

## **Camp Tyson and Calloway County**

1942 – 1947

In her 2016 book, *As If They Were Ours: The Story of Camp Tyson America's Only Barrage Balloon Training Facility*, author Shannon McFarlin explained how Camp Tyson in nearby Henry County, Tennessee, developed. It rapidly grew to over 400 buildings, and by the end of WW2, there were over 25,000 soldiers, including the Army Nurse Corps. Of special significance, Camp Tyson was home to the 320th Anti-Aircraft Barrage Balloon Battalion, the only all-African American unit to participate in the D-Day invasion.

In March 1942, the Murray Woman's Club conducted a census and discovered 26 military families were living in Murray. With warm hospitality, the people of Calloway County rolled out the red carpet of welcome.

The Calloway Victory Book Campaign committee soon organized a community book drive. The group collected new and used books to send to army camps and ships. By March 19, the volunteers had collected 953 books for Camp Tyson and the soldiers at Fort Knox.

Several churches and civic organizations participated in this and other drives, including a request to furnish a recreational room for the soldiers at the camp. Both the Murray Woman's Club and the Grove, located at 126 Woodmen Circle, contributed cash and furniture.

On March 28, 1942, the Murray State Tri Sigma Sorority hosted a formal dance party for 300 soldiers at Camp Tyson. Billy Shelton and his orchestra provided the music.

The following day, a huge rally was held in the college stadium, organized by the Calloway County Civilian Defense Committee. More than 1,500 were in attendance as a campaign was launched to sell U. S. Defense Bonds and Stamps in the county.

On April 6, Camp Tyson reciprocated by hosting an Army Day open house. This event gave civilians an opportunity to see the daily duties of the soldiers, and the balloons were presented aloft as they would be during an air raid.

In April 1945, officials learned that the camp would close. Locals were appalled by the manner in which buildings were either sold for scrap or plowed under. Caches of food and inventory – which could have been utilized by residents – were instead buried on the grounds. In tough economic times, many saw these actions as wasteful.

Hazel resident, Claude Barber White, Sr., was hired as an overseer towards the end of the camp's existence. His daughter Bennye Phillips recalled, "They were just dumping things out over there. My father really didn't like that, and he salvaged as much as he could."

Another Calloway County family benefited from this salvage effort. Randy Patterson explained, "My parents were always proud to show off the hardwood flooring they were able to install from the remnants of wood from Camp Tyson."

Late in the War, Camp Tyson was used as a prisoner of war camp for Italian and German soldiers. In 1947, the H. C. Spinks Clay Company purchased approximately 1,300 acres for a clay business and cattle ranch.

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Ledger and Times, March 5, 1942, March 12, 1942, March 19, 1942, April 2, and April. 1942.

*As If They Were Ours: The Story of Camp Tyson America's Only Barrage Balloon Training Facility*, Shannon McFarlin, Merriam Press, 2016

*Images of America: Camp Tyson*. Shannon McFarlin, Arcadia Publishing, 2017