

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Frederick Repole
26th Coast Artillery Band
9th New York Coast Defense Command
1917-1918
Interviewed by Tom Hoffman, NPS
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Transcribed by Mary Rasa, 2011



Soldiers of the 9th New York Coast Defense Command at Fort Hancock.



World War I soldiers posing in front of barracks like the one that Mr. Repole lived in at Fort Hancock.

Photos courtesy of NPS/Gateway NRA

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

(Talking before interview starts was not transcribed)

TH: But your family did come here roughly about 1910 you were saying?

FR: Oh they brought me down as a baby, 1897.

TH: What did Highlands look like then? You know your earliest remembrances as a little boy growing up?

FR: Not too much difference in a way. Let's face it. What we are getting now is these high rises along the waterfront.

(Tape stops and restarts)

TH: What about Highlands? What it looked like when you were a boy besides the condominiums?

FR: Well, first thing there was railroad. The railroad ran right through the Highlands. And they had a stop at Water Witch which is where I am in the Highlands. Then it went down over the bridge and so on. And then we had two movies in town that I can remember and a big dance hall down by the bridge. Creighton's they called it. And Bahrs' and all those restaurants. But physically, not much changed, you know. A couple of new houses. Up the hill, all that changed is up the hill and at the Lighthouse. You noticed that?

TH: Yes, the new buildings.

FR: Now they have the new high school up there and so forth and so on.

TH: Did they have dirt roads back then? In Highlands were the roads dirt or paved?

FR: No. No. We had dirt roads. Oh, I got, oh I forgot. You know I have a book home from the 50th anniversary. You want to see real old pictures. They are in there. It shows you what...oh when Bob when he came he used to tell me he would find his way back to the hotel they used to stick a lantern on a stick to show you which street to walk on.

TH: really?

FR: There were no real sidewalks.

TH: So we were discussing how you got into the Army.

FR: Yeah well, not only that like I said before I was subject to draft. No question about it. 19, a little over 19, and my neighbor, boy friend Davy we didn't feel like getting drafted or nothing, you know. So we didn't. We just walked up to the regiment, the local regiment and our Father knew somebody in the regiment and I spoke to somebody and he spoke to him and being as I said before the regiment, all the regiments the personnel the elderly personnel are all getting out and the they kind of always like to go out with a big full band. A full band and a full compliment and everything. So, from April 'til about August they was doing nothing but recruiting, you know. Coming in and out and getting organized and around April we got notice that we were going and going and going but like everything else you didn't know where you were going. And the payoff was I wind up here in Sandy Hook. This was my old stamping grounds since I was a kid in the town of Highlands.

TH: This is right off of here is where you would go fishing.

FR: Oh the fishing here was great then. The fishing, the crabbing. The crabbing is coming back again too I understand but the fishing and the clamming and what not. It was like I said you didn't need a penny in your pocket. You needed a little muscle a pair of oars and that was it.

TH: And you would go out and do pretty well.

FR: Yeah. We would get plenty, oh we used to right off the Hook here later on after I got the outboard and then he had boat my friend we came up here to go fishing. He said he heard all about it. So, I brought him up here. I said, "Bring a tub up with you." He thought I was kidding. So he brought a tub. We got one I think, we got 150 and he lived in Red Bank and he had a lot of neighbors. So, he goes home with all this fish see and everybody spoke to him would like to know are they all cleaned. He cursed me for days afterwards. They wanted them but they didn't want to clean them. (laughter) How was that?

TH: Quite a job to say the least.

FR: We just cleaned 18, we had 23 the other day and last week we got 28 one day and 25 another day. When you come home you get tired of cleaning them and then we filleted them. Some people like them with the bones and some people like a fillet.

TH: What about the, getting back to your entering the Army? Remember you said you joined up?

FR: We joined up two weeks after war was declared. We went up to regiment and we spoke to the bandmaster 'cause he wanted to know the instruments we played. I said I told him I played a little fiddle. The friend of mine he played a little trumpet. He said, "Fine." Suddenly we went in and talked to him and the first thing I know before we left we had signed our names on the papers. Then we went home to tell our folks and the riot was on. Without...

TH: You were saying why was that because you're....

FR: Yeah because we had signed up.

TH: Your parents didn't want you to go, right?

FR: Well yeah, they figured different. My Son he was in World War II, my Son and he was a musician too. Well, he was an accomplished musician. I mean he went to Julliard School of Music and colleges and he played in Radio City Music Hall for years. So, when they called him he was out on the road with a band. So, I went down to the office with the card and explained. I said, "He is a full fledged musician. He is out on the road." I said, "He will be back and give me an extension." When he came back he went in the Army. He really went traveling.

TH: I imagine so being a...

FR: He got in with a band and he went all over Europe. He was in Germany, down around Italy, he was in France and England. In fact, right now he is over someplace in Berlin on vacation.

TH: Well what happened to you after you signed up? When you signed up here?

FR: Well, I just signed up and went away over here and just a couple of months later we wound up over here. Then we put the whole winter in over here.
(Tape stops and starts.)

TH: I am sorry. You were saying before that it was awful cold when you got down here.

FR: Oh it was really bad and then we had the barracks was close by to the... see they kept the band separate. We had 26 men, 26 or 28 men in the band. And we were sort of a separate unit attached to Headquarters. And we lived in the wooden cantonments here right by the Lighthouse. We had our little luncheonette and everything was mostly out in the open. It was god damn cold. Whenever you got stuck on KP it wasn't funny. I am telling you that. And then it got so damn cold they finally they gave it up and we went in the basement of the barracks across the way. And what a ride we had down there. We were all most of us were about my age see. And we were hell raisers. We would have all the music instruments and everything down in the back down there. And then the drums would be set and someone, one guy would give one a kick and every god damn drum would go rolling down the stairway or something like that. I am telling you we did a lot of hell raising these guys did.

TH: What about when you first came down to Fort Hancock were you assigned a unit?

FR: Oh, no we came down as a regiment.

TH: As a regiment?

FR: Oh yeah as the 26th Coast Artillery.

TH: The 26th?

FR: No. The original name 9th CDC, 9th Coast Defense Command. And the boys up there in the Armory had 12-inch disappearing guns on the floor.

TH: What armory is this?

FR: The 9th Regiment. West 14th Street and 6th Avenue. Greenwich Village. That's been there for years and years. It's still there by the way. But that was, see every regiment had a different type and CDC meant Coast Defense Command. So, no matter where we go it had to be on the coast with that type of regiment you know. And who the devil knew where you were going to be exact. It was always was the story in the Army you are gone you are moving and that's it you just pack up and go. Or you pack up and you wait, they used to say. (laughs) We did that and we wound up right in here at Sandy Hook. Very nice place there. It is still the same. It don't look no different at all.

TH: When you were in World War, the 1917 period, World War I what were the roads made out of like? Were they paved over or were they dirt?

FR: Not really dirty. No. They were nice. As near as I can remember we had a nice setup. I can't exactly remember the roadway. The only thing I can remember, the movies. The movies in the wooden shack down here and they had a crank handle machine and I used to hang out in there with the boys and the fella would get tired of turning and give me a chance to turn it. And if you didn't turn it fast enough then the picture would look a little funny and you know, you had to do it at just a certain speed to have a correct picture on the screen, by hand though. And no talkies of course.

TH: Yeah they were all silent films.

FR: All silent.

TH: Were they the popular ones of the day then? Charlie Chaplin and....

FR: Charlie Chaplin and oh yeah that would be the same. And the other team, the big fat guy and little skinny guy.

TH: Oliver and Hardy? Yeah.

FR: No. Laurel and Hardy that was another name but (inaudible) and then the funny thing, we were here awhile and they made up what they called the 52nd Railroad Artillery. They took some of our boys and some of, because there was a couple of regiments here

from different spots so they made this railroad artillery out of them and they sent them overseas see. Well, I wound up down in New Orleans. That was another nice town.

TH: About how long did you stay here then at Fort Hancock?

FR: I was just trying to figure it out. We got down here in August of '18 as near as I can think of, remember you know. Yeah we went down with all the coats on and everything else and by the time we got down there we had everything off. We stopped at Atlanta, Georgia on the way down. Now that was another funny thing. We only went down with a small group. I think we had a sergeant. It was a group of about a dozen and yeah we had a regular Pullman car and we were always hooked on one of the other regular trains. So we got in a tunnel in Atlanta, Georgia. I don't know how it happened. The first thing we all they had them unhook the car, they left us in Georgia and we all went sightseeing. I always remember I pitied this poor sergeant that we lost anybody on the way by the time we got down to where we was to go. Then we got down to Jackson Barracks, New Orleans. A Lake Pontchartrain, I think they call it. So, we got down there and it was dark and everything else you know. You know you were assigned to your quarters and you the cots, you know, all the cots were open and ready and we walked in and everything and somebody kind of kicked it. It looked like all the god damn cots were going to walk away. There must have been a million cockroaches of every size. All over the whole god damn cot and you couldn't see them. No. We all ducked out of there fast and we went downtown and we slept on a boat. (inaudible) Somewhere down there for the night.

TH: No. I was just wondering about this is you were mentioning this was when you went down south. I was wondering how long you were at Fort Hancock?

FR: That time, I can't remember the time myself. We weren't here too long. Let me see.

TH: You say about 1917. Two weeks after War had been declared. That was 1917.

FR: Yeah well, that was when I enlisted.

TH: Right.

FR: That was two weeks after that was in April, April something you know.

(tapes stops)

TH: Okay. Well, we have established that...

FR: April 4th I think. War was declared April 4th or something.

TH: Well, it was early in April.

FR: The beginning of April, yeah that is April.

TH: So, you entered the service April 20, 1917.

FR: Right. That's when and so on.

TH: And you were later discharged December 23, 1918. Yes. That is just after the...

FR: No. See we were down in New Orleans. It's that time when we were there awhile. I don't know exactly. Down there in the south. And you know the difference between the south?

TH: And the north, yeah.

FR: Boy it was...

TH: Even way back then sure.

FR: The colored boys if you were walking down the street they would walk out in the street and out of your way and everything else. You know what I mean?

TH: Yeah the difference. But I am just wondering what did you do here in the band at Fort Hancock?

FR: Oh see now here in the band at Fort Hancock we had to do evening parade or reveille, not reveille much with the band but evening parade we had to do here every now and then. And then we would service between Keansburg and down in Long Branch, Little Silver and all these towns we went around selling war bonds. That was our hard patrol work, in other words.

TH: You would march to the towns with the band or...

FR: No. They would get to a hall.

TH: I see.

FR: We would get to a hall, some big hall and a couple of times we were down there to have the, in Sea Bright. That was where they had all those big (inaudible) we would get down at the field down there and we would do our little exercises and so on playing and selling war bonds that way.

TH: What kind of songs was the band playing then?

FR: I can't remember them.

TH: How about, *Over There*?

FR: Oh that was amazing. Like today, *Roll out the Barrel* and what not.

TH: But do you think it was *Over There*? Was that one of the popular, *Over There*?

FR: Oh yeah. In fact, now the Legion Band that I am with now see, they are from Brooklyn, we go to quite all the conventions we have been going and we have been to California and Niagara Falls and Washington, D. C. and everything else. So, going past the grandstand our favorite song is, *East Side, West Side New York*.

TH: Yes.

FR: I'll be damned and we were up to Rochester a couple of weeks ago and we just played the song, *East Side, West Side and All Around the Town* and everybody was singing with it and some other big bands going by us had about a hundred in them was playing just regular (inaudible) but just play those couple of songs. What the hell else? We had about three or four songs that we always worked. Use the same song day in and out. Miami Beach and LA, California, Boston, we have been to all them places. Like I say but we just use those popular songs indicating we came from New York and that's it.

TH: Yes.

FR: And it went big. We only had 15 men in the last parade. We are losing the you know, I don't know what is going on but we all seem to be having the same trouble, lodges, different big lodges: Masonic lodge and Elks lodge. You know, the young people don't go for that. The old days that was all big stuff.

TH: What was your first impression when you came into the Army at Fort Hancock? What was it like to come up the road then? It was a dirt road then, right?

FR: Well, yeah most of it was a dirt road all the way along there as far as I can remember you know. Most of the time we, the weather, we used to get about, well we always had the Army trucks. Everyplace we went the Army trucks would take us everyplace but if you were out by yourself you had got to hitch in and might hit some officer and somebody might hitch in. And then we went to town and walked around town. Our town really hasn't changed that much.

TH: What about when you first came in? Can you recall where you had to report at Fort Hancock?

FR: Oh yeah they had a time limit. You had to be by a certain time and you would pass a guard there see. And they would look at you and show you their pass. And everything was alright. Getting out was the same way. Always had to have a pass in and out near as I can remember now, see.

TH: You were in the wooden barrack buildings?

FR: Yeah.

TH: What did they look like? Can you describe what your bunk looked like or?

FR: Oh they just. I don't know they are still here. Any of those wooden barracks...

TH: Most of them are gone. Over by the Lighthouse they were all torn down a few years ago.

FR: Oh, well its just all wood and you have a coal stove. That's a part. They had one or two belly coal stoves and all night long somebody would be on deck to see that the fire would keep going and the fire wasn't you know out of order, you know. So you get assigned to that now and then.

TH: And did you have a bunk with a locker or anything?

FR: Now we just had these Army cots, Army cots and we had a little box at the foot of your bed to keep you own personal things in. In fact, I still have the box. It is home in Brooklyn.

TH: You really do?

FR: Sure and that's the box. It's about that big. Near as I can remember that is the same one.

TH: Would you store your uniform in that and things of that nature? Your shirts and...

FR: Well what you were wearing most of the time, most of the time would be your clothing. Then you could either do your own laundry or we had laundries I think there was a laundry around here where we used to duck up and have it done. Well, here you had everything. Well, some of the other folks were out where there was nothing and it was different. On the Fort here was all together different.

TH: What were you issued? Can you remember the type of clothing you were issued?

FR: Everything was woolen. And then we had the wrap arounds.

TH: Leggings.

FR: Leggings. And they had sort of a canvas.

TH: Legging like too.

FR: Leggings and they had a couple of slits in those.

TH: Were they usually the brown khaki colored clothes?

FR: Oh yes the khaki, yeah.

TH: And I guess you wore the high collared uniforms.

FR: Oh yeah and you had the big flat hat.

TH: Campaign hat?

FR: Campaign hat. I've got a picture of myself someplace.

TH: Your shoes were Army

FR: Oh yeah. All army shoes. Yeah.

TH: I am just interested. I just wonder what kind of undergarments? Were they the long john type back in 19--?

FR: Yes. We had them. We had them.

TH: 1917. Issued by the...

FR: Everything was issued to you. Everything was issued. One thing in the service, everything is always issued to you.

TH: Yeah I was just wondering what type of things were...

FR: I think, I think, I recollect you make an exchange with the clothing as they go sour you know. I think you exchange them. Turn one in and get another.

TH: Did you have any patch or anything to wear that signified that you were a band member or anything?

FR: We had a button with the band insignia around it and one from New York, I think the other button said New York.

TH: I see.

FR: I don't know where the hell them things went.

TH: Do you think you have your uniform or...

FR: Yeah. There was one where we were getting on and off the train. I think that one was taken in Atlanta, Georgia. With the full pack on. I know there is one around. And

another one up on the, Atlanta, Georgia I have got one of those. I know there is one of them standing by the train just getting on.

TH: Wearing a campaign hat at the time?

FR: Oh yeah.

TH: And full uniform.

FR: Oh yeah.

TH: Did you carry you instruments with you or were they stored away?

FR: Well, we used to, most of them were stored away because they had to go traveling in regular boxes so they don't get ruined. But some boys, I myself was one of them. We bought our own instruments. We were, what I am getting at is they needed clarinets, see, a clarinet was one of the hottest instruments. It really played something a class of the fiddle and everybody wasn't interested in you know. So, they issued us an Army issue but the type they issued was an old system. They called it the Albert system. And around that time this new system called the Boehm system which came out with more keys on it which means you can do more and you can work more fingers and you could on the other ones. So all of us, we all went out and bought our own instruments.

TH: I see.

FR: All the band instruments went in the closet. Went in the closet, left them in the box and that was it. We would have nothing to do with them.

TH: Now with your instruments, where did the band play? You were the 26th Band?

FR: We were the 26th Coast Artillery. Well we would always get stuck here and do the parade. Do the parade.

TH: Near the flagpole or out right in front of it here?

FR: We would parade the whole field. Parade the whole field yeah.

TH: I see.

FR: And then at other times we would just play concerts. For everybody you know. Yeah that is the regular routine for the Army band.

TH: You were saying.

FR: Marching and concert playing. And then in between we would make up a dance band to play for the dances. Like the officers' dances and the enlisted men's dance. Everything was all music.

TH: Now your group never served on the guns out here though?

FR: No. We carried sidearm's but we never used them.

TH: What type of sidearm is that?

FR: The old .45s.

TH: You mean the automatic Colt .45?

FR: They were big too.

TH: Yeah I know. No rifles or did you.

FR: No. No rifles.

TH: Did you ever fire any of this off or target practice or anything (must be nodding no) Just band just practicing in the band? What did the other fellas do here? I am sure they had other...

FR: Oh yeah. They had target practice all the time.

TH: How about drilling out here on the Parade Ground? Did they go through drills?

FR: Oh yeah. They had drills out here yes. The other boys, regular bands and barracks and so on. And then the other boys worked off the guns here and somebody towed the targets out there.

TH: Yeah the targets out in the water

FR: Well, see in the regiment we were known as the, "Saturday Night Soldiers." That was the password, Saturday Night Soldiers. So, all Saturday Night Soldiers came down here I heard and they pushed them on here and they set them on the targets. They never told us they are not supposed to hit the targets but our Saturday Night Boys were wrecking all the targets (laughter). I mean and that's all the props they got on the floor of the armory in the city. All the armories are the same way. Every armory was different. They had a medical score and you had the Air Force and everybody, every regiment in the city. It was quite an honor being in a regiment being in a regiment in those days.

TH: Yes.

FR: It was nice. And every regiment had different uniforms for the bandmen.

TH: Really.

FR: They had their own special color and staff outside the regular Army staffs which they would use on parades sometimes. They used to use the Army bands a lot. All of the different regiments all over the city. Thanksgiving Day Parade and New Year Eve Parade and all that.

TH: Did you ever get a chance, to get away from that though, when you were here did you ever get a chance to see the guns or was that off limits?

FR: No. We were off limits. We were bandmen.

TH: Yeah

FR: We could walk, well we couldn't get too close.

TH: But at no time did you ever get to see the guns here or sneak a...

FR: I seen them once or twice and then after when they had started to fall apart I don't know how I got in that time. I know I got in once or twice, walked all along or rode all alone the roadway there where all the guns were, see. But while we were in service and during the war at the time that was strictly taboo, you know.

TH: Did you ever here them firing off?

FR: Oh yeah. When these boys fired those damn things over there, this house shook over here in Highlands. We would get a warning. Target practice off the Hook. Keep your windows open.

TH: From the concussion.

FR: Yep. I am telling you. Yeah. That I can remember too.

TH: What was your, where would you eat like? If you lived back over here by the Lighthouse and you had a field the Army barracks.

FR: They had the, what did we call it, the Commissary, yeah. It was right here someplace. Right on that road too I think it was. The Commissary...

TH: Back behind the...

FR: Where the Bowling Alley was you could go in and get a soda or a sandwich or things like that. I don't know, no I don't think it was in that building.

TH: But back behind us. We are here in the Post Jailhouse.

FR: Yeah.

TH: Back over here.

FR: Well, what did they call it? The Exchange, the Post Exchange. Yeah finally get it. Yeah we had the Post Exchange. Yeah we had the Commissary down here where we could go in and buy cigarettes and cigars and things like that.

TH: What were the prices like then in the Army? Really cheap?

FR: Oh yeah. Dirt cheap. But we had a couple of wise guys. Their folks had stores and they used to buy everything by the dozen and bring them home and sell them through the stores.

TH: Real wise guys, yes.

FR: Well, you get that in every business and every racket, you know that.

TH: By the way you mention to me you had, was it a colonel out here, with the band, he always wanted you playing. What was the story behind that?

FR: Oh well, this colonel we had always wanted the band out regardless of the weather or the coldness so once a couple of times we get out there and the boys just start to play, they hit about four notes and that was it. The saliva in the instruments just froze up.

TH: What would you be playing then out here. What did the colonel want to hear, was it morning or ...

FR: It was according to what they wanted. If it was a concert we would pick up good musical numbers from shows and show numbers. We always used those. And other band numbers, see. Some of them were very nice, very descriptive and you really got to know your music to play the damn thing. And then some of the other numbers were, and then they had the regular band marching you know. That was the main thing marching and playing. Then they had the regular march tunes, the band master and the drum major and the song.

TH: What was a routine day for you like? You and the boys in the band?

FR: Well, we never knew. Well, here we were lucky. We had three bands. We had a week or two weeks off. One week one band for the whole Fort and then we would get lost and take the, go up on the boat and go up to the city for three or four days and come back.

TH: You told me about that experience with the ice. Can you tell me that?

FR: Oh yeah, that one, that was a good one.

TH: About what year was that?

FR: We would get on down to Wall Street see, and we came down this way but the weather was so damn cold and the ice in the river, by the time we hit here, this river was one cake of ice.

TH: This whole bay, you mean the Shrewsbury rRiver?

FR: Yeah.

TH: Sandy Hook Bay.

FR: Well, they tell me they used to drive horses and wagons right across the river down there by where the bridge is.

TH: Yeah around Route 36 Bridge.

FR: It doesn't get that cold anymore.

TH: Not from what I have heard. I have heard that too where it would freeze up.

FR: Well, that is what we had here. The only experience is what we had that day when we couldn't come back on pass as I said and if you don't get back on time with you pass then you are assigned AWOL and of course there is a little penalty of some kind. So to be on the safe side we got the captain and had him sign our pass that we were on that boat ready and would have been here on time up until the boat see.

TH: I am wondering though getting back to the routine, the day to day thing. Did you have band practice or how would you get up in the morning, you know? Was there reveille by bugle?

FR: Yeah. Well, you see as a band unit it was sort of a little band unit out by itself. We would get up and have our regular breakfast. We had to do our own stuff in the band. We had have our own cooks. We had to take our turns at the dishes and so on and so forth. We were a separate little gang you know. And then, of course, later on they had all machinery but at that time it was all hand work. Everything had to be done by hand. You had to help out in the kitchen by peeling potatoes and what not.

TH: KP, right.

FR: KP they called it. Can't remember all the different things but you know.

TH: Yeah. Well, I was just thinking after breakfast if you got KP duty you had to clean up.

FR: Oh yes. You all had your assignment. Everybody had to take a certain time for KP and sweeping the floor.

TH: Keeping the place clean.

FR: And keeping the fire going and the buckets of coal

TH: Did it keep the place warm for you or was it still cold in the winter months?

FR: Well, it wasn't that bad because the way they had the barracks, no nothing bad at all.

TH: I guess you had your regulation Army blankets too right?

FR: Oh yeah, the regulation Army and you had the long johns and everything else you know.

TH: Was it pretty comfortable? I am just thinking the winter months are cold for me. And I was out here in February. I am just thinking of the soldiers then.

FR: No. I was just, talking about being cold, I just finished 44 years with my Con Edison and I never worked indoors.

TH: Yeah. You were always out.

FR: Always out on different jobs you know. Most of the time it was on the meter department, putting in meters or taking meters out. You know it wasn't funny some times when you were trying to do something and it was god damn ice cold. Your fingers are froze. And you got to solder them in too, you know. Oh, we had some cold weather up in the city. I don't know how about here. Well, here it must have been about the same as the city.

TH: What about getting back to that routine after you cleaned up the barracks did you ever have band practice or were you given other assignments too?

FR: No. We had a regular routine. The orders were always sitting up on a board what time and of course for band practice.

TH: You said the fellas had a wild time here. What did you mean by that?

FR: Well we used to go out got to town, see. One of the boys had a car and get a couple together, you know in a car, you know, and then they go to town and get liquored up.

TH: What were the favorite spots? Were they local here like Highlands and Sea Bright?

FR: Well in Highlands there were a lot of small places, see. They still are. Town is full of little small places, see. Some of had some of the real hot stuff, you know. A couple down there yet that are always raided. Pulling them in but in little towns what goes on and what they don't know it ain't funny. I guess it is all over the country.

TH: Was the Fort area kept pretty well clean when you were here? Were there always men working on the place?

FR: Yep. It's what you got now. It's still the same. There ain't no difference.

TH: This is the war years. You said things were going pretty quick here. Were there a lot of men here?

FR: We were loaded. We were loaded.

TH: Really?

FR: All over. They had these wooden barracks all over the joint in here. Sure.

TH: They are called temporary barracks.

FR: They are temporary barracks set up. Just throw them up in a hurry.

TH: Did they have any like tents set up too?

FR: Oh yes, we had some tents too. In fact, we were in tents I think when we first got here. And tents done rightly are warm. Don't forget they are warm.

TH: When they are put up?

FR: Yes. I think I told you they are warmer than you imagine. They have a different type stove you know that you could use in a tent. You just have to be careful of the canvas. But the tents some of them weren't cold. I know the wooden barracks some of them boy you could look through the cracks.

TH: It was pretty well built up here then. Were there a lot of soldiers here? Were they training or drilling?

FR: Always training or drilling yeah. Oh yeah.

TH: I understand of units were sent out from here to Europe to fight over in Europe.

FR: Oh yeah they did.

TH: Did you see off any?

FR: Our bunch, some of my gang went off over there as the 57th Railroad Artillery.

TH: And they went off to fight in Europe?

FR: Oh yeah sure.

TH: Did you see them off back then?

FR: Well, you could never see what the hell was going on?

TH: Yeah.

FR: You were limited to where you could...

TH: Go.

FR: You couldn't walk around here. Privates more or less, we couldn't walk around here. That was all the Officers' Quarters. Near as I could remember see we had the main street there. You went from there up to the Commissary, the Post Exchange and so on. It wasn't bad. I am not sorry. I wish I had another couple of years. Stayed in.

TH: Really, in the service?

FR: Because musical training I would be better off than I am now in music. I tell you if you are doing it every day of the week it ain't funny. I pick it up once a week and every now and again I get fouled up. In plain English, you know, what I mean.

TH: As I understand it you couldn't go by Officers' Row. Was that off limits?

FR: Yeah.

TH: They were pretty well segregated back then. I guess it was much stricter?

FR: Yeah.

TH: Regulations.

FR: Oh yes. Especially during war time. They never know who the hell is around. And then they had places in the mounds down there, of course, where they had everything all buried and so on. And the big golf balls we had in here for a while.

TH: What is buried here? You say the mounds. Do you mean the gun emplacements?

FR: No, the ammunition.

TH: Oh yeah the ammunition.

FR: You see them alongside Spermaceti Cove in there.

TH: The bunkers right.

FR: You can tell they are there but you can't see them because they are, the ground, everything has growed right over. Only might see a door or something see. No. They are very strict in war time. Not like peacetime. Big difference.

TH: Did they ever use Army mules when you were here or horse?

FR: There were a few horses I notice but mules I didn't notice.

TH: By that time you were mostly mechanized with trucks and things?

FR: Well, you see, that's why this outfit was strictly guns on the waterfront. On the harbors.

TH: Harbor defense.

FR: Harbor defense and so on. That is why we didn't have anything like that. But you had the Infantry boys for background on the run, you know, things like that. That what it was, you know. We were Coast Defense Command. Just come down and man the big guns. And when they went off, they went off. (laughter)

TH: Have you seen any of your friends? Do you remember anyone or keep friendships with the band members?

FR: The last one I had seen I had seen one of those books but I think he is gone too. Because he went back to the old 13th Regiment after the War was over. He worked at Wannamaker's. John Wannamaker's. I remember that. And John Wannamaker had a big band see and he went back to that and joined to local regiment. And I went to that regiment too after a while hung out with them a while. I only went down there for the business. The band would go out and play at the horse shows at Madison Square Garden, New York. And that was strictly business see. You get paid the regular fee. And that is why I used to hang out with the regiment see. You could get paid the regular fee. A dollar an hour and that's it and music is, I got stuck on music. But the fiddle, madone.

(tape stops, restarts in car driving)

TH: These building like Building 47 here, were these warehouses in your day if you can recall? I mean it is a long time ago.

FR: They must have.

TH: They were here.

FR: It wasn't the Bakery was it?

TH: No. No this was just warehouses.

FR: They must have been here. You can see that. Yeah they have been here all that time.

TH: I just thought maybe you could recall if there was a specific use you saw it being used for....

FR: No. Worked anything done during war time, everything was too close and ...

TH: Secretive.

FR: Never wide open is what I am trying to say.

TH: Yeah right.

FR: Be careful where you walked and all the way down when we had to walk in sometimes this looks somewhat...

TH: This right up here?

FR: Yeah, yeah. That one little stool and then the movie house was here.

TH: Right here now where the movie theater is now? This theater was built in...

FR: I wonder if that was the building was here or is that new.

TH: Well that was built in 1941. That building is the Post Chapel but it might have been built on that site.

FR: Yeah I think it was right in this section here that I can remember.

TH: The Post Bakery, how did that operate? Did you buy things here or was it just baked here?

FR: No. We would come in and get our order of bread for the mess you know what I mean? I don't know how it worked. I forget how it worked but we used to come up and get our number.

TH: Right. You seem to remember. You wanted to see the Bakery. You can go right here. Did you used to go down here? You know was the bread good?

FR: Oh yeah it was the same like in a regular bakery like routine.

TH: Did they make just more than bread or?

FR: They didn't do much on the cake or maybe they did too. But I just always remember somebody one of us always got detailed to go down to...

TH: There's your wooden Army barrack there with the green roof.

FR: Nothing is standing. There are still older in Eatontown. There are a lot of them there, Fort Monmouth.

TH: This is that field there in the photographs in the Museum of where all the Army barracks were. This is by Battery Potter.

FR: I was just looking at that and was trying to figure.

TH: Because there you could see over by the Lighthouse out in the background.

FR: Well, this was all covered with the, that's right. This I forget now.

TH: That's the oldest brick building out at Sandy Hook.

FR: I mean was it something?

TH: What was it used for when you were here? I know it was the Officers' Club.

FR: Maybe that's it. The Officers' Club. I know it was something.

TH: Right. When you were here?

FR: Yeah. That would be the Officer Club there. (Building 114 in World War I would have been the Officers Quarters for the Sandy Hook Proving Ground before becoming the Fort Hancock Officers' Club in the 1920s.)

TH: And then over here you can make a right and pass in front of Battery Potter here. This is a big gun battery here where they had the earliest type of disappearing guns on top here. You can see it here on your left.

FR: 18--

TH: '90

FR: 1890. See off limits. That's what we always had to be careful.

TH: That's the old Post Exchange building because see the old Gymnasium here this was converted into the Post Exchange. Last year it was still used as a Post Exchange but you remember the old building here that was the Post Exchange.

FR: Well, the old buildings is what I am saying.

TH: You could buy odds and ends there, sort of.

FR: Yeah, you know, I was about to say little odds and ends. If you wanted to get a sandwich. We had that 3 point beer too and that was about it and soda and candy and ice cream and so on.

TH: What about right here? You can see the Lighthouse is to your right.

FR: I would assume I lived in this section.

TH: So this would be northwest corner of the Lighthouse right in here.

FR: I will have to go through my old relics to see my old pictures. Actually find some from here.

TH: We would appreciate it.

FR: Well if I can. See over here they used to call me the colored boy because you see what happens to me.

TH: You are tan, yeah.

FR: I get so god damn black and everything else they don't know who I am. So I always liked to wear a hat. A hat to keep the sun off mostly. We were only youngsters. A bunch of youngsters were over here.

END OF INTERVIEW