

## Camp Crane History

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## AN OLD REPORT

BY COLONEL RICHARD SLEE, M.O.R.C., U. S. ARM  
*Swiftwater, Pa., Formerly Commanding Camp Crane, Allentown, Pa.*

### EXPLANATORY

THE brief notes following were dictated in December, 1917, on the request of a medical journal, but, owing to stress of work, were not submitted for publication. They are interesting principally as fact records compiled at that time.

Subsequent events proved that, on the whole, Camp Crane continued its enviable health record. During the great influenza epidemic in the autumn of 1918, the camp was completely surrounded by communities in which the death rate from influenza and subsequent pneumonia was appalling. By the introduction of simple sanitary measures before the scourge reached the vicinity of Allentown, we passed through the epidemic with only 355 cases of influenza in a crowded camp population of above 10,000. The rate as a whole for the Army was 252 cases per thousand. We had but 62 following cases of pneumonia and only 13 deaths.

The venereal rate for the entire history of the camp was lower than that of any other camp in the United States or Europe. Some camps had as high as 275 cases per thousand. In approximately 20,000 men during two years, there were 414 cases discovered—only 160 of these contracted after entering the service.

I think that the Medical Department may well take pride in the results achieved during the two years approximately in which Camp Crane was in operation—commanded and conducted in all branches except the Q. M. by Medical Department officers and men.

### REPORT PREPARED DECEMBER, 1917

In view of the disquieting reports concerning the health of troops under training at various cantonments, the public at large, and also the friends and relatives of the commissioned and enlisted personnel of the United States Army Ambulance Service, located at the Concentration Camp, Allentown, Pa., will be interested in learning what has been accomplished at this cantonment.

The Ambulance Service Camp at Allentown has been in operation seven months. It was established and has been operated during this time entirely by medical officers, no line officers whatever being associated with the camp or its activities except the Camp Quartermaster's Department.

Approximately 7,000 men have passed through the camp, and its permanent inhabitants have averaged 4,500.

Its morbidity history may be briefly summarized as follows:

There has not been a single death from disease in the entire command since its organization. Only one death has occurred in camp, following operation for a ruptured gangrenous appendix, and one other member asphyxiated while on leave. There has not been a single case of infectious disease of any character, with the exception of 19 cases of mumps (discovered while on train to camp), although the camp is located in a city, in which measles, scarlet fever, diphtheria and mumps have been present.

The venereal rate at all times has been very low and constantly decreasing, for the month of November only 12 cases of gonorrhea being reported or discovered, the total cases for seven months for an average of 4,500 men not equaling the monthly rate per 1,000, as reported from National Guard and draft camps.

Pneumonia, so virulent and fatal in other camps, total 9 cases during the same period, are convalescent or discharged cured (no deaths).

One case of meningitis (of tubercular origin) recovering.

Of the 12 cases of syphilis, 9 cases were active on reporting to camp after enlistment.

The question will naturally be asked why any one camp should show such an unusual and unprecedentedly low morbidity and mortality rate, and it must be confessed it is a hard question to answer, as a number of factors must be considered.

From my point of view I will state the reasons:

1. This has been strictly a medical camp from its very inception, the location and practically all details pertaining to its working having been directed by Col. Elbert E. Persons, M. C., U. S. Army, its commanding officer.

2. Until quite recently every commissioned officer was a medical man, all, with the exception of five, being Reserve Corps Officers.

3. The enlisted personnel is and has been of an unusually high type, recruited largely from colleges and universities, some 49 institutions being represented by one or more full sections of 45 men.

To the character and manhood of our enlisted personnel do I give the credit for our present enviable position in comparison with the other camps, not one of which can even approach us in health records.

These men are largely red blooded, well trained and obedient athletes, they have learned how to obey, and it required but little effort to impress upon them the necessity for strict sanitary regulations.



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While their birthplaces cover the entire map of the U. S. A., they have evidently all been enough exposed to the various diseases of childhood to have acquired an immunity sufficient to protect the major portion; otherwise, with exposure in the city of Allentown, which has been at all times unrestricted to the holders of honor passes, we would have had a higher percentage of infectious diseases.

Critics may say, "Well, the camp is unusually well located," the men are and have been well housed, and this accounts for the exceptional results obtained. As one of the first officers in camp, I can dispute some of these assumptions.

The Fair Grounds in Allentown cover some 50 acres with the usual buildings, and an unusually good grandstand seating about 25,000 people. Under this grandstand can be seated at one time 2,500 men at mess, and I believe this grandstand with its opportunity as a mess hall and the various buildings as shelters were largely the deciding factors that persuaded Colonel Persons to select this camp.

Our colonel's selection was, as the boys say, all O. K. for the original number intended—about 2,500 men—but before we were well under way our Ambulance Service was increased to 4,500 men and then to 7,500, and the men piled in upon us almost without warning and we had to take care of them, house and feed them whether we were ready or not.

Few complaints were heard, although many had an uncomfortable time; buildings could not cover them, so tent flies and pup tents came into play and were used till Q. M. barracks could be built; and during the greatest press some 2,000 men were camped about 5 miles away, where they "dug in" in the most approved fashion. Other contingents were continually on the march, camping out and becoming hardened in a degree for the work before them over there. Clothing, blankets, shoes, etc., did not "come along" as expected, but with the telegraph and telephone at hand the C. O. early corrected the shortcomings.

Soldiering is no easy task nor a lazy man's job, and our men have had a taste of what they may expect "over there" and what several thousands of the Ambulance Corps are already experiencing after having passed through the Allentown camp. In fact, from letters we judge that, with all its trials, hardships and shortcomings, the camp at Allentown looks somewhat as the Broad White Way does compared to a country lane to our boys trained here and now somewhere in France.

Allentown is unfortunately without a sewer system (now remedied, 1922), and the camp had to depend almost entirely upon earth latrines for the disposal of all excrement. It required eternal vigilance and work on the part of the Sanitary Corps, but—flies were almost unknown in or about these shelters, and there was little soiling of the grounds.

The mess has been bountiful—well prepared and wholesome, not a single case of illness has been traceable to the mess—and the government ration has permitted a saving of thousands of dollars, returned to the section mess funds.

The mess officer of this camp also instituted the system of separating and selling the table refuse and garbage, with the result that hundreds of dollars have been added to the mess funds.

Altogether, the U. S. Ambulance Service Camp at Allentown, Pa., has been a mighty interesting and instructive place to be stationed, and it proves conclusively that the Medical Department of the U. S. Army possesses brains the equal at least of any other corps or branch, and it challenges any other camp to show a record of seven months, under the same conditions and difficulties, that is within measurable distance.

