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The Official Website of Fort Campbell and the 101st Airborne Division



World War II History

Installation Background

In the early 1940s, the United States government was confronted with the problem of effectively mobilizing the armed services for the coming war against Germany, Italy, and Japan. One of the many solutions was the acquisition of an extensive portion of northern Tennessee and southern Kentucky on the plateau above the Cumberland River for a new military facility. Initially designated as the Kentucky-Tennessee Armor Camp, this mobilization camp would be utilized by the Army during World War II. Initially designed as a temporary training base for the Army, Camp Campbell was designated in 1950 as a permanent installation and re-named as the Fort Campbell Military Installation.



Figure 1 The 1942 Armored Division: Shock, Firepower, Mobility

With the approval of the \$10 million Third Supplemental Defense Bill, funding, planning, and construction of new Army camps became a reality. By June 1941, 50 camps and cantonments housing more than one million troops were completed.

Two important factors in the selection of location for Army camps was the ready availability of transportation facilities necessary for the rapid deployment of troops and access to supply of necessary materials and materiel. A major railroad and national highway close to the site would also benefit in the construction of the post itself. Because of the existing transportation network, lumber could be easily shipped to Clarksville, Tennessee, the town nearest the new camp.

The Kentucky-Tennessee Armor Camp would serve as a training ground for Armored Divisions. Until 1940, the American Army was woefully behind Germany and other nations in the strength of its armored troops. Indeed, it was only in July 1940, after Germany had overrun Poland, Belgium, and France, that the Army created the



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U.S. Armored Force Headquarters. Camp Campbell was conceived and organized to support, "the concentration, mobilization, and training of these new, powerful armored divisions."

The area's topography, which ranges from plains to gently rolling hills interspersed with creeks, was suitable both for conventional training for the European theater and for the training of the newly formed armored divisions. The relatively mild weather in the area meant that construction could continue relatively uninterrupted and that once the post was ready, troops could train year round.

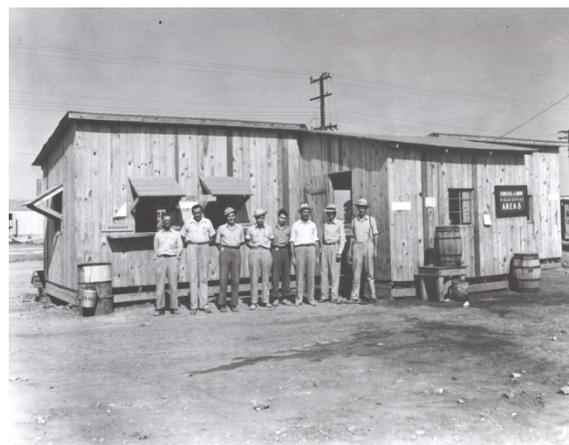
Construction began for the Kentucky-Tennessee Armor Camp on February 6, 1942. On February 23, 1942, the new name, Camp Campbell, was announced to the local press. The camp was named for William Bowen Campbell, a distinguished soldier who had served in the Tennessee Volunteer Regiment as a captain in the Seminole War, as a regiment commander of that same regiment in the Mexican-American War, and as brigadier general in the Union for 1 year in the Civil War. Campbell also served as a member of the Tennessee state legislature, was a three-time member of the

U.S. House of Representatives, and was governor of Tennessee.

Construction at Camp Campbell proceeded at a rapid pace. The common practice of using teams highly specialized in their tasks, such as carpenters, plumbers, bricklayers, who went from building to building to complete their portion of the task, was used.



1942 Construction



The makeshift field construction office of the building contractor



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Camp Campbell officially opened on July 1, 1942, when Special Order 189, Headquarters Fort Knox, Kentucky, named one officer and a cadre of 19 enlisted men for assignment and duty at the post. The troop strength at Camp Campbell grew at a rapid pace and was described as a new “bachelor city” in the making.



Figure 2 Overview of Block A During the Construction of Camp Campbell (May 8, 1942)

Fourteen chapels, dedicated to different denominations, were constructed on post. A large hospital building which would ultimately house over a thousand patients was constructed. To ensure healthy living conditions, a system of utilities, necessary in any “modern, healthy city,” had been laid out. The system included “an electric distribution system, sewers and sewerage disposal plants, water mains, hard surface

streets, heating apparatus, laundries and other plants.”

The Field House, the largest single structure at the post, was constructed for recreation and housed three basketball courts and room for other games. The design was to be flexible enough so that it could also become a theater. Apart from the Field House, five movie theaters, a service club that included a library, dance hall, cafeteria, lounge, and writing room for soldiers, and three guest houses for short-term visitors were constructed. Each battalion also had its own recreation hall.



Figure 3 Activation of the 12th Armored Division at Camp Campbell, 1942

On September 15, 1942, following the activation of the 12th Armored Division at Camp Campbell, the base was operational, although some buildings had not yet been



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completed. According to the Completion Report, the construction involved providing "housing for 33,011 enlisted men, 1,736 officers, a 1,254-bed hospital, 116 company motor repair shops with arms rooms, 288,000 square feet of closed storage space in warehouse area, 349,692 square feet of vehicle storage space, and approximately 397,000 square feet of hard standing." All troop housing buildings, warehouses, administration, and service buildings were of the mobilization type. The hospital was of semi-permanent type construction. The water treatment plant, sewage disposal plant, and pumping stations were the only permanent type construction buildings.

The post featured shopping facilities that included 14 Public Exchanges or stores. Each Public Exchange would stock and sell ready-to-eat food such as hotdogs, soft drinks, and popcorn. They would also sell radios, sporting goods, records, and "kindred goods." Each of the Public Exchanges employed 22 civilians as clerks. Each store had a barber shop, six had photography studios, and 10 included tailor shops. The profits made by these stores would

be turned back to the soldiers in the form of company funds, the proportions of which would be based on company enrollment.

The large, multi-wing hospital built in the cantonment area was among the largest buildings constructed at the post during the war. Built in 1942, the hospital had a 2,146-bed capacity. This was reduced to 646 by war's end as requirements decreased. Unlike other structures at the temporary post, the hospital was constructed of brick. After the post and a majority of its facilities were already constructed, later additions at Camp Campbell during World War II included additional barracks, WAC (Women's Army Corps) housing, and camps for German prisoners of war (POWs).



Military Barracks at Camp Campbell (image taken from a WWII-era postcard)

The new buildings, comprised largely of barracks, to be constructed were temporary in nature.



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Several training areas were located throughout Camp Campbell. To the south of the Airfield was an anti-air training area. To the west of the cantonment area were a bayonet course and an obstacle course. Further west were ranges for sub-machine guns and to the north were other ranges for machine guns, pistols, and rifles. There were three tank ranges for the training of armored divisions. These were all located in Stewart and Trigg Counties in the western part of the post.

Camp Campbell was among the 29 installations where Women's Army Corps (WAC) were stationed. It received its first WAC personnel in March 1943, when two officers and 17 enlisted women reported for duty. The WAC detachment formed an administrative unit with the mission of establishing a motor pool and motor corps. The WAC troops were also assigned specialist duties in the hospital, administrative positions in Post Headquarters, Post Finance, and Post Range Quarters.

German POWs arrived at Camp Campbell in 1943 and spent almost 2 years at the post. Three POW stockades, with a maximum capacity of 3,000, were built for this purpose. During their

confinement at Camp Campbell, the German POWs were engaged in a number of different tasks, of which the primary work comprised of labor details. While many helped local farmers with their work, a few, who were especially talented, did other tasks, such as repairing watches and painting murals on the walls of the Camp Campbell Country Club and Teen Canteen. The last of the prisoners were transferred from the post in April 1946.

During WWII, Camp Campbell was used to train and deploy troops to battlefields in Europe and elsewhere. Units stationed, trained, and deployed included the 1580th Service Command Unit (charged with maintaining the linkage between production for mobilization and the maintenance of adequate supplies for the war effort), the 12th Armored Division, the 26th Yankee Division, the 20th Armored Division, a WAC unit, and the 4th Armored Corps.

The first combat troops arrived at Camp Campbell in September of 1942, and joined the 12th Armored Division. In November, the training areas at Camp Campbell opened and the 12th Armored Division began its training. It remained at Camp Campbell until September



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1943, after which it departed for Camp Barkley in Texas. The division was deployed overseas in Spring 1944. The 12th Armored Division battled German forces in France, Germany, and Austria until the end of the war.

Following the departure of the 12th Armored Division, the 26th Yankee (Infantry) Division moved into Camp Campbell for a short period. In March 1943, a second armored unit, the 20th Armored Division, was activated at Camp Campbell.

A Soldier's Routine

The daily routine for enlisted personnel at Camp Campbell began when the sunrise gun went off at 6:30 in the morning, with the soldiers waking up to the sound of the reveille. The soldiers promptly washed up and were to be assembled within 15 minutes after reveille. In the next half-hour, the soldiers had to clean their barracks, make their beds, and head for the mess hall. Each company had its own mess hall located in the same complex as the barracks. Following breakfast, mail for soldiers would be distributed.

The soldiers would then head out for their training or other assigned tasks.

While training during the war for many soldiers was likely to be the required basic training, this was not true for all the enlisted men and women at Camp Campbell. Indeed, Camp Campbell also provided specialized training. Lunch would be served after the completion of training or assigned tasks in the morning and the afternoon would be devoted to exercise. Dinner would be served in the evening, after which the soldiers would be left to their own resources.

Local Impact

The installation significantly affected Clarksville. One year after the post opened, the population of Clarksville had increased from 12,000 to 15,000 persons, not counting the population at Camp Campbell. Clarksville benefited also from an economic boom, with retail sales in 1942 going up by 42 percent and restaurant business by as much as 300 percent.



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