

in [WWII Prisoner of War Camps](#)

Posted by:  [Benchmark Blasterz](#)

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Quick Description: All that remains of an 800-acre former POW camp in Hereford, TX is the POW camp chapel, the base of the camp water tower, and a historic marker. It was the second-largest POW camp in the US.

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Long Description:

Camp Hereford, known officially as The Hereford Military Reservation and Reception Center, was built in parts of Deaf Smith and Castro counties in the Panhandle of Texas in 1942. The first POWs arrived at Hereford on April 3, 1943. The last prisoners left on Feb. 7, 1946. Camp Hereford was the second-largest POW camp built in the United States.

Almost all of the prisoners held at Camp Hereford were Italian military personnel who would not renounce their allegiance to Benito Mussolini after his fall in 1943. Few Germans were assigned to Camp Hereford. For a while, there were some German soldiers there, but after a prisoner riot between the Italians and the Germans, the Germans were quickly moved out, and peace returned to the camp.

The Italian prisoners, although confined in a maximum-security camp, soon showed themselves to be non-hostile to the US soldiers who guarded them, or to the locals of the surrounding communities.

Over time the prisoners and locals developed a mutually trustful and respectful relationship. Many of the prisoners worked every day on area farms for wages, but returned to the camp at night.

A few of the POWs were talented artists, carvers, and stonemasons. They volunteered their time and talents to enhance the Catholic Church of St. Mary in the tiny nearby town of Umbarger. They carved details for the altar out of wood, painted murals, and installed stained-glass windows, which are all still part of the church today.

These men then turned their attention to creating a small chapel at the camp, to be dedicated to the five Italian POWs who died at the camp. In two short months they built a

beautiful 13 square-foot chapel. The bodies of the deceased prisoners were buried around the chapel.

After the war, the Hereford POW camp was declared surplus US property. The structures except for the chapel and the water tower's base were cleared off and the land was sold to local farmers. The bodies of the prisoners buried around the chapel were exhumed and re-interred at Fort Reno OK. A small headstone commemorates them at the chapel.

The chapel remained, alone and unguarded, in the middle of an active farm field until the mid-1980s. At that time the Castro County Historical Commission launched a fundraising drive and efforts to restore the chapel. They obtained a public entry easement to and from the chapel from the landowner, and restoration began.

In a sign of the past cooperation and respect between the locals and the Italian POWs, former POWs donated money and their original sketches and photographs for the restoration project.

When the chapel was restored and rededicated in 1989, 150 locals and 16 former POWs attended the ceremony. A state historical marker was added a few years later.