

Scene of the Crime

During the early days at Camp Hearne, the primacy of the Nazi ideology was consistently re-enforced by brute force and intimidation. Riotous attacks on the less ardent Nazi supporters were common, especially when the lights went out. Guards openly admit they did not try to stop these mob attacks simply because they were easily outnumbered and the Geneva Conventions certainly allowed prisoners to implement rules of command and order. Disciplining their ranks was left to them. Most prisoners kept their opinions to themselves and were careful not to openly defy the Nazi hierarchy.

Hugo Krauss was not so inclined. His father arrived in New York in 1928 ahead of his wife and children, Hugo (9) and Lena (7), who joined him in June 1929. The 1930 census shows the family lived on East 87th Street in Manhattan, NYC, NY. There, they joined many ethnic Germans who were drawn to the Yorkville neighborhood. Of interest was the proximity to Fritz Kuhn's *German American Bund* organization on East 86th Street which was a pro-Nazi group founded in 1936 operating in the U.S. to disseminate positive news about Nazi Germany. Perhaps this organization's activities played a part in persuading the teenager Hugo to return to Germany and join Hitler's Wehrmacht. His family's story is he returned to Germany to visit his grandparents only to be conscripted into the German Army. Regardless, he ended up captured by the U.S. in Tunisia in May 1943 and lived at Camp Hearne by August.

Hugo was reported to be a big burly man who worked as one of the Camp's butchers. He frequently bragged of his American relations and received visits from his sister who brought him a radio. He announced he was requesting a furlough to visit his parents in New York for Christmas and that he would return as an American soldier. He argued the Americans were winning the war and never joined the group singing of German songs after dinner. Whether true or not, he was accused of "ratting-out" the location of a secret shortwave radio to the Americans. It was not surprising that a "*Heilige Geist*" was ordered. "*Heilige Geist*," or Holy Ghost, was a secret society that operated among German enlisted men for the purpose of punishing "infractions of discipline."

The Camp was organized into three compounds with four companies (400 men) housed in 8 barracks. Each company had a mess hall, orderly room, and latrine. Each compound had a battalion office, infirmary, post exchange and recreation building. Hugo was assigned to Compound I, Company 3, barracks #1. On the night of December 17, 1943, several men met in barracks #4. After a raucous meeting and weapon making (wood sticks with 2-1/2-inch spikes), seven to ten of his fellow comrades left barracks #4, followed the path between the barracks and entered the back of barracks #1 where Hugo was sleeping in the first bunk. It was announced that everyone was to stay in their bunks and say nothing. The beating only lasted less than a minute before they left and "disappeared." Of course, no one saw anything or knew the culprits.

Hugo was taken to the infirmary and transferred the next morning to Temple's McCloskey Hospital where he passed a few days later. Hugo was returned to the Camp for burial. (NOTE: *All prisoners interred at Camp Hearne were returned to the families upon request, but Hugo was re-interred at Ft Sam Houston National Cemetery. Perhaps the family did not have the funds to transfer his remains.*) An immediate investigation produced no leads and it was only when one of the perpetrators had a *Crime and Punishment* moment and confessed that anyone was put on trial. The trial was convened at Camp Swift late January, 1946. Seven men were found guilty and sentenced to life in the U.S. Penitentiary, Leavenworth, Kansas. Upon the trial review, two men were exonerated and the other five sentences were reduced to 10-15 years. However, all served less than three years of their sentences before repatriation.



GERMAN PRISONERS OF WAR, convicted of the murder of a fellow prisoner by a court-martial at Camp Swift, Texas, are left to right: Sgt. Helmut Meyer, Cpl. Erich Von der Heydt, Pfc. Werner Hossain, Cpl. Heinrich Braun, Cpl. Guenther Meisel, Cpl. Werner Jarichko, Sgt. Anton Boehmer. Sentenced to life imprisonment, the prisoners now await review of their case by the Eighth Service Command and the War Department.

Safety tips for your Camp Hearne hike:

Poison Ivy alert. Stay on the trails. They have been sprayed and are cleared of poison ivy. However, as soon as you get off a trail, you may very well find yourself in a poison ivy forest so don't risk it.

Ticks and snakes. In the summer, late spring, and early fall, the ticks and snakes are out. If you stay on the trail, neither of these hazards should present itself. However, getting off the trail will almost guarantee a tick-embedding or two and, perhaps, a snake encounter. Most snakes are non-venomous but copperheads are fairly common.

Rough terrain. The trails are short with no difficult climbs or sharp descents, but they are dirt and bumpy

Trees and branches. Though the trails are cleared regularly, a sudden windstorm can overturn trees and blow off branches, blocking trails.

Deer and wild hogs. Both deer and wild hogs call Camp Hearne home. They are rarely seen and, again, if you stay on the trails, an encounter is highly unlikely. These critters are active at night. You may see their tracks and their scat.

Mud. Camp Hearne was intentionally built on the flat terrain of a river bottom. After a rain, the trails can be quite muddy for several days, depending on the heat and humidity.

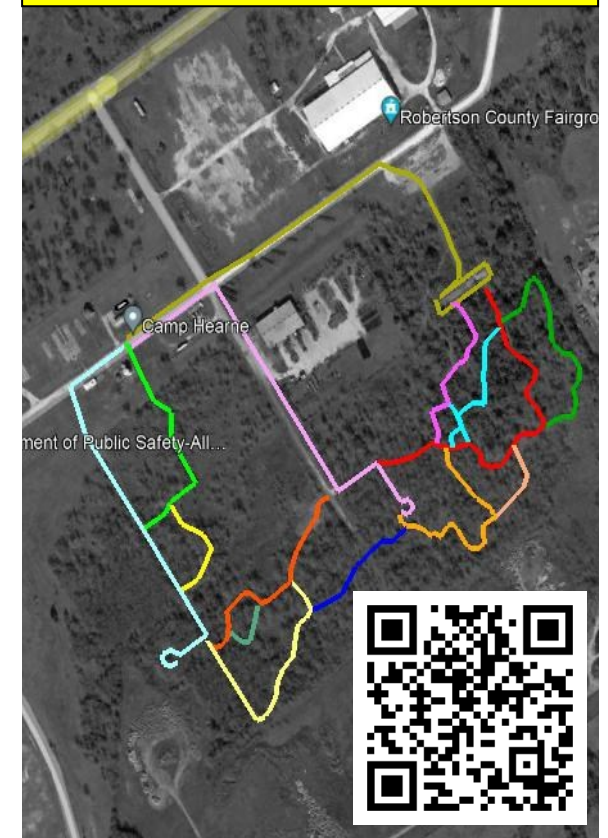
Heat and humidity. The best time to walk the Camp Hearne trails is the winter time! But if you can take the heat, summer is fine. But it is typically humid. Hiking early before the 11 am opening is a great idea--as long as the sun is fully up.

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HISTORIC TRAILS & RECREATION AREA



Stay on the trails and take water.
You should have a fascinating time walking in the steps of Rommel's finest--
the German Afrika Korps!

All trails are a half mile or less and fairly easy to traverse with no sharp climbs. They are rugged, however!

● The **Kneeling Lady Fountain [2] Trail**. This trail begins on the west side of the camp behind the Camp Hearne Theatre --the old pump house--across the street from the **Visitors' Center [1]**. It takes hikers to the **Bridge, Mess Hall** and the **Piers Trails**. It follows the old Camp road (**Avenue A**) through Compound 1.

● The **Bridge Trail**. This trail goes over one of the small bridges used to bridge the bar ditches that ran along each avenue--a necessity over swampy ground. It runs over a foundation and some pleasant groves of trees, ending in the meadow across from the Visitors' Center.

● The **Mess Hall Trail**. This trail goes across two mess halls, one at each end, and connects to the Piers Trail. It takes hikers across (**Avenue B**) through Compound 2.

● **DRY WEATHER ONLY**—The **Piers Trail**. This trail will take one between a set of piers that once held up a barracks. Barracks were pier and beam, unlike all the other buildings--common areas like mess halls and clinics--that sat on foundations. Then the trail takes hikers by the remains of the **prisoner-built sundial [3]** and the prisoner-build reptile enclosure.

● The **Castle Trail**. This trail begins across the street from the **Mess Hall Trail** and takes hikers to the remains of the **Castle Fountain [4]**. Hikers will pass by mess hall and latrine foundations and a small fountain close to the trail head.

● **DRY WEATHER ONLY**—The **Comfort Trail** is a short cut to the **Castle Fountain [4]**. The trail includes foundations and fountains..

● The **Walk in the Woods Trail**. This trail winds through the woods near a latrine foundation and by an open manhole until it ends at a fountain built next to the Compound 3 Canteen, the foundation west of the **prisoner-built theatre [7]**.

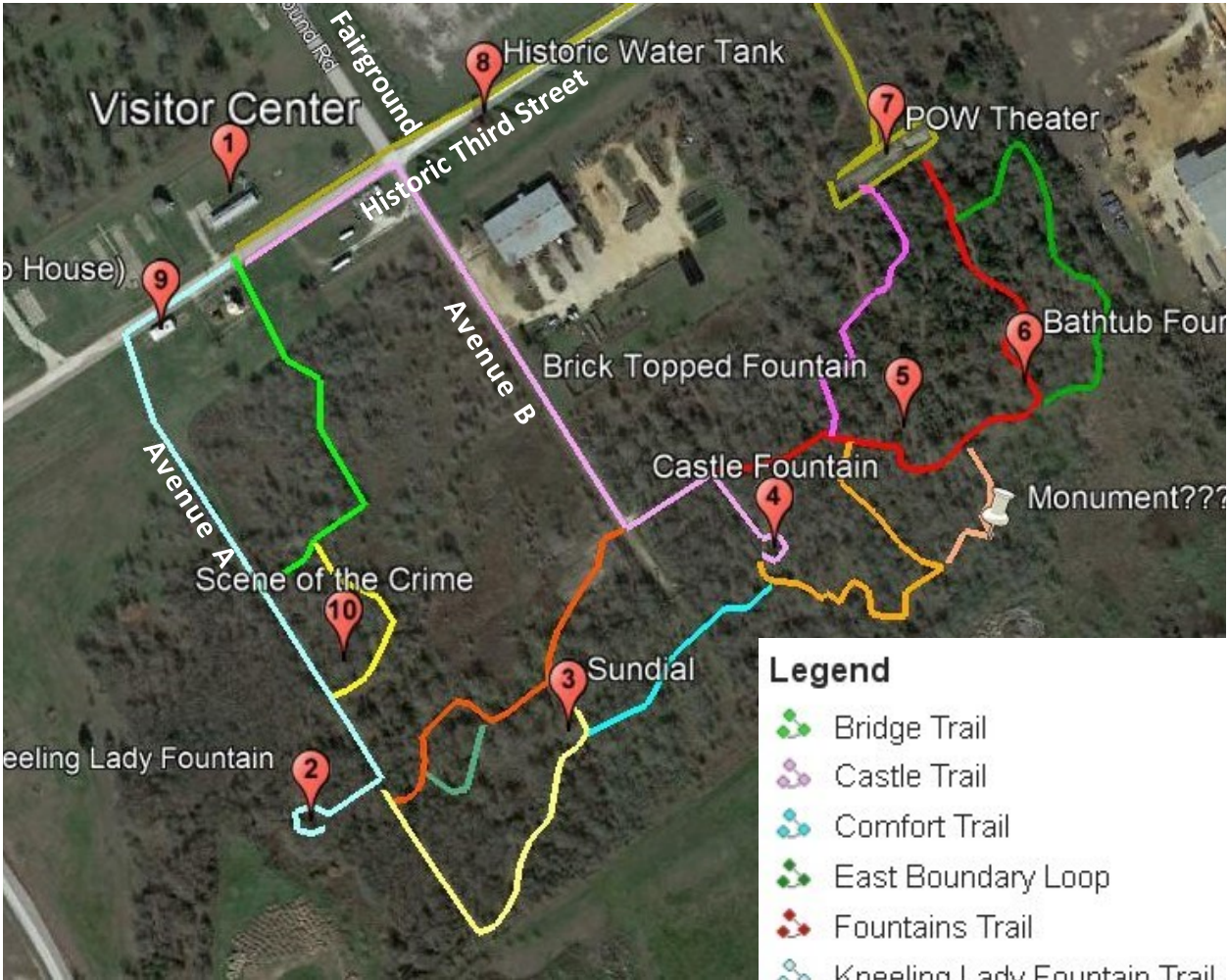
● The **White Iris Loop**. This trail winds through woods and meadow, skirting a patch of white irises planted by POWs to beautify their space. Note the piers, used to support a barracks, and the small fountain at the trail's end. The trail will loop around the fountain and return.

● The **Monument Loop** swings by an small relic which has none of the characteristics we see with other prisoner-built relics or building foundations. We welcome any speculation for we are stumped.

● The **Eastern Boundary Trail**. This trail takes hikers up to the camp compounds' eastern boundary. A short spur (note the arrow) will take one to a curious foundation (or is it?).

● The **Scene of the Crime Trail** takes you between the rows of barracks to the assigned backdoor of Hugo Krauss' barracks, site of his murderous beating. His crime, not being loyal to the Reich.

● The **POW Theater Trail** follows Camp Road east to the **POW Theater [7]**.



Two other points of interest are found on historic Third Street (the road that takes visitors to the Visitor's Center) and the Fairgrounds Road (the road coming into the Camp from FM 485). The original water tank [8] stands in its rusty glory on Third Street and the PX foundation and piers behind it are clearly visible across the street from the Robertson County Fairgrounds parking lot on Fairgrounds Road.

Note: It is important to STAY ON THE TRAILS! Camp Hearne is a poison ivy forest. The trails are sprayed often to rid them of poison ivy but to stray is to pay!

- Legend**
- Bridge Trail
 - Castle Trail
 - Comfort Trail
 - East Boundary Loop
 - Fountains Trail
 - Kneeling Lady Fountain Trail
 - Mess Hall Loop
 - Mess Hall Trail
 - Monument Loop
 - Piers Trail
 - POW Theater
 - Scene of the Crime
 - Walk in the Woods
 - White Iris Loop