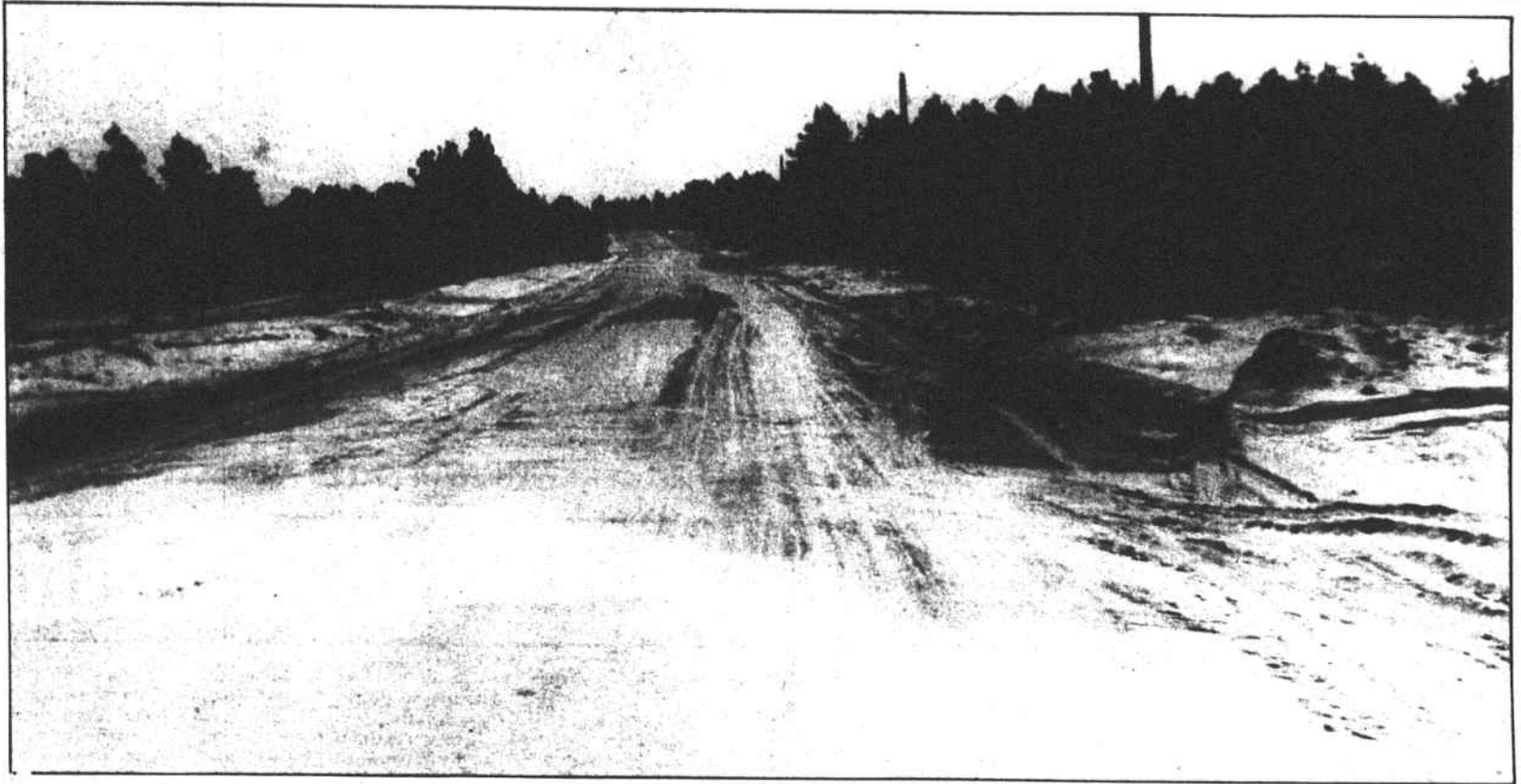


Well worn, but not traveled

The Raeford-Vass Road, which runs through the Fort Bragg Reservation was at one time a vital link between Hoke County and its most northern township, Little River. Because of the condition of the road and the artillery practice that went on along the road, Little River residents asked to be annexed to Moore County in 1957 where they did most of their social and economic trading.



Once Vital Link Sees Few Travelers

By Sherry Matthews

Attempts may soon be made to get a once well traveled "public road," which leads from Raeford to the upper state, paved and maintained.

The Raeford-Vass Road, which runs through the Fort Bragg Reservation and once joined the Little River Township to Raeford, apparently has not been maintained consistently for the last 60 years and is at times impassable, but at least one local official is interested in seeing the thoroughfare improved.

State Rep. Daniel H. DeVane said recently that the Vass Road was a "disgrace" to both the state and federal governments.

"It would be a good, sound investment to pave and maintain that road," DeVane said.

"We are making a mistake by not keeping it up," he added.

According to DeVane maintaining that road would help Hoke County as well as the U.S. Army.

"It would help them (the Army) just as much because it would lessen the wear and tear on vehicles," DeVane said.

Despite a federal court order,

which declares that Vass Road is a public highway and should remain open to travel by the public, the road has been allowed to fall into disrepair and during bad weather is impassable.

The road is also closed frequently when military operations are conducted in its vicinity.

Prior to 1957, travel on the road became so difficult for Hoke County residents living in the Little River Township that they were unable to reach schools and complained of poor police protection and the lack of other county services.

In January 1957, the township seceded from Hoke County and joined Moore County.

According to DeVane, maintaining Vass Road, which is a clay road full of washouts and holes, would save a lot of time for travelers and be a valuable tool for the county.

However, the Army does not agree.

Arthur Whittington, Director of Engineering and Housing at Ft. Bragg said that paving the Vass Road would "not benefit" the Army.

"It would not be of any benefit to Ft. Bragg," Whittington said.

According to Whittington, paving that road would be "harmful" because of the activity that goes on at the Reservation.

Impact areas surround the road and artillery firing goes on quite often, Whittington said.

During those times, the public road is blocked off by barricades and guards are posted to keep unwelcomed travelers away from the combat zone.

Whittington also admits that there is not a scheduled maintenance of the Vass Road even though it is assumed to be a public easement.

Attempts were made repeatedly to reach Ft. Bragg Commanding General Jack V. Mackmull for comment on the possibility of maintaining the Vass Road, but the efforts proved fruitless.

According to an Army spokesman Captain Bill O'Connell, General Mackmull is "a very busy man" and prefers that others on his staff field questions on issues like the Vass Road.

DeVane said Monday that he has written Mackmull about the road.

Eighth District Rep. Bill Hefner, who was also contacted, was "unsure" about the situation on Friday, but said he would check into the matter.

Chamber of Commerce Director Earl Fowler believes an opened, paved Vass Road would be beneficial to the county but respects the military's position.

"I feel that paving Vass Road would be a convenience for Hoke County residents, however, any advantages this might possibly create for Hoke would have to be weighed heavily against potential problems that might arise in military exercises at Fort Bragg," Fowler said.

In 1919 and in the early 1920's "Camp Bragg" and the U.S. Government struck a deep blow by sweeping some 92,000 acres of land out from under Hoke County for use as a military reservation.

Records show that landowners gave up their property to the government, some graciously, some with a struggle.

This eating away of land reduced North Carolina's 99th county from its original 414 square miles to 238.

This turn of events left many residents bitter and uncomfortable with their new neighbors.

In a 1922 court order it was stated that the roads running through the Reservation were "public roads" and that the county did have easement rights.

As a result of the order, Hoke County was denied compensation for the loss of the road.

The court order also states that if the government "appropriates or interferes with the use of the roads by the public, the board of commissioners may take such action to protect the rights of the public."

Federal Court authorities in Raleigh said Monday that because of the age of the 1922 order, they were unable to determine if it has been amended.

Hoke County Commissioners tried, unsuccessfully, to exercise their rights on several occasions.

In 1928, they ordered their attorneys to prosecute the U.S. Government for "damage sustained by Hoke County through the establishment of the Fort Bragg Reservation."

The records are unclear what became of the orders.

Several other discussions about the hazards of the Reservation were found in the County Commission minutes, but no solutions seem to have been reached.

In 1957, some 35 years after the reservation was started, the Little River Township asked to be annexed into Moore County.

The unkept and impassable Vass Road was one of the main reasons for this request.

According to the 1957 County Commission minutes, the Little River Township, requested the annexation because "the Reservation had separated the township from the remainder of the county."

Because of the Reservation and the unkept road, Little River residents were sending their children to Moore County schools and most of their "social and economic ties" were away from Hoke County.

For all these reasons, the township was lost.

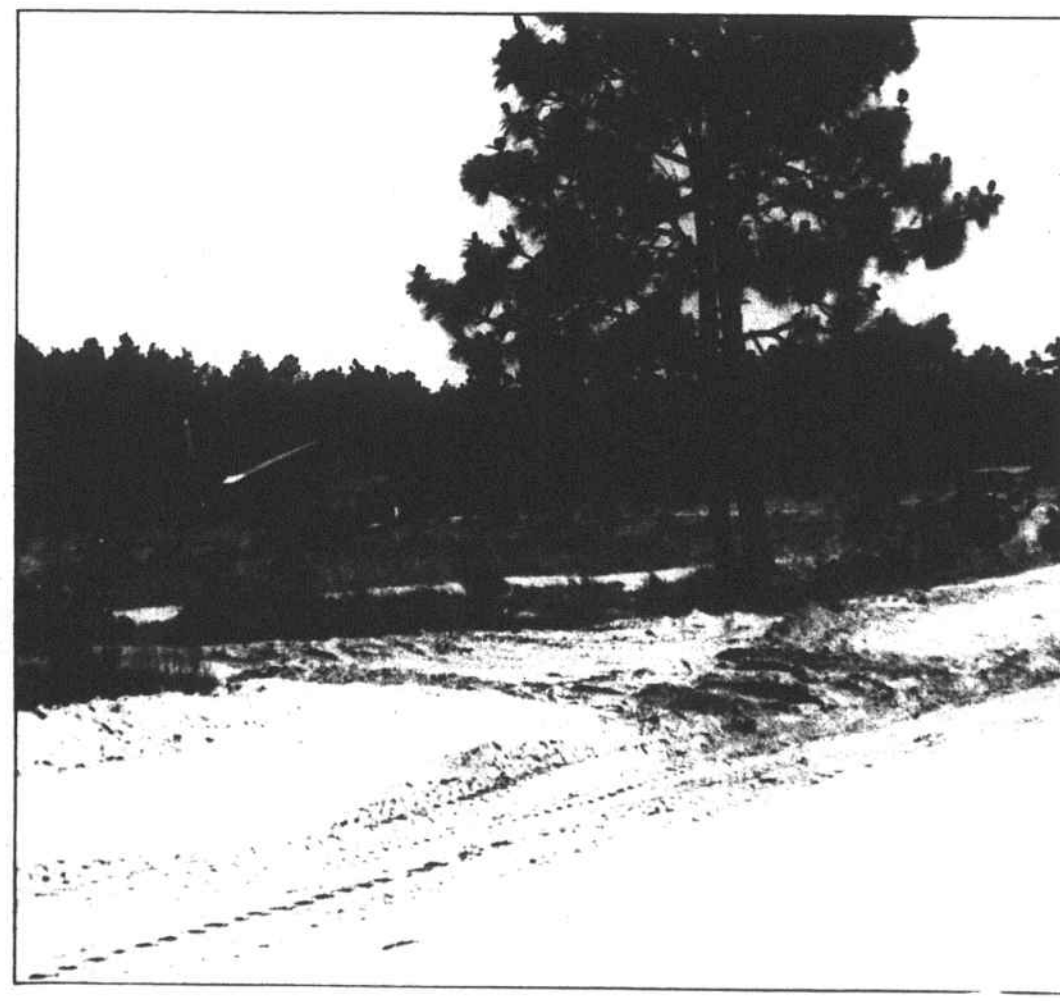
Today, some 60 years later, the Vass Road still remains unpaved and uncared for, and the Little River area is growing and prospering in Moore County.

**Public road or not?**

Although a court order states that the Raeford-Vass Road is a "public road", signs like this one are posted along side the easement. Road blocks and guards are also posted during times when the Army is having artillery practice.

**Combat Zone**

Driving down the cracked and rut-lined clay road, known as Vass road, one can see Army trucks and tankers sporting soldiers on maneuvers. Firing can be constantly heard and roads are blocked during artillery practice, leaving the "public road" impassable to those travelers wishing to use their thoroughfare.

**Deserted**

The Vass Road which stretches for over 15 miles lies deserted among acres and acres of Army reservation. Not many cars travel the clay road anymore because of the condition and military activities along the road. Usually Army vehicles are the only ones who beat the already worn path across the deserted Vass road. Helicopters, tanks and jeeps line the sides of the road preparing for maneuvers that include heavy artillery fire.