History of Fort Knox

America’s involvement in World War I made it necessary to establish new military installations. In April 1918 the War Department looked to the area of West Point, Kentucky to establish a permanent artillery camp. According to the Louisville Courier, “The West Point range would become the artillery training center of the army.”

On April 6, 1918 the first field artillery units arrived at West Point from Camp Zachary Taylor in Louisville. Additional units making up the Field Artillery Brigade of the 84th Division arrived the following month.

With the number of troops arriving, it was not long before the Army began looking for additional space. That summer the Army leased 20,000 acres of property in the area of Stithton, Kentucky, a small farming community in Hardin County. Stithton was desired for its close proximity to the railroad and for its higher elevation. Under Major W. H. Radcliffe, constructing quartermaster at Camp Knox, construction of buildings began in August of 1918. The “tented” camp at West Point would temporarily remain while permanent construction occurred in Stithton.

The land at Stithton was soon acquisitioned by the Army and more land was acquired from Bullitt and Meade Counties. Many of the houses in the town of Stithton were used for the Army’s purposes. Modest Victorian architecture once occupied by Stithton residents became homes used by Army officers and their families.

St. Patrick’s Catholic Church was utilized as a church and other purposes. (Today, it is the Main Post Chapel and the oldest building on post.) Barracks and warehouses were built to accommodate and support the growing population of Soldiers arriving by train.

Standardized plans were used to build most of these World War I mobilization buildings and identical buildings could be found on most other installations around the country. In this era and locality of the country, horse drawn equipment was still regularly used along with automobiles.

Reflecting its relationship to artillery, the new post was named in honor of General Henry Knox, Chief of Artillery in the Revolutionary War and first Secretary of War. It was World War One and Camp Henry Knox had come into existence as a permanent post for the United States Army.

In September 1918 it was decided to permanently move the artillery camp in West Point to Stithton. The following month the Camp Knox News was founded as the post’s first newspaper. That October, Camp Knox’s Godman Field became the first airfield in Kentucky when it was built for the 29th Aero Squadron.

On November 11, 1918 America celebrated the armistice that ended World War I and construction at Stithton slowed down dramatically. Later that month the first troops were transferred from West Point. Near the end of December, most of the troops there had been moved to the permanent camp at Stithton and the maximum number of troops on post reached a high of 9,000.

Troops returning from overseas were brought to Camp Knox to be discharged from the service over the next year. Much of their equipment was turned in and stored in the warehouses that still remain at Fort Knox.

The Army’s force was reduced in the early 1920s and it was deemed necessary to close the post as a permanent installation in 1922. Although closed as a permanent installation, Camp Knox remained an active training center for the Army. Camp Knox was used by the 5th Corps Area for Reserve Officer training, the National Guard, and Citizen’s Military Training Camps (CMTC). For a brief time, during 1925 to 1928, the area was designated as “Camp Henry Knox National Forest” until two infantry companies were assigned to the post in 1928.

**MECHANIZED CAVALRY HEADQUARTERED AT CAMP KNOX IN 1931**
In the following year the War Department created the mechanized force. Upon the recommendation of Lt. Col. Adna R. Chaffee Jr. and Col. Daniel Van Voorhis, Camp Knox was chosen to be the new headquarters for the Mechanized Cavalry in 1931. The size and terrain of Camp Knox made this a suitable area for such training.

On January 1, 1932 Camp Knox was made a permanent installation once again and from then on has been known as Fort Knox. Two weeks later the 1st Cavalry Regiment, the Army’s oldest mounted unit, arrived at Fort Knox and exchanged its horses for armored combat cars.

To support the newly Mechanized Cavalry, Fort Knox was required to construct housing and support facilities. Designed by the Quartermaster Corps, most of these buildings comprise today’s Fort Knox Historic District.

As Fort Knox was constructed, Mechanized Cavalry established the early doctrine of armored warfare. Maneuvers were held that supported the importance of armored vehicles in modern combat. Other duties were also presented and in 1937 they were called upon to guard gold moving into the Treasury Department’s new depository and assisted during the great flood that ravaged the area.

During the 1930s, Fort Knox was an induction center for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees. Train loads of young men were sent to Fort Knox from West Virginia, Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky. They spent about two weeks at Fort Knox where they received their shots, clothing and were trained. After this induction period was completed, the men were put on trains and sent to camps at various locations around the country.

A number of camps remained at Fort Knox. These camps were assigned such tasks as improving forests, constructing fire breaks, building roads, working in the stone quarry, soil conservation, pest control, cooking, cleaning, and working in the motor pool as mechanics.

As Fort Knox grew as an installation, additional infrastructure was required to accommodate all the new personnel and equipment. Both the CCC and the WPA (Works Progress Administration), another work relief program, assisted Fort Knox in this development.

**ARMORED FORCE HEADQUARTERED AT FORT KNOX FOR WW II, RESPONSIBLE FOR ARMORED FORMATIONS, DOCTRINE, TRAINING**
With the outbreak of World War II in Europe, the American Army prepared with the creation of the Armored Force and headquartered it at Fort Knox in the summer of 1940. It was responsible for establishing armored formations, doctrine, and training in the use of armored vehicles. Selective Service was implemented and thousands of citizen soldiers were ordered to Fort Knox and introduced to the tank. The post was required to undergo a massive building boom and acquisition of land to support these troops.

In October 1940, the Armored Force School and Armored Force Replacement Center were established, training Soldiers in specific areas such as armor tactics, tank gunnery, communications, and maintenance. The United States was thrown into World War II on December 7, 1941 and the Armored Force experienced their first battle casualty the following day. PFC. Robert Brooks, 192nd Tank Battalion, would be honored with having the main parade ground named for him.

In April 1942, Fort Knox served as the location of an important testing location for the Navy. At that time an all wood mock-up of the Landing Ship Tank (LST) well deck was duplicated to allow naval architects to track airflow and test ventilation systems capable of removing poisonous gases created by running tanks and vehicles enclosed in the well deck.

A solution was found and the go-ahead was given for contractors to complete construction on actual LSTs. In all, more than 1,050 such vessels were built during the war. Today the building, located at 1538 Eisenhower Ave., is used by the General George Patton Museum for various purposes. It is one of the few World War II wooden structures remaining on Fort Knox and is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

During World War II, armor made great advancements through the development of new tanks, organization, and training. Equipment and Soldiers benefited from findings made by the Armored Board and Armored Medical Research Laboratory. In 1943 the Armored Force was re-designated the “Armored Command” and within a year was changed to the “Armored Center.”

In 1943 another renaming occurred; the Armored Force Replacement Training Center officially became the Armored Replacement Training Center (ARTC). Here Soldiers received a 17-week course which included instruction in various arms, big tank guns, tank driving and maintenance, chemical warfare and many other subjects. They were introduced to hills “Misery,” “Agony” and ”Heartbreak” before graduating and then sent to divisions, additional schooling, or straight into the various theaters of war.

In May of 1944 the 477th Bombardment Group, a black Army Air Force unit, was briefly stationed at Godman Army Airfield. They came from Selfridge Airfield near Detroit, where black officers were barred from using the officer’s club. The Army moved them to Kentucky in an attempt to avoid further racial conflicts. While at Godman they were allowed to use the officer’s club at the airfield, but not on Fort Knox. The flowing March they were moved to Freeman Field in Indiana. Other World War Two units included the 387th and 391st Bombardment Groups.

**WW II PRISONER OF WAR CAMP ESTABLISHED AT FORT KNOX**
Fort Knox was site of a main POW camp between February 1944 and June 1946. The first POWs to arrive were Italian. In May 1944 they received an opportunity to volunteer for special service units to aid the American Army. While still classified as POWs, they were on an honor system and given more opportunities.

German POWs arrived in June 1944 and had a routine camp life which included work, rules, and recreation. Outdoor and indoor work details were assigned, many times alongside civilian employees. Many civilians and prisoners got along well with one another and some became friends. The German POW camp at Ft. Knox has since been demolished. It was located in the vicinity of Scott Middle School. The former camp soccer field is the only remaining feature of that camp and is now used for American football by students.

A number of Axis prisoners died while at Fort Knox and 18 are buried in the post cemetery. One tragic incident involved the accidental shooting of a number of prisoners and in which two died, Ernst Schlotter and Frederich Wolf.

At the close of World War II there were 16 combat tested armored divisions and approximately sixty-five tank battalions. Armored units had participated in every major theater of operations that Americans had participated in. The Armored Center was inactivated in October 1945 but reestablished over a year later.

In June 1946, Fort Knox Commanding General, Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey was killed in a B-25 crash as it attempted to land at Godman Airfield. He is the highest ranking officer buried in the post cemetery.

In 1947 Army recruits from the Universal Military Training Experimental Unit arrived at Fort Knox to participate in a short-lived experimental program (UMT) that offered extended basic training combined with civilian supervision and discipline. Also that year the 3rd Armored Division was reactivated at Fort Knox and assumed command of the ARTC, which was placed on an inactive status. They would train more than 300,000 Soldiers during their time at Fort Knox.

Under the Army Organization Act of 1950 armor and cavalry were combined to form the Armor Branch. In 1955 the 3rd Armored Division was shipped to Europe and the ARTC was activated to resume training. It was given the new name U.S. Army Training Center (USATCA), Armor, and comprised approximately half of the population at Fort Knox. Soon after the Armored Center and Armored School were officially designated the “Armor Center” and “Armor School.” In 1957 it became the US Army Armor Center.

The Cold War helped secure the Armor Branch’s role in the Army and the Armor Center continued to fulfill the role of producing capable and highly trained armor personnel. By the late 1960s, more than one million trainees had completed one or more training programs in the Fort Knox Training Center since its inception in 1940.

Combat operations in Korea and Vietnam presented new challenges for the branch that differed from those learned during World War Two. Thus, the Armor Center continued its role in the development and evolution of tactics and vehicles for Armor and Cavalry.

In 1981 the Armor Center contributed to the development of the Army’s Airland Battle doctrine, which took advantage of new weaponry to assume an offensive role in Central Europe. Guidelines set forth in this doctrine were applied successfully during the Gulf War in the early 1990s. During this conflict, Fort Knox served as a mobilization center and provided combat ready Soldiers.

With the approaching 21st Century, digital technology dictated another transformation in how armor would conduct itself on the battlefield and a Future Combat System was developed. To assist in this endeavor, the Unit of Action Maneuver Battle Lab was established in 2002. It was during this time that the Stryker Interim Armored Vehicle went through extensive testing. Military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq prompted changes and termination of the program at Fort Knox. However, to support Armor activities, a battle lab was retained.

**2005 BRAC ANNOUNCEMENT SETS STAGE FOR FORT KNOX TRANSITION**
The most recent era of transformation began in 2005 with the recommendations of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission. The Armor Center and School are relocating to Fort Benning to merge with the Infantry Center and form the Maneuver Center of Excellence. In addition, the Armor School is relocating to Fort Benning and, as with the Infantry School, will be subordinate to the MCoE.

Relocating to Fort Knox are Human Resources Command, Army Accessions Command and Cadet Command to join Recruiting Command information of the Human Resource Center of Excellence.

Additional units relocating to Fort Knox include the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division; Army Reserve Readiness Training Center; 100th Division Headquarters; and the 3rd Sustainment Command (Expeditionary).

Fort Knox served as the “Home of Cavalry and Armor” for seven decades and is now embracing its new array of missions brought about by the BRAC transformations.

As the Army’s Human Resource Center of Excellence, Fort Knox is now positioned to continue its central role in the front ranks of military installations in the United States, recruiting, training and supporting warfighters for the challenges of the twenty-first century. Strength Starts Here!