

# FORT WOOD'S EARLY DAYS



The story of Fort Leonard Wood's origins is one that has been often told. But following are some vignettes readers may find interesting. They were taken from a December 1944 article in the Pulaski County Democrat that was supplied to us by Joan Quesenberry of Richland.

\*Ground was broken at a ceremony December 3, 1940, attended by a small group of construction and army officials, who braved cold, blustery, snowy weather.

\*In six months, the new installation was ready to train the first soldiers.

\*At the height of the construction, approximately 35,000 workers descended on the new base.

\*During the construction, a sea of mud bogged down trucks and even bulldozers. It was nearly impossible to cross the streets without wearing long boots. The workers constructed wooden catwalks at busy intersections to facilitate pedestrian traffic. When someone wanted to cross a street, he lowered a drawbridge and hurried across. On the other side, he had to raise the drawbridge quickly so that it wouldn't be demolished by an oncoming truck crashing into it.

\*The first military unit to set up at Fort Wood was the Engineer Replacement Training Center, commanded by Brigadier General U. S. Grant the Third.

\*Fort Leonard Wood was the birthdate of the only army division ever activated in Missouri, the 75th

division. The activation ceremony on April 15, 1943, was attended by military and civilian dignitaries from all over the country. The principal speakers were Lieutenant General Ben Lear, who later became Commanding General of the Army Ground Forces in World War II, and Missouri Governor Forrest C. Donnell.



Fort Leonard Wood scene from 1941 of the 7th Corps' area on C Avenue. This postcard was mailed from Waynesville on November 18, 1941. Courtesy of Sue Hansen.



An early scene from Fort Leonard Wood of an unknown date. Postcard inscription reads, "Intersection in Fort. Fort Leonard Wood, Mo." Courtesy of Sue Hansen.