

*CAMP BLANDING  
MILITARY RESERVATION  
DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY*

by HEADQUARTERS  
DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS  
STATE OF FLORIDA  
OFFICE OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL  
STATE ARSENAL, ST. AUGUSTINE, FLORIDA 32084

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CIRCULAR 25-2*

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## 1. DESCRIPTION OF CAMP BLANDING

The Camp Blanding Military Reservation is situated in the west side of Clay County, Florida, astride what is commonly known as the “Ridge or backbone of the state”, approximately 37 miles southwest of Jacksonville and approximately 10 miles east of Starke. The 72,397 acres comprising this reservation cover a wide range of forest and soil types with an undulating terrain – its elevation ranging from 50’ to 250’ above sea level, with drainage generally to the north and east. Contained in this acreage are six (6) large lakes and an equal number of smaller

ponds, of approximately 2,500 acres. In addition, there are approximately three (3) miles of frontage on Kingsley Lake--the remaining 2 1/2 miles of this frontage being in private ownership. Of the total acreage, 12,400 acres have been leased for mining heavy minerals and 3,600 acres are used for cantonment area, firing ranges and special training area. This leaves about 51,500 acres of forest land for military tactical training and practice of forestry. It should be noted that this 51,500 acres and a part of the mining area are included as a state game management area and are seasonally open to public hunting. In an effort to further the "multiple use" concept of land management, three of the larger lakes in the southern portion of the reservation have been designated as "fish management area" and have been opened to public fishing. Camp Blanding is owned by, and under the control of, the State Armory Board. Permanent facilities for housing troops during Annual Training and MUTA weekends are increasing steadily. Upon completion of the current long-range construction program, facilities will be available to house a Reinforced Infantry Brigade. In addition to the above facilities there are a number of battalion administrative bivouac areas. Camp Blanding is noted for its excellent firing ranges. Ranges are available to fire all weapons organic to an Infantry Brigade with the exception of Field Artillery. In addition, a parachute drop zone and an airfield, complete with operations headquarters and air traffic control tower have expanded the training facility of the post. The U.S. Navy maintains a bombing and strafing target in the southern portion of the reservation by special agreement with the Armory Board. Recreation has not been overlooked. Splendid picnic and boat launching areas have been developed and maintained for officer and enlisted personnel and a most attractive camping area with generally associated facilities has been provided for the use of all Florida National Guard personnel.

## 2. HISTORY OF CAMP BLANDING

a. Prior to 1939 there was a National Guard camp on the St. Johns River south of Jacksonville, known as Camp Foster.

Troops from the State of Florida and other southeastern states utilized this camp for Annual Field Training. The area was owned in part by the Armory Board, State of Florida and in part by the United States of America, for the use of the War Department. The Navy was desirous of establishing a Naval Air Station at this location and the Duval County Air Base Authority was forced at Jacksonville to purchase the necessary property for this installation. The War Department agreed to release their portion of Camp Foster to the Navy Department provided the Armory Board of the State of Florida was compensated in the amount of four hundred thousand (400,000) dollars plus salvage rights for the property owned by them at Camp Foster. In mid 1939, the transaction was accomplished and the Armory Board selected, in Clay County, a tract consisting of 30,000 acres, to be utilized as a camp and training site for the Florida National Guard. An installation was constructed on this site to accommodate one (1) brigade, consisting of permanent type administration buildings, mess halls, latrines and warehouses. The National Guard Officers Association of Florida recommended to the Armory Board that the site be named "Camp Albert H. Blanding," in honor of General Albert H. Blanding. This recommendation was implemented and the name was established and accepted by the War Department, the camp being continuously known as "Camp Blanding" throughout the war period and to this date.

b. In 1940, the Army, faced with mobilization, leased from the Armory Board, the entire site and constructed a cantonment-type camp designed to accommodate two (2) divisions, a station complement, and a large hospital. These facilities were further expanded during the war and a prisoner-of-war compound was added together with other installations. During the course of World War II, it was utilized as an infantry replacement training center and induction center and later as a separation center. During this period, the Federal Government purchased an additional 40,000 acres contiguous to the original site for the establishment of ranges and training areas and leased an additional 100,000 acres for maneuver purposes.

c. Subsequent to World War II, the leases covering the maneuver rights were cancelled and the 40,000 acres owned by the Federal Government was declared surplus by the Department of the Army. The Adjutant General obtained a Right of Entry to retain this land for the training of troops. The Federal Government sold most of the installations constructed by them and the Armory Board retained certain installations in lieu of restoration.

d. In 1955, through the efforts of the Adjutant General, a bill was passed in Congress (Public Law 493, 83d Congress), titled "An Act to Consolidate Ownership and to Perpetuate Camp Blanding as a Military Installation." As a result of this legislation, the Federal Government deeded the 40,000 acres owned by them to the Armory Board. This conveyance was made after and subject to an agreement dated 24 January 1955, between the Armory Board and the United States of America, covering the use of Camp Blanding, the rights of exploitation of minerals and timber products and the use of revenue derived therefrom.

### 3. BIOGRAPHY OF GENERAL BLANDING

a. Lieutenant General Albert Hazen Blanding (Retired) was born in Lyons, Iowa, November 8, 1876, died in Bartow, Florida, 86 December 1970, at the age of ninety-four years. He moved to Florida in 1878, attended elementary schools and graduated number one in his class from the East Florida Seminary (now University of Florida) in 1894 with the rank of Cadet 1st Lieutenant.

b. He enlisted in the Gainesville Guards, Florida State Troops in 1895, and served in that organization in the enlisted ranks until its disbandment prior to the Spanish-American War.

c. General Blanding was commissioned Captain in the Florida National Guard in September 1899, and served as the Regiment 21 Adjutant of the 2d Florida Infantry. He was promoted to Major in 1906. Lieutenant Colonel in 1908, and to Colonel in 1909. He commanded the 2d Florida Infantry during Mexican border service from June 1316, to March 1917. In August

1917, Colonel Blanding was mustered into Federal Service and elevated to the rank of Brigadier General by President Woodrow Wilson. General Blanding served in both American and French Divisions and saw action in Alsace, Lorraine, Vierstraate Ridge, Wycheate Ridge, the Hindenburg Line, Battle of Celle River and Pont A Mousson and at the end of World War I, commanded the 53d Brigade of the 27th Infantry Division. He returned to the United States in 1919. In recognition of his accomplishments during that period he was cited by the 27th Division and General Headquarters of Army Expeditionary Forces and was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. The State of Florida recognized his outstanding war record and awarded him the Florida Cross. On October 15, 1924, he assumed command of the 31st Infantry Division, Florida National Guard and was appointed Major General.

d. The Congress of the United States confirmed his appointment by President Franklin D. Roosevelt as Chief of the National Guard Bureau in January 1936. He served the office with distinction until January 1940, and retained command of the 31st Infantry Division during that period. He participated in the Louisiana maneuvers with the 31st Infantry Division during August 1940; retired from the Florida National Guard on November 9, 1940, and was promoted to Lieutenant General, retired.

e. Although no longer in the active military service, General Blanding continued his service to the state and nation during World War II. He was the Military Advisor to Governor Spessard L. Holland and was the coordinating Director of Action Division of the State Defense Council of Florida. He served as a member of the Everglades National Park Commission and was instrumental in the successful implementation of the project which established the Everglades National Park. He was one of the leaders in organizing the American Legion, Department of Florida, following World War I.

f. General Blanding was recognized as one of Florida's foremost military personalities. When the State Armory Board acquired a training area in Clay County, Florida, the tract was named Camp Albert H. Blanding in his honor.

*THE EVENT*

*PETRIFIED LIGHTNING FROM CENTRAL FLORIDA*

A PROJECT BY ALLAN MCCOLLUM

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA

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