

In this and the past two issues, we highlight the news of 75 years ago and the building of Fort Leonard Wood. We did not have room in the 2016 *Old Settlers Gazette*, which looked at 1941, to detail one of the major construction feats in the beginning months. We do so now.

One of the most spectacular engineering feats in the United States. It will probably be rated the greatest engineering project ever completed in Missouri.

So proclaimed R. F. Bundy, chief engineer for the railroad spur project from the main line of the St. Louis-San Francisco Railway (Frisco) near Newburg to Fort Leonard Wood. He compared it to constructing more than 20 miles of track in the heart of the Rocky Mountains. Any hyperbole aside, there is no doubt that the railway was built over rugged terrain amid adverse condi-



Members of the family flank Sam and Anna Krafczik in front of their large log home in June of 1938. The homestead was located on what is now State Highway J, about two miles south of Route 66/I-44. The area in which the Krafczik home was located was locally known as the Dutch Flats, reflecting the ownership of several homesteads by German and Polish immigrants.

Making Tracks

Building the Fort Leonard Wood Branch of the Frisco

Terry Primas

tions with amazing speed.

Around November 1, 1940, a small group of engineers met in Leon, Iowa, tasked with locating a short connecting railroad over open farmland to the proposed site of a new training center. Before the drawing boards could be set up, it was determined the Iowa location lacked an adequate water supply for the proposed camp of 25,000 inductees. The War Department decided that the estimated cost of \$1,000,000 for a reservoir was too steep. The camp's location was moved to the more topographically challenging Pulaski County.

The railroad, as the did camp itself, had an impact on the local property owners but no one was displaced, as were the 308 families who lived on the land acquired for the fort. Right-of-way acquisition by condemnation took place during late November and early December of 1940. The condemnation resulted in the purchase of 55 parcels of private land (351.18 acres) and easements granted through another 11 parcels (24.15 acres) in Phelps and Pulas-

ki counties. The largest purchase was 68.60 acres from J. W. Black in Phelps County, encompassing the location of the junction with the Frisco mainline and also the bridge over the Little Piney. The next largest land acquisition was 33.50 acres from James Titterington on the northeast boundary of the fort. Incidentally, Dr. Titterington also owned the Old Stagecoach Stop at this time. It was called the Tourist Hotel.

Today, the most easily observed section of the branch railroad is where it crosses Highway J in Phelps, two miles south of I-44. At this point, the survey located the railroad crossing the land of Samuel and Anna Krafczik (below). Their log house was on the east side of Highway J and barely north of the tracks. This area and its high flat ground was called the Oak Flats by the Army but the local name was Dutch Flats in reference to the several German-Polish farming families in the neighborhood, e.g. Muench, Brisch, Lukrofka, and Immer. Missourians (among others)

pronounced Deutsche as Dutch, and not meaning people from the Netherlands.

Sam and Anna Krafczik immigrated to America in 1888, buying the original 80 acre homestead site in 1901, later expanding to about 160 acres. They raised ten children in the large log home. As the railroad ascended the flats from the Little Piney valley, the Army bought a narrow 5.46 acre swath through the homestead. We can imagine that the Krafcziks, living their quiet pastoral farm lives, never expected to hear the blast of a steam locomotive's horn blare almost in their house. A descendant remarked, "A couple of the older folks in the family suspect that the railroad spur hastened Sam Sr.'s death. He did live to the ripe old age of 88, but it seems he never did quite get over that particular affront to his sovereignty." Sam Krafczik died in 1942.

The construction of the branch line was built by a consortium of four contracting companies that was building the training center, the K. N. W. L. Company. Since speed



Sam Krafczik, Jr. and wife Lorene stand in front of the excavation for the roadbed of the Fort Leonard Wood Branch railway in early 1941. The Krafczik home is in the background. The railroad ran between the house and the farm pond. The right-of-way claimed 5.46 acres of Krafczik farmland. Pictures left and above courtesy of Joseph F. Krafczik.

was of the essence, the work was done on a cost plus fixed fee basis. At its peak, construction employees numbered 30,775. Of these, 3,000 worked on the railroad, plus 60 engineers.

The terminus of the spur was, of course, on Fort Leonard Wood and in the main warehouse area. The beginning of the branch railroad intersects with the main line of the Frisco 2.4 miles west of Newburg, just east of Little Piney Creek. It and the Big Piney River to the west were the two main water courses that were bridged.

The first eight miles were easy to locate and relatively easy to construct. A wye was constructed at the intersection with the main line of the Frisco. A wye is a triangular joining arrangement of three rail lines with a railroad switch at each corner connecting to each incom-

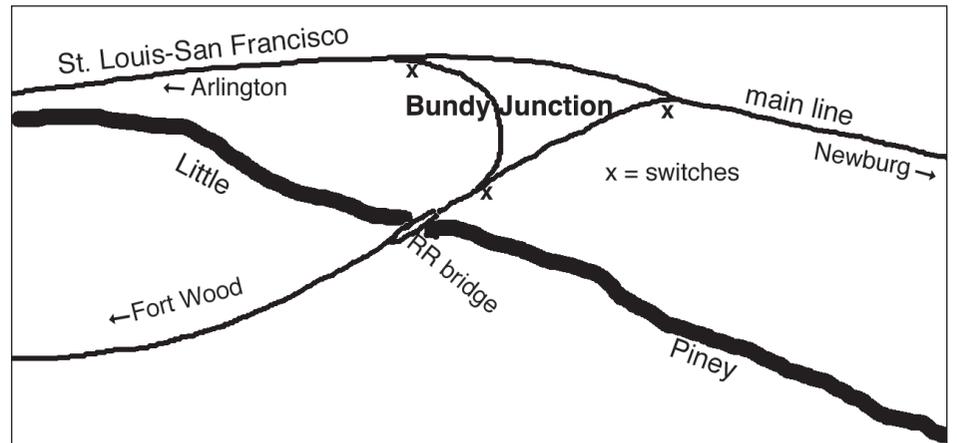
ing line. This allows a locomotive to be turned and headed back in the direction it came without building a turntable.

After crossing the Little Piney at an elevation of 672 feet, the roadbed proceeded down the south side of the Piney valley to Smith Hollow and up Smith Hollow to the Oak (Dutch) Flats at an elevation of 1,075 feet.

From the flats to the Big Piney River, location and then construction became more complicated. Several preliminary surveys were



Top right A view of Bundy Junction and the bridge over the Little Piney via Google Earth. The two lakes in the left portion of the image appear to be borrow pits for the grade. **Bottom right** An overlay drawing (with a shaky hand) of Bundy Junction with some identifiers.



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made attempting to locate the road while adhering to the standard of a maximum grade of 2.25 percent. The route went northwest from the Oak Flats, with an elevation of 1,075 feet to the crossing of the Big Piney River at an elevation of 698 feet with rugged hills and hollows between, all within a four mile stretch. The descent from the height of the flats started with a very heavy cut, christened Summit Cut. This cut was 3,150 feet long and 187,00 cubic yards of material were excavated, mostly sandstone. Of the 68 cuts, this was the deepest with a center-line depth of 46 feet.

In this rugged terrain, each cut in one place required a fill in another: 68 cuts and 68 fills. The longest fill, however, was near the beginning of the line, south of the bridge over the Big Piney. It was 9,000 feet long. However, it was not the biggest fill in terms of cubic yards of material.

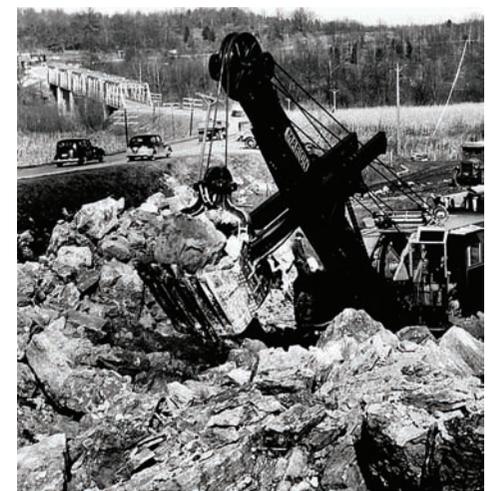
This designation belongs to a fill at Milepost 18.5 near the northeastern boundary of the camp along Dry Creek. The fill contained 141,800 cubic yards. It was also the highest fill at 68 feet.

Like most roads in the Ozarks, this one was not straight, either. In the 19.85 miles, the longest straight stretch was only 2700 feet. There were 70 curves, almost one curve every quarter of a mile.

The landscape was not the only challenge. During the survey work and early construction in late December 1940 and the first two weeks of January 1941, the weather was unusually wet. Mud became the Army's enemy. Trucks hauling material were pulled apart in the mire. The *Pulaski County Democrat* reported during this period, "Mud and more mud at the construction site has hampered the speed of the

The removal of 1,900,000 cubic yards of material, mostly rock, required a lot of blasting. In the first five weeks of construction, 70,000 pounds of dynamite each week were used. A total of 384,000 pounds of dynamite were used to complete the grading.

Procuring enough equipment for the rush job was another problem to be solved. It was acquired on a rental basis and came from as far away as Pennsylvania, Colorado, Texas, and Minnesota. A partial list assembled at the Summit Cut work included 23 shovel and draglines, 28 large compressors, 25 wagon drills, 3 pull-graders, 30 carryalls, 54 trucks, 24 bulldozers, 69 tractors, 65 lighting plants, and 14 water pumps. We list these to give a sense of the immensity of the job.



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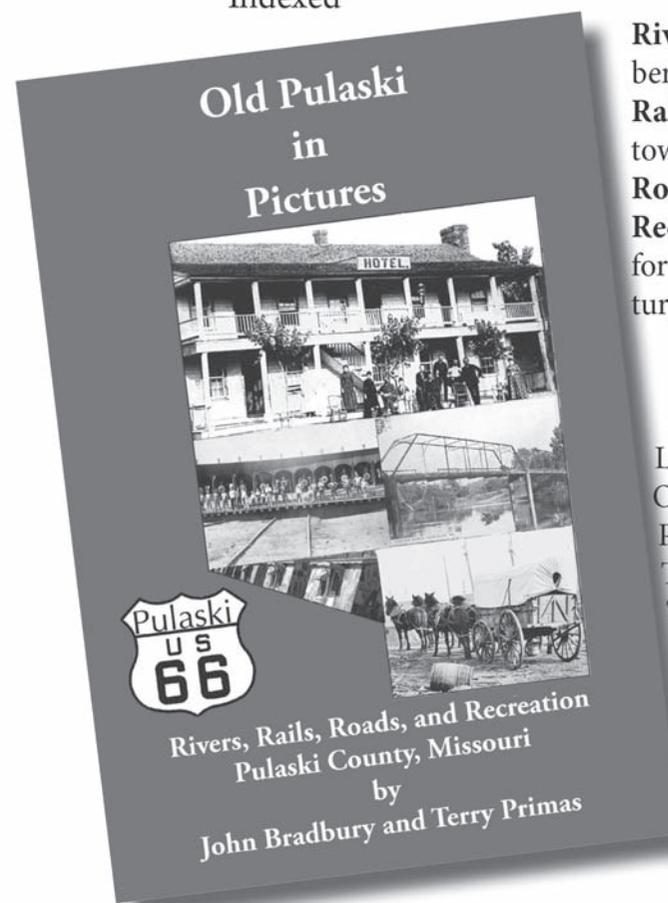
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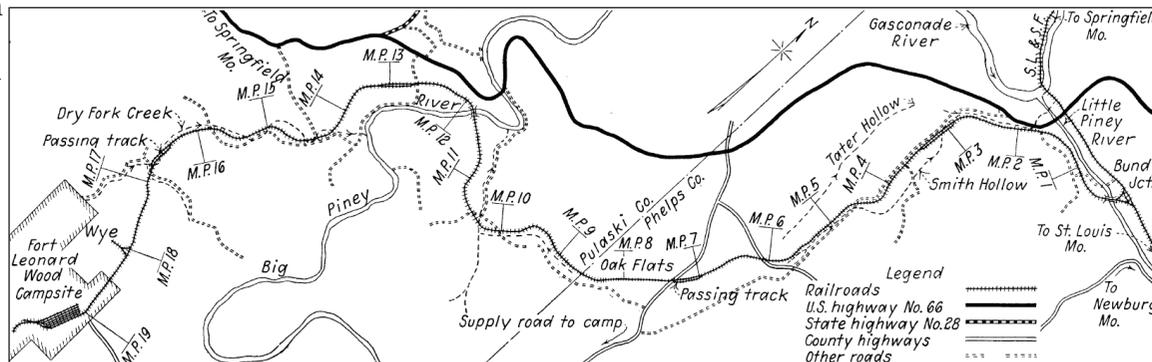
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job seriously. In places rooters have rammed the mud into piles five and six feet high. Road conditions have made for a great number of traffic accidents to cars, trucks, etc.” To emphasize the hazard, the paper repeated, “It has been reliably reported a laborer was killed at the camp last Friday when he became mired in the deep mud and the driver of a large road machine failed to see him, running over his body. He died on the way to the hospital.” Better access roads were constructed over the farmland and surfaced with rock or gravel. The rain abated and things began drying out by January 23, at least on the ridges, when the assault on Summit Cut began. The *Democrat* had the final word on the mud when it observed on February 27, “At Fort Leonard Wood south of here things are beginning to TAKE SHAPE and the

MUDDY MESS that covered the entire camp has resolved itself into graded roads and streets.” [*Capitals in the original text.*]

While there was an abundance of mud, some construction material was hard to find. Steel was particularly in short supply, requiring the use of a second-hand (or as we would say today “re-purposed”) 163-foot steel truss bridge obtained from the Frisco to span the Little Piney. Creosote-treated pilings were also hard to come by for the wood-



Fort Leonard Wood Branch Railroad map from *Railway Age* magazine, June 7, 1941.

Above This tractor stuck in the three-foot deep mud well illustrates the sticky problem confronting the construction workers over the entire camp site during early 1941. The only positive note is that the temperatures remained above freezing. AP Wirephoto courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

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Pulaski
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en trestles. Some untreated cypress piles were used and then painted with creosote. Their estimated lifespan was ten years and we trust they have been replaced.

Some topographic features could not be cut or filled. A narrow but deep hollow southeast of Devils Elbow on Joe Ross's farm was spanned with a 351 foot long wooden trestle bridge. This structure, Bunkhouse Bridge, is unique in our area and also spans our cover page.

In addition to bridging the Little Piney, one other watercourse was crossed. The Big Piney River received two through-pin connected steel truss spans, each 152 feet 6 inches long (also second-hand and purchased from the Frisco). What catches the eye are the wooden trestle approaches, measuring 1,462.9 feet long, making the total length of the Big Piney River bridge measure 1,767.9 feet. This long bridge cut through the farm of L. C. Rigsby a little west of Devils Elbow.

Laborers were not in short supply, once K. N. W. L. was able to attract the thousands of workers needed and the employment offices, established in Waynesville and Newburg, developed a smooth hiring procedure. The branch was designated a defense emergency project which resulted in 3,334,519 man hours of overtime, at one and a half times the regular wage scale. Work continued 24 hours a day, employing three shifts of 9, 8, and 7 hours. The day shift was a little longer as operators were responsible for equipment maintenance, too. General laborers made 75 cents an hour, which was considered a good wage for an economy trying to climb out of a deep depression and unemployment that had reached 25 percent. Skilled workers received a little more.

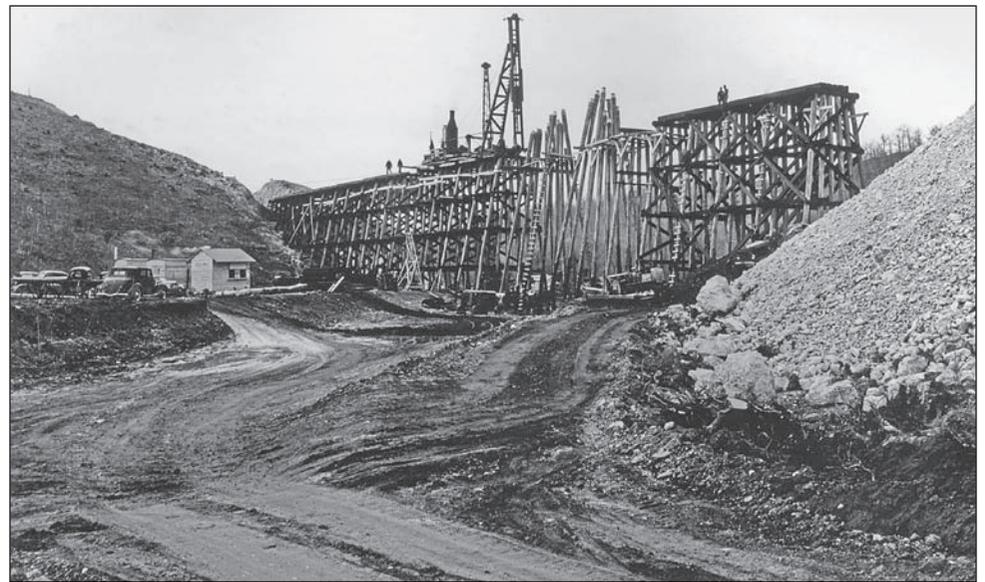
The original plan was to lay track from Bundy Junction to Oak Flats where a materials yard would be established, stockpiling rails, ties, fasteners, and other supplies. Track would then be laid in a linear fashion to the terminus at the camp.

Large shipments of rails (mostly used) began arriving, so the engineers and contractors opted to place five gangs, 25 men in each gang, at five different places along the line. This sped up the rail laying.

Meanwhile, work was progressing to receive the train loads of supplies. *The Rolla Herald* (May 15, 1941) described it well:

“While the railroad was being built from Bundy Junction to the Fort, warehouses in the Reservation were springing up at the rate of a completed warehouse every six days. Along the rows of warehouses, one could watch them being completed—at the site of one of the first in a row, the foundations were being dug, at the next the concrete was being poured, at the third, the sides and framework were shooting skyward, at the fourth, the roofing was being placed and at the last in the row the electricians and plumbers were hard at work, putting in the finishing touches. Along side of these warehouses, the railroad construction gangs were laying track and putting in switches. As far as one could see, the railroad was growing—here in front of us the grading crew, beyond, the ties were being laid and almost on the heels of these workers, came the rails and the spikes and the ringing staccato of hammers driving home the spikes, and, off in the distance the railroad completed, even to a work train puffing merrily along, added the finishing touches to a picture that was all but impossible to believe.”

No one disputed the major engineering and construction accomplishment of the branch railroad. Including the four passing tracks and six tracks in the warehouse area, there were almost 30 miles of railroad. The line with 68 cuts, 68 fills, and 70 curves was completed in five-and-a-half months, estimated to take two years under normal circumstances. The project was considered to have a good safety record with “only” four fatalities.



Bunkhouse Bridge is shown here under construction. Steam-driven equipment is driving the 84-foot piles. The wooden wonder is 351 feet long and 50 feet high. One can still drive underneath this bridge on Temporal Road, which cuts off the original Route 66 at the northeast corner of the Devils Elbow bridge. The bridge is about two miles down the county road.



Crossing the Big Piney River required 1464 feet of wooden trestle approaches on each end of the two steel truss bridge spans. This view to the east shows the trestle on the Fort Wood side of the bridge. Today the best view of the railroad bridge and trestles is from the scenic turnout on Route 66 just west of Devils Elbow.



The two steel truss spans, together 305 feet long, over the Big Piney River as seen from the scenic overlook. Photo above by Terry Primas. Construction photographs courtesy of the Fort Leonard Wood Engineer Museum.

The spur was officially opened on May 25, 1941. During its first year, 1,500 tons of supplies arrived each day via the railroad.

The Fort Leonard Wood Branch Railroad did have its detractors. Responding to numerous complaints about the “waste of manpower and material” at Fort Leonard Wood and also Camp Crowder south of Neosho, Missouri, Senator Harry Truman decided to make personal visits.

In talking with Army personnel, particularly Major Frank Reed, Jr., construction quartermaster on the project, it was admitted that there was some road building that wasted money and time. In the planning, “there had been neglected the provision for parking spaces for

workmen’s cars, which averaged 18,000 a day, and which had been parked along the route of the highway, cutting its capacity to one lane. Subsequently, 40 acres for parking purposes were set aside and scraped and filled with crushed rock,” testified Major Reed.

According to the *Pulaski County Democrat* (May 15, 1941), “In view of the fact that virtually all materials for construction had been transported by trucks, Senator Truman suggested that the camp’s \$3,500,000 railroad spur was a ‘luxury.’ He estimated that 37 freight cars a day would be enough to supply the training center with food and other necessities. He argued at least there was no need to make the railroad an ‘emergency matter, at three times

the normal cost.”

Senator Herring (Dem.), Iowa, traveling with Senator Truman, interjected “We abandoned the site in

Iowa to save \$1,250,000 for building a water system, and then find that we have to spend more than \$3,000,000 on a railroad.



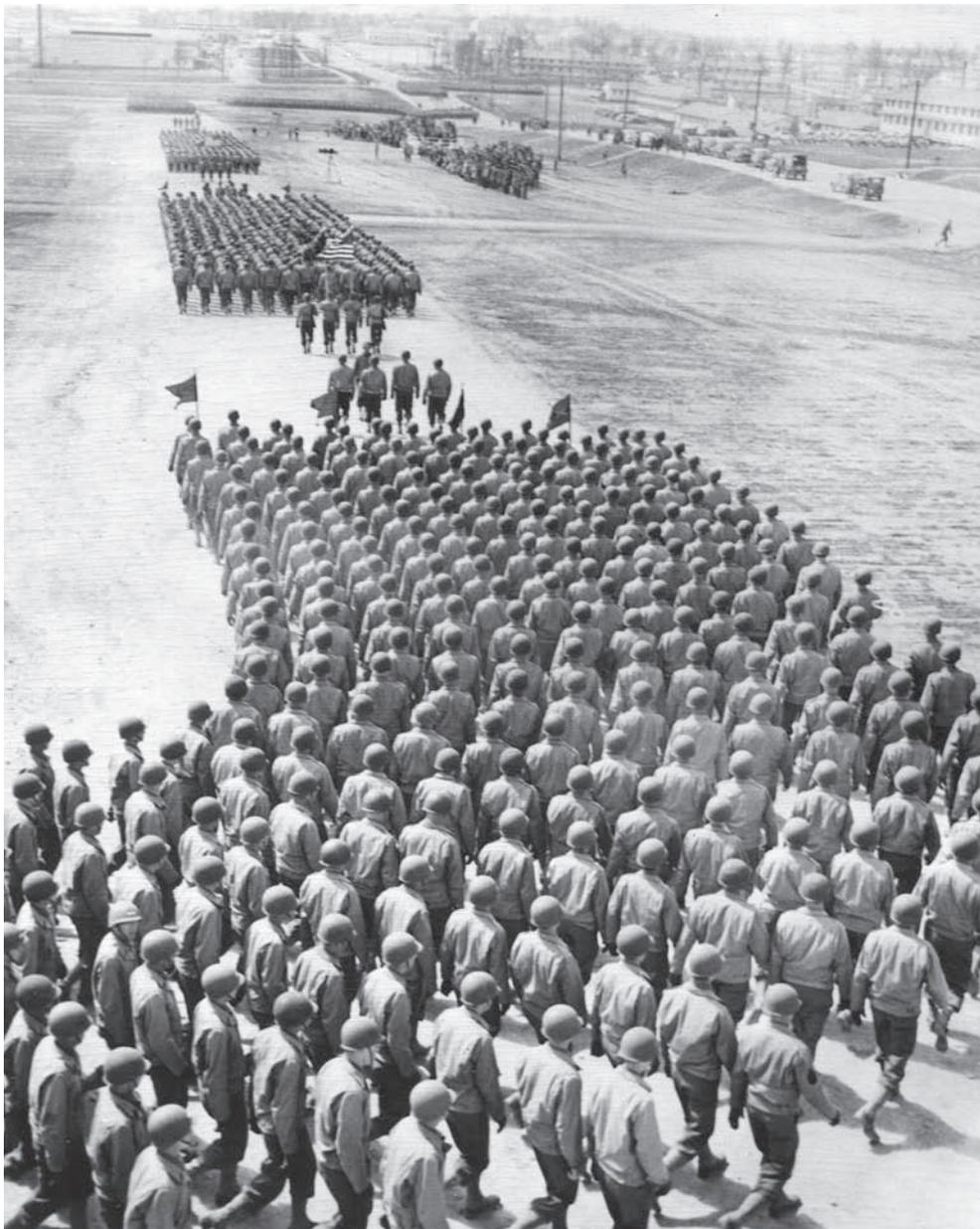
Above The cartoon was drawn by Don Mayes, Arch. Eng., for his 1941 booklet *Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri*, which summarizes the construction phase of the Fort.

Left The spur ended in the middle of the warehouse complex where the matériel was unloaded. Much of the warehouse area survives today at the intersection of the railroad and First Street, near the East Gate. Courtesy of Fort Leonard Wood.

Bottom Changes rippled up the main line due to the construction of the branch railroad. Newburg replaced its original depot (left) with a new one (right) because rail traffic had increased “a thousand fold” on the main line. Courtesy of John Bradbury.



Training Days — 1943



Troops of the new 75th Infantry Division march onto the drill field and pass in review before high military and civilian officials, as part of the ceremonies marking the activation of the division at Fort Leonard Wood. Lieut. Gen. Ben Lear, retiring Commander of the Second Army, welcomed the new organization in the main address of the ceremonies. Acme Photo (4/13/43) courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



A case of personnel confusion loomed on the horizon at Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., with the arrival of the Shaw Twins, Ethel and Doris, from Atlanta, GA. The problem was solved by assigning the girls to offices a mile apart. Acme Photo (8/12/43) courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.



This picture of wall climbing and those on the next page are from a collection of an unknown soldier in 1943. Although not as sharp as many Kodaks from this era, they indicate what was important to the soldier. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

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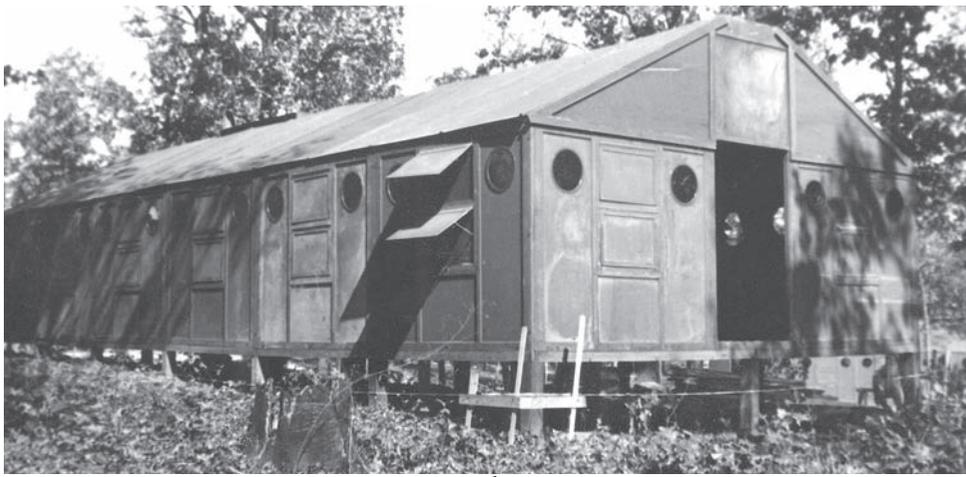
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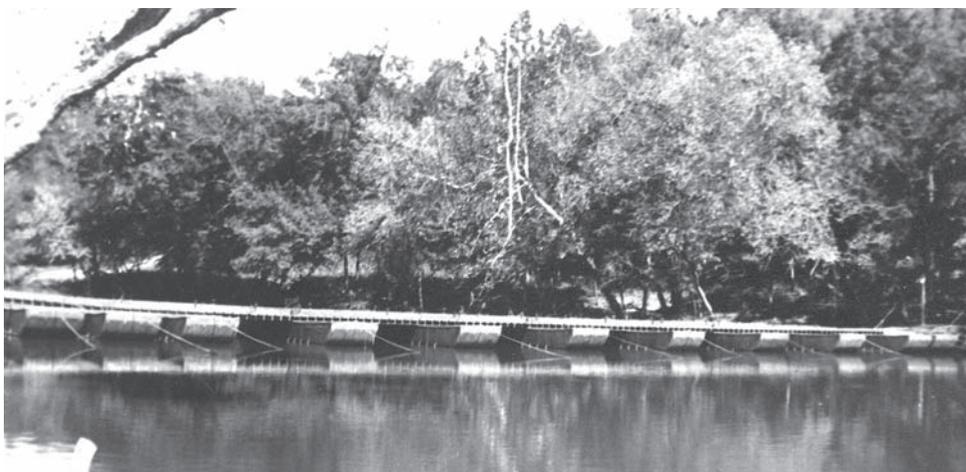
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The snapshots on this page were taken by an unidentified soldier in 1943. 1-Bivouac building. 2-Early morning pontoon bridge building lesson on the river. 3-Completed pontoon bridge on the Big Piney River. 4-Dining room interior. 5-Land trestle bridge. Apparently the soldier worked on this bridge as he had several shots in various stages of construction. 6-Overhead tram bridge. There are other shots of bridges under construction. Bridge building is what engineers do. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

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