

Remembering the CCC

Memories of My CCC Days

Camps at Falcon and Palace

by William (Bill) Lawrence York
[written in 1988]

To many Americans the date April 7, 1933 would have little significant meaning, but to the men still living who served in the Civilian Conservation Corps more than fifty *[now more than eighty]* years ago, it still means the fulfillment of a promise.

At age twenty-one I voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt for President in 1932. F. D. R. had a good idea. He promised that under his plan to establish the "Energy Conservation Work Plan" that he would put a million young men to work at a dollar a day. Just thirty-seven days af-

ter his inauguration, on April 7, 1933, he made good on that promise and the first men were inducted into the Civilian Conservation Corps, better known as the CCC.

Those of us who lived then still remember those days. We are now in our sixties and seventies and we have lived to see a lot of things happen since those years of the Great Depression. Fellows from all walks of life, veterans of World War I, and many American Indians were among the many men who worked in the CCC to work to stop erosion, to plant forests, to build dams, bridges, and state parks, to fight forest fires, and to work at a steady job with opportunity for improvement.

In those days there were no jobs for young people, and older men had a hard time making a living. The future looked bleak indeed. High school was available for some of us, but higher education was out of the question for most.

I knew these things first hand. I was born and grew up in a small town called Bloodland, which was situated in the middle of what is now Fort Leonard Wood. Some young people went to St. Louis and other cities to look for work. Mostly we worked at odd jobs in the timber or whatever we could find to do. Often there was just no job at all.

Falcon Camp

The CCC was not an immediate answer to my work problems, but finally in 1935 I was accepted and sent to a new camp about two miles north

of Falcon, some twenty-three miles east of Lebanon, Missouri. Perhaps the good feeling I had about having a steady job accounted for part of my success but I was young and strong and willing to work hard.

Young men had to apply to get in. Usually a constable or justice of the peace from each township recommended young men from a vicinity on the basis of need. Since there was only my dad and I in our home, I was down on the certification list. After we were accepted we had to pass the physical examinations.

The fellows had to have a desire to serve. They could walk off and go home, though few did. However, nobody would have come after them. They received a dishonorable discharge eventually, but this was a big difference from the Army's AWOL

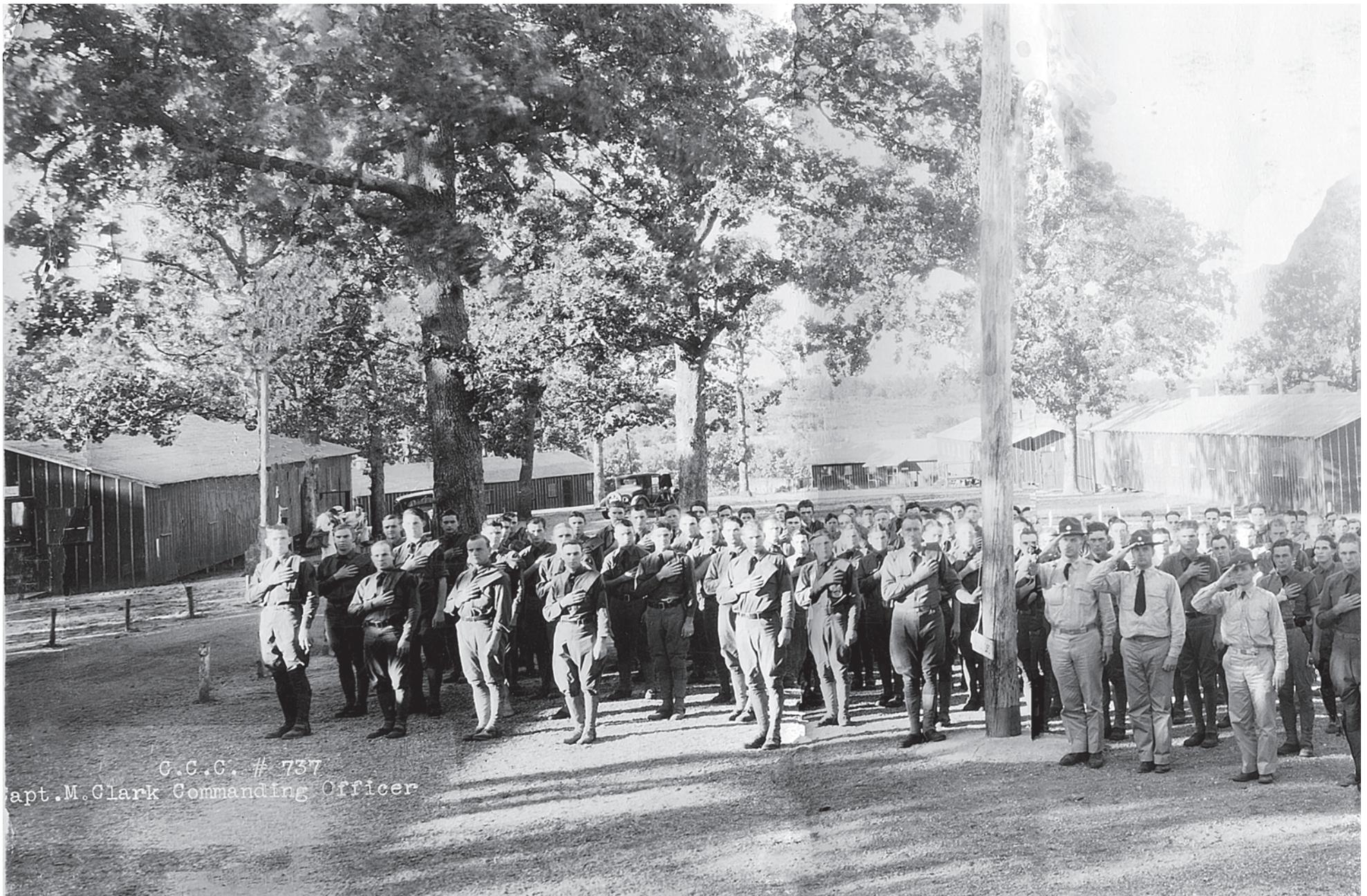




Photo above courtesy of The State Historical Society-Rolla Research Branch. Panorama opposite and below courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

policy.

Most of the men from our area went through Rolla to be inducted, then directly to camp. Falcon was number 3734. We got there in the evening and were issued clothing and assigned to barracks. I was in number 8. Furnishings were army issue. Those cots were just as hard as I found the one in the military.

Soon we received a series of three shots. Typhoid was the worst of all. Nearly everyone suffered a sore arm. Most, including me, had never had a shot before.

At that time I had never been in an army base, but I later realized that the camp was loosely patterned after an army installation. It had a headquarter building, including space for officers, a doctor and clinic, and offices for the men who

There were four CCC camps established within 30 miles of Waynesville. The Palace camp (panorama below and opposite page), near the south gate of present Fort Leonard Wood, was established November 1, 1933. Blooming Rose (above left, 10/2/1934) was near Duke. The Falcon camp (6/28/1935) was near Nebo. The Fort Leonard Wood camp (5/8/1941) was short-lived. For a detailed look at the Blooming Rose camp, see the 2005 *Old Settlers Gazette* at www.oldstagecoachstop.org



supervised the forestry department. There was a kitchen and mess hall, a recreation building, a wash house with shower and latrine, and barracks buildings.

When it was pay day we had to wear our uniforms (including caps). *[The wool patch for cap and uniform is at right.]* We lined up alphabetically and were each given five dollars. The rest of our pay was sent home to our parents—in my case my father. Sometimes my dad didn't need all of the money to live on and I got a little of it.

We had regular inspections. My barracks never earned the lowest rating although I admit that at times I wondered how we escaped. The barracks that had the lowest rating, or the most things wrong, had week-end duty. My men and I were always afraid that we would get caught and have to stay in camp and work, and I suppose that this spurred us on to be better housekeepers.

Though we didn't have much money, there was nowhere to spend it, anyway. The food was good and sufficient. Most of the men gained weight in spite of all the hard work. I did. In those days many of us didn't have a big variety of food at home, and in my case my dad and I lived alone and cooked for ourselves. Here we had all the rations we needed. The menu was much like I found later in the Army. Supplies were trucked in with many supplies picked up at Lebanon.

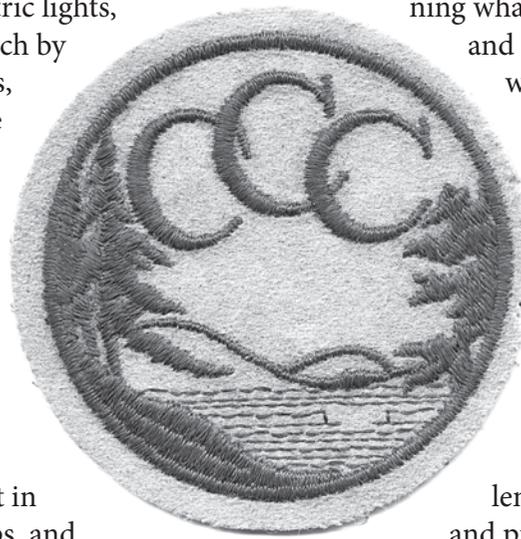
A drilled well furnished the water for the camp, pumped by a gasoline

engine. The electric lights, certainly not much by today's standards, were much more than most of us ever had. The camp had its own power plant.

The men in my outfit were housed in eight barracks. Seven leaders were sent in from other camps, and out of the two hundred men, I was chosen as the eighth leader. Being leader in itself was a challenge, but in addition to this responsibility, my crew was immediately given a difficult task. With hand tools and a lot of elbow grease we had to get the new camp grounds shaped up. I had twenty-five good men willing to work, proven in that just three weeks we cut and grubbed out all the sprouts and stumps, making the camp ready for sidewalks. The many compliments that came our way from our superiors made us determined to work even harder.

My men deserved the praise. I don't see many of these fellows now, but even after all these years we are happy to see one another again when we meet at the CCC reunion held the second Saturday in September at the high school in Plato, Missouri. Several travel long distances to attend.

Being a barracks leader had its headaches. We reported each eve-



ning what we accomplished and how many men worked. On certain nights, usually Friday, we had group meetings. Each leader took a turn discussing and reporting on the work week. We discussed any problems, safety items, and procedures that could be improved. We were always looking for ways to improve the operation in this new camp.

I've never been a public speaker, so it took a lot of nerve for me as a young man to stand up with all the officers and more experienced men. Though I didn't look forward to those meetings, they served a good purpose. I did what I needed to do. Since my men were good workers, I always had good things to say about them. At one meeting the doctor stated in his report that he treated more men in York's crew for blisters than from all the others.

I was fortunate to have a crew that followed my orders and tried to do everything right. I devised a plan to work longer the first four days of the week so that my men could leave camp at noon on Fridays instead of at the regular four o'clock time. They really liked that.

I had twenty-five good men. One of my best and most dependable

men was James Crossland. A fellow named Nelson was good, too. After I came home from World War II and came to the farm in Laclede County, another of my men was my neighbor, Jim Sullivan. (His widow still lives near us below Cox's Crossing.) He told me that he thought I was going to work him (and the whole crew) to death at camp!

At times I had a few extra men in my barracks, called local experience men or LEMs. Mostly these were older married men. Some of these didn't want to take the time to make their bunks properly or to police around their sections of the barracks. I suppose they thought they had better things to do or perhaps they resented someone as young as I, but I kept after them because I was responsible for that barracks. One LEM was my cousin Ray Wood. Being a good friend as well as a relative, I could depend on him to follow orders.

After clearing the area, our next assignment was building a road that was to lead to the Gasconade River. Because of right-of-way problems, this project had to be abandoned when only half completed. The part of the road we built is still traveled today.

When we did right-of-way clearing, I figured that it was best to divide my men in crews of four. I always tried to put more experienced men with the less experienced ones. I spaced them out some fifty to seventy-five yards apart all to work in the same direction. I knew that there was less

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chance of someone felling a tree on the others that way and less chance that someone would get hurt. When the first crew of four worked up to where the second had started, they skipped to the front again so all six crews could be working continuously. I went back and forth among the crews to see that the work was progressing properly.

When we were cutting right-of-way, we had to clear all the timber. The requirements were that we carry every bit of debris at least fifty feet back from the roadway where it would be out of sight.

After cutting, trimming, and moving the trees to the side, we had to remove the stumps. A small charge of dynamite loosened the stumps so that they could be pushed out by small caterpillar tractors. We prepared the ground for the graders which were brought in by other crews.

We used forestry equipment on road projects. Size 22 clec cats weren't very big for road building. The forestry superintendent's name was Mr. Atridge, a capable man.

I have always enjoyed timber work and my experiences as I was growing up proved beneficial. I was often pulled off my regular job to do some special timber work, such as selecting trees that would make good board timber. The forestry department was building a log structure as authentic as possible. After I selected the trees, they cut, barked, and split

them and then brought in outside help to rive the boards and do the building.

In the timber stand improvement work, since the crews were farther apart, more men could work together. For the most part, the timber in the area where we worked had been logged by private owners, leaving many tree tops we had to clean up. We did not need to cut many trees, except undesirable or dead ones now and then. No one could smoke in the forest. Even all sharpening of tools had to be done in camp. We were very careful about fires.

Though I stressed safety, I remember one narrow escape. A fellow from the kitchen asked permission to ride home on the truck. My men knew



The state nursery near Licking was started by the CCC boys. Here they are weeding a field of short leaf pine seedlings in June of 1937. Courtesy of George O. White State Forest Nursery.

where to stand when the truck was being loaded and unloaded, but this man stood behind the truck. We saw him just in time to prevent his getting caught between the truck and the tool box.

There was tragedy that I wasn't part of, but I remember it. Almost every day after work men went to the Gasconade River to swim. One night a man dived off a high bank and caught his head in the forks of a sunken log. Since nobody was watching, it was a while before he was missed. After his death, safety measures were tightened and the buddy system was adopted so that no one swam alone.

Our crew worked hard and played hard. For those who stayed at camp on weekends there was good recreation to enjoy. I excelled at baseball and enjoyed playing first base. Boxing was also a favorite and, while I was good at that, I never dared get in the ring with Cliff Massey, Red Dye, or S. Burgess. They could really make the leather pop.

I didn't mind staying in camp on weekends as we usually played baseball, but at times I went home to play ball with my home town team. I usually walked across country to Highway 66 to hitch a ride. Back then anyone who came along would stop and give a guy a ride.

Sometimes the camp truck took a load of men to Lebanon to a show. I usually didn't go, but once I was assigned to go as a guard to "see that the men stayed out of

Old Town." I had lived in the area all my life but was naive enough that I wasn't aware of any difference in Old Town or New Town.

I remember one time when a lot of us went to Falcon to some program and we were hitchhiking back to camp. A Model A car came along. The driver kept picking up the men until he eventually had seventeen men on that vehicle. They were all over it.

Vehicles were not allowed in camp but sometimes the LEMs would drive from their homes and leave their vehicles in a garage in the area. I remember one time that one of the LEMs left his car in Shockley's garage. Some of the fellows sneaked it out and drove it around most of the week without his knowledge. I doubt that he had enough gasoline to go home.

We had a piano in the recreation room. At Falcon we had one big dance that everyone attended, including a lot of visitors. However, the weather was very hot that summer and everyone was glad to stay outside as much as possible.

We sometimes attended Falcon Baptist church on Highway 32.

Girls didn't figure much in my life then. For one thing I had a lot of responsibility. Then, too, there were a lot of fellows in our camp and in other nearby camps and not enough girls to go around. Lots of fellows met the girls who later became their wives during their time in CCC

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camps.

My cousin Ray was a forestry worker (an LEM) and knew the area. He also had a steady girl friend, Violet Morehouse, who lived in the vicinity. Once he fixed me up with a blind date with her sister. I guess this was the second blind date of my life. At other times we took girls to church, and I remember having a date with the Shockley girl who lived nearby.

For a small fee those who wished could take some advanced classes. I chose to take typing because it was something that I thought would be of benefit, and I did not have the opportunity to take it in school. That was another way to improve my skills. I was determined to take advantage of any opportunity to get more training.

In late fall 1935 our camp at Falcon was disbanded. I was in charge of checking everything in for the whole camp and responsible to get it all into railroad cars in Lebanon to be sent to its destination. Lots of stuff was crated or boxed, but some was sent just tagged.

Camp at Palace

We were sent to various other camps. I went to Palace (just south of present Fort Leonard Wood boundary) where I had less responsibility as they already had barracks leaders. There I was selected for the truck driving job. Some of the other fellows were a bit envious, or perhaps they just wanted the job themselves, so to try to get even they disconnected the brake rods of my truck. I am sure they were disappointed that I didn't wreck it, but I had often driven vehicles with little or no brakes by using gears, so I caught on quickly and made the necessary repairs.

One of our responsibilities at Palace was to feed the wild turkeys that were just being restocked in the area.

Also at the Palace camp we helped reforest the area. We drove the truck along the roads where acorns and hickory nuts were thick and picked up sacks full of nuts to be planted. When we planted these we used a device called a dibbler, which looked a little like a trowel—about a foot long. We stuck the sharp end in the

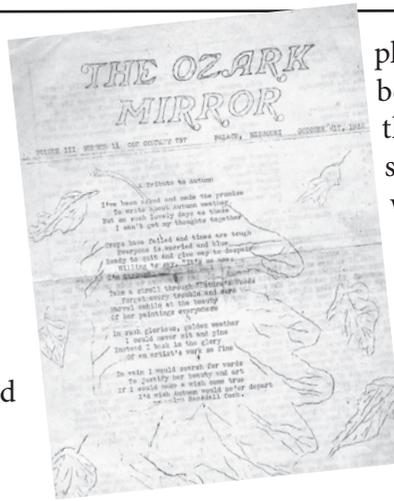
ground, raised it up a bit, placed the acorn or nut under it, removed the dibbler, and stepped on the hill to firm it. It depended on the thickness of the existing timber and other conditions just how far apart we planted, but a big crew of men could plant a lot of nuts in one day in this manner.

We had one army truck—the one I drove; the rest were forestry equipment. One of my jobs was to pick up the mail. Once I was sent to Houston when an officer needed a ride as his car broke down. Since it was against regulations for more than two to ride in the truck cab, the officer had to ride in the back of the truck. (He didn't want his wife to ride there and I was the driver!)

The camp got orders for everyone there to go to California in December, 1935. A lot more happened, of course, and it all made a lasting impression on me and on a lot of other men. The opportunity to get an education and develop skills was of great importance. Many CCC boys completed the eighth grade and did high school work on their own time. (Later during the school year of 1939-40, the boys in Blooming Rose Camp attended high school and were among my wife's pupils when she taught at Old Bloodland.)

One could see the growth and maturity of these young men. Rightfully called boys when they enrolled, they were men when discharged. Perhaps the maturing was a good thing, too, with World War II looming on the horizon.

South Central Missouri was fortunate to have many camps. From Laclede County's Brice at Bennett Spring where CCCers built most of the original park to Texas County's camps that built roads and bridges,



Most camps had a newsletter. Numerous issues of Blooming Rose's "The Oak Leaf" have survived. Only the cover of the Palace newsletter, "The Ozark Mirror," survives, dated October 17, 1935.

planted forest, and did timber stand improvement in the national forests, one can still see the results of the work of these young men.

The opportunity to work in the CCC camps helped them and their families get through some difficult depression years, leaving the country in better shape. Some three million young men served with the CCC before it was closed in 1942. By then some of these, including me, were serving in Roosevelt's military army. I began my service in early

1941. Training I received in the CCC, especially my experience in handling men in barracks and on work crews, served me well in the Army.

Naturally the work of these young men was of lasting benefit to society.

Even the sites of temporary camps still show the results of their work. I was surprised when I visited the site of the Falcon Camp recently (1988) to find that much of the space that we cleared is still open. I expected it to be completely overgrown with brush. The entrance near the old well, whose cement curb is still existing, seems to be a favorite spot for hunters to leave their vehicles while hunting deer and turkey. There was some evidence of small camp fires.

When I visit the sites where we worked and where other CCC men built bridges and parks or planted forest, I join a lot of others in feeling proud that I served in F.D.R.'s "Tree Army"—the CCC.

After the war, William Lawrence York and his wife Eula lived on a farm near Stoutland for more than four decades.

Article courtesy of son William Wayne York of Marshfield.

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Fort Leonard Wood 1941



“FORT LEONARD WOOD, MO, FEB. 8--TO KEEP THE BOOTS DRY--Missouri mud has no respect for shiny boots. But this effort has been made to keep as clean as possible the boots of those going to the office of the commander, Col. R. L. Cochran. The drawbridge is kept open so that trucks used in the construction of the big camp in the Ozarks can pass.”

—Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

It was an unusually wet winter and early spring. The above AP Wirephoto attests to the conditions of the dirt streets during the months January through April of 1941 when much of the initial construction of Fort Leonard Wood was accomplished. Another contemporary headline proclaims “Fort Leonard Wood Emerging From the Ozark Mud” while “work going on 24 hours a day with 12,000 men” in an attempt to convert “this stubborn tract of Missouri land” into a training center for the United States Army Seventh Corps.



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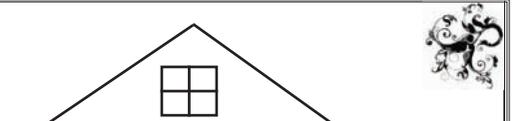
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