CRYSTAL CITY FAMILY INTERNMENT CAMP

Enemy Alien Internment in Texas during World War II

Acknowledgements

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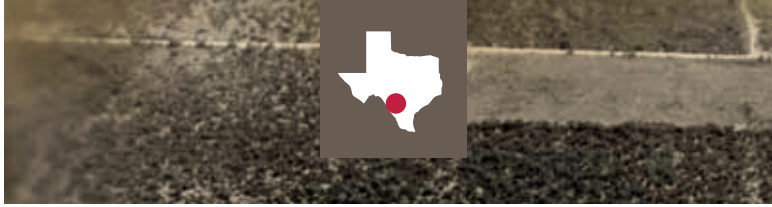

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"Inevitably, war creates situations which Americans would not countenance in times of peace, such as the internment of men and women who were considered potentially dangerous to America's national security."

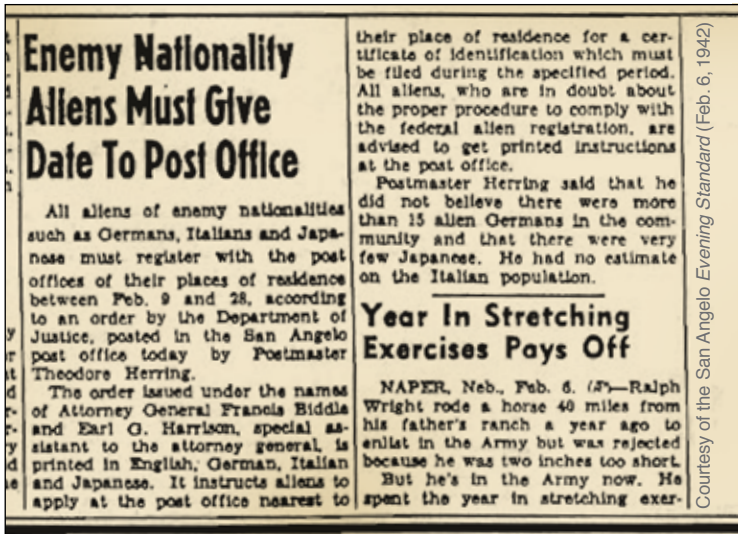
—INS, Department of Justice, 1946 Report

Shocked by the December 7, 1941, Empire of Japan attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii that propelled the United States into World War II, one government response to the war was the incarceration of thousands of Japanese Americans on the West Coast and the territory of Hawaii. More than 120,000 Issei (first generation, Japanese immigrants) and Nisei (second generation, U.S. citizens) were moved, primarily, to War Relocation Authority camps across the country. These internees shared a common loss of freedom with the thousands of Japanese, German, and Italian Americans and Enemy Aliens detained in Department of Justice (DOJ) camps through the Enemy Alien Control Unit Program. Texas hosted three DOJ Enemy Alien confinement sites with camps, administered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), at Crystal City, Kenedy, and Seagoville, as well as two U.S. Army "temporary confinement camps" at Dodd Field, Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, and Fort Bliss in El Paso.

Internment Camps in Texas during World War II

The government's authority over Enemy Aliens, and by circumstance, their American-born children, came from United States Code, Title 50, Section 21, Restraint, Regulation, and Removal, which allowed for the arrest and detention of Enemy Aliens during war. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Proclamation No. 2525 on December 7, 1941 and Proclamations No. 2526 and No. 2527 on December 8, 1941—modeled on the Enemy Alien Act of 1798—collectively stated, "All natives, citizens, denizens, or subjects of [Japan, Germany and Italy], being of the age of fourteen years and upward, who shall be in the United States and not actually naturalized, shall be liable to be apprehended, restrained, secured, and removed as alien enemies."

Prior to these presidential proclamations, the U.S. government realized the high probability that it would eventually be involved in war. In preparation, both the DOJ through the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the State Department, utilizing the Special War Problems Program, produced Custodial Detention Lists. This system



Enemy Nationality Aliens Must Give Date To Post Office

All aliens of enemy nationalities such as Germans, Italians and Japanese must register with the post offices of their places of residence between Feb. 9 and 28, according to an order by the Department of Justice, posted in the San Angelo post office today by Postmaster Theodore Herring.

The order issued under the names of Attorney General Francis Biddle and Earl G. Harrison, special assistant to the attorney general, is printed in English, German, Italian and Japanese. It instructs aliens to apply at the post office nearest to their place of residence for a certificate of identification which must be filed during the specified period. All aliens, who are in doubt about the proper procedure to comply with the federal alien registration, are advised to get printed instructions at the post office.

Postmaster Herring said that he did not believe there were more than 15 alien Germans in the community and that there were very few Japanese. He had no estimate on the Italian population.

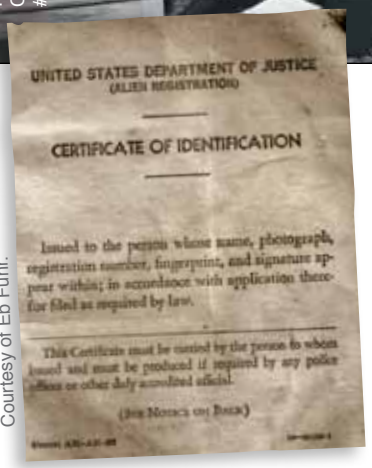
Year In Stretching Exercises Pays Off

NAPER, Neb., Feb. 6. (AP)—Ralph Wright rode a horse 40 miles from his father's ranch a year ago to enlist in the Army but was rejected because he was two inches too short.

But he's in the Army now. He spent the year in stretching exer-

Courtesy of the San Angelo *Evening Standard* (Feb. 6, 1942)

Photo courtesy of the San Antonio Light Collection, Institute of Texan Cultures, UTSA, #L-2860-E, from the Hearst Corporation.



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
(ALIEN REGISTRATION)

CERTIFICATE OF IDENTIFICATION

Issued to the person whose name, photograph, registration number, fingerprint, and signature appear within; in accordance with application therefor filed as required by law.

This Certificate must be carried by the person to whom issued and must be produced if required by any police officer or other duly accredited official.

(See Notice on Back)

Courtesy of Eb Fuhr.

Above: Photo of Japanese American registering at a San Antonio police station.

Left: World War II identification card, carried by Japanese, German, and Italian Enemy Aliens, while not interned.

indexed thousands of people as potentially dangerous individuals in time of war and currently residing in the U.S. and Central and South America. With this questionable legal foundation in place, the FBI began arresting Enemy Aliens from Axis nations, currently residing in America, as early as the night of December 7, 1941 and placing them in detention centers. By January 1942, all Enemy Aliens were required to register at local post offices, and they were fingerprinted, photographed, and required to carry photo-bearing Enemy Alien Registration Cards at all times.

Early in 1942, the DOJ established a bi-level organization, which handled the individual cases of Enemy Aliens. The Enemy Alien Control Unit in Washington, D.C. and an Enemy Alien Hearing Board with branches located in each of the federal judicial districts of the U.S. (in Texas, boards were held in Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio). Enemy Aliens taken into custody were brought before an Enemy Alien Hearing Board and were either released, paroled, or interned for the duration of the war.

History of Crystal City Family Internment Camp

Many Enemy Aliens were fathers, so the INS faced an increasing number of requests from wives and children volunteering internment to be reunited with the head of their households. Crystal City Family Internment Camp is unique because it was the only INS camp established specifically for families.

In seeking for a location to place this expected large family internment camp, the INS looked for a site that was removed from important war production facilities and had quality water and electrical services. Noting the pressing need for the camp to open, the INS identified Crystal City as a location where the U.S. Government already owned a large portion of land. During the Great Depression, the Farm Security Administration had acquired land on the outskirts of the city.

Originally, the internment camp was intended to be populated by people of Japanese ancestry and their immediate families. However, on December 12, 1942, the camp's first internees to arrive were German. On February 12, 1943, the first group of Latin Americans arrived—also Germans—deported from Costa Rica. On March 17, 1943, the first group of Japanese American internees arrived. Many arrived at the train depot in nearby Uvalde and were bused south to the camp. Thus began the multi-national Crystal City Family Internment Camp, consisting of Issei Japanese immigrants, Nisei Japanese Americans, German American citizens, German nationals, Italian nationals, and Latin Japanese, German and Italian nationals, and a small group of Indonesian sailors.

When Crystal City Family Internment Camp opened, it was approximately 240 acres in size, with 41 small three-room cottages and 118 one-room shelters

(measuring 12x16 feet). Twelve of the original cottages were left outside the fenced area (100 acres in size) for use by official personnel and their families. With an expected increase in population, the DOJ confiscated an additional 50 acres to the south of the fenced area, dug a water well, and constructed a self-contained sewer system. Within the fenced area, with the assistance of German and Japanese American internees, temporary housing units consisting of 61 duplexes, 62 triplexes, and 96 quadruple barracks were built. Fifteen additional three-room cottages were built for internees, increasing the total to 44 buildings. As more internees arrived, the INS added 103 Victory Huts for temporary emergency housing. The camp had a 10-foot-tall barbed wire fence around the internee section; six guard towers with one located on each corner and half-way down the west-to-east axis; armed guards that patrolled the fence line; and an internal security force patroling both the Japanese and German sections of the camp. The Crystal City Family Internment Camp was staffed by local civilian employees in secretarial and clerical positions, a professional cadre of INS administrators, and Border Patrolmen. Later in the war, the INS employed local men from Crystal City as guards.

Courtesy of Carroll Brincefield.

Federal High School, looking north

The Third Geneva Convention—Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (1929)—stipulated that no internee had to perform manual labor against their will. For those who wanted to work, however, they could earn 10 cents per hour up to a maximum of $4 per week. In an effort to prevent internees from stockpiling cash in the event of an escape attempt, camp scrip was issued to internees. There were no reported escape attempts, successful or otherwise from Crystal City Family Internment Camp.

One of the most beneficial programs established at Crystal City Family Internment Camp was an accredited education program. Robert Clyde "Cy" Tate was hired to supervise the camp's school system. Tate established three types of schools: the American (Federal) School, the Japanese School, and the German School. Each school provided an elementary,

Right: The remains of the Uvalde, Texas train depot, where many Crystal City Family Internment Camp detainees detrained before being bused to the camp.

Courtesy of Reiko Fujii.

Below: Crystal City Family Internment Camp, looking south

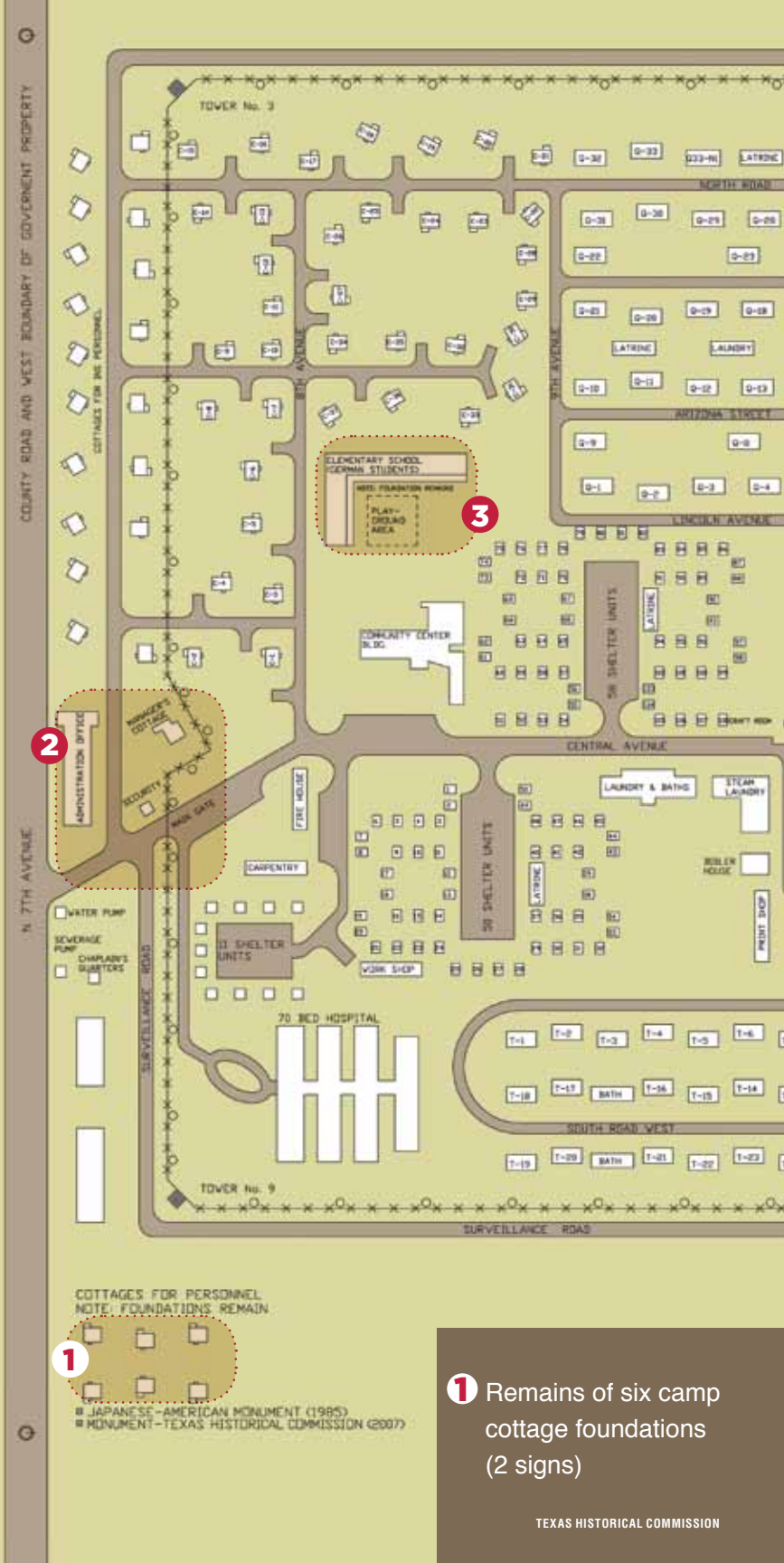
Courtesy of Eb Fuhr.

junior high, and high school education. The Federal School provided an American-style education, accredited by the State of Texas. Both the Japanese and German schools offered students a background in their ancestral cultures and language. The Japanese and German American internees supplied teachers for their schools, and the teachers designed their own curriculum. While meeting the cultural needs of internees, the Japanese and German school systems assisted future voluntary and non-voluntary repatriates for life—after they were exchanged for Americans and Allied personnel—in their ancestral home lands.

Above: Camp scrip, made of press paper or plastic

Right: In front of city hall is a 1937 statue of Popeye, celebrating Crystal City's status as "Spinach Capital of the World;" a local landmark that many internees remember.

Camp scrip image courtesy of the National Border Patrol Museum, El Paso



1 Remains of six camp cottage foundations (2 signs)

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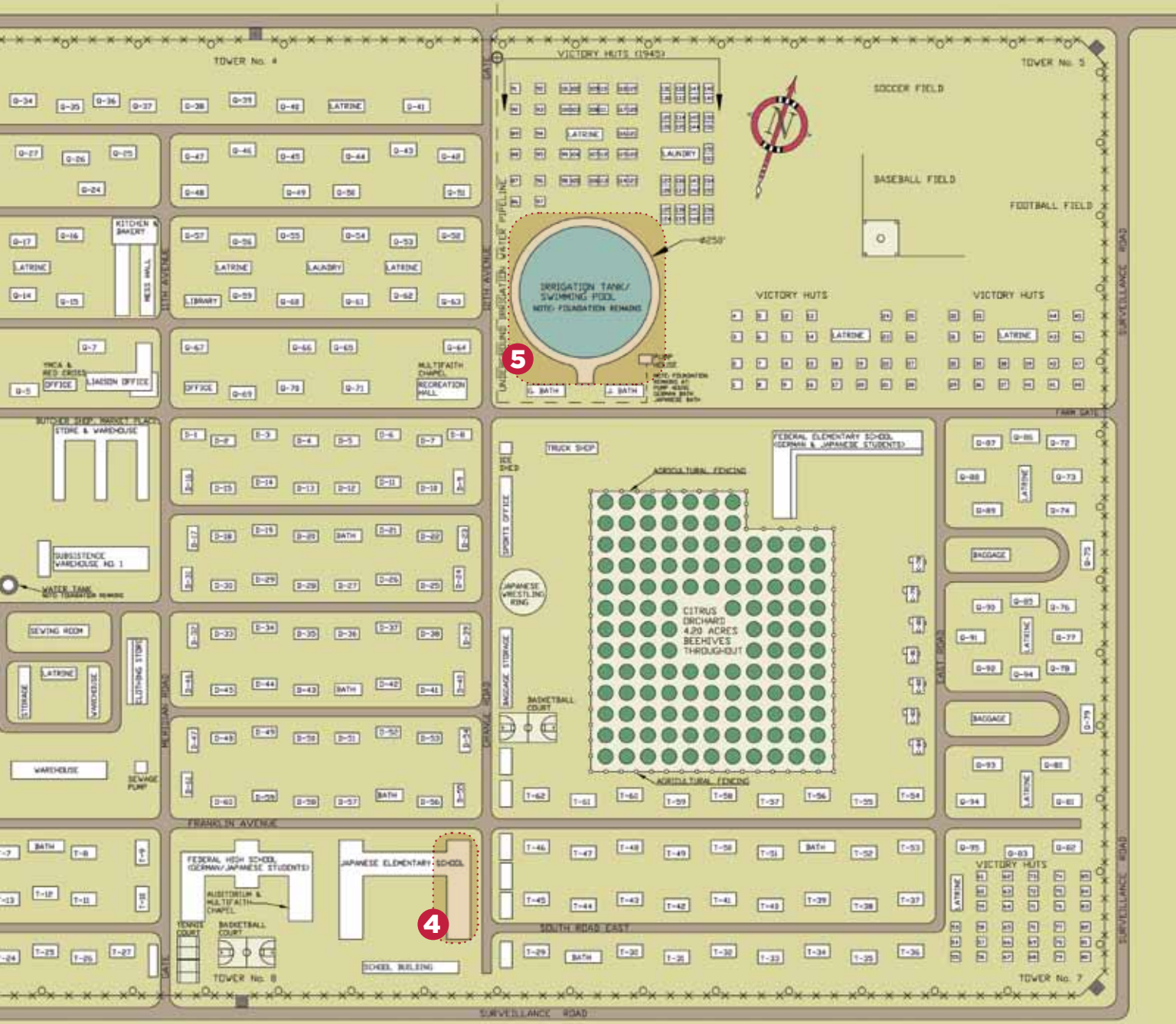


Above: Crystal City Family Internment Camp Map, drawn by former internee Werner Ulrich, with details provided by other former internees, family members of former camp officials, and the National Archives and Records Administration (Southwest).

2 Former camp entrance (1 sign)

3 Former German Elementary School (1 sign)

4 Remains of a portion of the Japanese elementary school (2 signs)

5 Former camp swimming pool/ irrigation reservoir (2 signs)

Japanese, German, and Italian Latin American Internment at Crystal City

During the war, the U.S. State Department—in cooperation with 15 Caribbean, Central and South American countries (see map)—worked to increase the security of the Western Hemisphere, especially the vulnerable and vital Panama Canal Zone. With the U.S. focused on a two-front global war against the Axis, this was accomplished primarily through financial and material support—via programs such as the Lend-Lease Act—to participating American nations. At a conference of Western Hemisphere countries in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in January 1942, the U.S. called for the establishment of the Emergency Advisory Committee for Political Defense. This new security program was tasked with monitoring Enemy Aliens throughout Central and South America.

The result was thousands of Axis nationals, as well as citizens of these Latin American countries of Japanese, German, and Italian ancestry, were taken into custody by local officials. While a number of those arrested were legitimate Axis sympathizers, most were not. Forcibly deported, these detainees were shipped to the U.S., considered security risks, and detained in internment camps across the U.S., including the three permanent camps in Texas. Stripped of their passports en route to the U.S., these Latin Americans were declared "illegal aliens" upon arrival, a fact many former internees and historians have referred to as "hostage shopping" and "kidnapping," by the U.S. and Latin American governments. These Latin American internees provided the U.S. with an increased pool of people for exchange with Japan and Germany, each of which held comparable numbers of American and Allied personnel taken prisoner earlier in the war.

How the Camps Fit Into the Repatriation Process

The U.S. implemented three programs to identify and, if necessary, detain civilians considered a threat to the country during the war years: the War Relocation Authority, the DOJ Enemy Alien Control Unit Program and the State Department's Special War Problems Program. In all three programs, citizens of their respective countries, legal resident aliens, and naturalized citizens were targeted alongside individuals who qualified as Enemy Aliens.

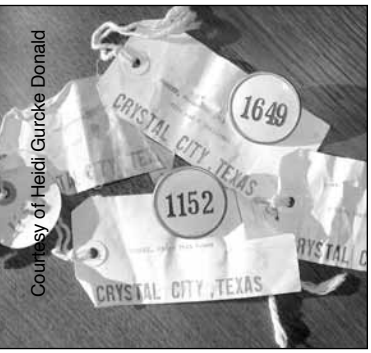
Deported to the U.S. during the war, many Japanese, Germans, and Italians from Latin America could only communicate with loved ones back home by letter.

Letter image courtesy of the El Progreso Memorial Library Archives, Uvalde, Texas

Within days of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the DOJ took into custody several thousand Axis nationals. Although not legally administered in each case, and often spurred by prejudices, the

action was intended to assure the American public that its government was taking firm steps to look after the internal safety of the nation. After arrest and detention, the U.S. looked toward the possibility of exchanging Enemy Aliens with Japan, Germany, and Italy.

Between 1939 and 1945, the U.S. and its Allies suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties to the advancing Japanese and German armies across the globe. In addition to the combat soldiers taken prisoner were American and Allied civilians disconnected overseas as countries fell to the Axis. In March 1942, the U.S. began to negotiate with Japan and Germany for the safe return of American and Allied citizens. The first Japanese American internee repatriations or exchanges from Crystal City took place in June 1942 and September 1943. German, German American, and German Latin Americans were also voluntarily and involuntarily repatriated in two massive movements, one in February 1944 and one from December 1944–January 1945. Later in the war, Japanese Latin American exchanges took place.



Courtesy of Heidi Gurcke Donald

Internee lapel and luggage white tags served as identification during transit to and from Crystal City.

Conclusion

In addition to the camp's national significance having been deliberately built to bring Enemy Aliens and their families together, this confinement site was the largest wartime measure that brought together Enemy Aliens and American citizens representing multiple nationalities into one camp. A source of recreation and community for all, the Swimming Pool/Irrigation Reservoir was the camp's largest defining feature, and it remains the most extant resource left of the site. The 250-foot wide circular pool was designed by Italian-Honduran civil engineer Elmo Gaetano Zannoni. With German internees providing the labor, a former swamp was drained, cleared of snakes, expanded, and paved over to form the structure.

Courtesy of Audrey Moonyeen (Neugebauer) Thornton

One of the three diving platforms at the camp's Swimming Pool/Irrigation Reservoir.

The Crystal City Family Internment Camp closed on February 27, 1948, nearly 30 months after the end of the war—September 2, 1945. In November 1948, the Crystal City I.S.D. purchased 90 acres of the camp from the War Assets Administration, primarily within the fenced area. In 1952, the city purchased additional property to the north and east to establish an airfield. In subsequent years multiple schools were built over the former camp's footprint.

View from North West guard tower.

Courtesy of the El Progreso Memorial Library Archives, Uvalde, TX