

MILITARY ASPECT OF THE OLD SPANISH TRAIL

During the 1920s the Old Spanish Trail auto highway was built across the southern U.S. from mission to mission, fort to fort, connecting military facilities. In 2004, the Old Spanish Trail Centennial Celebration Association began looking for someone to gather information about historic OST military posts and those established in the century since OST founding; such as Pershing's first U. S. military use of mechanized vehicles in the punitive expedition into Mexico.

Many aviation history newspaper articles appeared during the June 1930 opening of Randolph Air Force Base. The San Antonio business community involved in the successful Old Spanish Trail auto highway also worked tirelessly to place RAFB on the OST in eastern Bexar County. On OST Texas Tourist Loop #10: "Between Bandera and Center Point is old Camp Verde, where, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War, his experiment in using camels for this country was tried out."

The highway, today known as Interstate 10, was first conceived as the Old Spanish Trail in 1915 to connect St. Augustine, FL to New Orleans. By 1919 the concept had grown from Florida to California connecting historic missions and forts. The Great World War slowed highway design and construction funding. Florida paving went well. Texas with one third of the mileage moved quickly. The difficult sea walls and bridges over rivers with two-thirds of the drainage of the US proved too expensive for the gulf counties and states. Federal help was sought. General John Pershing's placing of the OST on his 1922 U. S. military route map assured funding for a continuous gulf and borderlands highway. Expensive bridges and seawalls began to be funded.

The following are excerpts from a short OST Association article, "Military Pre-eminence of the Old Spanish Trail System," compiled Jan. 1, 1923.

No highway in the New World and probably no highway it's length in the whole world has so many military, naval and air establishments as the Old Spanish Trail.

Jacksonville - U. S. rifle range.

Pensacola - Important naval base. Naval air base. Coast defense. Ft. Barrancas; Ft. McRae; Ft. Pickins

Mobile - Coast defense. Ft. Morgan; Ft. Gaines

New Orleans - Great supply depots. Jackson Barracks; Ft. Jackson; Ft. St. Philip.

Galveston - Coast defense. Ft. Crockett; Ft. San Jacinto; Ft. Travis.

Houston - Ellington Flying Field. Important Air Service Station. pursuit group; aero squadrons; signal corps; bombing school and various detachments.

San Antonio - Greatest military base in the United States. All arms of the service with extensive military supplies and properties. Ft. San Houston, permanent army post extensively equipped, headq. 8th Corps Area, headq. famous Second Division; Kelly Flying Field Nos. 1 and 2; Brooks Field, school for balloons and airplanes; Camp Normoyle, motor repair shops; San Antonio Arsenal; Quartermaster Depots; Base Hospitals; Camp Bullis, target practice; Camp Stanley, field artillery target range; 90th Division; Non-divisional organized headquarters.

El Paso - Important borderland base. Fort Bliss, general military headquarters; Camp Owen Biene; air service; William Beaumont General Hospital.

Columbus - Infantry camp with service detachments.

Fort Huachuca - Cavalry; infantry; pack train and detachments.

Nogales - Camp Stephen D. Little. Infantry; pack train and other detachments.

Tucson - Military rifle range.

San Diego - Ft. Rosencrans. Headq. coast defense detachments. Rockwell Field, army flying; North Island; naval flying field.

That list did not include early French and Spanish coastal and U. S. frontier forts: St. Augustine, Camp Verde, Ft. Stockton, Camp Furlong, and many more. Or later installations such as Gulfport's U. S. Navy Construction Battalion 1942 to 1946 site and the National D-Day Museum in New Orleans.

The military aspect of the building of the Old Spanish Trail auto highway will add greatly to the centennial celebration of the tremendous achievement of early road building pioneers.

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