



## Fort Hood, Texas

*...The Great H*

### A brief History of Killeen Base; Now West Fort Hood

Editor's note: Fort Hood had a role in atomic weapons storage. This story is compiled from several previous stories in the Sentinel.

In 1948 a mysterious military post became a quiet part of the Killeen-Copperas Cove area economy that was known as Site Baker or Killeen Base .

This project originally named "project 76" by the War Department used Black & Veatch Consulting engineers to do the initial plans and drawings. After 3 revisions to the plans, approval by the War Department was granted.

The actual construction of Killeen base began in the spring of 1947. Miners were employed to dig tunnels in to the mountainside. These workers from coal mining parts of the country, neither knew what the tunnels were to be used for, and did not know where they were doing the construction.

The 7,000 acre base surrounded on three sides by then Camp Hood had the tunnels carved out of solid rock, heavily reinforced with concrete, and sealed off with heavy steel doors.

The first concrete was poured in the fall of 1947. The construction of the tunnels, for ultra secret reasons, was not without its problems.

According to a retired construction contractor that worked on the project. The major problem encountered during construction was water gushing from underground.

The tunnel corridors are each 20 feet wide with 30 foot ceilings that penetrate to a depth of 80 plus feet below the mountain top.

Interspersed through out the complex are rooms of various sizes that are still equipped with steel rails for overhead cranes.

Killeen Base was one of seven atomic weapons storage facilities located in five states, and the only one operated by the U.S. Army.

Officially, Killeen Base was a Department of Defense Classified Ordnance Storage Facility, manned by Army personnel under the direction of the Defense Atomic Support Agency with Headquarters in Washington D.C.

Security was extremely tight at the base producing many stories and rumors about what went on inside. Reportedly a couple of deer hunters who accidentally strayed onto the reservation were picked up by guards, whisked away to headquarters, and held incommunicado until an investigation showed they were not communist spies.



The Santa-Fe railroad switched cars on a mile long spur only under the cover of darkness. Heavily armed guards took over the train from switchmen at the railhead.

There were reports from people in the surrounding communities of planes disappearing with their mysterious cargo, inside an underground cavern.

The base was so ringed with security forces that any hour of the day or night that guards might pop up from the ground — like hidden targets to challenge man or beast. The concrete watch towers are still intact along the original inner parameter.

Among the most bizarre stories that flourished in the civilian communities was that Killeen Base had a giant underground area that airplanes could land. And there's the story of the underground submarine refueling base, with an underground waterway to the Gulf of Mexico.

At the same time Killeen Base was being constructed, the Air Force began building an airfield adjacent to Killeen Base in support of the Defense Atomic Support Agency. The aviation facilities located on 12,000 acres included a 10,000 by 200 foot hard surface runway built to handle classes of military aircraft including the Boeing B-52 Stratofortress.

A total underground fuel storage area for more than one million gallons, and 1,186,000 square feet of aircraft parking ramp.

Designated Robert Gray Air force Base after Robert Manning Gray , a native son of Killeen the base was built in four phases, with the last phase of the project completed in 1972, well after the Army took control.

In 1960 Killeen Base employed Approximately 800 personnel, including civilians, but not including Gray Air force Base.

In December 1960 the Air force announced a cutbacks in personnel at Gray by 350 men. Leaving 71 military personnel to man the airfield. It was June 1963 when the Air force turned over complete control of the base to the Army.

Early in 1969 it was announced by the Department of Defense that operations at Killeen Base would be closed, and the base would be deactivated no later than December 31 ,1969.

This action was part of a DOD economy measure. Gray Army Airfield was not to be affected by the deactivation.

Requests were made to Washington officials to re study the closing of Killeen Base , but the process continued on schedule. Fort Hood took over administrative control of housing and firefighting facilities at Killeen Base.

In August of 1969 rumors in the adjacent communities circulated that some kind of test center would be moving to Killeen Base, thereby keeping the post active.

By the end of August the rumors were confirmed that HQ (MASSTERS) Mobile Army Sensor System Test and Evaluation Review System would indeed be the new tenant. Their mission would be to test night visual devices and target acquisition equipment.

The totally new organization had top priority on almost everything — from supplies to personnel.

The only assault helicopter company in the U.S. at that time (The 181st Assault Helicopter Company) had the sole mission of supporting project MASSTERS.

Residents from Belton to Lampasas experienced more than one year of "UFO sightings" with strange lights at night.

For the testers it was reverse schedules — sleeping during the day and flying at night.

In addition it was announced that Killeen Base would be known as West Ft. Hood and that it would be home of associated troops elements

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and other III Corps units.

On the day following the announcement the super secret military installation became an open post.

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