



Fort Campbell Army Air Base

(Courtesy of Eleanor Williams, *Homes and Happenings*)

Camp Campbell, established July 16, 1941; 12th Armored Division was activated September 15, 1942. One of the main reasons the area was chosen as the site for the post was the area's topography. Rolling hills were considered optimal for armored training. Another reason was the favorable political climate and the ready availability of a workforce in the area. The tobacco market had suffered reverses and a work force suitable to building a fort was available. Also there was political pressure to create jobs for constituents. Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky and Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee used their positions to influence the Army to settle on the more than 100,000 acres that make up the Fort

Campbell reservation.

A survey team came to Clarksville in 1941 and established its headquarters as Clarksville was nearer the proposed site than Hopkinsville. Appraisal teams then arrived. Farm land occupied by generations since 1800 were now to be chased by the government. Ancestral homes and family graveyards were to be abandoned though some bodies were disinterred and buried elsewhere. Land owners were concerned over appraisals placed on their farms. The War Department Real Estate Office and the Farm Security Administration assisted in resolving problems. There were 1105 tracts of land involved: 801 in Tennessee and 304 in Kentucky. Nearly two thirds of Camp Campbell was located in Tennessee with more than 68000 acres in Tennessee and more than 33,000 in Kentucky. The total estimated cost came to \$4,064,948 with Tennesseans receiving \$2,833,970 and Kentuckians \$1,230,978. The average price paid for the land was \$39.93 per acre.



Selection of a name for the Tennessee-Kentucky border was begun. The names

considered were those of Colonel Henry Burnett, a Kentuckian, and General William Bowen Campbell, a Tennessean. Colonel Burnett was a former member of Congress and a Confederate officer in the Civil war. Brigadier General Campbell was the last Whig Governor of Tennessee, leader of the Bloody 1st Regiment of Tennessee Volunteers in the Mexican War and Brigadier General in the Federal Army on inactive duty in 1862. The name Campbell was chosen.

Construction began in February 1942 even though removal of families not completed until June 1942. At one time more than 1000,000 persons were employed in this gigantic construction effort. Some work was continued throughout a 24-hour period with three shifts of workmen.

With approximately two-thirds of the camp area in Tennessee and survey teams operating from Clarksville, the installation was first designated Camp Campbell, Tennessee, by the Army. However, in September 1942 Army, possibly pressured by Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky, redesignated the base as Camp Campbell, Kentucky. The reasons given for the change were that the base's post office was in Kentucky and that the majority of the post Headquarters building which was built on the state line, was in Kentucky.

One officer and a cadre of 19 men arrived at Camp Campbell on July 1, 1942, as a nucleus of the 1580th Service Command Unit. The 12th Armored Division was activated September 15, 1942. Next came the 26th Yankee Division. Both the 12th Armored Division and the 26th Yankee Division were assigned to overseas action as was the 14th Armored Division. On March 13, 1943, the 20th Armored Division was activated. Acting as a training division, this unit trained and shipped large numbers of armored replacements overseas. Thereafter, the 20th was assigned to duty in

Europe where it was designated as the dreaded “Ghost Corps” by the enemy. Subsequently it was chosen to lead General George Patton’s Third Army in its eastward drive across France.

The first WAC personnel arrived on March 17, 1943; they were soon followed by 419 other service women. They performed administrative duties.

Troops stationed at Camp Campbell reached its peak in 1944 when nearly 100,000 men and women were stationed here.

From 1943 to 1946 three stockades at Camp Campbell housed a maximum 3000 German war prisoners. It was necessary to segregate Nazi and anti-Nazi elements. Many of these men worked on farms while others were on labor detail or assigned to duties within the camp area. When the last of the prisoners were transferred from the post in April 1946, the bodies of five of their countrymen remained in a specially built cemetery where headstones identify their grave.



A facility known as Clarksville Base was also located within Camp Campbell. IT was operated by the Navy and was a classified Naval Weapons Storage area. Access to this area was limited to authorized personnel only and strictly controlled. The majority of the buildings in this area were underground and the area was surrounded by an electrified fence which was patrolled at all times. Planes were forbidden to fly over the area. Many Clarksvillians were unaware of this facility and during its operation no one knew of its purpose.

Following VE Day, Camp Campbell was an assembly and reemployment center for returning troops. The XVIII Airborne Corps returned from Europe and was inactivated at Camp Campbell in the spring of 1946. Shortly thereafter the 5th Infantry Division arrived and was inactivated the following September. The Regular Army Division and the 3rd Infantry Division arrived at Camp Campbell in March 1948. The 11th Airborne Division arrived in the spring of 1949.

In 1947 the Army conducted a survey to determine if Camp Campbell could be used as a long term facility. The completed survey emphasized the good soil with good drainage and the amount of acreage available. Based on this report, the Army redesignated the installation as Fort Campbell on April 14, 1950.

On September 21, 1956, the 101st Airborne Division was organized with pentomic concepts to become the first nuclear capable airborne division in the United States Army. The 101st Airborne Division now calls Fort Campbell home.

