

## Camp Bowie

Camp Bowie, located at Brownwood in Central Texas, was a military training center during World War II. The campsite was one and one half miles south and southwest of the city limits of Brownwood, Texas. During the years of 1940-1946 it grew to be one of the largest training centers in Texas, through which a quarter of a million men passed. It was named in honor of the Texas patriot James Bowie, and was the third camp in Texas to be so named. The previous World War I camp was three miles north of downtown Fort Worth. The Republic of Texas army camp of 1837 was called Camp Bowie.

In 1940, the war situation in Europe caused the U. S. Congress to determine that it was time to strengthen the defense system. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was given the power to mobilize the National Guard units. The 36th Division of the Texas National Guard unit arrived at Camp Bowie in mid-December for their year's training. Before the year of training ended, war had been declared.

On September 19, 1940 the War Department announced that a camp would be built at Brownwood. Work began at the campsite on September 27, 1940. The Camp was the first major defense project in the state and there was no scarcity of labor when the building work began. At one time more than 15,000 men were employed on the project.

The land was to be leased from the land owners but this proved to be unsatisfactory. On October 1, 1942 the War Department became the owner of 123,000 acres of land in Brown and Mills Counties. The original plan was for a 2,000 acre campsite, 8,000 acres for the infantry training, 28,000 acres for maneuvers grounds and 23,000 acres for artillery range. Before the War ended the campsite encompassed 5,000 acres, and approximately 118,000 acres was used as the training grounds.

There were eight divisions trained at Bowie, and many other battalions, regiments, and companies came for a short time to use the training grounds. Medical companies, MP companies, and others were here to learn how to survive during the War. During the War Days at least 30,000 men were at Bowie for training and at one time the population was 60,000 men.

The first German Prisoners of War arrived at Bowie in August of 1943. Most of the men were members of Field Marshall Erwin Rommel's one proud Afrika Corps. When they got settled at Camp Bowie the 2,700 men were well behaved. The men worked at jobs on the Camp and became day laborers for the farmers and ranchers in Central Texas. They raised their own vegetables and had their own burial grounds near the Jordan Springs Cemetery.

On August 1, 1946 the War Department notified Texas members of Congress that the Camp had been declared "surplus". The Civilian War Assets Administration was to take charge and began the distribution of the land and buildings.

The Brownwood Industrial Foundation was able to purchase a portion of the prime property, using the existing infrastructure in their plan for the creation of an industrial park. The Camp Bowie Industrial Park became the home of our major industries in the 1960's and 1970's. The

movement has continued and Brownwood has grown a solid base of small, medium and large industries in the past decades.