



U.S. ARMY

CASTNER RANGE
NATIONAL MONUMENT

Fact Sheet



Castner Range Military History

Located on the eastern slope of the Franklin Mountains on Fort Bliss in northeastern El Paso, Texas, the Castner Range National Monument protects 6,672 acres of Chihuahuan Desert landscape. Established on March 21, 2023, Castner Range National Monument blankets a swath of the desert floor with creosote, yellow poppies, sand prickly pear cacti, and many other native flora. Burrowing owls and horned lizards, along with various mammal, reptile, and bird species, share this biologically diverse semi-arid environment.

The acquisition of land that later became the National Monument began late in the four-year-long tenure of Brig. Gen. Joseph Compton Castner as Post Commander at Fort Bliss. Shortly before his departure in 1926 to assume command of

American troops in China, Brig. Gen. Castner had advised the War Department of the need to expand the overall land holdings at Fort Bliss for training purposes. "When the post is finally completed," he stated to the *El Paso Herald*, "and the new land deal which I managed is in operation, this post will be

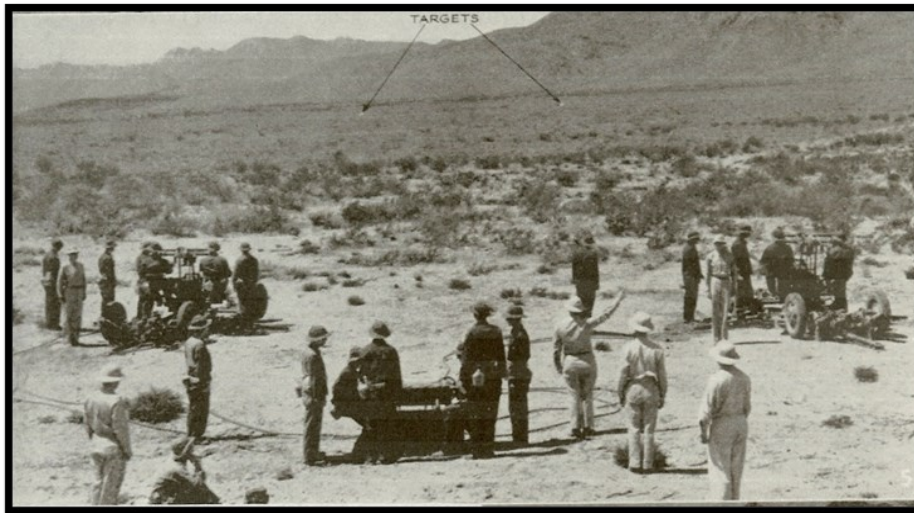
one of the greatest in the Army."

The land deal Gen. Castner alluded to eventually became the sites for Biggs Army Airfield and the artillery range that later was named in his honor. Small arms training and light artillery exercises began on Castner Range in 1926. Located about three miles northwest of the post, the range was distant from residential neighborhoods on the east slope of the Franklin Mountains. Throughout the late 1920s and 1930s, soldiers trained with Stokes mortar shells, eight-inch coast artillery rounds, and

many types and calibers of field and air defense artillery on Castner Range. Beginning in 1932, Fort Bliss authorities routinely published notices in the local newspapers of small-arms and machine gun training to warn the public, an initial sign that the firing

range's proximity to El Paso presented some safety concerns.

In August of 1938, the 1st Cavalry Division, based at Fort Bliss from 1921 to 1943, conducted maneuvers across a zone of operations stretching from the southern point of the Organ Mountains



Moving Target Range on Castner Range, circa 1941. Photo courtesy Fort Bliss Museum.



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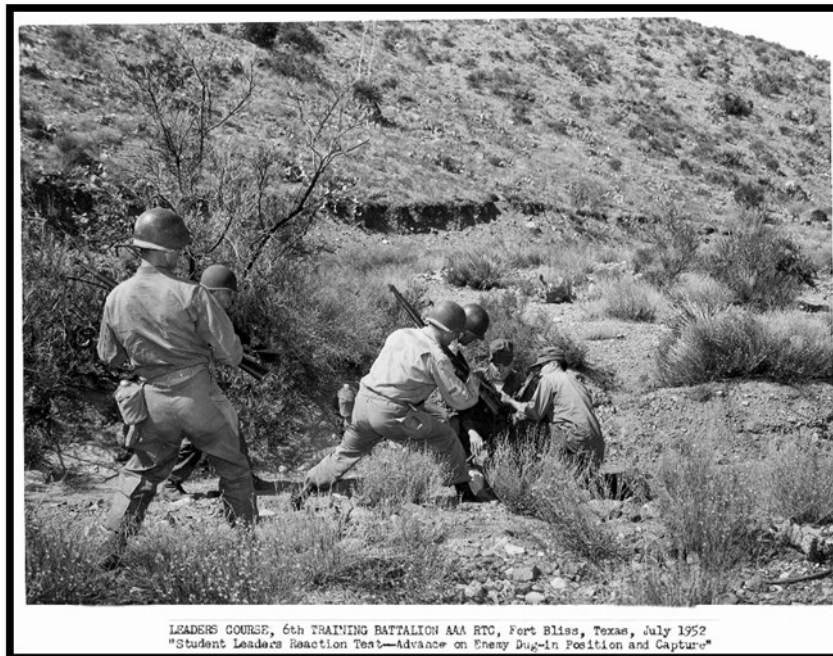
near Webb Gap and Anthony Gap, eastward toward Newman, New Mexico; for these maneuvers, Castner Range served as a staging area for troops and munitions. Soldiers of the 1st Cavalry successfully applied the tactics learned during the 1938 maneuvers and at Castner Range upon their deployment to the Pacific Theater in 1943. Machine gun training on the range continued throughout the Second World War before transitioning toward a revised training purpose to meet America's security demands in the early Cold War era.

In 1945, when Fort Bliss was designated as the home of the U.S. Army's first anti-aircraft guided missile battalion, training exercises on Castner Range supported this new mission. Three years later, the Army established the First Guided Missile Brigade, marking a new era of modern guided-missile warfare, which extended Castner Range's usefulness as a training ground. With greater emphasis placed on guided missiles, the range's acreage and proximity to El Paso hindered training exercises. Following the Second World War, El Paso experienced

tremendous growth, and as new streets and subdivisions encroached northward toward Fort Bliss and beyond, a land-use dilemma slowly emerged.

In the 1950s and 1960s, training exercises were scaled back on Castner Range. Small-arms firing and light artillery practice were replaced with search-and-destroy mission exercises frequently used in the Vietnam War. A mock Vietnamese village was constructed on Castner Range for this purpose, yet in 1966 the range was deactivated for live ammunition training. The expansion of U.S. Highway

54 and the construction of Loop 375 (Woodrow Bean/Transmountain Road) aided the city's growth, and the former firing range was quarantined due to the potential amount of unexploded ordnance. For five decades, the desert environment encompassed by Castner Range has thrived due to very low impacts by people and their activities. Now, this former firing range provides wildlife habitat and open space while acknowledging its military heritage — a worthy legacy for Castner Range National Monument.



LEADERS COURSE, 6th TRAINING BATTALION AAA RTC, Fort Bliss, Texas, July 1952
"Student Leaders Reaction Test—Advance on Enemy Dug-in Position and Capture"

Military training, July 1952. Photo courtesy Fort Bliss Museum.