

Through a Soldier's Eyes

Introduction:

Narrator: Camp Edwards, part of the Massachusetts Military Reservation, lies along the western edge of Cape Cod. Established in 1938, Camp Edwards has a long history of service for the nation's armed forces, playing a role in all major conflicts since World War II. Today, Camp Edwards continues to serve as a major Army National Guard training facility. As we face the future it is important to review and commemorate our history. This film is intended to provide a starting point for that effort.

"1940's Radio Narrator" (*text taken from archival material*): To say that a city has sprung up overnight from the scrub oak wastes of Cape Cod tells the story. Here the year's long growth of another city has been crammed into a few weeks. Camp Edwards so far challenges description because it never stands still. Captain Brown of the Constructing Quartermaster's office tells of leaving bare ground when he started an inspection trip around the great triangle and returning to his starting place to find a barracks standing on what had shortly before been open space.

Today in the parade ground along the roads and in every open space between buildings, one sees groups and ransom troops engaged in intensive training. At mess call long lines of men flow toward the mess halls; everywhere one sees activity. Experience and information of many experts are being used in training the new recruit. His physical, mental, and social life is undergoing a training which not only fits him to fight if need be, but will be reflected throughout his whole life.

To you mothers who are speculating about a great many things that will concern the daily life of your son when he comes to Camp Edwards, he will live in a barrack with 62 other selectees. His future home is a two-story frame building on concrete foundations, well heated, with plenty of windows for light and air. In short, here each man will find every feasible provision for his comfort, education, and security during his training period. While there may be some items omitted from the program which might contribute to a more complete social life, it must always be remembered that proper training demands certain sacrifices for best results.

Veteran's Interviews

John Mulcahy: Well at that time they just started to build up the barracks. We still stayed in tents.

Arnold Hunter: We used to have rain, and cold, and freezing, and in each tent was a stove that burned wood, called a Sibley stove, and it had a pipe that went up through the middle of the tent, and on the top of that pipe was a spark arrester, which was a screen, so that when you lit your fire of wood you didn't spray sparks all around to somebody else's tent. But now if you didn't pay attention during the day and go up and clean out your spark arrester, that night maybe you'd get smoked out, so when your tent got full of smoke, it backed up, so then you'd run up the tent, and go up the side of the tent and see and take your spark arrester off. Then maybe you'd get sparks flying all over the tent and you're setting other people's tents on fire. We were having fires all the time. A

wood-burning tent with no heat down in Camp Edwards is not a lot of fun, but as long as you were young it was okay.

John Mulcahy: We were there for about a month, and in tents, the very last night before we got aboard trains for Camp Hillman, Texas, we slept on the floors of the new barracks, probably the first time those barracks were ever occupied.

John DeLoffi: I was working here for Walsh Construction Company, I believe from New York, and I was making the most money I ever made in my life – I made 34 dollars a week I believe. I worked for a carpenter foreman and my job was checking people...

LTC Anthony Cimino (*former Deputy Commander Camp Edwards*): Nine months it took to build the city that was to be Camp Edwards, holding 30,000 troops – sports arenas, food distribution centers, warehouses, the tracks that came in to carry troops in and out – and it was an amazing project. This was one of the first such posts built and it was used as a model for building many of other war-time training posts.

Albert Megna: Some went down in trains, others went down in trucks. My unit, being an anti-tank unit, went down, we had some trucks, and we went down in trucks.

James Buckle: Well I can remember coming into the railhead there, and we marched from there over to our barracks, and fortunately our barracks were on that side of the quadrangle, and we didn't have far to go. And, the first few days were very confusing, getting organized, and getting set up in our barracks, and what thing or another.

Unidentified speaker: We got activated and we got on the train and went down to Camp Edwards. Well I thought it was big, it was big, but before you knew it, it flew right up.

John DeLoffi: It wasn't home, sure it wasn't home. And being about a foot-and-a-half, two feet away from each other, we slept, and we had to hang up our clothes in the same area. We had one men's room, which we all... open shower, open toilets, open washbasin.

Carl Britnall: It's a good thing they had the National Guard to train all these new outfits that were being organized. But it was funny watching them come in, because you know they didn't have enough equipment, so they had all World War I overcoats, coats that were hanging right down to the floor. They really looked terrible. At least they were warm.

John Mulcahy: When I first went in, they were still using the wrap-around leggings, even at the summer training, we were still wearing the old campaign type hats.

Carl Britnall: They didn't even, they had to use wooden, wooden guns at the time too. And then they had, instead of having Springfield rifles they had Enfield rifles...

Albert Megna: It was pretty rough because we didn't have all the equipment we were supposed to have. Many of us, like in my unit, I was a corporal in anti-tank, and I was in charge of the guns. And

my gun was a wooden gun until such time that we got the regular weapons. Then we went in training with the 37-millimeter, and when they were sending the 180th and the 182nd to the Far East, they took all our weapons that we had because they didn't have enough to go around.

Vincent Saccone: At Camp Edwards though we did mostly training, and we did qualify on the weapons – one weapon, you had to do that. And that was the last time we seen a rifle, because at that time medics didn't carry rifles, and I don't see how they can carry rifles today – because if you've got, if you're in a full war, then the medics, the medical man is always too busy to think about shooting. And we never had a minute to think about shooting.

William Lanza: You had, of course, reveille every morning. Then you used to draw different details, you probably had to work in the kitchen, do a little guard duty somewhere, that was part of the training. But as a rule you went out as a company, you know, and you get your orders, and you'd march to a training area, maybe four or five miles. And then you would have your critiques and your training, you'd have your different problems.

John Mulcahy: And we did have the guns and we'd have gun drill. At that time I was with Battery B, and they had three-inch guns – huge monsters of guns, with huge metal platforms that they were on. And it took quite a few men just to get the gun in place. So we had that practice of putting the guns into place.

John DeLoffi: I was just a plain rifleman, and that was all that I had, but most of us were basically infantrymen, and we went out to train every day or march and...

Chet Nelson: So I learned things that aren't even taught today, and won't be taught. They were very advanced thinking, let's put it that way. I went out to shoot a rifle, everybody knows how to shoot one, the first time I started to shoot standing up and I said I got rapped in the back of the head and he said you wouldn't last an hour that way...What are you doing? You know, (inaudible) maneuvers...But I was a kid just learning, and they're teaching me all these advanced things, and I thought that was the way it's always done.

LTC Anthony Cimino: So the men went through their training, and they trained on Camp Edwards. For water training they used Snake Pond, which at that time was part of the post, named Snake Pond by the Army so they could discourage troops from sneaking away for a swim during training, and the name has held.

Arnold Hunter: And the searchlight battery, which was A Battery of the regiment, they had I think either six or eight in the Battery. And they'd put them in a big circle, and then they would light, supposedly out there in the dark, now an airplane would go and they'd switch their lights on and they'd search the sky, they'd lock onto the, if they found a plane, they'd lock onto it, and then the guys with the guns would shoot at it.

Robert Gaudette: So from January until March we had duties: KP, boiler guard, regimental guard, what else....

Carl Britnall: Boiler guard, especially, to keep the barracks warm.

James Buckle: There were three barracks to take care of; they were all heated by coal. And then you had the mess hall, that had a coal fire in it, you had to make sure the fire was stoked up when the cook, when they came to work at about four o'clock in the morning. And then we had a day room, like a little recreation room, and you had to keep the fire going there, plus there was a fire, a stove in the supply room, we had a supply room... and they were all serviced by coal – it kept you busy going from one to the other.

Joseph Burke: The worst thing was the KP, you know, they'd assign us KP, those jobs. So these poor guys that did KP, they'd start at four o'clock in the morning, and I remember the last meal was at six o'clock at night – with all that grease, you didn't get out of there until nine o'clock at night or ten o'clock at night. So from four...it was terrible duty, I thought that was the worst duty of anything in the Army.

John Mulcahy: Being a cook usually meant getting up before everyone else, and getting the breakfast ready, and almost all my duties at that time were centered around the mess. I was in the kitchen, practically all the time.

James Buckle: When the good weather came in I guess about April of 1941, then we started having full field inspections, and we had to put everything in, make up your pack, and go out in the parade field, and you lined up there in the formation, the lineup to fix up your shelter half (?) Every man, you would have, you would have the pup tent – that was your shelter half, and you had two blankets in it, and they didn't make us carry rations, but you had to carry your toothbrush and your razor and all that stuff, and then set up the pup tent and then they threw the blanket down and you had to weigh your material on the blanket. And then the officers would come by and inspect it. And during the bad weather we did the same thing inside of the barracks – we laid it all out on our cots though.

Chet Nelson: It was an extremely important base. It was an extremely important base. And its function, it worked well. And I liked the idea that it became the 1011th Convalescent Hospital at the end of the war.

Vincent Saccone: The hospital was very good; it was a good-size one. They must have had about 15 wards. I'm sure it was used plenty after we left.

Alfred Wells: I was at Camp Edwards in '44, mostly just convalescing there. But, we'd have to go to a class in the morning and then we'd get off in the afternoon to run around, go the beach and this and that...

William Lanza: Well, football, baseball, squash if you want. And then they had a theater. And then they had dancing at the rec hall.

Robert Gaudette: Most of the time when you'd get through supper, you were too tired to go anywhere.

Carl Britnall: But they had a day room.

Robert Gaudette: We had a day room.

Carl Britnall: Dayroom. Yeah, and a ping-pong table.

Robert Gaudette: And a canteen, where you could drink 3.2 beer, and you could drink it all night and not get a spy (?)

Joseph Burke: Every Saturday morning we used to have to line up outside the barracks, on what they called Company Street, out in front of the barracks was a Company Street and Captain Road out there. Prior to that on Saturday morning they used to have a barracks inspection, and all the units all the way along, and we'd have the officers would come in and they'd go through that routine of checking for the dust and all this kind of stuff. And if, whichever barracks did the best job of that, and we'd scrub the barracks, because the old barracks remember had wooden, like pine floors on them and they actually had big cracks in them and stuff like that – but we used to scrub those floors with a, with brushes, we really went down, soap and water and brushed it, we really did a bang-up job, I mean it was really unnecessary – it didn't need to be that clean – but nevertheless that's the Army way. So we went all through that routine. And then one outfit would be given the prize and they used to call it the bologna, and what that, they'd give us a little streamer. So after that big inspection, that big deal out in the street where we all lined up and all the officers and all the saluting and all this, whoever won would lead the parade over into the parade grounds. And our particular unit, which was A Battery, we won that thing for about, I think for about 10 weeks in a row, 12 weeks in a row. Then all of a sudden the boys said, wait a minute we never got anything other than leading the parade, so after about 10 or 12 weeks of this we said wait a minute, what are we getting out of this? This is not worth all the effort we went into to win that prize, so then we quickly fell down towards last place thereafter, so we never did win anything after that.

Carl Britnall: Somebody from my company had to go to Officers' Cooks & Bakers School. My name is a B, that's bad, because they all start at the top of the alphabet, so I end up doing most of these things. So I end up going to Cooks & Bakers School. It's only going to be a one-day deal. So I go there and I think I was the only First Lieutenant there; all the others were majors or colonels or so forth. They're going to teach us how to use dehydrated foods overseas. So we prepare all this stuff, they tell you what they're doing. You know they've got every condiment you can think of under the sun. When you fix this stuff up, gee that was great, not bad. You got a potato, they take some ham or some bacon fat and mix it in there and cook it and wow, it come out terrific. Oh, this won't be too bad, well. We get overseas, no condiments, no bacon, no... just dehydrated this, dehydrated that.

Albert Megna: We had one guy, we had balconies up on the second floor, and one guy thought he could sing. He was pretty good, so somebody brought him over to the front of the barracks and told him to sing "By the Waterfall" and a couple of guys up above got buckets of water and when he said by the water fall they dumped the water on him.

Robert Gaudette: My wife gave me two dollars to give to the kid, and 40 cents to buy a hamburger down at Buzzards Bay before we went into Camp. So sure enough, we stopped at Buzzards Bay and I got a hamburger and a cup of coffee, cost a quarter, and I had 15 cents left over. Saturday, we had

inspection, we had to clean all the barracks, you know, get everything in ship- shape and the minute the officers left, somebody said “shoot a nickel,” and out come the dice. I ran that 15 cents up to 80 dollars.

Arnold Hunter: We got the first Jeeps that were ever given to the Army; we got the first Jeeps, original Jeeps, the very first ones. It was interesting, and our kids got a hold of them, they thought they had tanks; they’d go running around and think they could do anything with them; they were getting in all kinds of accidents everywhere. They would see a tree about this big and say oh we can mow that down, finally they realized they couldn’t mow that down, it was stopped.

John Deloffi: I used to, remember taking our workmen’s carrier and going out in the woods in the four-wheel drive vehicles and going through all the shrubs, and the trees weren’t mature then – they were all baby trees – and just having fun there, when we could get the vehicle.

LTC Anthony Cimino: As a final exercise the Amphibious Brigade went to Cotuit, to Camp Cotuit, which was named by them Camp Can-do-it, where they did some, a lot of water training. And using the 36th Division they undertook an invasion of Martha’s Vineyard, to see if indeed the theory was going to work. So under tremendous secrecy, and under cover of darkness, they left Cotuit after very sneakily – not sneakily, but secretly amassing there. They crossed the sound, and at just the right time, at EENT, dawn, first light – they hit the beach at Martha’s Vineyard, and everything went according to theory. They hit the beach, the boats opened, the troops went up and took positions, and at that time most of the population of Martha’s Vineyard rose up from behind the dunes and cheered them on. So their secrecy went down the drain. They came back and then worked on more security.

John Deloffi: In the end, at Camp Edwards, I felt I was going to a nice place.

Joseph Burke: It was a good life while it lasted, then we had to get old. And very likely I’m going to use the military cemetery over there, the National Cemetery here at Camp Edwards, and I think of the plaque over there. So little did I know when I came down in 1948 that Camp Edwards, that I’ll probably end up always being at Camp Edwards.

William Lanza: I like what the Army did for me. It kept me in pretty good shape. A lot of guys didn’t like it. But I like the fresh air. I like the outdoors. And I more or less kind of adapted...

Carl Britnall: I can’t remember anything bad. All I can remember is all of the good things. So many good people, a good time really.

John Mulcahy: I think that by and large that throughout the military experience the highlight are the guys that you’re with. I think almost everyone probably would say that, but it’s true. You form real life-long connections.

Chet Nelson: And I’ll go by certain roads and know what was there, and what it meant. There’s certain roads that really bother me when I go down them, you know – ‘cause a lot of these guys didn’t come home, you know, this was their last stop.

James Buckle: All in all I'm glad I served my country, and I was fortunate enough to come home with a full hide, which some of my friends didn't...

Arnold Hunter: And it taught me discipline, it taught me self-reliance, it taught me personal responsibility.

Chet Nelson: I always felt a lot of pride here, yeah, what I know, and felt the feelings of men passing, you know...

Alfred Wells: I was just lucky – lucky, lucky – that's all I can say.

Albert Megna: You went in there as a boy, you come out as a man. You take away Camp Edwards – then what? You've got nothing.