

Barracks All Around Us - The Construction OF Fort Leonard Wood

By Gary Knehans

People old enough to remember still express amazement at the scope and the speed of construction of Fort Leonard Wood. Carved out of wooded wilderness, the Army base experienced its peak construction in 1941.

"We'd go to bed at night in the only barrack on the street, and when we'd wake up next morning there'd be barracks all around us," Staff Sergeant George Whitney humorously recalled in 1945.

Whitney, who arrived for training at the Army base on January 5, 1941, said his first barrack did not have a roof. It hadn't been installed yet.

"It was a little drafty," he admitted.

Some 14,000 workers commuted daily to Fort Wood in February of that year. The increased traffic clogged many of the area's automotive arteries. Missouri State Highway Department engineers compiled average daily traffic amounts for February 14-16 and compared the results with the average daily count for 1939. The figures confirmed dramatic surges in motor vehicle flow.

The 1939 average daily count for Route 66 just east of Route 17 (cur-



Newburg men pose for a picture along the Frisco tracks in Newburg October 3, 1941, before starting to work constructing pre-fabricated housing for Fort Leonard Wood. Sign in back of them reads, "500 defense houses for Fort Leonard Wood." Photo courtesy of Shirley's Kitchen in Newburg.

rently St. Robert) was 1745 vehicles. But 1941's average daily count jumped to 11,148. Route 17 just south of Route 66 (entrance to Fort Wood) skyrocketed from 119 in 1939 to 16,375 in February 1941.

State Highway Department engi-

neers worked to complete plans for improving Route 17 from Fort Wood to Route 66 (currently Missouri Avenue) and on Route 66 from near Waynesville to Route 28. Their plans included a proposed grade separation at the junction of Routes 17 and 66

and divided lane construction of Route 66.

Just a month later in March, the Fort Wood construction force was estimated to be 30,000, more than double the labor contingent of the previous month.

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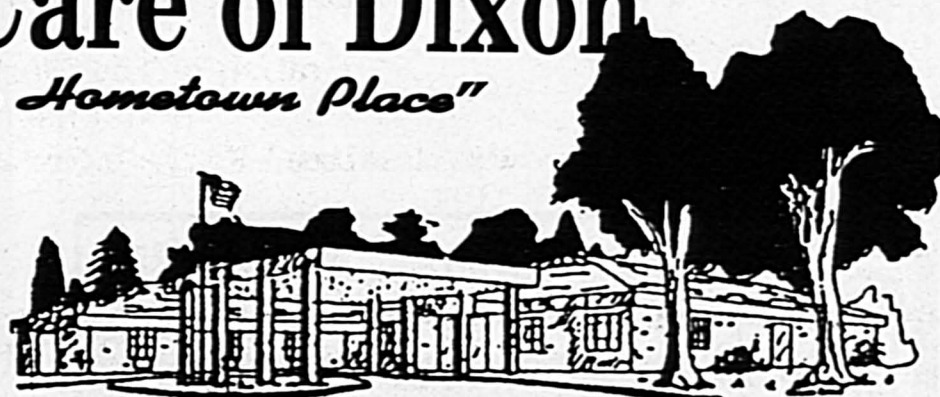
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