

Camp Crane History

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The history of the Quartermaster Corps, as it affected Camp Crane, began on June 1st, 1917. On that day the Government officially took over the grounds of the Lehigh County Agricultural Society, formerly used as the site for their annual fair. Captain Jason D. Byers, Q.M.C., was the first Camp Quartermaster. Capt. Byers is one of the Regulars, having a long and enviable record in the "Old Army", but he was handicapped from the very start due to no experienced men upon whom he could rely for assistance being available. A few men were detailed from the Army Ambulance Service, but these were "rookies", and before any actual work could be done, it was necessary for the Quartermaster to explain each step taken. Everything was certainly in a chaotic state in those early days. The duties of the Quartermaster being so variant and so numerous made the task of Capt. Byers especially difficult of accomplishment, and it is a compliment to his ability that organization and system were quickly realized.

Hundreds of men, all still in their civilian clothes, would pour into Camp unannounced, those early days of June, 1917, and they would come not only in the daytime, but would arrive in the middle of the night. It was a tribute to the loyalty and faithfulness of the men detailed to the Q.M.C. that they were on the job practically day and night, with no thought of complaint. Hasty wooden barracks with canvas tops were constructed; pig pens and horse stalls improvised, until the permanent structures were built.

Many carloads of supplies in the meantime had been received, so that by the end of June, 1917, it was found that everybody in Camp could be equipped with "khaki." It was amusing to hear the stories the boys would tell the Quartermaster in their endeavor to secure either shoes, suits, or "just a hat". Some would hobble into the office in spiked baseball shoes, claiming those as their only "means of support;" others had the seat of their trousers out and asked, could they, in all modesty, walk around in such a condition. Of course, the entire Camp could not be outfitted in one day, but everybody got theirs just as quickly as possible, and no complaints were heard about the speed with which it was accomplished.

A few words about the personnel. Of the men later transferred to the Corps, Joseph A. Penrose, at present 2nd Lieut. Q.M.C., was the first to report for duty, closely followed by Edwin C. Winters, now 1st Lieut. in the Army Ambulance Service in France, then William C. Becker, Sergt. 1st cl. Q.M.C. The first named was put in charge of the clothing warehouse; Winters took care of all

outside purchases, and the last named handled the finances. As an illustration of the way these men stayed on the job, the following story is given: One Friday in June, Penrose asked Capt. Byers for permission to go into town that night; Capt. Byers was highly surprised and exclaimed: "Why, man, you were down town Tuesday of last week". Of the regular personnel to arrive in Camp, Sgt. Axel Boldt, of the regular service, came first, with Sgt. Benjamin Pericone second. There always was an argument between Sgts. Boldt and Pericone; Boldt maintaining that he ranked Pericone by "one paragraph," actual time, five minutes.

Capt. Frederick R. Williams, Q.M.G., who had over 20 years of service in the Medical Department, came the first week in July as assistant to Capt. Byers, and in August of that year became Camp Quartermaster when the latter went to France.

The first contingent of troops to leave this Camp for France was that under command of Lieut.-Col. Percy L. Jones, M.C., who took with him the then Camp Quartermaster as his Quartermaster. This vacancy was filled by Capt. Williams, who assumed the position of Camp Quartermaster on August 7th, 1917, which he held until his ~~exit~~ ^{release} on July 21st, 1918. With Capt. Byers went the well wishes of everybody who worked under him, quite a few of whom were dejected in spirits because the opportunity was denied them of serving under so capable an officer.

Capt. Williams soon grasped the details of his office, and inaugurated the broad policies upon which the Detachment was run, several of which are still adhered to by his successor. To those who were denied the privilege of going overseas, it soon became evident that Capt. Williams was a "good fellow", as they expressed it, which in great measure made up for their being kept this side of the Big Pond. They soon became reconciled, and were glad to work under an officer who at all times was cognizant of their wants and feelings. Fifteen barrack buildings and three officers' quarters were built during the regime of Capt. Williams, involving an expenditure of approximately \$140,000. for labor and materials, all of which was covered by contracts with firms in Allentown. A heating system costing \$150,000. was installed by Hersh & Bro., of Allentown, under the direction of Capt. Williams. This job was one of the biggest ever handled by that firm.

The personnel was organized and the work systematized under their various headings by the Camp Quartermaster. A routine was established which permitted the work being carried on without the personal overseeing of the Quartermaster, who was thus enabled to take care of whatever emergencies might come up, leaving the details to his subordinates. This routine so capably filled all requirements that it is still

in force.

Up to that time, Capt. Williams was the only commissioned officer in the Quartermaster Detachment at this Camp, and it soon became evident that he required commissioned assistants. Upon making proper requests for such assistants, he was advised by Washington that Capt. Walter S. Bramble, of the Quartermaster Corps, would shortly arrive. This was in the early fall of 1917. Capt. Bramble is also a graduate of the old school, having over 20 years of experience in the Regular Service.

The Subsistence division was greatly in need of direct supervision by a commissioned officer, one who ~~know~~ it thoroughly, as it differs from any other branch of the service, requiring special knowledge of its requirements. Capt. Bramble ably filled this difficult job, and soon had the Subsistence warehouse running like a clock, neat as the proverbial pin, and with a reputation as the cleanest place in Camp. In addition to this duty, he had charge of all contracts. From the writer's experience with contracts, let it be said that contracts are the most complicated and exacting of any red tape yet devised by the powers that be. One to successfully cope with the Treasury Department's requirements in this respect must have the knowledge of a Philadelphia lawyer, the patience of Job, and the ability of Solomon. And to say that the contracts written by Capt. Bramble were seldom returned for correction is a recommendation not to be beaten.

Early in 1918, orders come through to establish a Reclamation and Salvage Branch. This was quickly done under the personal direction of Capt. Bramble; the building was constructed, roads built leading to it, and modern machinery installed, necessary to efficiently carry out the ideals established, such as balers, pressers electrically-operated shoe-repairing machinery, etc. Everything, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant, has some material and saleable value. The problem presented was to organize a plant, and create a personnel from men who had absolutely no experience along those lines, to secure the greatest possible benefit from the waste, which ranged from the tinfoil in cigarette packages, tooth-paste tubes, etc., to large quantities of piping, turned-in clothing, etc. Very good work was done, and much was salvaged which otherwise would have been lost, many thousands of pounds of material being shipped to Philadelphia. In fact, pleasant comments were received from every inspector of the War Department, each remarking on the neatness and despatch with which the work was ~~extant~~ accomplished.

There still being need for more commissioned assistants, the War Department ordered Capt. Waldo S. Ickes, O.M.O., then stationed at Panama, O.Z., to Camp Crane. Capt. Ickes, also a Regular Army officer of eight years experience, upon his arrival took charge of the finance department. This is the most important branch of the Corps, in fact the most important branch of any business, and demands careful attention to details, complete knowledge of Army and Treasury Department Regulations, and willingness to work late and often. In this connection, it might be stated that close to four million dollars were expended. Every penny of this huge expenditure had to be carefully checked and accounted for, Capt. Ickes supervising the major portion.

About March, 1918, our organization was further augmented by the arrival of Lieut. Clifford J. Williamson, O.M.O., an officer versed in the ways and intricacies of what Reclamation and Salvage mean to the Government, together with wide construction experience. Lieut. Williamson secured his commission at the training school at Camp Joseph B. Johnston, Jacksonville, Florida, and was a welcome addition to the force. This officer was put in charge of outside construction and assignment of quarters to incoming troops. The purpose and aim of the Camp had been changed, from that of training only members of the Army Ambulance Service to training and outfitting medical Department units ordered abroad, in consequence of which, organizations were arriving constantly, greatly swelling the strength of the Garrison in excess of its capacity. The task of assigning these troops to quarters devolved upon Lieut. Williamson. This officer had some trying times, but he it said to his credit that he came through with colors flying, every arrival being given quarters within thirty minutes of his reaching Camp.

Later, about July of last year, Lieut. Williamson was made Reclamation Officer of the Camp, and has successfully carried on the policies established by his predecessor. Plans and specifications had also been drawn for the construction of a laundry to care for such work of the Camp. The contract had been let and first ground broken when the Armistice was signed. This business was also to have been put under the supervision of Lieut. Williamson, as part of the Reclamation Branch. Lt. Williamson was ably assisted in his many duties by Sgt. Thomas Kennedy, who faithfully and earnestly performed the exacting duties asked.

Many changes had taken place in the personnel of the Quartermaster Detachment; it had grown from nothing to an organization at one time of one hundred a ten men, so that the Quartermaster, in addition to his other duties, had to bear w-

the vicissitudes and worries that go with commanding an organization of such size. Three men, Q.M.Sergts. Joseph A. Penrose and Raymond H. Larney, and Sergt. 1st cl. Harry A. Duntun, had been commissioned; Lieut. Penrose being ordered to Headquarters, Southeastern Department; Lieut. Larney put in charge of the subsistence warehouse at this Camp, and Lieut. Duntun assigned as assistant to the quartermaster of the Italian contingent, Army Ambulance Service. Five men were transferred to other camps, two of whom, in turn, receiving the coveted commission, namely, Lieut. Frank O. McCreery and Lieut. William C. Huntress. Writing of these men winning their commissions reminds the writer of the fact that of those men transferred from this organization to some other camp, not a one suffered demotion, but, rather, generally advanced, either by securing commissions, or by going higher in the non-commissioned ranks. This is a record to which we point with pride. Another singular fact of which we are chesky is that each and every one of those men is holding a responsible position, ranging from Adjutant of a labor battalion to assistant to the Depot Quartermaster at St. Louis. Several of the non-coms were fortunate enough to secure overseas service. Most of the lucky ones left with the Italian contingent, Army Ambulance Service, while a few went to France.

When this Camp was started, it was necessary to alter to a large extent the buildings formerly used for exhibition purposes by the Fair Association. As these buildings were constructed of wood, it was necessary to secure the services of an expert carpenter. Sgt. 1st cl. Knut Olsen was placed in charge of this work, and great and many were his woes. From building offices to making a warehouse out of what was previously a cooling shed for race horses was what this non-commissioned officer had to contend with. All of which was faithfully carried out. Another man who had troubles all his own was Sgt. 1st cl. Frank Cassidy. He is our master plumber. One thing Sgt. Cassidy cannot understand. That is: why does a 12" water main always burst the night before a holiday? Sgt. Cassidy is to be complimented because he struggled successfully against great odds, and because he executed the orders given and solved the problems presented so efficiently. There is still one other soldier whose services were very greatly appreciated, he is Sgt. 1st cl. Thomas I. Rankin, engineer in charge of the heating system. Everyone knows the troubles and accidents that are bound to happen to a large heating system when first installed, and happen they did. It seemed the favorite time for anything to go wrong was always when the thermometer was hovering around zero and the Commanding Officer asked where the H--- the heat was. Sgt. Rankin is an engineer

of many years practice, so he was equal to the occasion in every incident. It was always something with a long name that nobody else knew anything about, something very technical, eh Rankin?

Not all the members of this Detachment wore the uniform, Mr. Chas. Rismiller, official representative of the American Railway Association, being one of these. Mr. Rismiller came to this Camp at its inception, and has remained here since. We all know the strained conditions and congestions under which the railroads were operated during the war, so it is easily seen that the task assigned this hard-working A.R.A. representative was one which required much skill and ability getting coal into Camp during the severe weather of the winter of 1917, when it was almost as scarce as hens' teeth and probably snow-bound somewhere, to tracing lost thermometers was all part and parcel of his daily routine. Several times during 1917 the supply of coal on hand was only sufficient to last two hours, and it required some tall hustling on his part to keep the "home fires burning", but he did, for which those of us who were here last winter are extremely grateful.

The largest single body of troops to leave this Camp, up to that time, was the Italian contingent of the Army Ambulance Service. With this contingent went one hundred and ten Quartermaster men, of which quite a few were from this Detachment. The Quartermaster of this contingent, Capt. Denis McSweeney, had been stationed here for some months previous to his departure. This officer had greatly in excess of 20 years service in the Regular Army, and he would often entertain the boys with stories of his experience in China, Philippine Islands, etc. He will be remembered by all for his refreshing wit.

Late in July, 1918, Capt. Williams was relieved as Camp Quartermaster and ordered to Governors Island, Capt. Mamie E. Rovin, Q.M.C., arriving from Governors Island to assume the duties involved. But this officer was only allowed to remain for a few weeks, then was assigned back to New York City for contemplated overseas service. Capt. Bramble was then given the office, and has held it up to the present.

The Detachment, Quartermaster Corps, at this Camp has been exceedingly fortunate in the matter of not losing many of its members by death, only two men having died since the Detachment was organized, namely: Sgt. Harvey W. Leidy and Pvt. William L. Caffrey. Pvt. Caffrey was the first to answer the call, succumb to an attack of pneumonia of only a few days' duration. Pvt. Caffrey was a faithful soldier, always performing whatever was asked of him in a cheerful manner, and his

memory is cherished by all who knew him. Sgt. Ledy contracted Spanish Influenza during the recent epidemic, which later developed into pneumonia, and he finally answered the summons of the Great Master. This soldier had the respect and love of those who worked with him, and it was with a heavy heart the news of his death was received by the boys throughout Camp.

The Quartermaster Corps was reorganized and divided into various branches and divisions by the War Department at Washington several times during the War. One result of the first reorganization, as it affected Camp Crane, was the re-assignment of the duties of the commissioned personnel of the Camp Quartermaster's office; Capt. Bramble was called Utilities Officer, and Capt. Ickes was given the title of Sub-Depot Quartermaster, assistant to the Depot Quartermaster, New York. This arrangement was very satisfactory, especially to Capt. Bramble, as it relieved him of a great many details, leaving him free to act more directly upon several contemplated constructive projects. Later, another reorganization took place, sometime towards the end of 1918, which changed their titles but practically left them the same duties to perform. To explain this complex scheme intelligently would take too much time and space, furthermore, it would necessarily have to be technical, and, therefore, would not be of interest to those outside the office force concerned. But one very important change made Capt. Ickes Camp Supply Officer, and brought under his superintendence all supplies, including Medical, Ordnance, Signal, Engineer, and Gas Defense Warfare, as well as Quartermaster.

In a short narrative of this kind, it is impossible to do justice and individually mention everybody that played a part in the successful execution of the work carried on by the Quartermaster Corps at this Camp. Sufficient it is to say that every member of the Corps has been faithful to his superiors and country and each has done his duty in a noble military and business-like manner.

Below is given a list of the present Quartermaster Corps personnel

W.C. Becker,
Sergeant 1st cl., Q.M.C.