

A HISTORY OF FORT CAMPBELL, KENTUCKY

AND

*THE 101ST AIRBORNE DIVISION
(AIR ASSAULT)*

*PRESENTED TO THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY
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MR. PRESIDENT, MR. SECRETARY, MR. TILLEY AND MEMBERS OF THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY:

Many of those in this room are very active in the recruitment of new industry and the expansion of existing industry in this community. We all well remember the fanfare with which it was announced that Toyota was coming to Kentucky and what a great economic boost it would be for all of Kentucky. This prediction has largely come to pass, and even we in far Western Kentucky have benefited.

Having said this, I feel that many of us in this area overlook an "industry" if you will, in our area that in terms of both economic and human impact makes a plant like the Georgetown Toyota plant pale in comparison. I refer of course to Fort Campbell, our neighbor 16 miles to the south, home of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). My paper is entitled *A Brief History of Fort Campbell, Kentucky and the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault)*.

The year was 1941. War clouds hung over Europe like a pall. Hitler had already invaded and conquered Poland, much of Eastern Europe and the air war over Britain had caused Churchill to remark, "Never has so much, by so many, been owed to so few!" And in the Pacific, Japan was on the march in Indonesia and Manchuria. Unknown by the Untied States, Japan was already making plans to secretly attack our Naval Base at Pearl Harbor.

It was in this setting, that the War Department began making plans for what seemed to be our ultimate entry into the war. On July 16, 1941, the United States Army selected an area divided by the Kentucky-Tennessee state line as the site for a new military installation. This area encompassed parts Of Christian and Trigg Counties in Kentucky and Montgomery and Stewart Counties in Tennessee. The Army began buying the farms and homes that in many instances had been owned by the same families for generations. As an aside, I found in the attic of my former home on Alumni Avenue the notebook of Huel Cowherd, the former owner of the house. He had served as an appraiser for the government and in his notebook are hundreds of pencil sketches and notes concerning the land acquisitions.

Construction of post facilities began February 4, 1942. The base was named Camp Campbell in March of 1942, in honor of Brigadier General William Bowen Campbell, the last Whig Governor of the State of Tennessee. He was elected Colonel of the 1st Tennessee Volunteers, the "Bloody 1st" And is remembered in history as he led his regiment in the storming of Monterey in 1846 with the cry "Boys, follow me!"

With nearly two-thirds of the base situated in Tennessee, and the post office located in Kentucky, determining the official address of Camp Campbell was difficult. On March 6, 1942, the War Department officially designated the base Camp Campbell, *Tennessee*. However, six months later, the War Department without explanation reversed itself and redesignated the post as Camp Campbell, *Kentucky*. One explanation I have always heard, and it may be apocryphal, is that the late Senator from Kentucky, Alben W. Barkley wielded his immense influence in Washington until he got it changed.

Within a year, the post was developed to accommodate one armored division and various support troops or a total of 23,000 men. From the arrival of the first cadre of troops in the summer of '42 consisting of one officer and nineteen enlisted men from Fort Knox, literally tens of thousands of men poured through Camp Campbell. During the War, Camp Campbell served as the training ground for the 8th, 12th 14th and 20th Armored Divisions, the 26th Infantry Division and Headquarters for the XXII Corps and the IV Armored Corps.

When the war ended, Camp Campbell became the center for the assembly and redeployment of troops returning from overseas. The XVIII Airborne Corps arrived in the summer of 1945 and later deactivated. After the paratroopers left, the 5th Infantry Division arrived from Europe. The Commander of the 5th, Major General Jens A. Doe, became the first integrated division/post commander in Camp Campbell's history. In 1946, the 5th deactivated and was replaced by the 3rd Infantry Division. In March of 1949, the 3rd, "The Rock of the Marne" moved to Fort Benning, Georgia and the 11th Airborne Division returned from occupation duty in Japan and made Camp Campbell its home.

On April 15, 1950, Camp Campbell was made a permanent military installation and was redesignated *Fort Campbell*. From 1951 until 1953, Fort Campbell was under the command of Second Army, while the 11th was under the command of the Third Army. This temporarily ended the division/post integrated command and staff until 1953 when the post transferred to Third Army command.

In 1956, the last units of the 11th transferred to Germany. On September 21, 1956, Secretary of the Army Wilbur M. Bruckner and the Army Chief of Staff, General Maxwell D. Taylor, Commander of the 101st during World War II, presented the colors of the 101st Airborne Division to Maj. General T.L. Sherborne.

In July of 1965 1st Brigade of the 101st deployed for the Republic of South Vietnam. The rest of the division deployed in 1967. On May 2, 1966, Third Army General Order 161 directed the activation of a Basic Combat Infantry Center at Fort Campbell. On July 6, barely two months after its activation, the Basic Training Center received its first 220 new inductees. Basic Combat Training began on schedule on July 11, 1966 with a full complement of 1,100 trainees. Also, during this period, the 6th Infantry division was reactivated and made Fort Campbell its home from November 1967 to July 25, 1968 when it was once again deactivated because of budgetary constraints.

Fort Campbell officially welcomed the return of the 173rd Airborne Brigade on September 2, 1971, welcomed by Secretary of State Melvin Laird, for what turned out to be a very short stay. This unit deactivated on January 14, 1972 and most of the equipment and personnel was transferred to the 101st and which became 3rd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Airmobile).

On April 6, 1972, the balance of the 101st “came home” to Fort Campbell in ceremonies attended by vice-president Spiro T. Agnew, who earlier had been stationed at Fort Campbell while serving in the Army and lived in Hopkinsville while at Fort Campbell and General William C. Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff, former Commander of troops in Southeast Asia and former Commander of the 101st Airborne Division and Fort Campbell. On April 15, 1972, an era ended for Fort Campbell ended when the United States Army Training Center closed. The Center had played an important role during its existence at Fort Campbell, for while the 101st was in Southeast Asia the Training Center had trained more than 200, 000 troops on behalf of the war effort in that conflict.

Upon the return of the “Screaming Eagles” to Fort Campbell, a construction and renovation program was essential to improve housing and service facilities for an expanded division. The result has been new barracks, family housing, dental, commissary, Post exchange and recreational facilities. On September 17, 1982, a dedication ceremony marked the opening of Colonel Florence A. Blanchfield Army Community Hospital. The 241 bed facility honors Col. Blanchfield, a former chief of the Army Nurse Corps who spearheaded the drive to obtain regular commissions for Army nurses.

Another constituent group headquartered at Fort Campbell is the 160th Special Operations ation Regiment (Airborne). To this regiment the modern Army owes its current night fighting capabilities. This unit was formed as a result of the ill-fated attempt to rescue the hostages out of Iran in 1979. From that attempt much was learned. It was decided that a specialized unit was needed with capabilities to fly in any weather, in any conditions and coordinate with all branches of the military forces of the United States.

The 160th was originally formed of attachments from the 229th Aviation Battalion and the 159th Aviation Battalion and immediately entered into a period of intensive night flying training and quickly became the Army’s premier night fighting aviation force and the Army’s only Special Operations aviation force. Task Force 160 as it was then known, was officially recognized a unit on October 16, 1981. Since that time, the 160th has become known as “The Night Stalkers” because of their capability to strike undetected during darkness and their distinguished accomplishments around the world.

The 160th received its baptism by fire during OPERATION URGENT FURY in Grenada Despite flying against a heavily armed Cuban and Grenadan force. The Task Force was able to complete its mission. Since 1983, the unit has responded to numerous missions at the request of the National Command Authority. The Night Stalkers were called upon to spearhead OPERATION JUST CAUSE, the liberation of Panama at the capture of Gen. Manuel Noriega. Soldiers of the 160th deployed from Fort Campbell during the harshest winter conditions on record into the sweltering darkness of Panama. Night Stalkers conducted successful pre-H hour combat airborne and air assault operations, striking the first blows to oust hostile dictator and safeguard American and Panamanian lives.

The reckless and senseless destruction of Kuwait was met by the swift introduction of 160th SOAR into the Southwest Asia theater of operations. This proved the 160th's ability to conduct complicated night and sustained combat operations as a Unit against a determined enemy.

In 1993, while supporting the requirements of the National Command Authority, Night Stalkers engaged an unconventional force under the direction of gang leader Farah Aideed in Mogadiashu, Somalia. The soldiers of the 160th entered into an 18-hour fire fight of an intensity that had not been encountered since Vietnam. The dedicated efforts exhibited by these soldiers to overcome adversity and rescue fellow comrades once again demonstrated another motto: "Night Stalkers Don't Quit."

As the 160th has evolved, various unit configurations have occurred. On October 16, 1986, the tough warrior spirit of the airborne and the tenacious determination of the Night Stalkers were joined as the Task Force further evolved and became an airborne Unit. With the redesignation as the 160th Aviation Group (Airborne), came the honored and rich tradition of the airborne soldier. The organization continued to grow and was officially activated as the 160th SOAR (Airborne) in June 1990. Responding to an increased demand for elite highly trained special operations aviation assets, the Regiment activated three battalions, a separate detachment, and incorporated one National Guard battalion.

On August 19, 1988, Fort Campbell welcomed the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) as its Group Headquarters. 1st, 2nd and Support Battalions were relocated from Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

The 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) traces its lineage from the unit of World War II fame; the First Special Service Forces. "The Devil's Brigade" a combined Canadian-American Force constituted on July 5, 1942 in the Army of the United States as Headquarters and Headquarters Detachment, 1st Battalion, Third Regiment, 1st Special Service Force. This unit activated and trained at Fort William Henry Harrison, Montana. The unit participated in the Italian Campaign and saw additional action in France. The unit deactivated on February 6, 1945. The unit reactivated into the Regular Army on April 15, 1960 and was designated HHC, 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), 1st Special Forces.

On September 21, 1961, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina the 5th Special Forces (Airborne) was officially activated. Just a year after the 5th Group was organized, elements of the 5th Special Forces Group began serving temporary duty tours in Vietnam. Full deployment of the Group was accomplished in February 1965. From its operational base at Nha Trang, the Group deployed throughout the four military regions of South Vietnam. Its operational detachments established and maintained camps at 270 different locations which trained and led indigenous forces of the civilian irregular defense groups, as well as regular units of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam.

Despite being one of the smallest units engaged in Vietnam, the Group colors fly twenty campaign streamers and its soldiers are among the most highly decorated in the history of the nation. Seventeen Congressional Medals of Honor were awarded to members of the Group, eight posthumously.

The Group returned to Fort Bragg on March 5, 1971 where it remained until June 16, 1988. On that date the colors of the Group were "uncased" in a ceremony by Col. Harley C. Davis, Commander of the 5th Special Forces Group, Maj. Gen. Teddy G. Allen, Commander 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and Fort Campbell and CSM Joseph Dennison, at the Group's new home, Fort Campbell.

The Group contributed significantly to the mission in Desert Shield/Desert Storm and in the words of Gen. H. Norman Schwarzkopf, "Special Forces were the eyes and ears on the ground," in that conflict.

Over the past several years elements of the Group have trained in Oman, United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Jordan, Egypt, Ethiopia and Somalia.

Far and away, the unit most closely associated with Fort Campbell is the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault). The Division's colorful history traces back to the formation of the 101st Division in World War I. After the War the 101st was reconstituted as a reserve unit headquartered in Milwaukee. It is from this era that the Division acquired the nickname "Screaming Eagles," after an eagle mascot of Wisconsin Infantry in the "War of Northern Aggression" known as "Old Abe."

On August 15, 1942, the unit disbanded as a reserve unit and reactivated in the Regular Army as the 101st Airborne Division at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana. The Commander, Maj. Gen. William C. Lee made a very prophetic statement to his new troops when he stated "The 101st has no history, but it has a 'Rendezvous with Destiny'"

As a Division, the 101st has never failed that prophecy. During World War II, the 101st led the way on D-Day in the night drop prior to the invasion. When surrounded at Bastogne, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe was asked to surrender by the Germans, and answered "NUTS!" The Division fought on until the siege was lifted. The 101st was awarded four campaign streamers and two Presidential Unit Citations for its contributions in World War II.

The 101st deactivated on November 30, 1945 at Auxerre, France. During the next eleven years the 101st activated and the inactivated three times as a training unit, including periods at Camp Breckinridge, Kentucky, from July 1948 to May 1949 and again from August 1950 to December 1953. In May 1954, the Division activated at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, remaining until March 1956, when the Division was transferred to Fort Campbell as a combat division.

In the Vietnam Conflict, elements of the 1st ("Always 1st") Brigade deployed in 1965,

followed by the entire Division in 1967. During almost seven years of combat in Vietnam, the Division again distinguished itself by being awarded 15 campaign streamers.

In 1968, the 101st took on the structure and equipment of an Airmobile Division. Today the 101st stands as the United States Army's and the world's only air assault division with unequaled strategic and tactical mobility.

This capability was demonstrated to the world in January 1991 when the 101st once again had a "Rendezvous with Destiny" during Desert Storm. In that conflict, the 101st successfully launched the largest and deepest combat air assault into enemy territory in the history of warfare, penetrating almost two hundred miles into Iraq. Miraculously, the 101st had no troops killed in action during the assault and at the same time, captured thousands of enemy troops.

Fort Campbell and the 101st are treasures that we as a community have in times past overlooked. Fort Campbell had a combined civilian and military payroll in Fiscal Year 1995 that exceeded one billion dollars. As to the economic impact that Fort Campbell has on Hopkinsville-Christian County we only have to remember 1990-91 during Desert Shield/Desert Storm when several local businesses had financial difficulties that were alleviated only when the troops (and families) returned. We as a community need to do everything possible to reach out with the hand of friendship to our friends to the south. I hope that this paper has helped each of us see this and that we will each "BE ALL THAT WE CAN BE *WITH* TODAY'S ARMY!"

THANK YOU!