

HONORING OUR TROOPS

Texas State Highway 36 The 36th Division Memorial Highway By: Randy "Harley Doc" McCamey, TRT Correspondent



In a longstanding tradition, Thunder Roads Texas continues to recognize, acknowledge and salute the brave military men and women who make the enduring and sometimes ultimate sacrifice so that we may live and ride in this great and peaceful state and nation. This month's ride is in honor of our military and those of the 36th Division. The 36th was originally a combination of personnel from National Guard units in Texas and Oklahoma. The patch designed for the division is a combination of a blue arrowhead, representing the state of Oklahoma, and the large block T in the center of the arrowhead, representing the state of Texas. In part, due to this insignia, members of the 36th are often referred to as "T-Patchers".

Organized in 1917 at Camp Bowie, Texas [near Fort Worth], the 36th division spent twenty-three days during WWI in active sectors capturing 649 prisoners and suffering 2628 casualties. In WWII, the 36th Division spent 400 days in actual combat, fought five campaigns in four countries, captured 175,806 of the enemy and suffered 27,242 casualties, the third highest of all American divisions.

~Texas Historical Marker on Highway 36, west of Buckholts, TX

RIDE MAP



To commemorate the 36th Division and their sacrifice, this month's ride is along Texas State Highway 36, a main state artery in Texas that cuts through the central part of the state. The south terminus of Texas 36 is at the intersection of Pine Street in Freeport. To the north, the highway terminates at Treadway Boulevard (Texas 83) in downtown Abilene. The highway runs through the great cities of Rosenberg, Brenham, Temple, Gatesville, and Cross Plains. Texas 36 is generally well-maintained and smooth with ample shoulders. Making the ride in the spring of 2011, I found only a few miles of construction along the route. Clocking in at about 400 miles, Texas 36 is definitely a "touring highway", so pack the bags, fill the tank, and set the cruise control for a nice long ride!

Denton Valley Store at the intersection of Highway 36 and FM 604, about 16 miles south of your starting point. A great start to a nice little ride...but it was not such a nice little ride for Silverstre Herrera (El Paso, TX) of the 36th near Mertzwiller, France in 1945...

He advanced with a platoon along a wooded road until stopped by heavy enemy machinegun fire...beyond an extensive minefield, Pvt. Herrera moved forward, disregarding the danger of exploding mines, to attack the enemy position. He stepped on a mine and had both feet severed; but, despite intense pain and unchecked loss of blood, he pinned down the enemy with accurate rifle fire while a friendly squad captured the enemy gun...

~Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

As you cross into Comanche County, the landscape breaks into more low rolling hills and oak and pecan trees can be spotted. Further south, in Hamilton and Bell counties, you will encounter greater swells in the landscape. Not to anyone's surprise, much of what you will see on Texas 36 is agricultural in nature. Things change, however, when you get to Gatesville. Yes, still agricultural, but some high fences and heavy equipment are a sure sign that something else makes up this part of the state. Military presence becomes most obvious along this stretch of Texas 36 as you ride the highway in Coryell County. A significant portion of Coryell County is taken up by Fort Hood; a grand and imposing military installation by anyone's definition. Fort Hood is one of, if not the, largest active military post in the U.S. Opened in 1942, the base is highly focused on armored weaponry and armored training for the troops. Large tanks and armored vehicles are easy to spot on the base nearby as you travel along the highway. An interesting bit of history sits about a mile south of Gatesville. Turn onto the Old Fort Gates Road and check out the historical



marker describing Camp Gates, later named Fort Gates. Abandoned in 1852, nothing much remains of the old fort, which is located on about two miles further down the Old Fort Gates Road. In 1943, Private William Crawford (Pueblo, CO) of the 36th Infantry Division could have used an old fort, or anything else for that matter, to help fight the enemy...

After reaching the crest of the hill, the platoon was pinned down by intense enemy machinegun and small-arms fire. Pvt. Crawford, without orders and on his own initiative, moved over the hill under enemy fire to a point within a few yards of the gun emplacement and single-handedly destroyed the machinegun and killed 3 of the crew with a handgrenade, thus enabling his platoon to continue its advance. When the platoon, after reaching the crest, was once more delayed by enemy fire, Pvt. Crawford again, in the face of intense fire, advanced directly to the front midway between 2 hostile machinegun nests located on a higher terrace and emplaced in a small ravine. Moving first to the left, with a handgrenade he destroyed 1 gun emplacement and killed the crew; he then worked his way, under continuous fire, to the other and with 1 grenade and the use of his rifle, killed 1 enemy and forced the remainder to flee.

~Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient



Just south and west of downtown, heading south on Treadway Boulevard, you will turn east on 11th Street, the starting point of Texas 36. As you pass under Loop 322 on the east side of Abilene, the highway veers to the southwest toward Cross Plains and Rising Star. The first hour of the trip is rural, remote, and reminiscent of what many imagine west Texas to be – a broad expanse of horizon with little to block the view of the vast fields and farms that you pass. Windmills, cactus, and cattle are constant along this stretch of highway. It is not unusual to pass remnants of things that "used to be" like the old

Passing Fort Hood, you cross beautiful Belton Lake. At the half-way point of the ride, Temple is the "big city" on Texas 36 that, with lots of shopping and food establishments, makes for a great rest stop. The ride south of Temple gets you into some of the beautiful hill country area as you travel through Burleson and Milam counties. Brenham, the jewel of Washington County, is located about 16 miles south of Lake Somerville. Most of you are aware that there are numerous side trips in this area. The rolling hills and swooping backroads make for many a pleasant mile in this part of the state. The ride around the town of Independence is incredible and a stop at Washington-on-the-Brazos is in order for anyone interested in the history of how Texas broke away from Mexican control and became an independent nation.



Independence Hall
Washington-on-the-Brazos

As the wife and I stop for a break at a certain well-know ice cream company in Brenham(!), we get into the everyday banter that most of us share – the weather, the beautiful scenery, and the great ride. But in France almost a century ago, there was a special kind of banter going on and it had nothing to do with the beautiful scenery, good weather, or well-maintained roads. The banter had everything to do with life and death...

On October 12-13, 1917, members of the 36th Division, 142nd U. S. Infantry Regiment attacked toward the line of the Aisne (Ay n) River on the right of a four regiment/two brigade attack that advanced the American Line and eliminated a German salient south of the Aisne. During this campaign the numerous American Indian members of the old Oklahoma National Guard were used as telephone talkers, becoming a legend as the "Choctaw Talkers".

Riding south, you cross I-10 at Sealy and fall off into the coastal plains. Texas 36 turns due south at Rosenberg, so be watching for the signs! Traveling south through West Columbia and Brazoria, the coastal landscape changes to more palm trees and hanging moss typically associated with the coast. You will also begin to see more industry and chemical plants on the horizon. The journey concludes at Freeport where my wife and I traveled east of town to find County Road 257 (also known as Gulf Drive or Blue Water Highway) which is the coast road to Galveston. Along the way, we stopped at a quite spot on the beach to reflect on our days' journey. Decades earlier, on a beach in Italy, the scene was very different for Army Sergeant James M. Logan (McNeil, TX) of the 36th Division...

Sgt. Logan landed with the first wave of the assault echelon on the beaches of the Gulf of Salerno. Voluntarily exposing himself to the fire of a machinegun located along the rock wall..., Sgt. Logan attacked the machinegun. As he dashed across the 200 yards of exposed terrain a withering stream of fire followed his advance. Reaching the wall, he crawled along the base, within easy reach of the enemy crouched along the opposite side, until he reached the gun. Jumping up, he shot the 2 gunners down, hurdled the wall, and seized the gun.

~Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

I hope you will have fun and enjoy your ride on State Highway 36. It is a great ride through the heart, and some of the history, of Texas. A great ride from the plains to the palm trees. I also ask that, during your journey, you remember the fallen. The highway is, after all, a memorial highway. In honor of our military, and in memory of our military hero's, a big Thank You from Thunder Roads Texas to the 36th Division. Or perhaps I should say, a big TEXAS Thank You to the 36th Division.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes and citations are from information posted by various authors on the Texas Military Forces Museum website TexasMilitaryForcesMuseum.org between March 1, 2011 and July 20, 2011.

Along the Way

As you journey along the 400 miles of Texas Highway 36, you will have need of a few places to stop, rest, and recharge. Here are just a few of my favorites.

- Kent's Harley-Davison in Abilene – Enough said!
- Joe Allen's Bar-B-Que in Abilene – the best BBQ and steaks for miles in any direction.
- Jean's Feed Barn in Cross Plains – A good ol' down-home, old-fashion café where you can get a great cup of coffee and have breakfast any time the doors are open.
- Cooks Fish Barn, south of Rising Star – If you are passing through on a Friday or Saturday evening, stop in for a great catfish buffet with all the trimmings.
- Storm's Drive-In in Hamilton – One of the best hamburger joints in the state.
- Horny Toad Harley-Davidson in Temple – All Harley, All the Time. Nuthin' wrong with that!
- West of the Brazos Bar and Grill in Damon – a real diamond in the rough! Our sympathy is with them after the tragic fire in May. But, they are rebuilding as we speak, so please stop by and have a beer under the tent.

