

CALHOUN COUNTY WORLD WAR II PARTICIPATION

I. CONTEXT

When the United States went to war in December of 1941, Calhoun County was involved in farming, ranching, and commercial seafood. Residents did not really think they would be involved in any way except through participation in the rationing of vital goods, growing victory gardens, investing in Government Bonds, and sending young men to battle.[1] Calhoun County's five hundred miles of navigable shoreline [2] did not go unnoticed by the United States Government. As time went by, Calhoun County became a party to the national effort to keep our country safe, to contribute to the actual effort of fighting espionage, to train both artillery soldiers and pilots, and to participate in everything that helped the war effort.[3]

II. OVERVIEW

Calhoun County learned ships were being sunk in the Gulf of Mexico by German U Boats. The seriousness of the situation was brought home with the sinking of a ship within sight of Port O'Connor, Calhoun County. The cargo was washed ashore on Matagorda and salvaged by local citizens in the coastal areas. The Military established a protective watch along the Gulf Coast. [4] The whole area was under the supervision and control of the United States Army Air Force (USAAF).[5] First private citizens began regular and constant patrolling of the beaches, driving up

and down Matagorda Island in a jeep.[6] The Army fears were not unfounded. One night on Matagorda, the walking guard walked up on Germans coming ashore in a life boat and took them prisoners. The patrols were necessary; the threat real.[7]

In November 1940, some 19,000 acres on the northeast end of Matagorda Island were condemned and taken for military purposes by the U.S. Government to establish a temporary training facility for the World War II Era. The owners were given ten days to remove their belongings.[8] A base was established. Bags of flour were used to train the airplane pilots to drop bombs and shoot targets.[9]

During that time, Port Lavaca had gotten its first causeway across Lavaca Bay connecting it with the Olivia community and the Gulf Coast region. It came as quite a shock when there was an attempt to burn the causeway. The FBI was called in and determined it was espionage. [10]

The San Antonio Military decided to put in a surveillance system in our county with observation towers, one located in Port Lavaca, and one located across the bay in Olivia. Each tower was equipped with a telephone that had a direct line to San Antonio headquarters. Private citizens volunteered and learned to identify plane types and report every airplane that flew within seeing distance. [11]

By July 1941, the Army had expanded Camp Hulén operations with a firing range at Magnolia Beach and Indianola. Camp Indianola served as an anti aircraft target practice area using remote control drones for practice because the surrounding bays

provided a safe range for target practice. The troops were sent to the two Battalion Camps between Magnolia Beach and Indianola to be organized into Battalions. After final training, they were sent overseas as a combat ready Battalion.[12] The Indianola Battalion Camp was located along North Ocean Drive. The Miller's Point Battalion Camp was East and north of HW 316. A Tower at Olivia was one of at least three observation towers built for the Well Point area firing positions.[13] Olivia had both a civilian and Camp Hulen observation tower; each used for a different reason.

Marge Miller Jacks recalls Camp Hulen taking over their property, Miller's Point, soon after Pearl Harbor in 1943. 'Many soldiers were stationed just down the beach from our property. Daddy got a job helping to build the camp. They laid concrete foundations and built a Mess Hall, Infirmary, PX, and barracks. It was determined it would be safer if there were no civilians close to the firing range. Our family relocated to Port Lavaca. After the storm of 45, the Army returned the property to Daddy in 1945,[14]

Curtis Foester Sr. lived two miles from Magnolia Beach. [15] His ranching business surrounded Camp Indianola. His son, Curtis Foester, Jr. often went with his father to Camp Indianola.

On January 14, 2010, Curtis gave an oral interview at the Calhoun County Museum on the soldier's conditions and the equipment used for training at Camp Indianola. He and his father were first to return to Camp Indianola after the 1945 Hurricane. He still remembers the car covered with shell up to its windows and the total camp destruction.[16]

III. SIGNIFICANCE

The Port Lavaca Wave, January 9, 1941, reports that Texas coastal towns are fighting to prevent the use of the Texas Gulf Coast Water as a bombing range for Army air Corps. Because of the close location to Camp Hulen, that did not happen in Calhoun County. In addition, The State Highway Commission approved money for a road from Port Lavaca to Indianola as listed in the Port Lavaca Wave, January 23, 1941. The Port O Connor road was also developed. Some individuals received lease money for land as reported in the Port Lavaca Wave, April 24, 1941; while three families on Matagorda Island never received their property back. Individual business developed such as a taxi service between Camp Indianola and Port Lavaca by Miss Beulah Marion Marshall.[\[17\]](#)

Calhoun County became a party to the national effort to keep our country safe, to contribute to the actual effort of fighting espionage, and to participate in everything that helped the war effort. Our boys who “Sacrificed All “ are listed at the Calhoun County Courthouse. They are remembered by their friends and families. A quiet fishing and farming county became energized and supportive of the military conflict which threatened our nation’s existence.

- [1] Jewell Fisher, "Remembering WWII", Calhoun County Museum, January 14, 2010, pg 1.
- [2] Rockport.net, Coastal Bend Texas, Calhoun County-Port Lavaca, Texas
- [3] Jewell Fisher, pg. 1
- [4] Jewell Fisher, pg. 2.
- [5] www.facebook.com, "Texas World War II Army Airfields", pg 1.
- [6] Mary Belle Meitzen, Interview with Lewis Madden, January 16, 2010, Material available at Calhoun County Museum.
- [7] Jewell Fisher, pg., 2.
- [8] <http://www.matagordaisland.com/history.htm>, p.1, May 17, 2008
- [9] Lewis Madden interview
- [10] Jewell Fisher, pg. 2
- [11] Mary Belle Meitzen, interview with Gertrude Damstron Ramsey, April 14, 2010, script available at Calhoun County Museum
- [12] Mary Belle Meitzen email: Tom Hall (thail@computron.net) to Hunt, Jeff W. CIV(Jeff.hunt@us.army.mil), May 11, 2010 "Olivia Observation Tower (Unclassified), p.1. Tom Hail is the Aviation Historian for the Air National Guard.
- [13] Mary Belle Meitzen email: Tom Hall p.2.
- [14] Marge Miller Jacks, "Millers Point at Old Town Indianola", Calhoun County Historical Commission, January 16, 2010.
- [15] Curtis Foester Jr., Camp Indianola and Other Stories, (2011), pg.7.
- [16] Curtis Foester Jr. pg. 13.
- [17] Mary Belle Meitzen, Oral Interview with J.V. Hayes, January 14, 2010, Calhoun County Museum.