimes directly with the POW camp, a truckload of prisoners was delivered at 8 a.m., together with a guard or two, who sometimes went to sleep under a tree while a prisoner was appointed to patrol the perimeter with his empty rifle. The German POWs generally worked well, though not as quickly or efficiently as free labor. On occasion they participated in work slow-downs, such as a small group of German naval personnel transferred from Camp Bowie to Camp Alvin. In March of 1945, a small detachment of ten men was assigned to the nearby Burnett Farms, where they worked in slow-motion and destroyed some farm tools "by accident." They spent the rest of the month on bread and water in the stockade.

Those POWs who worked, however, did a wonderful job. At Camp Brady, for example, despite the continual unrest, those prisoners who did work had the best grain and oat yield in the entire area—an average of one hundred bushels per acre. Most farmers agreed that they could not have

brought in the Texas harvests in 1943, 1944, or 1945, without the help of German POWs and in some cases, particularly around Fort Bliss, Italian prisoners, as well. In very rare cases, Japanese prisoners were put to work.

More than thirty-nine counties in Texas utilized prisoner of war labor in 1944 alone, and in 1945, the number of Texas counties that were fortunate enough to receive POW labor rose to forty-five. The TES (Texas Extension Service) reports contain such statements as "Work as a whole was very satisfactory. Prisoners of war saved the day in most areas" and "Thousands of bushels of peaches would have been lost in Parker County alone had not the prisoner of war labor been made available." They seemed to be everywhere. Most people in rural Texas couldn't drive fifty miles without bumping into some German POW workers: blonde, healthy, and tan, in their distinctive blue overalls with yellow letters "PW" stenciled front and back, waving at pretty girls or singing German songs from the back of an open truck.

The relationship between the German POWs and American farmers was often quite close, and it was not unusual for the POW to eat lunch with the farm family, or for the prisoner to give the farmer a hand-made gift. A number of friendships lasted well past the end of the war, with the farmers sending CARE packages and even acting as official sponsors for those immigrating to the United States. At Camp San Augustine, a POW named Otto Rinkeauer, fell in love with a local girl, Amelia Keidel; after the war he returned from Germany, and they were married. They built Keidel's Motel in San Augustine, which stands to this day. On one notable occasion, a farmer who died many years after the war left his farm to his former German POW worker.

But not all the POWs were happy. Prison was still prison, after all, and the monotony brought out numerous complaints, real and contrived. A common early complaint, for instance, was that their food did not reflect their German or Italian diets. Too much spaghetti and not enough meat and potatoes, or vice versa. American white bread was declared inedible compared with the hearty whole-grain bread in Europe. Surprisingly, in this case, the War Department agreed. Washington's logic was: if the POWs liked and ate what they were served, they would throw away less and thus conserve food for the war effort.

Contrived complaints ranged from charges of abusive guards to dental neglect. The Red Cross

representatives dutifully investigated every minor complaint and usually dismissed them. Prison monotony was particularly hard on the energetic youngsters and family men. Older men often became depressed worrying about the fate of their families as Allied bombs pulverized their cities. The youngsters relieved the boredom by playing pranks on the guards, bartering for forbidden items, or fermenting wine from the raisins in their breakfast toast. At POW Camp Bay City in Matagorda County, prisoners often made extra money tanning snakeskins and selling them as bookmarks and other souvenirs to the guards and farmers. One POW at Bay City who volunteered to be the projectionist on movie nights, secretly reproduced still photos of the heroine's face or anatomy for sale to all. At Camp Kenedy, sixty miles southeast of San Antonio, POWs often painted swastikas on the backs of turtles and let them wander through the camp. And at Camp Swift, near Bastrop, prisoners who were sent up to repair the shingles on a roof, arranged contrasting colors into a swastika pattern that wasn't spotted until a low-flying plane reported the stunt.

In many camps, however, rebellion took a more serious turn. At Camp Brady, for example, the NCOs were forever unruly. They refused to work, protested unpopular policy decisions with hunger strikes, and raised a hand-made swastika flag from the camp flagpole. The Italians at Camps Hereford and Fort Bliss were always up to some mischief, but the most dangerous form of POW action concerned the camp Nazis. In nearly every camp there were a number of die-hard Nazis who often terrorized their moderate comrades, intimidated church-goers, eavesdropped on suspected anti-Nazis, beating them senseless with blackjacks made from a bar of soap in a sock and, on occasion, even killing them in the middle of the night. Prisoners who didn't cooperate with the Nazi thugs were ostracized from the "German community of fellowship," which drove most to cooperate. A few prisoners were harassed until they committed suicide.

Nationwide, no less than seventy-two suspicious deaths were simply listed by the Army as "suicides." The authorities were generally at a loss to identify the culprits or to protect the victims. One example will suffice. Corporal Hugo Krauss, 24, was born in Germany but lived with his parents in New York from 1928 to 1939. He became enamored with the Third Reich, went back to Germany, and joined the army. He fought in Russia and North Africa. Krauss was captured and shipped to Camp Hearne, Texas, where his fluency in English enabled him to

become the translator for the American camp commander. His English, his naturalized parents still living in New York, and a few random criticisms about the German government sealed his fate. According to the Army report: "After the lights were put out at 9 p.m. on December 17, 1943, from six to ten men invaded Krauss' barracks. He screamed for help but no one came to his aid. His barracks mates looked on while his skull was fractured, both arms were broken, and his body was battered from head to foot." He died in the camp hospital six days later. No perpetrators were discovered. Indeed, many American camp commanders simply gave the Nazi groups what they wanted in an effort to maintain order and prevent problems.

After August 1944, three thousand of the most uncooperative and pro-Nazi German POWs, largely NCOs, were shipped from around the country to Camp McLean, and when McLean was full, Camp Huntsville became the unofficial dumping ground for incorrigible NCOs, Gestapo, and SS men. Originally, Camp McLean had been an average three thousand-man camp located three miles east of McLean, Texas. Its first occupants were Afrika Korps prisoners. They had quickly created flower beds and bushes around their barracks, named the roads and camp sidewalks with German street names, and decorated the mess halls with beautiful paintings of scenic Germany. The POWs were active in music, theater, sports, and handicrafts; the food was varied and abundant, and the visiting International Red Cross representatives consistently praised the camp and its atmosphere. In April 1944, everyone was transferred to other camps, and the camp placed on "stand-by" by the Army. Whatever studies or discussions were carried out in Washington, Camp McLean re-opened in August with the appearance of three thousand pro-Nazi NCOs, and the problems began. Two of the three compounds held POWs who pledged not to work, who complained bitterly about every aspect of camp life, and escaped regularly. One flamboyant escapee on Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1945, says it all. A prisoner crawled out of the compound, climbed atop the water tower, mounted a Nazi flag, and brazenly walked back into his compound.

The canteens in both compounds were permanently closed, and the sale of cigarettes and beer to the uncooperative prisoners was prohibited. During the camp's remaining year, five POWs were killed by guards, all shot in the process of escaping or attacking a guard. Meanwhile, the cooperative Germans in the first compound enjoyed a fifty-five-piece orchestra and a theater

group, and fielded a sports program with twice-weekly soccer matches, Sunday tournaments, and organized handball and fistball leagues. They worked well for the local farmers and seem to have gotten along with everyone but their pro-Nazi comrades at the other side of the camp. In fact, after the war a former German POW named an American civilian maintenance camp plumber as his child's godfather.

The Italian POWs at Camp Hereford were among the most disruptive troublemakers in any camp in Texas. Hereford was a large camp of four compounds, with 4,800 enlisted men and 1,000 officers. In addition to the regular camp offerings, Hereford's Italian officers were quartered in efficiency apartments, the canteen was particularly well-stocked and popular, and Camp Hereford even provided a building where the prisoners and relatives could spend private time together. Many POWs responded well, working diligently on local farms—even spending their spare time for three months hand-building a 150,000 bushel grain elevator in Happy, Texas, that is still in use today. The Italians were especially proud of their creative abilities and produced works of art ranging from violins, carved boxes, and rings made from coins, to beautiful oil murals on the interior walls of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Umbarger. All nine church artists returned to Umbarger in 1955 to present a memorial plaque which is still on display in the foyer of the church.

Despite the handicrafts and privileges, the camp was filled with hardened fascists and monarchists who gave each other a straight-arm salute as they passed on the camp sidewalks. They feigned illness by the dozen and complained continually to the Red Cross, to the Bishop of Amarillo, the Italian Ambassador, and the U.S. War Department. They broke windows, set their barracks on fire, and, on one occasion, two men stabbed each other over a candy bar. They fought among themselves, monarchists against fascists, or the fairskinned northern Italians against the swarthier southern Italians. They rioted regularly, once against the presence of one thousand German POWs in transit through Camp Hereford, but usually against the guards or the firemen called to put out a barracks fire. The American commander was a tough old officer, and during one riot, a company of American MPs waded into the angry crowd, with the result, the official reported, of over two hundred Italians injured, eighty-five with skull fractures.

But mostly the Italian prisoners escaped. They dug numerous tunnels from beneath their barracks to distant corn fields. The largest tunnel was five hundred feet long and big enough to stand in, with a sophisticated ventilation system. They dug so many tunnels, in fact, that local residents continued to discover them as late as 1981. The Italians tirelessly repeated the same cycle: escape, get caught a day or two later, be returned to camp to rejoin their cheering comrades, and escape again.

Regardless of the camp, the escapees were a mixed lot. Career militarists among them believed that they were under orders to escape, others were wild-eyed about the safety of their families in war-torn Europe, some were simply homesick and wanted desperately to find their way home, and still others just wanted to tour the United States and meet girls. Since there was no serious punishment involved beyond several weeks in the brig and loss of pay if the effort failed, escape became a game. Stronger punishment, it was felt, would jeopardize the safety of American prisoners in enemy hands who would doubtless escape if possible.

And escape they did. The POWs burrowed under the fences and pole-vaulted over them; they hung underneath laundry trucks that entered and left camp, posed as American guards and walked out the front gate, and slipped away from work details. Escape attempts were always in progress and their uniqueness was limited only by the imaginations of the prisoners and the tools at hand. At Camp Brady, as at Hereford, the prisoners dug and maintained a tunnel under the floor of their barracks into a nearby field. Local legend in Brady has it that some of the prisoners used the tunnel to visit around town for a few hours and return undetected. Whether fact or fiction, a suspicious guard alerted the authorities and the Brady Volunteer Fire Department came out and flooded the tunnel.

Most of the time, the escapes were mundane and short-lived. At Camp Mexia on February 7, 1944, for example, the 5:15 p.m. roll revealed the absence of five German officers. Camp authorities hastily notified the FBI, the Texas Rangers, the Texas Highway Patrol, and local law enforcement officers in the surrounding areas. Scores of agents and officers combed the countryside, checking all roads, highways, and train boxcars—to no avail. Two days later the Germans were spotted by a route carrier for the *Waco News-Tribune*, and three of the escapees

were picked up as they walked along a moonlit highway between Mount Calm and their destination, Waco. The remaining two had hopped a freight train four hundred miles to Corpus Christi. There they tried to check into a tourist motel, in full German uniforms and unable to speak English, and were startled when the clerk called the police. They were back at Camp Mexia the following day where they were greeted like heroes by their fellow prisoners. On October 8, 1944, after much preparation, two other POWs escaped from Mexia. They had spare uniforms, cigarettes, surplus food, and compasses, but they were caught the following day about ten miles from the camp. Another escape attempt, this also from Mexia, involved several home-made dummies, which the escapees had taken their places at roll-call while they drifted away. Everything worked fine until one of the dummies fell over. The Germans were back in camp by nightfall. Two final examples of escapes from Mexia: in one case, an escaped POW was found after two days, huddled and hungry, in an old railcar on an unused spur line in downtown Mexia. He had been waiting for the out-of-commission railcar to speed him away. On a different occasion, an escapee crossing a pasture was run up a tree by an angry Brahma bull. The American guards searching the nearby roads were alerted by his cries for help. He was grateful to be escorted back to the safety of the POW camp.

Several particularly curious incidents occurred at Camp Fannin, ten miles northeast of Tyler in the northeast corner of a military installation. Aside from Fannin's interesting Civil War history when, as Camp Ford, it was used to imprison some six thousand Union soldiers and sympathizers, an event occurred which could be fare for a Hollywood movie. One of the thousands of German POWs who passed through Camp Fannin actually found his brother, one of thousands of American soldiers stationed for training at the very same camp. The American brother had emigrated to the United States years earlier, and had no idea that his brother had been drafted into the German Army, captured, and shipped to east Texas. Each was stunned to see the other, and their joy was tolerated by the camp authorities, who allowed them to meet regularly and reminisce without interference.

Sometimes the relaxation of War Department policy backfired. At Camp Fannin, the camp commander's lack of discipline enabled a German POW to convince a guard that he was on an errand. He then boarded a bus and rode to Tyler, where he strolled and window-shopped for

several hours. He then went to the downtown bus stop, still in his German Army uniform (so as not to be accused of being a spy), rode the bus back, and strolled through the main gates of the POW camp. Embarrassed camp officials sentenced him to a week in the guardhouse.

Emboldened by his success, however, three other POWs used the identical ploy to leave the camp and spend an afternoon fishing at a nearby creek. They, too, returned to Camp Fannin for dinner. This time it was not only the prisoners who were punished, but the American camp commander who was transferred elsewhere.

On one occasion, a POW who wanted to remain in a camp was taken out against his will. At Camp San Augustine, a few miles east of Chireno, the U.S. Intelligence Service caught up with a high-ranking Nazi who had been posing as someone else. SS Brigadier General Heinrich Schwartz had assumed the identity of a buck private in the Afrika Korps and spent the war years as a POW clerk in Texas. It was his superb bookkeeping abilities as the camp's clerk that ultimately aroused the suspicions of the authorities: how could such an outstanding bureaucrat have remained a simple private? But it was not until the Allies entered Berlin and discovered records that his real identity came to light. MPs and intelligence officers showed up in May, 1945, and he unhappily left the camp for Maryland's Intelligence Interrogation Center.

Overall, most of the escapees were captured within three days, often sooner, and few remained at large for more than three weeks. One of the longest escapes involved the Italian POWs at Camp Fabens, about thirty miles south of Fort Bliss. On the evening of July 3, 1944, two Italians escaped and eluded capture for an entire year. After recapture both were transferred to Camp Hereford. A week later, on July 9, 1944, six other Italians escaped from Fabens, and made it across into Mexico. Three were arrested separately two weeks later in Gomez, Palacio, and Durango, and the other three in Villa Ahumada, Chihuahua. When they were finally arrested, all gave the straight-arm fascist salute and were taken back to camp, vowing to escape again.

Punishments ranged from loss of privileges to fourteen days in the cooler on a diet of bread and water. Only in the case of theft or outright sabotage could an escapee face prison time, as happened to two Germans from Camp Fannin who stole a skiff to paddle to safety and exchanged the good life at Camp Fannin for eight years of hard labor at Fort Leavenworth. At

Camp Hereford, three Italian prisoners escaped on Christmas 1944, and stole a Plymouth from an area resident. The men were soon recaptured tooling down the back-roads like a bunch of high school kids, tried for theft, and were sent to Leavenworth for a three-year stint.

The largest and best-organized mass escape attempt in the Texas POW system occurred at Camp Barkeley, a branch camp of Camp Bowie, located about seventy miles northwest of Brownwood near Abilene. It was one of the ugliest and most primitive camps in Texas, made up of fifty-eight wooden, one-story, black tarpapered barracks. Two coal stoves heated the quarters during winter, and the POWs slept on canvas cots topped with straw mattresses. The barracks had no waterproofing, and the strong West Texas wind and rain penetrated even the best constructed buildings. The 550 POWs escaped at every opportunity. MPs frequently found POWs sleeping in the gazebo at the Abilene court house or napping in the old band stand in Abilene's central park. The big break occurred after lights-out on March 28, 1944, when a dozen German prisoners escaped through an impressive tunnel eight feet deep and sixty feet long, with electric lighting, timber shoring, and air bellows to blow fresh air down the length of the tunnel. Each man had a tissue-paper map showing the major highways, rural roads, railroads, and area ranches. Each also carried a pack with a change of clothing and a ten-day supply of food. Once out of the tunnel the twelve separated into small groups and fanned out in a general southwest pattern toward Mexico. The sirens went off, and the chase began. City and county officers, state highway patrolmen, Texas Rangers, FBI men, and military personnel shifted into high gear. The Abilene Army Base sent up five light observation planes.

Four of the Germans walked twelve miles to Tuscola, hid in the underbrush for two days, then stole an automobile and drove to Ballinger. A Ballinger night watchman, Henry Kemp, became suspicious as he watched four men in German uniforms, screaming directions at each other and "driving crazily." Our heroic Mr. Kemp jumped into his car, chased them down and forced them off the road. He collared all four and marched them to an all-night service station where he called the sheriff. Within days, the four Germans were back at Camp Barkeley.

Seven others were caught within a few days. Of the seven, two spent a day in Abilene State Park, and then went to Winters, where they were arrested by the local constable and returned to Barkeley. Two others were arrested by a night watchman as they strolled along a railroad track in

San Angelo. The last of the seven spent their first night in Ovala and then walked to Bradshaw. Ten miles west of Bradshaw they broke into an abandoned house on the Melvin Shaffer Ranch. They were still there; fast asleep, when Mr. Shaffer came out to feed some animals the following afternoon. Back they went to Camp Barkeley.

The final two escapees, Gerhard Lange and Heinz Rehnen, walked at night and slept in cornfields during the day. In Trent, they caught a freight train to Toyah, near Odessa. There they managed to hop aboard another freight train, this one to El Paso. The Mexican border was within sight when a detective from the Southern Pacific Railroad bagged them. Like all the others, they surrendered meekly and were soon reunited with their comrades in Barkeley's guardhouse, lamenting their diet of bread and water but pleased with their camp notoriety.

According to the Texas historian Richard Walker, if one considers that about fifty thousand POWs were held in Texas for up to three years, escapes could be considered minimal. Compared with an ordinary town of fifty thousand inhabitants, the number of criminal acts, serious or petty crimes committed by the prisoners would be no more than the average number of felonies or misdemeanors committed by the inhabitants of a city of the same size.

As the war wound down in the Spring of 1945, small branch camps began to funnel their prisoners to the larger camps, as the large camps readied their POWs for shipment east and eventual repatriation to Germany. But the American general in charge of German post-war occupation, Lucius Clay, didn't want to see four hundred thousand healthy German POWs return to Central Europe, nor, for that matter, did America's farmers want to see them leave. On the other hand, American labor unions demanded that they leave the United States to make jobs available to returning U.S. soldiers. The new president, Harry S. Truman, never one to mince words, simply ordered the War Department to ship them out of the United States, to whichever country wanted them. Consequently, most German POWs spent the next two to three years in the unfriendly hands of the French and British. The last German POW was returned home in mid-1948, three years after the war was over.

Many returned to Texas as quickly as possible, especially when confronted with the devastation of post-war Germany. One POW, a German named Joachim Obier, didn't wait until he returned

home. In 1946, while being held in Oxford, England, he escaped the British authorities and darted into the United States Embassy in London. He pleaded to be returned to Texas. Although he was turned away by Embassy officials who were reluctant to antagonize America's wartime allies, POW Obier did manage to emigrate to Texas after all, in 1951, and happily lived the remainder of his life in Brownwood. About five thousand others returned over the years. A Hearne farmer, Tom Moore, for years told the story that several years after the war he was in Houston, in an elevator in the Cotton Exchange Building. Astonishingly, he recognized two of the other passengers in the elevator with him as German POWs in his work crew years before. In another case, a former POW named Wolf Raddmann had spent the war years in Navasota. He became close friends with a local physician, who sponsored his emigration back to Texas in 1952. The doctor helped Raddmann find employment with the Anderson Clayton law firm in Houston, and later as a teacher at Texas Southern University. Wolf Raddmann married, had a son, and lived out his life in Houston. Another prisoner, an aristocratic Afrika Korps officer named Rüdiger von Wechmar, rose to the very top following the war; a POW at Camp Maxey, near Paris, Texas, in Lamar County, and later at POW Camp Trinidad in Colorado, von Wechmar became the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

Former POWs sometimes re-visit their wartime Texas homes for reunions, usually with their children and grandchildren in tow. They reminisce, hug their former guards, and poke around the grounds in hopes of finding their initials scratched into a now deteriorating wall or point out where they made home-made wine. Without exception, they recall their years as POWs in Texas as "the greatest times of their lives."

After the war was over the POW camps in Texas began to disappear. Camp McLean was closed on July 6, 1945. Some of the old barracks were moved into town; several were used as warehouses, four others were eventually dismantled and sold off for the lumber, and one became the American Legion hall. For years a lone wooden guard tower was visible from the highway, but in 1957 the El Paso Natural Gas Company purchased the property and demolished all the remaining buildings, including the guard tower.

The last Italian POWs left Hereford during the first week of February 1946, and gradually the

buildings were sold off to the public. The mess hall with the murals became a cafeteria near Stanton High School, and the only visible remains of the once bustling camp are the memorial chapel and the massive amount of barbed wire that still entangles the remaining fence posts.

The Marfa camp was assigned to the Marfa Army Air Field for administration, and on October 22, 1946, the city of Marfa and the Texas National Guard negotiated for the buildings. By the late 1980s a Federal Land Bank Office, a laundromat, and the Border Patrol Sectional Headquarters occupied the site of the old POW camp.

At Camp White Rock, outside of Dallas, considered a "Country Club" by former prisoners, Southern Methodist University used the camp facilities as married-student housing for a brief period before returning the buildings to the city of Dallas. The city used the area as a public recreation facility, and as late as 1979, one lone small building remained at Winfrey Point, a reminder of the resort playground that was once a POW camp.

Camp Corsicana, thirty miles south of Kaufman, first a branch camp of Mexia, and later of Fannin was deactivated in December 1945. Today, McDonald's Golden Arches tower over the area of the old Corsicana POW camp.

Camp Swift closed its doors immediately after VE-Day in May 1945, and the Army sold the land back to the original owners. In the years since, the former camp site, home to three thousand POWs for most of its thirty-five months, has been turned into housing developments and ranches, a University of Texas cancer research center, and a regional headquarters of the Texas National Guard.

Camp Brady, filled with largely uncooperative NCOs, closed in June 1945. The army designated Brady "surplus" property. Between 1946 and 1950 the camp was a school for "delinquent Negro girls." In the 1950s, C. W. Barbee bought the property from the government and removed most of the buildings. A solitary building, one of the guard houses, and a carved wooden bowl in the Brady museum are the only tangible remains of the camp that once swarmed with thousands of Hitler's troops deep in the heart of Texas.

The Army deactivated Camp Bowie after the war and closed the camp on May 15, 1946. The buildings were sold and the land placed up for auction, some sections being returned to the original owners. Today, former Camp Bowie is an industrial park, a hospital, and a junior high school.

Camp Huntsville was closed on January 5, 1946, and was declared "surplus" three weeks later. Almost immediately, Sam Houston State Teachers College applied to the government to use a portion of the former camp for its college agricultural program, and on June 6, the Surplus Property Disposal Agency gave the college the largest gift that it had ever received: the entire camp property and all its facilities. After June 20, 1946, the old POW camp became the Country Campus of the college, with enough housing for 850 married couples, 300 single men, and 250 single women. From 1949 until 1956 one of the dormitory buildings served as a Naval Reserve Electronics unit. Later, part of the old camp site was turned into a golf course and a fishing pond.

The former Camp Hearne lay empty for years after the war. Some ten years ago, an anthropology professor at Texas A&M University, Michael Waters, took on the camp as an excavation project and wrote an excellent book, entitled *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne* (Texas A&M Press, 2004). He convinced the City Council to create a museum on the site, which currently attracts hundreds of tourists weekly.

Seven decades have passed since the end of World War II. Families out on a Sunday drive, passing through small towns in Texas, may stop and wonder about a lone building or watertower standing in the middle of an open field. They may stop to worship and marvel at the beautiful murals on the church walls. History buffs may wonder what happened to the hundreds of thousands of prisoners captured in untold battles during the Second World War, or take satisfaction in Germany's post-war friendship with America. American tourists regularly report bumping into elderly Germans who know as much about Texas as they do, or who talk about Texas as their second homeland. American families out on weekend drives have often come face-to-face with a story which few textbooks bother to describe: the more than approximately ninety thousand German, Italian, and Japanese prisoners who spent much of the war in the Lone Star State. The enemy captives contributed a great deal to America, and were, in turn, profoundly

affected for the rest of their lives. Many who were interviewed for this essay still shine with pride when describing their experiences in Texas.

Recommended Reading

The best single book on the subject of the German POWs, immodestly, was written by this author and is entitled *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York: Stein & Day, 1979, Scarborough, 1983, 1996). It is considered the standard on the topic, and covers the history of the German POWs from their capture, transportation, arrival in the U.S., and camp life across the nation. Since the history of POWs in America is especially interesting to former POWs and their families who view the POW years as part of their military service, a German language edition, *Deutsche Kriegsgefangene in Amerika 1942–1946*, was published in Tübingen, Germany, by Lück & Mauch, Universitas Verlag Tübingen, 1995. Both books contain lists of the largest POW camps, number of incoming prisoners, as well as numerous photographs.

While there are a growing number of articles and books about the German POWs in various states (Utah, Minnesota, Kansas, Maine, Florida, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Alabama, Missouri, South Carolina, and Colorado), the Texas historian Richard P. Walker's *The Lone Star and the Swastika: Prisoners of War in Texas* (Austin: Eakin Press, 2001) concentrates entirely on the POWs in Texas. Drawing on archival sources, local newspapers, and interviews, Walker's excellent book explores the events which occurred in both large camps and small branch camps. Given the enormous size of the Lone Star State, it is only fitting that several other studies are available. Mark Choate's well-written book, *Nazis in the Piney Woods* (Lufkin: Best of East Texas Publishers, 1989), examines the huge base camps of Fannin (Tyler) and Huntsville (Huntsville), as well as the small agricultural branch camps such as Alto, Center, Chinero, San Augustine, Milam, Kirbyville, and Lufkin. Among the German POWs, the U.S. found dozens of high-ranking officers who were dealt with separately; their exciting story is told by Derek R. Mallett in *Hitler's Generals in America: Nazi POWs and Allied Military Intelligence* (University Press of Kentucky, 2013). There is even a book about the Italian POWs who painted St. Mary's Church in Umbarger by Donald Mace Williams, *Interlude in Umbarger: Italian POWs and a Texas Church* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1992, 2001).

A number of outstanding Masters and Doctoral dissertations have been written about the POWs in Texas, and are available from their university libraries. Among the best are Robert Tissing, "Utilization of Prisoners of War in the United States During World War II; Texas: A Case Study" (M.A., Baylor University, 1973); Martha Vivian Hewlett-Warren, "The Culture of a Community: Cleburne, Texas, German POWs and American Army Guards, 1944–1945" (M.A., University of Dallas, 1987); and James Richard Keen, "The Captive Enemy? Italian Prisoners of War in Texas During World War II" (M.A., The University of Texas of the Permian Basin, 1988).

The most interesting book, however, was never published. Professor Ida Blanchett, teacher and author of local history at Alvin Community College, spent years traveling to every known camp site, corresponded with former prisoners, interviewed local residents, and investigated the official documents. The result is an engaging, accurate, and passionate study of every camp in the State. Sadly, she perished to cancer before the book was published, and the typewritten manuscript and mountains of supporting research remain untouched and unconsulted at her Community College in Alvin, Texas. It is to her that this essay is dedicated.