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The site of Camp Ellis was chosen by the Army in part because it was sparsely populated; had a large, relatively flat area where the encampment itself could be built, and a large area of rough, partly wooded terrain suitable for combat training.

In the fifty years since Camp Ellis closed, much of the land has been returned to farming, and some of it has been strip-mined. There is one new farmhouse in the center of the site, and a few houses and the VIT school were built on the edges of the camp, but the site today is strangely empty and silent. Although one sees the occasional pick-up truck or dirt bike, one may drive for hours without seeing a house, a vehicle, or a person.



Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, the United States abruptly entered World War II. In September, 1942, the U. S. Army purchased 17,500 acres in rural Fulton County, Illinois, to build an Army Service Unit Training Camp. Within seven months the farm buildings on the land had been demolished and a self-supporting 'city' built. Camp Ellis had a railroad, a landing strip, 2,200 buildings, water and sewage systems, and electrical and telephone lines. At its peak it housed 40,000 military and civilian personnel and nearly 5,000 prisoners of war. In less than two years it trained and sent off to war 456 service units of 48 types, ranging from entire regiments of about 1200 individuals, to small units of five people. It trained 125,000 men in all before the camp closed in 1945. Within 10 years, little trace of its existence remained. The people from all over the world who came to the camp to work, to be trained, or to be imprisoned, have never forgotten the place which played such an important part in their lives. They return today to relive their memories and to talk about them with new generations.

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Tips for your Driving Tour

There are several routes that you can take through the site. The suggested route is that of the sequence of numbered features.

It is recommended that you drive only on the roads shown in solid black on this map. These are mostly original camp roads that were well graded and covered with imported white gravel. Dotted roads are in poor condition. White indicates roads no longer in existence. Other areas can be hazardous due to gullies and strip mining activities, especially during or following a rain. The roads in the south part of the camp are in better condition than those in the north.

While the roads are public, please remember that the property is private. There are no public facilities of any kind within the camp area. The best spot for a picnic is the riverside park in Bernadotte.

The area of the camp is large, almost uninhabited, and traffic is rare. If you have a cell phone, take it with you.

There are beautiful fall colors to be seen in the northern part of the site, but more features of the camp can be seen from November to April, when leaves and crops are gone.

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*Self-Guided Driving
Tour of the Site of*

Camp Ellis

World War II Army Service Unit Training Camp

Fulton County, Illinois



This brochure was produced by Dickson Mounds Museum in conjunction with the special exhibit *Reveille to Retreat -- The Story of Camp Ellis in World War II*.

Copies of the brochure are available from the museum upon request. Individuals and organizations are welcome to xerox and distribute the brochure if they wish.

Dickson Mounds Museum, a branch of the Illinois State Museum, is a major on-site archaeological museum that explores the world of the American Indian through 12,000 years of human experience in the Illinois River valley. The museum is open daily from 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. There is no admission charge.

Dickson Mounds Museum. Lewistown, IL 61542.
309-547-3721 12/98

<http://www.museum.state.il.us/ismsites/dickson>

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"We drove there and found corn growing among a few remaining chimneys. It was an eerie feeling, causing us to wonder if such a place as Camp Ellis ever really existed."

(Cora Gigax)

"Everything else had been brought in, but the land was here and the land remained."

(Wayne Azbell)



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Points of Interest on the Driving Tour

The suggested route is indicated by the numbered sequence.

1 Preview. (From Rt. 136 in Ipava, take Maxwell road to the Dobbins Cemetery.) From here one can view the entire southern part of the site -- the encampment area -- where camp personnel lived, worked, and did most of their training. On the right side of the gravel road that continues past the cemetery to the north was the **Hospital**, one of the largest World War II Army hospitals in the country. Covering 140 acres, with 1500 beds, it trained medical units for the field, and treated soldiers who had been wounded overseas.

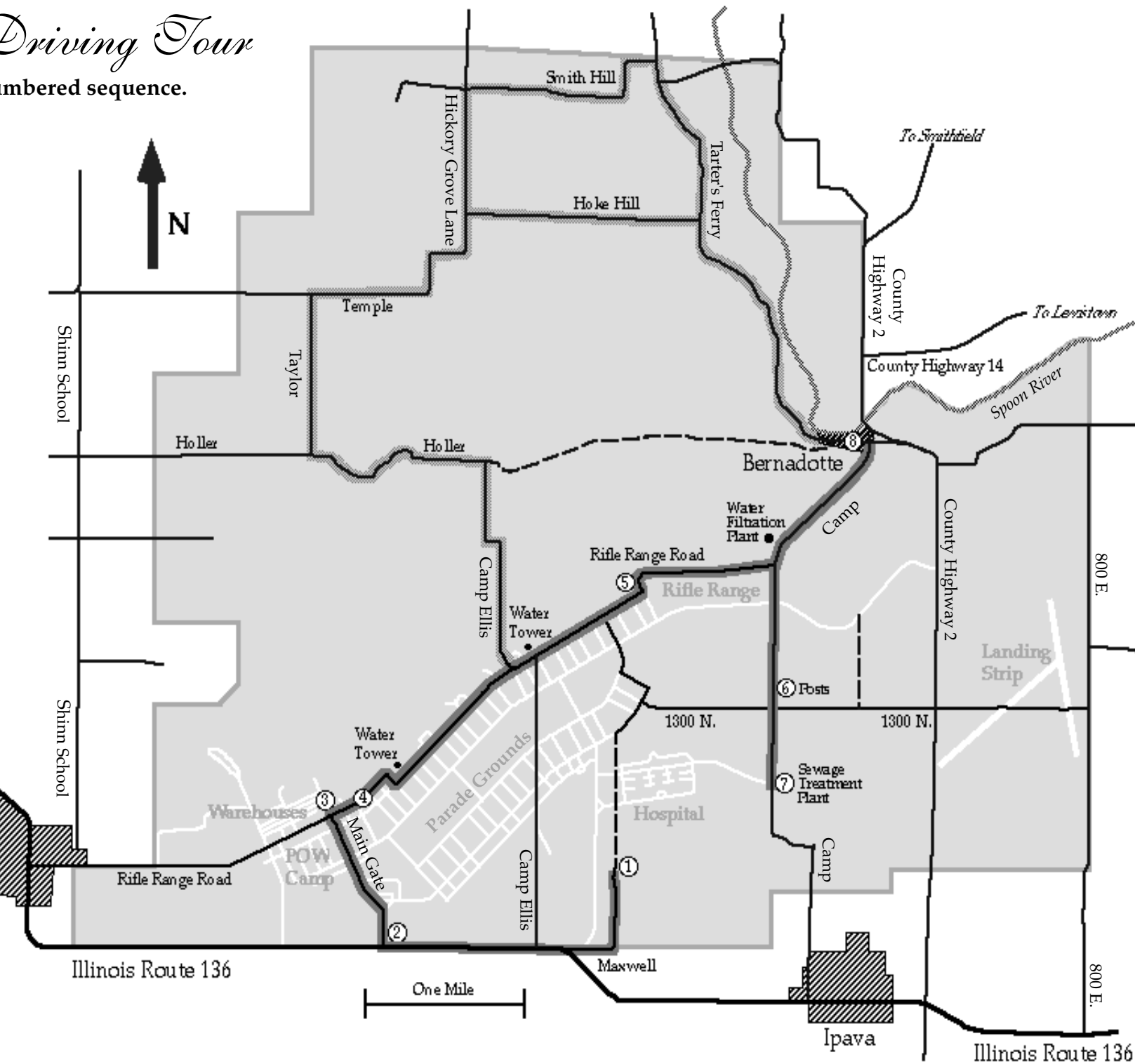
Dobbins Cemetery is one of four small, local cemeteries that the camp maintained while they occupied the area. Several German POWs who died at the camp were buried here with full German military funerals. (Because of the poor condition of the road, it's best to turn around here, turn right when you reach Rt. 136, drive 1.5 miles, and turn right onto Main Gate Road.)

2 As you enter **Main Gate Road**, the site of the camp's 200-acre Victory Garden is on your left, its baseball diamond on your right. At the point where the road veers to the left, you are passing the area on the right where Headquarters, the reviewing stand, and the 100 foot flagpole stood. A little further along this road on the left, the **POW camp** with its recreation area and guard barracks. German POWs, under guard (cover photo), did much of the manual labor at the camp, and also worked outside the camp with crops, lumber, construction, and food processing.

3 Junction of Main Gate and Rifle Range Roads. Just ahead and to the left was the Railroad Yard and Warehouse area. The chimney may mark the site of the Motor Pool. (The road to the left follows the line of the camp railroad to Table Grove. It passes the site of the camp stables, which were north of the road.)

4 Turn Right onto Rifle Range Road. This is one of the few original 'streets' of the **Encampment** itself. (The camp had 21 "north/south" streets, and 47 "east/west" streets.) The 2,200 camp buildings occupied the area south of this road for a distance of 2.5 miles. Between the ranges of barracks was the **Parade Grounds** where most of the special function facilities were located -- the service clubs, recreation halls, gymnasiums, libraries, a number of the chapels and movie theaters, and the outdoor amphitheater. Within the encampment were separate areas for the Quartermaster, Signal Corps, Engineers, and Medical Service units to live and train. All that can be seen here today are traces of some of the original gravel roads. Along roads throughout the camp are piles of rubble -- bricks and concrete -- later bulldozed out of fields so that crops could be planted.

On your left, along the length of Rifle Range Road were special facilities like the bakery and the two water towers; and special training areas, such as the driving and obstacle courses, bayonet and hand grenade courts, tear-gas chambers, and pistol and rifle ranges. Occasional 'islands' of vegetation and brick chimneys today mark the location of major buildings. Small concrete fence posts can also be seen here.



The 700,000 gallons of purified Spoon River water that the camp used daily came through the two giant, bomb-proof water storage towers that remain.

5 Rifle Range Road makes a sharp turn to the left (just past one of two large concrete block buildings built along this road by the National Guard in the late 1940s, after World War II Camp Ellis had come to an end.) The camp's three known-distance **Rifle Ranges**, each a quarter of a mile long, had targets positioned at ground level on a concrete ledge. The ledge extended below the surface of the ground to protect those who replaced the targets from rifle fire. The 'walls' this created remain the camp's principal landmark. Camp Ellis soldiers began the tradition when they wrote their names and addresses

on the 'walls'. The tradition has continued until today -- the 'walls' are an enormous palette on which fifty years of layered graffiti reflect the concerns of young people. (At the junction of Rifle Range and Camp Roads, turn right.)

6 To your left, at some distance, was the location of the camp's landing strip. Watch carefully for two high concrete posts that stand near the road on your left. These are original camp 'signs' marking the "Heavy Equipment Area," and the "General Construction Area." Here engineering units practiced building barracks, and learned bricklaying by building a brick 'castle.' Just past these concrete posts are the remains of a small stone overpass abutment built by the POWs.

7 Sewage Plant Remains. Considerable remains of the camp's state-of-the-art sewage plant can be seen on both sides of the road. On a hill to the left are two large digesting tanks, and other extensive remains are on the right. (Turn around here and backtrack.) Shortly after passing Rifle Range Road you will see on your left the concrete remains of the **Water Filtration Plant**. Continuing along this road you will reach the village of Bernadotte.

8 Bernadotte, the only town demolished when the camp was constructed, has been rebuilt. Its park is a good spot for a picnic. A major attraction is the dam the camp built on the Spoon River to provide a reservoir for its water supply. Concrete remains of the camp's pumping station can be seen on the bank just above the dam and tumbled along the bank below the dam.

From this point, you may exit the camp via the road leading out of Bernadotte to the east, or by going south on County Highway 2 to Rt. 136.

If you wish to view the scenic northern part of the camp, you may go back on the road by which you entered Bernadotte to Rifle Range Road, follow that to Camp Ellis Road, and turn right (north). Or you can take the gravel road from Bernadotte that follows the river upstream (Tarter's Ferry Road). Both routes allow you to make a circuit of the north part of the camp via either Hoke Hill or Smith Hill roads. This is a drive of from 9-12 miles.

The North Area of the Camp. The purpose of Camp Ellis was to train service units -- the support troops behind each combat soldier -- who provided the roads, bridges, food, shelter, clothing, vehicles, communications, mail, recreation, and medical aid he needed. But all men trained at Camp Ellis received basic training as well. The 8,000-acre northern part of the camp -- with rough, wooded ravines -- still has the unimproved roads that were appropriate for the simulation of battle conditions the camp needed for basic training.

In the northern area of the camp were located some of the finest small arms ranges in the country, with 22 courses constructed. There were machine gun courses; and anti-aircraft and bazooka ranges. Here men practiced laying land mines and viewed bombing demonstrations. A mock German Village was built in the northwestern part of the camp for practicing street-to-street battles.

Engineering units practiced bridge-building on the Spoon River. Shortly afterward, several of these units participated in building the first Allied rail bridge across the Rhine.

Today there is no trace of the war-like activity that once took place here, but 'Hell Holler' Road is still a challenge to negotiate, the view of the Spoon River Valley from the top of the amazingly steep Hoke's Hill remains spectacular, and Tarter's Ferry Road along the Spoon is idyllic and serene.