



Camp Cooke and Vandenberg Air Force Base, 1941-1966

From Armor and Infantry Training to Space and Missile Launches

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About the Book

During World War II, hundreds of military training installations were built throughout the United States to prepare servicemen for the rigors of overseas combat. One such installation was Camp Cooke in California, which since 1957 has become an internationally recognized missile and rocket base renamed Vandenberg Air Force Base.

This book examines the history of the camp, starting with its construction in the early years of the war. Established some 150 miles north of Los Angeles, Cooke was designed for armored divisions, but by the end of the war hundreds of other specialized organizations also trained at the camp. The camp also supported many USO clubs and attracted some of Hollywood's leading entertainers as well as many more from radio and stage.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, Cooke supported Army National Guard and reserve units. Its large 1,350-bed hospital also cared for war evacuees and Army medical cases from other parts of the globe. When it became an Air Force base, America's first spy satellite program, known as Corona (code-named Discoverer), was conducted from there. The intelligence data collected from these missions exploded the myth of a "missile gap" with the Soviet Union. At the height of the Cold War, America's first ICBM missile equipped with a nuclear warhead was based at Vandenberg. Among the high-profile visitors to Vandenberg was President John F. Kennedy who witnessed the launch of an Atlas missile.

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