



Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne

*Dr. Michael R. Waters PhD, Mark Long, William Dickens, Sam Sweitz, Anna Lee Presley, Ian Buvit,
Michelle Raisor, Bryan Mason, Hilary Standish, Norbert Dannhaeuser*

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“The cement slabs and decaying fountains obscured by vegetation at the site of Camp Hearne echo a time forgotten of a bustling city of nearly 5,000 men brought together by world conflict.”

The oral histories, archival research, and archaeological data compiled by author Michael Waters and his team of researchers tells the story of 5,000 German soldiers held as prisoners of war in rural Texas during World War II. Camp Hearne, located on the outskirts of Hearne, Texas, was one of the first and largest POW camps in the United States. Between 1943 and 1945 nearly 50,000 German prisoners, mostly from the German Afrika Korps lived and worked at seventy POW camps across Texas. The story of Camp Hearne told here offers the first in-depth look at one of these camps and includes an archaeological study of the treatment and conditions of the German prisoners.

Drawing on newspaper accounts and official records from the time, and the recollections of surviving POWs, guards, and local residents, Waters and his team have constructed a detailed description of life in the camp: educational opportunities, recreation, mail call, religious practices, work details, and the food provided. Also revealed are the more serious issues that faced the Americans inside the POW compounds: illegal alcohol distillation, suicides, escapes, hidden secret shortwave radios, and the subversion of postal services. Fascinating artifacts recovered from the site and from the collections of local residents add concrete details. Waters also discusses the national policies and motivations for the treatment of prisoners that prescribed the particulars of camp life.

The shadow world of Nazism in the camp is revealed, adding darkness to a story that is otherwise optimistic and in places humorous. The most sinister and brutal example of Nazi activity was the murder of Corporal Hugo Krauss, a German-born New York-raised volunteer in the German army. Captured in North Africa after service in Russia, Krause was attacked seven months later by six to ten fellow prisoners and beaten with clubs, nail-studded boards and a lead pipe. The dramatic recounting of the murder and the ensuing investigation illustrate much about the underlying political tensions of camp existence. This book makes a unique and notable contribution to Texas history. The narrative is enriched by numerous photographs and drawings. It will engage those interested in Texas history and World War II and hold particular interest for avocational and professional historical archaeologists.



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