



The Bugler

Official Newsletter of Roll Call - Friends of Camp Hearne

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Hearne Prisoner Of War Camp

[Excerpts from *Hearne on the Brazos* by N.L. McCarver, Sr.]

Early in 1943, upon the completion of the construction of this camp, an announcement that the first group of German prisoners would soon arrive created quite a bit of excitement among the local people. When the day arrived for the first trainload of prisoners to reach Hearne, the roadways leading from the outskirts of town to the main entrance of the camp were lined with curious citizens waiting to get a good look at the German prisoners of war. The prisoners were unloaded from trains on the Southern Pacific Railroad near the intersection of State Highways Nos. 6 and 190 and were marched to the campsite down Highway 190 under heavy military guard. This first group of prisoners were former members of General Rommel's *Afrika Korps* and arrived in Hearne still wearing the clothes they had on when captured several weeks previous. Bloodstains were still visible on the clothes of those prisoners who had been wounded during the fighting in North Africa.

Upon arrival at the camp, the prisoners were checked in, allowed to take baths, and issued new clothing with the letters PW stamped in large print on the back. This was necessary in order that prisoners of war could better be identified. Those needing medical attention were placed

in the camp hospital.

Due to the shortage of farm labor, some of the prisoners were used in the cotton fields around Hearne and the Brazos Bottom for cotton chopping and cotton picking. They were paid for this work in the form of credit that could be spent for any article desired at the camp operated store. Most of these prisoners had never seen cotton in the fields before and it took some time before they became very efficient in cotton picking. Other prisoners were used in labor groups around the camp in the building of roads

and other jobs.

It was quite a sight to see several hundred of the German prisoners of war lined up on the streets of Hearne awaiting transportation to the cotton fields.

To Be Set in Stone...

An expression that implies durability. Something that is intended to last forever. Unchanged. What better way to record history?

Our Texas historical marker program actually began in 1936. Celebrating the Texas Centennial, many communities commemorated their hometown heroes and sites of historical interest by erecting markers. These were made from various materials including stone with incised lettering. Others were metal plaques with raised lettering. Today's modern historical markers are made of aluminum with raised lettering on a black background.

Although not in stone, being awarded this highly recognizable symbol that 'something of historic significance happened here' is quite an honor. **Camp Hearne's** marker is currently at the foundry being cast. Delivery is expected this Spring.

The Texas Historical Commission staff wrote the inscription enclosed and the RC Historical Commission approved its text in January. Roadside park designs and site options are currently being developed to properly display this historical marker and tell **Camp Hearne's** story.

CAMP HEARNE WORLD WAR II PRISONER OF WAR CAMP

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, ALLIED TROOPS CAPTURED LARGE NUMBERS OF AXIS SOLDIERS AND TRANSPORTED THEM TO PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS ESTABLISHED THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES. MORE THAN 70 CAMPS IN TEXAS HOUSED SOME 50,000 PRISONERS. IN MARCH 1942, HEARNE CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PRESIDENT ROY HENRY CONTACTED CONGRESSMAN LUTHER JOHNSON TO REQUEST THAT A CAMP BE LOCATED HERE. WITHIN A MONTH, U.S. ARMY STAFF HAD INSPECTED THE AREA AND SELECTED 720 ACRES AS A PRISON SITE.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE CAMP BEGAN IN SEPTEMBER 1942 AND WAS COMPLETED IN SIX MONTHS. IT WAS LAID OUT IN THREE SECTIONS, EACH OF WHICH INCLUDED A MESS HALL, LAVATORY, COMPANY OFFICE AND EIGHT BARRACKS. THE FIRST OF ALMOST 5,000 PRISONERS OF WAR (POWS) ARRIVED IN JUNE 1943. MOST OF THE POWS HOUSED HERE WERE NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS (NCOS) OF THE FAMED GERMAN *AFRIKA KORPS* CAPTURED IN TUNISIA. BECAUSE NCOS WERE NOT REQUIRED TO WORK IN PRISON CAMPS ACCORDING TO THE GENEVA CONVENTION, THEY SPENT MOST OF THEIR TIME IN RECREATIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES WHILE THE BULK OF THE WORK IN THE CAMP FELL TO ENLISTED MEN WHO COMPRISED ABOUT TWENTY PERCENT OF THE PRISON POPULATION.

IN 1944, CAMP HEARNE BECAME THE CENTRAL MAIL DISTRIBUTION POINT FOR ALL GERMAN POWS IN THE U.S., BUT POOR SUPERVISION ALLOWED A SMALL GROUP OF NAZI SYMPATHIZERS TO INFILTRATE THE SYSTEM AND INTIMIDATE AND TERRORIZE BOTH PRISONERS AND THEIR FAMILIES BACK IN GERMANY UNTIL THE SCHEME WAS DISCOVERED AND THE OPERATION SHUT DOWN IN JULY 1945.

A FEW HUNDRED JAPANESE PRISONERS WERE BROUGHT HERE IN THE SUMMER OF 1945 SHORTLY BEFORE THE END OF THE WAR. ALL POWS WERE GONE AND THE CAMP CLOSED BY JANUARY 1946.