A MAP TO REMEMBER

The Texas Story Project.

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By **CLAUDIA SANCHEZ** Crystal City

What started as a hobby for Werner Ulrich in 2001 turned into a project that has absorbed him ever since, one to which others throughout the United States have contributed details and memories. Ulrich has been re-mapping a small square of South Texas so as to preserve on paper an internment camp dismantled 70 years ago.

In 2002, after being employed in the building and construction industry, Ulrich, took a three-semester course to learn AutoCAD, a software designed to aid architects in constructing 2-dimensional models. He did not then know that he was embarking on a journey that would "reconnect [him] with his childhood." The project had humble beginnings. Ulrich mentioned to his friend, Eberhard Fuhr, that he was taking an AutoCAD course to which Fuhr suggested he "fool around with the camp." Fuhr's idea was that by modeling the Crystal City Internment camp where they had both been interned as children during World War II, Ulrich could practice the architectural tool. Fuhr, who had worked as an "iceman" in the camp, asked Ulrich to create a survey drawing of the route he had taken as an internee tasked with making deliveries from the ice factory to the camp. Ulrich retired in 2007 and turned Crystal City internment camp and CAD into a dedicated hobby.

At first, Ulrich began by looking at aerial photos of the camp and doing rough measurements and 'guess work' to complete the drawings. However, as more people learned of his drawings, they began to provide him with information about the actual dimensions of the camp. This began with William McWhorter, of the Texas Historical Commission and friend of Ulrich's, who traveled to the National Archives in Fort Worth, Texas to provide him with the dimensions of the barbed wire fence around the camp (½ mile long by 1,600' wide). Arthur Jacobs, friend and former Crystal City internee, then began contributing vital information for the initial drawing. Another of Ulrich's friends, JoAnna Wartemann Terwege Howell, also a former Crystal City internee, then went to the Fort Worth archives to locate exact, original blueprints in digital format of many camp buildings, including plumbing inside buildings and underground piping throughout camp grounds, which she sent to him via email.

Who were the internees living in this camp some 75 years ago? Besides the Ulrichs, Fuhrs, and Wartemanns, thousands of others were interned in Crystal City during the war. Ulrich gives us the following statistics that he and others have researched throughout these years. A total of 4,751 people were inducted into the Crystal City Internment camp during

the 5+ years between its opening on December 12, 1942 and its closing on February 27, 1948. At its peak in 1945 the camp housed 3,374 people, crowded into 100 square acres. The camp was surrounded by a 10' tall barbed-wire fence and 6 guard towers, with armed guards posted in the towers and riding horseback around the perimeter. A total of 218 American children were born in the camp. Ulrich points out that 29 people died there, which he reminds us is a low mortality rate. The internment camp was not a concentration camp, as some claim. The people of German, Italian, and Japanese ancestry interned in Crystal City were shipped to this isolated South Texas farm community from all over the United States and Latin America.

Why were they interned? Astonishingly, before the United States declared war on Germany, residents and citizens of German descent were required to register at their local post office. This process included being photographed, fingerprinted, and sometimes denaturalized. Some were put on FBI suspicion lists, where they were classified as A, B, or C. Following the Pearl Harbor attack, many German Americans on these lists were arrested as potentially dangerous enemy aliens and sentenced to internment, yet their convictions lacked valid evidence and the process relied only on hearings without attorneys, not fair trials. The Attorney General himself soon sent the FBI director a memo discrediting the "ABC lists" and telling him not to use them, but nothing happened. Mass hysteria among the American public following the Pearl Harbor attack made the internments continue, even years after the war ended. In December 1942, the first families to arrive to the Crystal City camp were of German heritage. In February 1943, the second shipment of families arrived—German Latin Americans from Costa Rica. From the opening of the Crystal City camp until its closing in 1948, the camp housed a total of 513 families of European heritage and 547 families of Japanese heritage.

One of those families interned in Crystal City, Texas was the Ulrichs from New York—Werner Jr., his father, Werner Sr., and his mother, Erna. Before his arrest in 1942, Ulrich's father was an American citizen who worked at Hotel McAlpin in New York City as a stationary engineer; however, the United States revoked both his and his wife's citizenship and forced them to register as "Enemy Aliens" despite their American citizenship. The United States interned Ulrich's father in April 1942 and sent him to Ellis Island in New York. As a result of this, his mother went on welfare with her infant son. Officials informed them that they would be allowed to reunite only if they signed an agreement to be repatriated to their country of origin. Once Ulrich's mother agreed to sign the agreement, she and their son, then one- year old, were allowed to be interned on Ellis Island, too. At Ellis Island, she signed the agreement promising to expatriate herself as she had promised. They spent Christmas 1942 in internment.

In January 1943, once her husband signed to expatriate himself and their son, the Ulrich family was ready to be sent to the Crystal City family internment camp. To ship them across the country to Texas, officials stuck tags on everyone's chest that read, "Crystal City." Finally, in February 1943, they reached Texas where they were able to live together again as a family, though confined behind barbed wire. Ulrich's father taught sixth grade in the German School inside the camp. All of the shops inside the camp, such as the bakery and butcher shop, were run by internees earning ten cents per hour. The camp had its own currency, tokens made of pressed paper and plastic, that internees used to buy food or clothes. Ulrich remembers that "the army sent a big load of parachutes and the women used these parachutes as material to make clothes. The clothes were then sold to the people." Ulrich recalls how some of the INS employees formed baseball and football teams to give the interned children a taste of normal childhood. In 1946, Ulrich's mother gave birth to his sister, Gudrun, with the aid of Anneliese Sporel, a 15-year old internee working as a nurse's aide. This is yet again another example of the camp being a community of internees helping each other. Due to his sister's birth, Ulrich's family was able to live in the special houses reserved for the sick or for newborns. They felt lucky to have some basic facilities, such as a kitchen and a bathroom, which most other units in the camp lacked.

As time came for the Ulrichs to be deported to Germany, Ulrich's mother refused to allow her child to be sent to war-torn Germany. Having experienced Germany during World War I, his mother desperately fought to spare her son the hardships she had suffered during the Great War. She asserted to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)

personnel that she would rather have her son be put into a foster home than go to Germany. She was willing to honor the agreement that she had signed and be sent to Germany so long as her son would not have to go. Her insistence stalled their deportation and the family ended up staying in the camp. Then April 2, 1947 Ulrich's father received a message ordering him to pack his belongings because he was going to be sent to Germany alone. Luckily, before his father was expatriated, the family was released from the Crystal City internment camp in June 1947. However, before the family was allowed to leave, they were made to sign another statement saying they would never speak about the camp.

This statement held up for much of Ulrich's life until one day in 1995, nearly 50 years later, his youngest son, Richard, arrived home shaking. Distraught at what he had found out, Richard informed his mother and father that he did an Ancestry search and discovered that his father, Werner Ulrich, Jr., had been interned during World War II. It also came as a surprise to Ulrich's wife, Marie, as he had not told her throughout their long years of marriage, mainly out of habit. This stems from the agreement that Ulrich's mother and father had signed to not speak about the camp. However, now that the news was in the air, the family began to research this history. Ulrich's eldest son, Kenneth, took great interest in the topic and agreed to take over the Foitimes.com website, originally former internee and friend, Arthur Jacobs, had founded to inform people about German American Internment during World War II. And Ulrich began mapping memories.

What started as a hobby for Ulrich, has now transcended into a greater understanding of his own past and of the untold history of the United States. His work continues to this day. Ulrich just received the precise dimensions of the mess hall only on April 1, 2018. The archivist mailed it on a disk and it cost him $200. Now, Ulrich is only 10 buildings away from completing a fully-finished, detailed map of the Crystal City camp. To support his work, we just traveled to Crystal City to measure the German School where Werner Ulrich, Sr. taught and Werner Ulrich, Jr. attended. It is an honor to aid Ulrich in his final survey drawings. Ulrich's hard work has given full dimension to memories that were vague, fading, and doomed to be lost as the last surviving internees age. Former internees sent him details and their memories, and Werner Ulrich drew them carefully so that now we can all learn and never forget.

Claudia Sanchez is a freshman history major at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. She is one of the student leaders of the German-American public history project at St. Mary's University. The project seeks to win official recognition for German Americans and German Latin Americans who were interned in the United States during World War II.

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