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COMPANY 311, STATE CAMP 77, NORTH BEND, PA  
SHINGLEBRANCH

The mission of organizing the Corps was turned over to the War Department. The Army had long established bases in every section of the country, stocked with World War I surplus clothing, tents, stoves, and everything else needed to outfit an army, be it a military or a forest army. Within days the Army was mobilizing all of their facilities to begin accepting and conditioning recruits for the task of working in the forests. In the Third Corps Area of the Army of which Pennsylvania was a part, this was accomplished from concentration points established at Ft. Meade, Ft. Washington, Ft. Howard Ft. Hoyle, Ft. Holibard, Maryland; Ft. Monroe, and Ft. Humphries, Virginia and the Carlisle Barracks in Pennsylvania.

It can be said that Co. 311 had it's origin on the streets of South Philadelphia as that is where most of the young men who eventually comprised the company were from. When the first call for recruits was announced in Philadelphia, all youths between the ages of 18-25 began to inquire as to what the camps were all about, how to get in, what was the pay, and above all, "it is not the regular army is it?".

There was a distaste for the regular army in many cities at that time, as the memories of World War I was still fresh in the minds of many of the parents of these young men. Also fresh in the minds of all concerning the regular army was the treatment the Bonus Army of WW I received at the hands of the regular army under the command of Gen MacArthur and his aide Col. Eisenhower, who, backed by army tanks and horse cavalry, roughly routed the Bonus Army out of their makeshift camp in Washington, D.C. in 1932.

The pay that the new recruits were inquiring about was 30 dollars a month, with 25 dollars being sent directly home to their dependents and the other 5 dollars going to the men at camp for their own spending money. The 25 dollars going home in many cases was the only cash money some of these families had as income. Conditions were very tough. Somehow they survived. Also food, clothing and lodging were to be furnished by the army, "army style".

The first to be recruited were from the most destitute of families. Many, even though they were eligible on destitute grounds, did not pass the physicals. They had to be healthy to do outdoor work that was being planned for them in the forests and parks. It did not matter so much if the recruit was underweight as many were. They were expected to put on some weight from working hard, eating balanced meals and getting plenty of rest.

The physicals were amusing in a way. There were fellows of all shapes and sizes. Some were dark and hairy, others light and hairless. And the Army had a sure fire way of dehumanizing the men by marching them around from room to room naked, and looking into and investigating every hole and crevice in their bodies, poking them here and there and everywhere.

After the recruits were selected and passed their physicals, the next step was to transport them to Ft. Meade, Maryland for conditioning. Many of these city boys have never seen a mountain, ridden a train, killed a snake or used a shovel. Many would not have known the difference between a hemlock and a sugar maple tree. But that was all in their not too distant future. They all came with a common purpose. They saw a chance to help stave off the depression for themselves and their folks at home. And there was a bit of high adventure in it too. For untold ages, youths have been leaving their homes for this reason. Whether they sail the seven seas, or to fight wars, or as crusaders toward the east, or to "ride the rails" to California, young men have always had a restless desire to see and to partake of action just a little beyond of where they were.

From their gathering point at the 30th Street Station in Philadelphia, all recruits were shuffled onto passengers coaches of a Pennsy train headed for Ft. Meade, Maryland. From the size of the gathering and the number of coaches lined up, it appeared that every youth in South Philly was expected and really was there. The regular army men in charge were trying to make everyone march in lines of fours... it was funny... and they were serious about it too. But many of the new recruits either could not count or they did not understand English, or both, as these fellows were bellowing something like... YER-RUP ...DOO ...TREE ...HORE ...YER-RUP... DOO... TREE ... HORE. It was confusing, but they did herd them into the cars for the four hour ride to Ft. Meade. The ride ordinarily would take much less time, but this "troop train" was long and slow and slower yet going through towns where people were out in full force along the tracks waving and crying at the boys as though they were going off to some war. It was a war in a way, not a shooting war, but a war on poverty, hopelessness and despair.

The train pulled into Ft. Meade about noon after leaving Philadelphia at 8am. They were immediatel lined up, yelled at , "yer-rupped at" and marched into a long building with a sign in front .....MESS HALL ... Those words were to be the most important of many new words that the recruits would have thrown at them for the next few weeks by the regular army men. They will visit this place about three times a day and some may even spend considerable time there

peeling spuds while on KP ..... a form of punishment for minor infractions in the army.(!!!)

At the mess hall line each recruit picked up a mess kit, an aluminum dish about five inches by eight inches and about an inch and a half deep, deep enough to hold some stew, or mashed potatoes and gravy and a piece of meat. There was a hinged aluminum arm about a half inch wide that could be used as a handle to carry the mess kit when it is full of food, or when turned over the top could clamp down the cover which also was of aluminum and could be used as a dish for bread or cake or salad. Also picked up were a canteen cup, a knife, fork, and a spoon. the canteen cup had a hooked handle to make it easy to carry when filled with coffee or tea. Later a canteen was issued that would fit into the cup and was used for water and fastened onto a belt when working in the woods. But that too was in the future.

The first meal was a stew of some sort, bread, butter, coffee and a piece cake; also an orange. It was a hearty meal. That orange was something as most had not had an orange since Christmas, about four months ago. Everything was eaten as all were hungry. After that first meal, all the men were lined up again in single lines at several points marching toward the dispensary, another army term that the men would get to know more as time goes by. At the dispensary the army went into it's dehumanizing act again, only this time more thoroughly. "Alright youze guys off with your clothes and throw them here on a pile, you won't need them again". Some men could not give up their duds that easily, so they retrieved them and put them under their arm as they walked along naked. "Hell, my brother can use these clothes back home", one of the men was heard to say.

The naked line moved right along with would-be doctors on each side swabbing and poking inoculation needles into each arm near the shoulders, making some a little woozy, stiff and sore. The line kept moving along to the clothing counters. Here the men were being outfitted in army duds. Each man received two sets of everything.... Long johns, khaki shirts, work dugarees (later known as Levis) and matching work shirts, heavy shoes, socks, dress shirts, overseas caps .... everything in two's. Nothing fits, everything two sizes too big, possibly on purpose, expecting the men to grow into them. Every ones head is spinning by now, from the shots, from the dose given with the shots and from walking around naked for the past two hours and having all of the clothes thrown at them.

After putting on some of the mothball smelling clothes, the men went to the tents assigned to them, six to a tent, with iron folding cots together

with mattresses, sheets and blankets. After a short rest and trying on the new clothes, the men were looking forward to one more important and hopefully peasant function ..... SUPPER. The bugle blew for supper and all fell into the "chow" line. The supper was good; roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, salad, desert and coffee. There were no complaints. It was a hectic day from Philadelphia early in the morning to Ft. Meade at noon, then the medicals, shots, ill fitting clothes with a lingering mothball smell, then supper and sleep on cots in tents. So far everyone survived this first day, sore, stiff, tired sleepy and apprehensive.

For the next two weeks it was learning the army way of doing things. The GI way. There were the bugle calls in the morning to get you up, bugle calls for "mess" and taps at night. All Army. But there were no rifle drills or anything of that kind of training, as this was a civilian corps and the army was reminded of that emphatically. Since this was an army post with regular army sergeants in charge of conditioning of the men, they found it very exasperating to be compelled to treat these civilians with kid gloves. But treat them with kid gloves they did or they would have had to answer to Congress.