

## Camp Crane History

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## The Guth's Station Camp of the U.S.A.A.S.

In October, 1917, the Allentown Camp was very much overcrowded. Delays by the contractors had left the new barracks buildings uncompleted and only unheated sheds were available for a surplus of more than two thousand men. It had been a particularly unpleasant month with many violent wind storms accompanied by cold rain and realizing that the overcrowding in unsanitary barracks was a menace to the health of the whole command, Colonel Persons adopted unusual methods for relief. For several weeks the Third Overseas Contingent had been taking daily hikes to an abandoned placer mine site at Guth's Station, about four miles from Allentown, utilizing the ideal terrain for field training and maneuvers, returning to Camp in time for Retreat. Major Metcalfe, commanding this contingent of four battallions suggested keeping them out there in camp as long as the weather permitted and, although only pup tents and a few tarpaulins were available for shelter, Colonel Persons listened so kindly to the suggestion that he not only adopted it; but added four extra battallions and an Ambulance Company for good measure, making a rather imposing detachment of something more than two thousand men which marched out of the North Gate at seven o'clock on October 28th.

For equipment the men had just what they could carry on their backs, a few trailer kitchens, field ranges, picks and shovels and tarpaulins which followed in the train. Camp was pitched by battallions and very trim and soldier-like the straight company streets looked; but the wind and rain which came down from the Blue Mountains that night convinced officers and men that pup tents as a protection against the Autumn weather of Lehigh County were a delusion and a snare. At officers' meeting that morning the situation was put up to the battallion commanders; there was practically unlimited territory, a few picks and shovels and the

adaptability and resourcefulness of the Yankee soldier on one hand; a most discouraging weather forecast on the other; the tacit promise to Colonel Persons that, rain or shine, blow hot or blow cold, the command would remain in the field until December 1st an impassable barrier to a return to Allentown. The dugout seemed the only solution and the selection of new camp sites and the style of architecture to be adopted was left to the individual judgment of the respective battallion commanders.

Mistakes were made, of course; some of the first attempts promptly caved in, others proved admirable reservoirs for the collection and retention of rain water. A few plutocratic privates who still had money, in spite of the distance from pay day, attempted to remedy the unpreparedness of Uncle Sam by private purchase of materials; but this was immediately stopped by order from headquarters. The men worked like beavers and woodchucks and within a very few days the last pup tent had disappeared and every soldier in the command was comfortably sheltered in a home of his own construction. There was infinite variety in the architecture which ranged from one ambitious structure which accomodated an entire section, to a burrow hollowed in the hillside occupied by a single soldier with a hermit's disposition. Some of the dugouts consisted of two or three rooms, others of a single room with a half dozen bunks ranged about the wall; but without exception they had one thing in common; a servicable open fireplace. In fact, as the days passed the men entered so thoroughly into the game that they attempted camouflage and the existence of more than one cleverly concealed underground habitation was betrayed only by a wisp of blue smoke rising from the ground. The open fires kept the dugouts warm and dry and their cheerful light

enabled the tired soldier to spend the long evenings in the study of his testament or osteology with two cubes of bone marked with appropriate black dots; the gentle reader is offered one guess as to which proved the more popular indoor sport.

The strange camp soon gained notoriety and visitors flocked to it from the entire surrounding country. On the second Sunday there were more than five hundred automobiles parked in and about the camp and it was necessary to detail M.P.s to control the traffic. Girls, of course; thousands of girls and equally, of course, all of them pretty. If there is any girl in Lehigh County who didn't have her picture taken in the door of a dugout with an admiring group of soldiers about her, she is out of luck.

But in spite of the hard scratching for shelter, the hewing of wood and the hauling of water and the inevitable policing, the military training purpose of the camp was never forgotten. Learning to care for themselves in the field was not the least valuable part of the experience; but the other training was necessary. A complete sanitary service, simulating as closely as possible war conditions, was organized and for several hours each day the entire command was exercised in the gathering, treating and transportation of wounded, the chain extending from the regimental aid station, through field and evacuation hospitals to the base; the entire operation supervised and directed from headquarters established on a mound which gave a view for miles around. First aid, litter work and ambulance driving was taught by lecture and practical demonstration and in the necessary signalling a corps of more than thirty expert wig-waggers was developed. In a practical way the officers were taught the proper method of preparing the many forms and reports re-

quired by the Manual of the medical Department, the use of diagnosis tags and, last, but not least, were given a thorough course in map reading and map making. Uniforms and equipment became mudstained and shabby; but in spite of the primitive conditions the men and officers flourished and grew fat. There was practically no sickness, although the soldiers comfortably housed in Allentown barracks referred to Guth's as "Pneumonia Hill." The retort courteous from the mudstained veterans usually contained a remark about Boy Scouts, or Camp Fire Girls.

Day by day the men used their spare time to elaborate their dugouts. The prohibition against the purchase of materials was rigidly enforced; but nothing had been said about "borrowing" and more than one window sash and board door appeared mysteriously, while irate farmers from miles around began to appear at headquarters with tales of chicken coops and other outbuildings disappearing in the night.

And then, perhaps as a fortunate coincidence, the barracks at camp Crane were at last completed; for winter arrived with a vengeance. Breaking camp in a blizzard on the 8th of December was no joke; but the property and transportation was accounted for and packed up and as the bugles sounded retreat at Camp Crane the head of the detachment, with six inch icicles from their congealed breaths dangling from the points of their overcoat collars, marched back through the North Gate. And Colonel Persons, reviewing their entrance, smilingly acknowledged that they came back better men and infinitely better soldiers from their Forty Days in the Wilderness.

In the following March I camped with a convoy of those same men at Angers, on the way to Paris. To the table where I was dining came Lieutenant Kimball, transferred to an Engineer outfit a few weeks before.

"Major, I want to thank you for saving my life," he said. "I was on the Toscana when she was subbed and I spent three hours floating around in the Irish Sea before I was picked up. It was pitch dark, the wind was blowing a gale from the north Pole and the water was icy; but, believe me, it seemed like a summer picnic after what you put me through for forty days at Guth's Station!"

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