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FROM FT. MEADE TO NORTH BEND

Company 311 formed with recruits from Philadelphia were in their second week of conditioning under the command of Lt. Paul Pichard of the regular army and 1st Lt. Joseph Mullins of the reserves. There were six other non-coms who helped to whip the new recruits into somekind of shape with calisthenics. This was intended to toughen up their muscles and together with wholesome food, put these men probably in the best physical condition of their young life.

On May 5, 1933 at 1pm, Commander Pichard received orders to have all of his men pack their equipment and be ready to march out on the company street by 3pm. Trucks would be available to take them to the railroad station for departure---- destination unknown. This order was for all other companies at Ft. Meade also. And it was raining torrents. Lt. Pichard, a veteran of WWI remarked that it always rains when the army moves.

After eating a bag lunch and being served coffee at the station, the men finally boarded the "troop train" and settled into the day coaches with their wet blanket rolls. It was now about 8pm. After much jerking and shuttling the train was off. The men fell into a fitful sleep of their crowded coaches. Company 311 occupied three coaches and were told not to wander into any of the other coaches of the train. The officers took turns watching over their company in transit. The slow moving train reached Harrisburg, Pa. at midnight. Again more shifting and jerking until the long troop train with all of the lights out found it's regular track where it settled into a uniform rat-tat-tat of the train wheels and an occasional whaling of the locomotive whistle.

As daylight came the next morning, May 6th, the train stopped at North Bend, Pa., it's destination, and the men of company 311 piled out as the rain kept pelting down. North Bend in the mountains of central Pennsylvania was a dreary looking rain soaked hamlet to these men from Philadelphia. Not only did the men pile out, but all of the gear needed for equipping a military company was thrown out..... the tents, stoves, the men's duffel bags, assortment of canned goods and dried foods, and even some bags of coal for the ranges. Acting mess sergeant Pat Canavan delegated some "volunteers" to set up the coal ranges back of the railway station. In a short time there was hot coffee scrambled eggs bread and jam for all.

After their makeshift breakfast was finished, the men were milling around the station and some ventured to a nearby combination store and gas station while the officers were trying to find out the location of the camp and how to get there with the men and equipment. There were only a handful of natives

around at that hour and they were as confused with all of the commotion of the new arrivals as the new arrivals were of this God forsaken place called "North Bend". The officers were making frantic efforts to secure some kind of trucking company to haul the gear out. Finally after an hour's effort, the Finnefrock Dray Line was secured to do the job. It was another hour before the trucks arrived.

In the meantime the men were getting restless. It was decided to start the march to the destination while the men were still eager for some action and their bellies still full. It was Sergeant Latham's job to gather the company into some kind of marching line and get moving. It was difficult to get them away from the store where they were buying a piece of candy with the meager few pennies that they had. One enterprising local youngster was doing a brisk business selling names and addresses of local girls to those who still had a nickel or so left. The price was a nickel a name. Sgt. Latham soon broke that up. **(The enterprising youngster was 'Ish Heaps*)*

The men shouldered their water soaked blanket rolls and set out through the pouring rain in single file, Indian fashion. That soon changed to a double line and after a short distance the line was getting irregular, sometime double and sometime triple or more. As the line was advancing out the macadam road, the natives were peering out the doors and windows, some were standing on porches just looking at this "invasion." They only vaguely heard about these new CCC outfits coming here. One look at this water soaked line and the young girls were locked up in the house until the line passed by.

Many felt sorry for the young men trudging along slowly in the down pour, hunched over from the water soaked blanket roll. Several men standing on the porch at Piker Fravel's Hotel were keenly observing the marching line, notably Piker himself and Ralph Smith and Elmer Heapes, all veterans of WW1, which was only fifteen years before. Memories were stirring for them.

The line moved on for what seemed like hours with gloomy predictions that the camp site was forty miles back in the forests. And after more weary marching time, they arrived at the site indicated on the map which the army officers were examining carefully. "This is it", Lt. Pickhardt said, "the army makes no mistakes. OK Sgt. Latham, set up camp here as soon as you unload the gear off the trucks".

What the officers and the 100 and some odd men saw at the junction of the Left Branch of Young Womans Creek and Shinglebranch Creek in Clinton County of Central Pennsylvania was five acres of tangled underbrush, fallen trees, old railroad embankments left over from lumbering days, rocks and mud, everything

that would make it the most miserable site for a camp anywhere.... gloom ...gloom ...gloom.. everywhere. And rattlesnakes, 12 were killed the first day and forty that first week.

Having gotten his orders, Sgt. Latham went into action.... "Alright you'ze guys, don't just stand and mope around, we have work to do". Latham was an old hand at these kinds of manueverings, having served in the army of occupation in Germany in the early twenties. "Put your blanket rolls down and get them axes, picks and shovels and start clearing the place. We want to get some of these tents up. And you corporal, get some of these guys and start setting up the cook stoves. Never mind the rain, we can't do anything about that", yelled the Sarge again. He seemed to be in the height of his glory. He never had so much depend on him before. The officers were practically useless here, they were more or less book soldiers, but a little while with Sgt. Latham and they will learn in a hurry.

After being threatened with no chow and sleeping on the wet ground and in the rain, the men soon picked up the sarge's enthusiasm and grabbed the axes, picks and shovels and began to swing wildly but before anyone got maimed the whistle blew and the sarge was bellowing again. He was forever blowing his whistle and bellowing. Fortunately there were a few men experienced in the use of the tools to show the others how to cut down trees and clear the area enough to set up a few tents. By dark and after a superhuman effort by the men, enough tents were set up to give them a bit of shelter. Early in the afternoon and also after a super-human effort by the mess sergeant Pat Canavan, some soggy bread was dried out on the now partly sheltered coal ranges and served with strawberry jam and hot coffee to the hungry men. Also at dusk with the rain still trying its damnest to discourage the men, who by now were dog tired, hungry and soaked to the bone, a welcoming aroma was drifting over the camp..... it was from a big GI kettle full of Irish stew and lots of steaming black coffee. How Canavan managed that was an appreciated mystery. There is nothing that will make a tired water logged hungry man happier than a belly full of Irish stew and hot black coffee.

What a daywhat a 24 hour period.... unbelievable.... and not a man lost or maimed. Somehow the men curled up in their soggy blanket rolls and wet clothes and fell into a well deserved sleep tripled up in the tents and on the ground, but no one cared about that now. Sleep, sleepbut during the night the call of nature had to be answered, and the army through Sgt. Latham already thought of that. He had a detail of men with shovel dig a hole about two feet deep and fifteen feet long some distance down wind from the camp but

not too far as they might have to go in a hurry. They then drove two three foot long 2'x4' pieces of wood pointed at one end and pounded into the ground at the edge of the dug hole and about six feet apart. On top of that they would nail another 2x4 the length to reach from one of the pounded stakes to the other to form a seat to accomodate about three men at a time. Several of these were put around the hole. These "accomodations" would have to do until a more permanent arrangement was made later.

It took another two weeks to get the site cleared and leveled off and all of the tents set up in an orderly and straight line along what will be the company street. Everybody pitched in and worked, and no arms or legs were lost from the wild axe swinging. Surprising too, as none of these men had ever swung an axe before. They were getting into the swing of things and their spirits were being buoyed, so much so that they were beginning to smile and joke a bit now....even to poke a little fun at the Sarge, behind his back of course.

Sgt.Latham was a Creole from down Louisiana , and he not only had a southern accent with a Creole twist, he also had a speech impediment. It made every utterance of his come out as a slightly tounge tied slurred non-stop southern drawl. Every morning he would come around about 6 blowing his whistle and shaking the tent poles trying to get the men out of their sacks (bunks). But he would shine at roll call after breakfast. With his slight slur, along with his southern drawl and Creole twist, he could slide through those Polish names that would even make the Pope proud. Over half of the camp was Polish, Slovish, and Russian with the rest being Italian, Irish, German or Scotch Irish. There were only three Jews and three Greeks and no Amish in the two and a half years that this camp was here at Shinglebranch.

After a while all of the company members knew of the Sarge's proficiency in sliding through all of those so called foreign names, and the Sarge himself was pleased with that feat. So much so that he would on occasion pull a reverse on the name pronounciation, especially when he would want to impress some important VIP's.

He would proceed to call the roll.. Andrekas, Baranoski, Katarzyna, Michalczyk, Byzkukszko and on and on until he came to a stumbler and ... looking perplexed, he would spell out ... S...M...L...T...H... "how do you pronounce that?", he would ask.