

Prisoner of War Camps in Texas

Purpose

This lesson is intended to be a quick, easy way for you to fit in important World War II TEKS that can be difficult to get to incorporate into 7th grade Texas History. It is a stand-alone lesson that could be used close to Veterans' Day or Memorial Day or fit in with a unit on World War II. (It might also prove useful in 8th grade with the Language Arts unit on *The Diary of Anne Frank*.) The evaluation is very simple and short, but provides a way for you to check student understanding. Extra resources are provided for the teacher to give background information and to use as enrichment with students if time allows.

Approximate Timeframe

One day

TEKS

- 7.7(E) analyze the political, economic, and social impact of major events, including World War I, the Great Depression and World War II, on the history of Texas
- 7.8(A) create thematic maps, graphs, charts, models, and databases representing various aspects of Texas during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries
- 7.8(B) analyze and interpret geographic distributions and patterns in Texas during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries

Key Understandings

- Students will understand how prisoner of war (POW) camps and POW labor helped the Texas economy.
- Students will understand why POW camps were located in certain geographic regions of Texas.

Guiding Questions

- Why did so many communities in Texas want POW camps located in them?
- What kind of work did POWs do in Texas?
- Did POW camps have a lasting effect on Texas?
- Why is it important for people to know about POW camps in Texas?

Vocabulary

- Prisoner of War

Texas Historical Commission
P.O. Box 12276
Austin, TX 78711-2276
512.463.6100
history@thc.state.tx.us
www.thc.state.tx.us



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Materials

- PowerPoint 1
- Two POW Camps in Texas Maps
- PowerPoint 2

Teacher Resources

Background Information on POW Camps in Texas

With nearly seventy prisoner of war camps, Texas had approximately twice as many as any other state. These camps ranged from extremely large base camps that housed thousands of prisoners to small branch camps that held less than 100. Over 50,000 German soldiers were held in Texas during World War II.

While Texas as the choice to house so many prisoners of war may seem odd, the Geneva Convention stated that prisoners of war should be housed in a climate comparable to the one in which they had been captured. For those captured in Southern Europe and North Africa, Texas provided the most similar climate, according to the United States military.¹

Since most young American men had gone off to fight the war, the United States faced a shortage of agricultural labor. In response, the War Department authorized a major program allowing farmers in need of labor to utilize the POWs. In order to facilitate this, Texas housed 22 branch camps, some with as few as 35 prisoners, to provide labor to farms and factories that were too far from the main POW camps. Farmers paid the government \$1.50 a day for the POW's labor. Out of this money, the prisoner was paid eighty cents in scrip that was only good at the camp store.² The additional seventy cents went to the government to pay for the expenses of the POW program. From 1943 until 1945, POWs in Texas picked fruit, harvested rice, cut wood, baled hay, threshed grain, gathered pecans, and chopped cotton. POWs who were not performing agricultural tasks worked projects such as the Denison Dam and Reservoir and the construction of state roads. They also served as orderlies at Harmon General Hospital in Longview and worked at Ashburn General Hospital in McKinney.³

Useful Websites

- Camp Hearne: <http://camphearne.com/>
- Camp Hearne: <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txrcfch/CAMPHEARNECOLLECTION.htm>
- Camp Hereford: <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/quh01>
- German Prisoners of War: <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/qug01>
- Texas World War II Camps, Prisoners of War: http://www.texasescapes.com/FEATURES/World_War_II_chronicles.htm#camps

¹ The Battalion, "Waters Describes POW Life,"

<http://media.www.thebatt.com/media/storage/paper657/news/2005/01/26/News/Waters.Describes.Pow.Life-841444.shtml>. While many authorities agree on the climate provision of the Geneva Convention, the actual wording of the document is open to interpretation.

² All prisoners were paid \$3 a month, but those who worked received additional wages.

³ Michael R. Waters, *Lone Star Stalag: German Prisoners of War at Camp Hearne* (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 41-42.



- Portal to Texas History, “Prisoners of War” search:
<http://texashistory.unt.edu/search/?q=prisoners+of+war&t=fulltext>

Texas Historical Markers

- <http://atlas.thc.state.tx.us/> Enter the Atlas. Search by keyword with “prisoner of war”. Or search by county and keyword.

Texas Archive of the Moving Image:

- Alien Enemy Detention Facility, Crystal City:
http://www.texasarchive.org/library/index.php?title=Alien_Enemy_Detention_Facility,_Crystal_City,_Texas

If you have specific questions, contact the Texas Historical Commission marker program and/or military historian directly at 512/463-5853 or history@thc.state.tx.us.

Anticipatory Set

Show PowerPoint 1 to students (If you do not have access to a computer to display PowerPoint, these photos can be printed and passed around to the students to view or pin them up temporarily on the walls for a gallery walk.)

Discuss what they see.

- Photo 1: Camp Hereford—fence and guard tower
- Photo 2: Camp Huntsville—detail of fence and guard towers
- Photo 3: Camp Swift—funeral service for German POW
- Photo 4: Camp Hereford—POWs harvesting vegetables

Questions and Points for Discussion:

- Why would soldiers be picking squash?
- Why are there fences and guard towers around military barracks?
- Talk to students about prisoners of war.
- Where do students think this is?
- Photo 1 and 4 are from Camp Hereford (in the panhandle of Texas) and the prisoners are Italians. Photo 3 is from Camp Swift and the prisoners are Germans.

Explore

Points to discuss

- The Great Depression devastated Texas’s economy.
- Almost every community looked for a way to get a government funded industry or military installation to help their economy improve.
- Because so many young men enlisted or were drafted into the military, there were very few left to help with agricultural work.

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- POW camps helped the local economy because they provided employment for local citizens; the soldiers who came in with the camp shopped and sought entertainment in the local community; and the POWs could provide necessary labor.
- Give students some of the background of POW camps in Texas, which is provided in the Teacher Resources section.
- Use the maps provided to discuss the geographic location of the camps and what kinds of agricultural work the POWs might have been doing. Share the following statistics.

POW Work Statistics

County reports to the Texas Extension Service revealed that 39 counties used 11,505 prisoners of war as farm laborers during 1944. These prisoners greatly contributed to agricultural production in the state.

In 1944, they performed the following tasks.

- 174,343 acres of rice harvested
- 42,071 acres of cotton chopped
- 12,749 acres of corn harvested
- 3,528 acres of land cleared
- 1,842 acres of potatoes harvested
- 400 acres of figs harvested
- 150 acres of onions planted
- 130 acres of vegetables harvested
- 75 acres of sweet potatoes harvested
- 25 acres of tomatoes harvested

- 56,938 pounds of pecans picked
- 15,730 tons of hay harvested
- 1,593 miles of fence built or repaired
- 16 buildings repaired

- 54,288 man-hours to chop cotton
- 8,000 man-hours on canal work
- 5,200 man-hours in repairing buildings
- 4,000 man-hours on repairing machines

In 1945:

- 103,487 acres of cotton chopped
- 102,088 acres of rice harvested
- 21,000 acres of corn harvested
- 9,346 acres of land cleared
- 1,848 acres of potatoes harvested

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- 107,468 bushels of potatoes picked
- 58,083 tons of hay harvested
- 2,150 miles of fence built or repaired¹

Wrap up with questions or discussion about what would have happened to these crops without POW labor.

Evaluate

Have students write a brief answer to each of the following questions.

- Why did so many communities in Texas want POW camps located in them?
- What kind of work did POWs do in Texas?
- Why is it important for people to know about POW camps in Texas?

Closure

Show PowerPoint 2 – demonstrating the only remains of most POW camps across the state.

¹ <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~txrober2/TissingIII.htm>



PowerPoint 1 Notes

Slide 3: Camp Hereford in Deaf Smith County housed only Italian POWs. One of the largest of the US POW camps during WWII, Camp Hereford held approximately 5,000 Italian prisoners and had around 750 US military personnel. Although designated as a temporary camp, it was constructed as a maximum security facility as evidenced by the fence surrounding the camp.

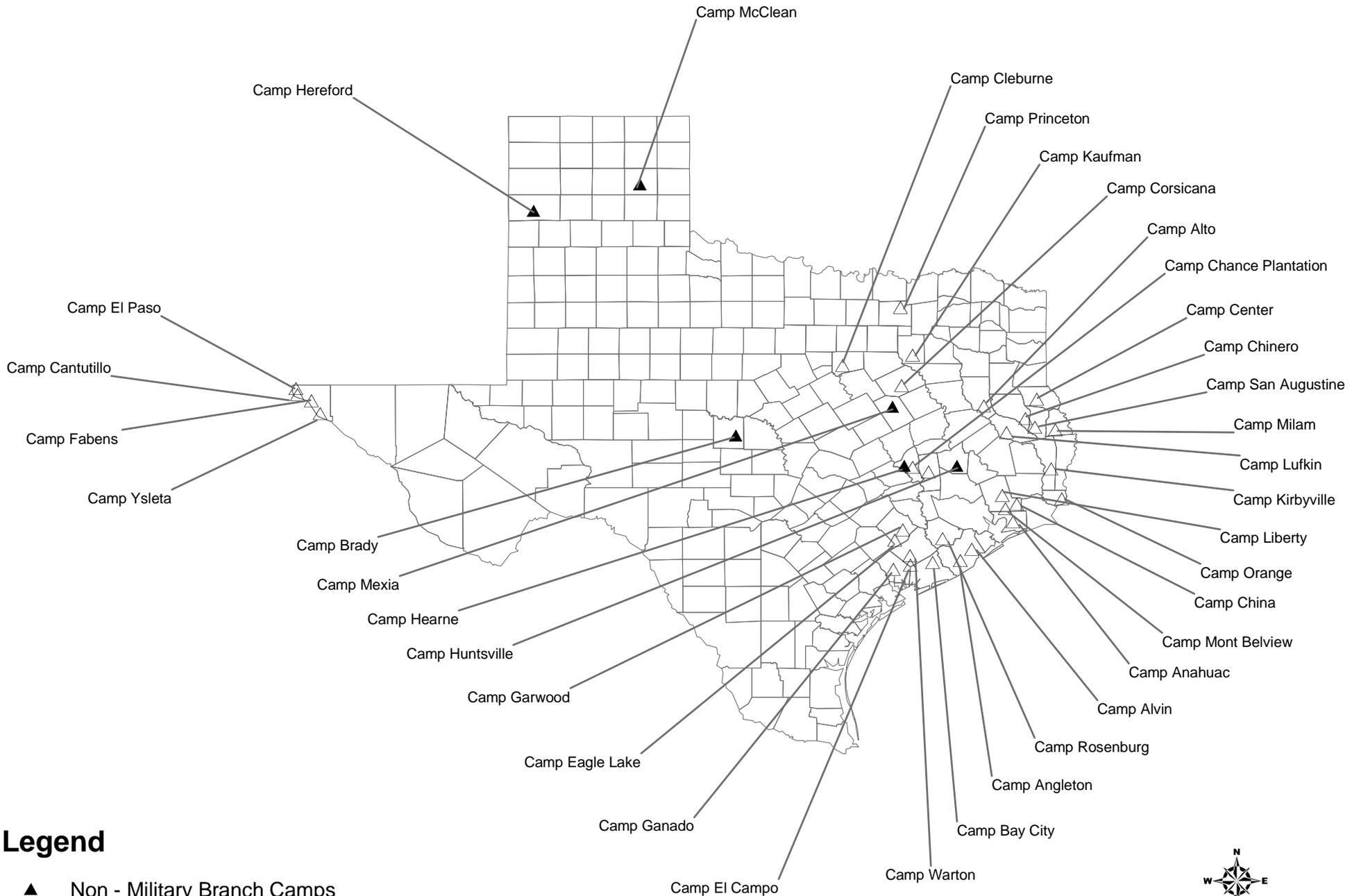
Slide 4: One of the first prisoner of war camps built in the United States, Camp Huntsville was the first POW camp constructed in Texas. It accommodated 4,800 prisoners and consisted of more than 400 buildings, including a cafeteria, gymnasium, laundry and hospital. The first prisoners at the camp were members of Germany's Afrika Korps. Later it became a branch camp for Camp Hearne where its prisoners were sent to make space for the arrival of a small group of Japanese prisoners.

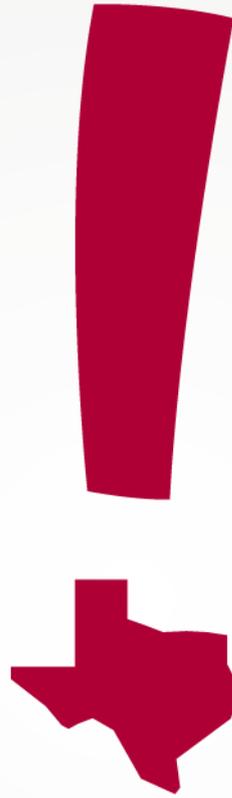
Slide 5: First German Prisoner of War funeral at Camp Swift near Bastrop, 29 October 1943. Source: Records of the Chief Signal Officer RG111-SC Box 702 photos 333717-333718 Camp Swift, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD.

Slide 6: Italian prisoners of war harvesting vegetables in Texas farmers' fields near Hereford during World War II. During the war, Axis soldiers were paid for work undertaken while in prisoner of war camps.



P.O.W. Camps of Texas





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Prisoner of War Camps

PowerPoint 1



Camp Hereford





Camp Huntsville





Camp Swift





Camp Hereford







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Prisoner of War Camps

PowerPoint 2



Camp Howze, remains of chimney



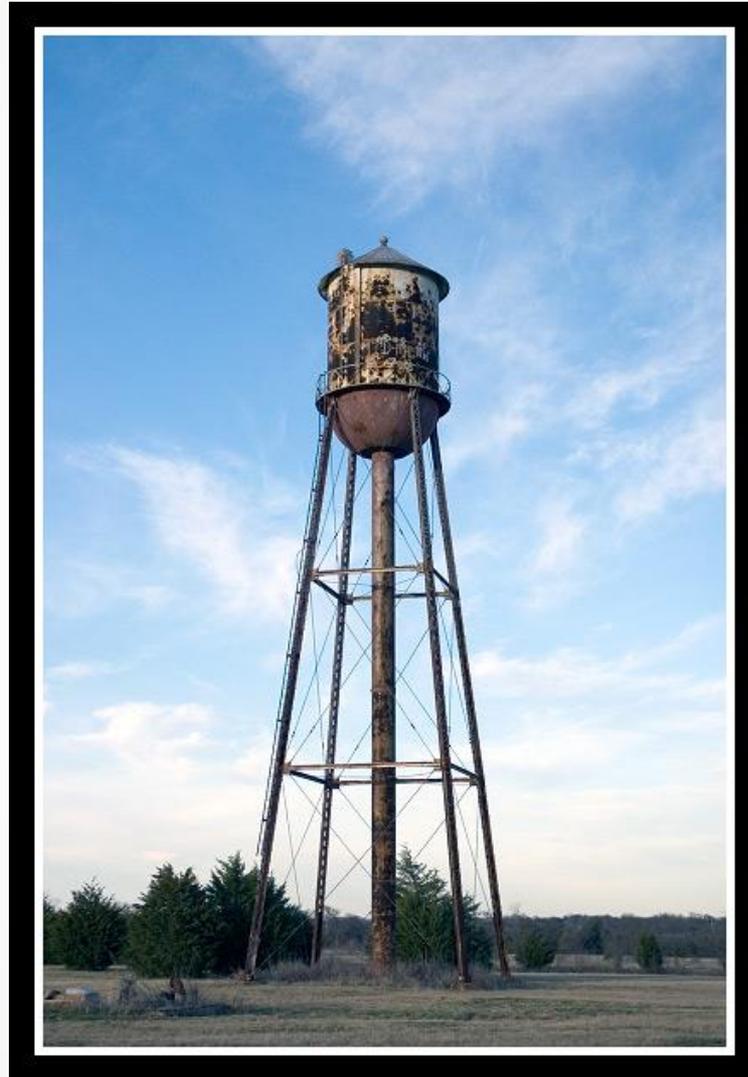


Camp Brady, remains of guard shack





Camp Princeton, water tower





Camp Hereford, chapel





Camp Hereford, chapel





Camp D.A. Russell, mural





Camp D.A. Russell, mural





Camp Bowie, mural





St. Mary's Church in Umbarger



