

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
Written Memories from Albert R. Germaine, March 1993
Child living at Fort Hancock
1930-1939
Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011
Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

In the early (19)30's we lived in North Jersey and spent much time on the "Hook" with the family of Master Sgt. Louis Razga, 52nd Coast Artillery. In 1913, my Dad was also a Coast Artillery man stationed at Fort DuPont (DE) and Fort Monroe, Va. "The Sergeant" had two daughters, Eleanor and Margie. Margie's husband was also a sergeant in charge of the "Military Police." He rode around with an "Indian" motorcycle, always spit and polish and "hot stuff." We stayed at #73-A at Sergeant's Row.

For a little kid the "Hook" was the greatest. It was fascinating and exciting. Nine Gun Battery at North Beach was like a magnet. We ran about the catwalks and the 12" rifle (gun). Did them all! The beach was beautiful and had maybe a handful of people on it! Fishing on the "Hook" then (1930), the pier was used by the Army Ordnance and the Coast Guard. I recall the latter received a new revolutionary type of boat. It was called the "Invincible." It was completely covered. It could roll over maintaining a degree of watertight integrity. It was like they said it was unsinkable, an impressive piece of equipment for its day. Fishing on the pier seemed to be a busy place, crowded with fishermen! My Dad used drop lines attached to bells screwed into the pier to "sound a bite." A large variety of fish could be caught such as porgies, kingfish, and croakers, in addition to the kind that are caught today.

At North Beach the blues and stripes were plentiful at the right tide, etc. "The Rip" was trolled for hours by the Highlands striper captains. We also recalled watching the Coast Guard chasing the "rum runners."

Over toward Officers' Club was a tennis court not used too much in those days. I don't know if we had sporting goods quite like it is today!

I believe the old movie house was moved to its present location as a Chapel. (The WWI era wooden movie house was torn down before WWII. The Chapel, Building 35 was constructed in 1941.) Sal Giovenco and Sgt. Gooch's daughter Juanita were married there. I believe in 1944! In any event I recall going to the "new" movie house about 1933. For 5 cents I had the biggest "frozen Milky Way" candy bar and my first! The lobby was "spanking new" and the seats had emblems of the American eagle and red velvet. Very impressive.

The present Museum was the "Guard House" in those days! The "Prisoners" always wore denim work clothes and hat with a large white "P" stenciled on the back of their jacket. They usually collected the trash in back of the homes. A large mule pulled a triangular shaped cart with big wooden spoked wheels. Always a "non com" (Non-commissioned Officer) accompanied them. He had a small arm strapped on his back.

We spent the summers at Sandy Hook, always with a case of poison ivy! Calamine lotion and a cup of lye solution were close by.

The Parade Ground was usually the center of attraction; morning muster, parades, baseball games, retreat, etc. It was a beautiful site with Officers' Row over on the bay side.

We always stayed at Bldg. 73-A in Sergeant's Row; a duplex house on the south side (or half). In that period, the furniture wasn't too fancy. It was Spartan but functional and comfortable.

The bakery was located just east of the movie house and the hot bread was placed in large two wheeled carts to be taken to the mess hall by the "guys with the blue denims!" (Bad boys in the Highlands on a night off!)

As kids we wondered why some roads were purple in color! We found out that it came from the Ford Co. in Edgewater, NJ, a large assembly plant. I guess someone surmised that it was pretty good fill for roads. Also probably free for the taking!

While trolling "The Rip" at the "Hook" lines quite often were lost by supposedly "giant fish." Later in the 1960's someone said this was a large boiler type wreck. It was finally removed and was photographed and printed on the front page of a fishing magazine. You couldn't believe the thousands of hooks, plugs, and sinkers festooned on this thing!

I remember one day we set up a table to sell beach plums to anybody who would come down and stop, as kids did selling lemonade!

The 20" inch Rodman Gun was moved in 1937. Retired Master Sgt. Razga was in charge of the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) members (that moved the gun and constructed the island that it sits on).

At the entrance of Gateway as it is today you can still see the concrete apron in the center of the roadway which the "Gatehouse" manned by soldiers. In order to gain entrance to Fort Hancock as a visitor the guard would have to phone the person you're going to visit. Then he gave you a large green visitors pass to place on the driver's side of the windshield!

Also at the entrance to the Hook was called Sandlass Beach on the bay side, it had numerous bath houses and a great beach, and was always a busy place.

I recall the colors of Fort Hancock (for instance college colors etc.). All officers and sergeants had sings with colors yellow on red background stating the rates and ranks.

I believe there were two naval reviews off Sandy Hook in the years 1935 and 1939. President Roosevelt was aboard one of the ships. It drew thousands of people and cars it was an exciting day.

Sgt. Razga in 1921 was chosen to represent the Army as a body bearer for the unknown soldier (The Old Guard took custody of the remains, and the procession to the capital rotunda where it lay in state. After to internment to Arlington.)

The many and wonderful days and times as a kid at Fort Hancock in the 1930's now in the 1990's my enthusiasm for Sandy Hook has not waned. Many great times and people I've met makes me go back quite often.

Respectfully submitted,

Albert R. Germaine