



Military Corner

Camp Polk

Construction of Camp Polk, in Louisiana, began in 1941. Thousands of wooden barracks sprang up quickly to support an Army preparing to do battle on the North African, European and Pacific fronts. Soldiers at Polk participated in the Louisiana Maneuvers, which were designed to test U.S. troops.

Until 1939, the Army had mostly been an infantry force with supporting artillery, engineer, and cavalry units. Few units had been motorized or mechanized. As U.S. involvement in WW II became more likely, the Army recognized the need to modernize. But it also needed large-scale maneuvers to test a fast-growing, inexperienced force. That's where Fort Polk and the Louisiana Maneuvers came in. The Maneuvers involved half a million soldiers in 19 Army Divisions, and took place over 3,400 square miles in 1941. The Maneuvers gave Army leadership the chance to test a new doctrine that stressed the need for both mass and mobility. Sixteen armored divisions sprang up during World War II after the lessons learned during the Louisiana Maneuvers. These divisions specialized in moving huge combined-arms mechanized units long distances in combat.

While primarily a training facility, Camp Polk also served as a military prison for Germans captured during World War II. The first (POWs, who began arriving in Louisiana in July 1943, were from the Afrika Korps, Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's troops who fought in North Africa. They were housed in a large fenced-in compound in the area now encompassing Honor Field, Fort Polk's parade ground.

The POWs picked cotton, cut rice, and cut lumber. They also helped sandbag the raging Red River in the summer of 1944. Prisoners who worked earned scrip for their labor, with which they could buy such necessities as toothpaste or snacks at their own Post Exchange. From the end of World War II until the early 1960s, the post

was closed and reopened numerous times. During much of this time, it was open only in the summers to support reserve component training. Soldiers were stationed there temporarily during the Korean War and the Berlin Crisis.

It is now Fort Polk, the only Combat Training Center that also trains and deploys combat units. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Polk]

Aerial view of Camp Polk during the 1940s

