

Historic Landmark Commission
May 21, 2012
Demolition and Relocation Permits
HDP-2012-0119
909 West Johanna Street

PROPOSAL

Demolish a ca. 1942 house.

ARCHITECTURE

One-story, rectangular-plan, side-gabled frame house with a partial-width shed-roofed overdoor hood; one recent carport structure at the front left side of the house; 6:6 fenestration.

RESEARCH

The house was built by the U.S. Government at Camp Swift in Bastrop County in 1942, and moved to its current site in 1948. The house has largely served as a rental property with a high turnover of tenants.

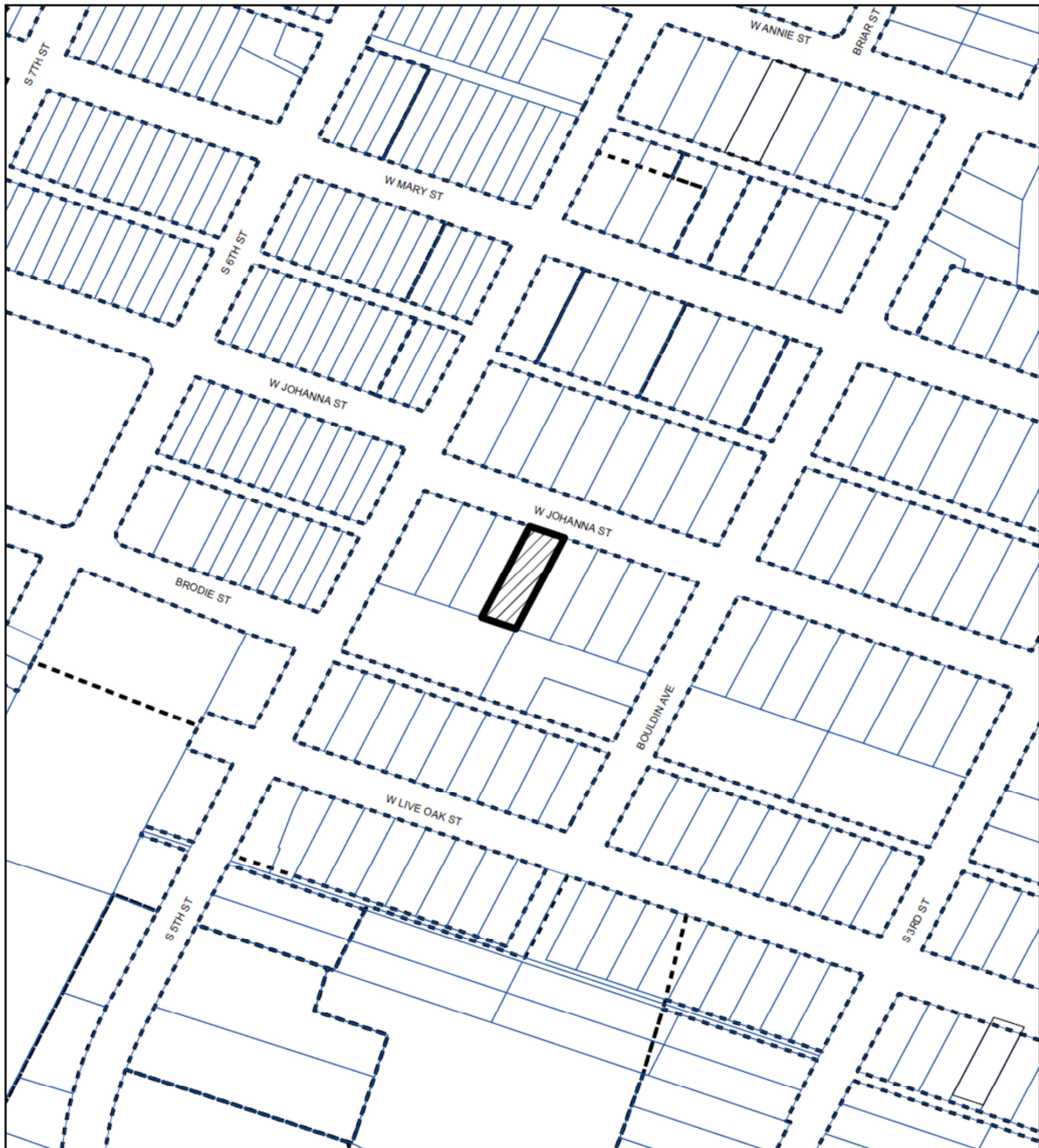
STAFF COMMENTS

The house is not listed in any City survey.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Release the demolition permit after completion of a City of Austin documentation package consisting of photographs of all four elevations, a dimensioned sketchplan, and a narrative history. While intriguing as a Camp Swift House, the house has insufficient architectural or historical significance to warrant individual designation as a historic landmark.

LOCATION MAP



SUBJECT TRACT



ZONING BOUNDARY

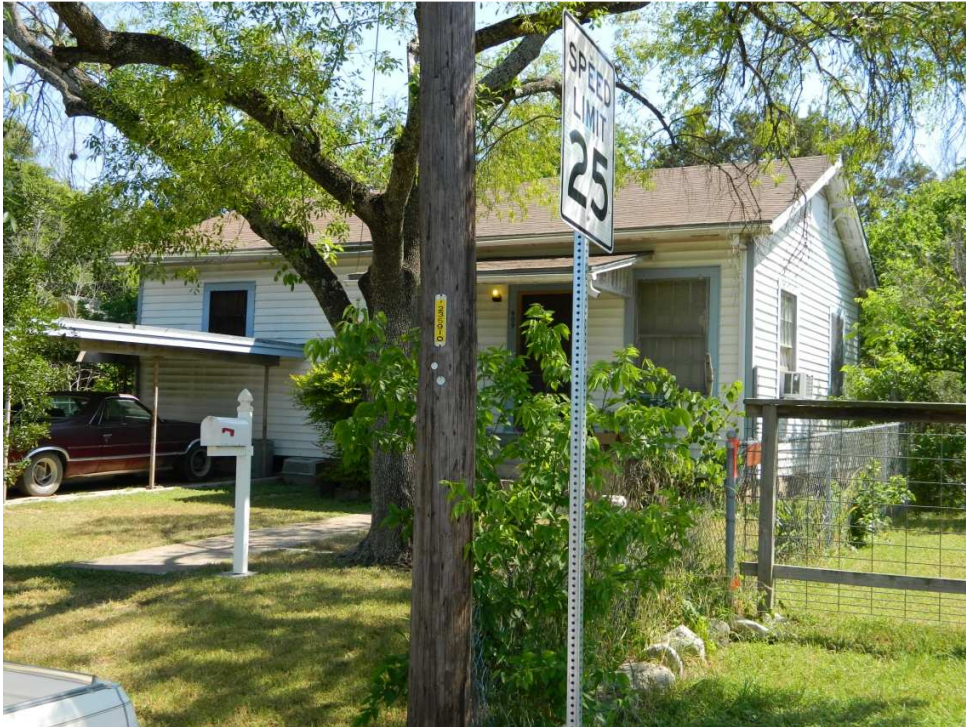
CASE#: HDP-2012-0119
LOCATION: 909 W Johanna Street



This product is for informational purposes and may not have been prepared for or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes. It does not represent an on-the-ground survey and represents only the approximate relative location of property boundaries.

This product has been produced by the Planning and Development Review Department for the sole purpose of geographic reference. No warranty is made by the City of Austin regarding specific accuracy or completeness.

909 West Johanna Street
ca. 1942 and moved to its current site in 1948



OCCUPANCY HISTORY 909 West Johanna Street

City Directory Research, Austin History Center
By City Historic Preservation Office
April, 2012

1992	Wenceslao and Estella Matias, owners Employed by the City of Austin
1985-86	No return
1981	Wenceslao and Estella Matias, owners Park grounds maintenance man, City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department.
1976	Wenceslao and Estella Matias (not listed as owners) Park grounds maintenance man, City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department
1972	Vacant
1969	Vacant
1963	John F. and Grace M. Greenwood, renters No occupation listed
1958	Richard G. and Josephine Dudash, renters U.S. Air Force
1954	Charles W. and Alice Holle, renters No occupation listed
1952	Joseph E. and Miriam Cogbill, renters Brickmason
1949	Frank Webb, renter Manager, HEB Food Store No. 4 (unknown location)
1947	The address is not listed in the directory. – The house was moved to its current site in 1948 from Camp Swift, Bastrop County.

A. F. White 909 West Johanna St.
 115 5 0 - -
 Bouldin Addn.
 Carport addn. to front of residence.
 44759 6-1-50 \$150.00
 W. & W. Const. Co.

Building permit to A.F. White for a carport on the front of the house (1950)

Contrary to popular belief, Pearl Harbor was not a complete surprise, although it certainly was to those stationed there. Hitler had already invaded Poland and the war was a reality in Europe. Camp Swift was planned in 1940 and it's nearly 3,000 buildings were constructed in an incredible 120 days in early '42, at a cost of \$25, 000, 000.

Today, Camp Swift sits like hundreds of **National Guard** facilities around the country, hardly more than a parking lot for Army Reserve equipment and vehicles. But at its peak, this installation had more impact on **Bastrop County** than any occurrence natural or man-made, before or since. The population eventually reached 50,000, (some sources say as many as 90,000) which more than sextupled the civilian census. On any weekend, 20 – 25,000 soldiers would be trucked to Bastrop on flatbed trucks where they would board buses to Austin. **Kerrville Bus Company**, who had the contract for this weekend transmigration, was not immune to the tire rationing then in place, and frequent blowouts would leave stranded buses all along this route.

Basically, Camp Swift was an **Infantry** training facility, but **combat nurses** were trained here as well. The drain of talent from local hospitals caused a shortage of nurses that continued until after the war. Infantry training for European bound troops took advantage of the **Colorado River** to practice river assaults and crossings.

As a **Prisoner of War Camp**, it housed mostly **German soldiers** captured from **Rommel's** elite **Afrika Corp.** Some 300 **Russians** who were forced to fight on the German side were also confined, but had to be segregated from the Germans. At least eleven Germans remain buried on the former grounds of the Camp.

Escape attempts were rare enough to let the Germans work unsupervised after 1944. When escapes were attempted, they usually had a humorous conclusion. One man was treed by a local bull and shouted for help to those looking for him. Another was bitten in the buttocks by a tracking dog where he had pocketed a hunk of bologna. Adding insult to injury, the guard dog was a German Shepherd. Escapes were far more frequent and successful with the 3,000 mules brought to the Camp by the **10th Mountain Division**. Frequent herds of 100-200 had to be rounded up almost weekly, and three who were too wild to recapture were left behind.

The helpful librarians at the **Bastrop Public Library** will gladly direct you to the Camp Swift files. Additional files are kept at the **Museum** at 702 Main Street.

One of the files contains a **History of Camp Swift** by *O.P. Houston* and *Walter E. Long*. Included is a poignant **letter** written by one of the prisoners who worked in a camp office. It was found in his typewriter after he was sent back to East Germany, which was then under Russian occupation. In his words, the letter follows:

A recent visit to Camp Swift confirms what the library files say: that there's hardly anything left of the camp. I spoke with Master Sergeant *Robert West* who had a few interesting stories. As late as 1989 a former German POW returned for a visit.

The POW cemetery is now on land that was given back to the former owners, when the camp was decommissioned in 1946. Three other cemeteries exist and fencing is currently being installed around two of them. The third cemetery consists of only three graves, a father and two sons who were killed by Indians. MSG West also says that two **cougars** reside at Camp Swift, one golden and another darker one. Sightings were as recent as last year.

While each barrack housed 16 prisoners, if all prisoners had all returned from their contract work outside the fence, there wouldn't have been enough barracks for them all. Contractors had to provide off base housing, while the Army provided the MP guards.

Prisoners were paid 80 cents per day while the farmers and/or contractors paid the government the going rate of 2.60 per day per prisoner. Prisoners were unable to spend all of their script and some at Camp Wallace in Texas City donated \$440.00 to the local YMCA who had given them books. Officers weren't required to work and Junior Officers were paid 20.00 per month, Captains, 30.00, and Field Grade and above 40.00.

Ten Texas Universities provided camps with correspondence courses and university credits! In addition, mail from Germany was promptly forwarded and Swiss monitors visited the camps to insure The Geneva Convention rules were being complied with.

It's likely that German children had their equivalent for "What did you do in the war, Daddy?" One can imagine hearing: "Well, up to '43 I was an Oberfeldwebel (Master Sergeant) in the Afrika Corps, then I went to Texas and stuffed olives." Stuffed Olives? Our researcher read where prisoners near Alvin grew peppers and tomatoes and canned them along with olives.

This puzzled us until a photo was found of a bunch of smiling POWs sitting at a sorting table stuffing strips of pimento peppers into imported olives. Nice work if you could get it.

The Bastrop museum files also contain a letter from 1993 wherein a former POW thanks the **Bastrop Historical Society** for information they furnished him and enclosed two snapshots of a German funeral at Camp Swift. One shows the flag draped casket (POWs were even allowed to fly the Swastika Flag) being carried by pallbearers and the other shows a US MP Honor Guard firing a salute.

Washington received many complaints that the prisoners were being treated too well. **FDR** defended the policy by reminding Americans that the Germans held US prisoners. After the war, the wisdom of this was apparent in the statistics on the mortality rates of American vs. Russian POWs. Camp Swift prisoners were sent to England for two more years where they helped clean up some of the mess (and presumably were told not to do it again) before they were sent back to two Germanys.

For those of you under 40, we won. 1946 found Camp Swift with a skeleton crew of 800. This is the year the dictionary formally recognized such words as jerk, cheesecake (as in leg art) and jive. **Congressman**

Lyndon Johnson visited with all of Bastrop Co. mayors at a barbecue in Bastrop State Park and it is here (some historians believe) that LBJs lifelong fondness for Elgin sausage began. Their Honors wanted Camp Swift reactivated, LBJ wanted to be reelected. Shortly before elections, a convoy of Troops from the 12th Cavalry at Camp Hood (approximately 1000 men) conspicuously occupied the Camp. Johnson was reelected, the troops inconspicuously convoyed back to Camp Hood and Camp Swift was reduced to lumber being sold at \$5 per truckload.

The current Editor at the **Bastrop Advertiser**, *Davis McAulty* recently visited the site of the POW cemetery. His flowing and detailed description made us feel we needn't visit the site ourselves (besides, there are cougars out there). Mr. McAulty is a policeman's dream eyewitness. This is one guy who would get the number of the get-away car. According to the Editor: "The site is overgrown by pines, and a small sandstone wall defines the perimeter." His estimate of 10 –12 marker-less graves matches our researchers total of 11. Most but not all of the graves are visible due to the depression in the soil where they were evidently exhumed for return to Germany or else became cougar chow.

From "Camp Swift", by John Troesser (1998)
www.texasescapes.com

Camp Swift, established in 1942 as a major combat infantry training area for WWII, is now a Texas Army National Guard (TXARNG) training site. Training activities conducted at Camp Swift include basic infantry skills, tank maneuvers, combat engineering skills, helicopter operations, small arms and crew-served weapons firing, personnel/cargo air drops, and demolition. The Camp Swift training site provides a training environment for military and civilian organizations with training areas and facilities on a year round basis, to accommodate up to a battalion size. All NCOs in the Texas National Guard who take classes to be promoted have to go through training at Camp Swift near the small town of Bastrop. Along with classrooms for advanced courses, the camp includes a variety of training facilities: a "gas chamber" for gas-mask training, a drop zone for airborne units, helicopter landing sites, pistol and rifle ranges, and space for land navigation testing. Camp Swift provides training areas with ranges for guns as small as hand guns to fields for tanks and artillery. Camp Swift sits like hundreds of National Guard facilities around the country, hardly more than a parking lot for Army Reserve equipment and vehicles.

During World War II Bastrop was the home of Camp Swift. Camp Swift was officially activated with a flag-raising ceremony on May 4, 1942. Austin civic leaders campaigned for the Bastrop location of the army camp for the economic benefit Austin would derive from the influx of military personnel. The US Government acquired 52,191 acres (52,092 fee acres and 99 lease acres), on 23 March 1942. The site was used by the Army as an infantry replacement training camp. The camp was named for Eban Swift, a military figure in Texas and Mexico, a World War I commander, and author of many military books. The Army constructed numerous barracks, warehouses, support buildings, training facilities and areas, recreational facilities, artillery ranges, motor pool vehicle parking areas with gasoline pumps, storage tanks and security boundary fences. This army training facility housed, at its peak, over 90,000 US servicemen. It also served as a German prisoner-of-war camp with 4,000 prisoners captured in North Africa from Rommel's Afrika Corps and at Normandy during the invasion of Europe.

In 1945 when the war ended, the military started shipping soldiers home immediately. The Army declared the property excess to the War Assets Administration (WAA), on 5 May 1947. Following the declaration of excess, 373.99 acres were deeded to the State of Texas, Department of Health. On 30 June 1946, the Federal Farmers Mortgage Corporation (FFMC) assumed accountability of 83.0 acres, and the General Services Administration (GSA) assumed accountability of 17,301 acres. On 1 March 1950, the GSA terminated the leases covering the 98.5 acres and returned the land to the original owners. Over the years, all of the former camp has been either sold to numerous individuals or accountability was assumed by the GSA, FFMC, State of Texas, and Lower Colorado River Authority (LCRA). On October 29, 1996, Camp Swift was designated as a historically significant site by the Texas Historical Commission.

The camp, covering about one-fifth the acreage of World War II, is still used by the National Guard for training and storage purposes. The government retained 11,700 acres for the Texas National Guard, a medium-security federal prison, and a University of Texas cancer research center. Development plans for the mining of extensive lignite deposits under Camp Swift began in the 1970s, though opposition by environmentalists and former landowners resulted in decades of litigation.

Getting the regulators and public involved early on in the cleanup process is a major goal of the Formerly Used Defense Sites program, and at the former Camp Swift in Bastrop, Texas, it's paying dividends. Camp Swift is a former World War II infantry training center that is being cleaned up through the FUDS program. Although some work was completed at the site in 1995, the Fort Worth District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was slated to begin an ordnance removal project in fiscal year 2001 with an engineering evaluation/cost analysis (EE/CA) phase.

In preparation for the EE/CA, district officials conducted an initial site visit in January 2000 and began a serial photo analysis of the property. An initial public meeting was conducted in June 2000 at Bastrop High School during which time the public received the results of the photo analysis and an overview of both the FUDS program and the ordnance removal project.

In early November, a Technical Project Planning meeting in Austin was conducted to discuss data needs for the project. Participating in that meeting were representatives from the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife agency, the State Historical Preservation Office, the Boy Scouts of America (which owns a 5,000-acre track in the old impact area) and the Lower Colorado River Authority (a large land owner).

Camp Swift's 11,740 acres, located in north central Bastrop County on State Highway 95, are primarily in the Oak Woods (Post Oak/Blackjack Oak) and Prairies natural region and at the northern edge of an area known locally as "Lost Pines". Topography is rolling, with elevations ranging from roughly 400 to 600 feet. Surface water is limited, but includes 56 miles of perennial and intermittent streams, 39 small ponds and 31 small, mostly ephemeral, winter wetlands.

A comprehensive Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan for Camp Swift is being developed by TXARNG's Environmental Resources Management Branch (ERMB). The goal is to return lands to their original sustainable condition by use of prescribed-burns and restoration of native plant species. TXARNG has sponsored the "Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship" program at Camp Bowie, Camp Swift and Fort Hood. ERMB uses a geographic information system to review each proposed field training exercise for potential impacts on the environment. Recommendations are made on ways to accomplish training missions while minimizing damage to natural resources.

From globalsecurity.org