

The Knowledge Bank at The Ohio State University

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Cadet Engineers At Knox

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This story presents a brief summary of Company "D" Engineers, R. O. T. C. Camp held in summer of 1940 at Fort Knox, Ky. The company was composed of 42 Ohio State University, 22 West Virginia University, and 17 Rose Polytechnical Institute students. Lieutenant-Colonel Dorst of Ohio State University acted as our senior officer, Captain Henney of Rose Polytechnical Institute as Company Commander, and First Lieutenant Hagen of Rose Polytechnical Institute second in command. Sergeant McMath of West Virginia University and Sergeant Haas of Ohio State University were in company headquarters. Camp started on June 13 and extended to July 26, 1940.

The first two days were nervous and exciting ones for those who had never been to a camp and especially to a military camp. Most of our time for the first two days was spent taking a rigid physical examination, receiving clothing, equipment, and the assignment of temporary sleeping quarters. By Monday, June 16, the entire company was somewhat whipped into shape; permanent tents were assigned; rifles were issued; and the squads and platoons were formed. Without a doubt this day officially opened the camp period.

The first week was given to physical exercise, military drill, organization and rifle instruction (learning trigger squeeze, various positions, aiming, breathing etc.). Toward the end of the first week the boys were quite tired of hearing whistles, of changing clothes every hour or two, and especially of handling the rifle.

The next two weeks were devoted to the rifle range; the actual firing of the 30 caliber Springfield rifle. Each morning at 7 a. m. we would start out to the range in a six-truck convoy and return to camp around 3:30 p. m. This was a practical session of what we should have learned the first week of camp. There were about 72 targets ("mark 73," as Rollin Smith would call down to the phone operator in the pits) that were fired at by the R. O. T. C. infantry and engineers. Company "D" occupied targets from 62 to and including 72. Our jawbone record, which meant the practice round, was fired at all positions. We fired at 200- and 300-yard distances. After we completed our practice round we shot for record. A number of Ohio State University fellows qualified for expert, sharpshooter, and marksmanship ratings.

We also took our turns at firing the pistol and realized how difficult it was to shoot and its importance. We fired a jawbone round at 15- and 25-yard distances both rapid and slow fire, but a number of the fellows failed to qualify in their record fire.

After these three weeks of preliminary training, the boys were ready for the real training in duties and work

that the regular army engineers perform. We spent one day at field fortifications which consisted of digging trenches, goose berries (round circular affair made of barbed wire), and putting up double apron barbed wire fences (design similar to ordinary fence with the addition of barbed wire strung out to the sides). We also had interesting demonstrations on anti-tank obstacles and road blocks.

Another day was spent surveying the R. O. T. C. camp area with a plane table. Each sketching party consisted of four fellows, your own tent mates. This was one of the problems that were assigned to us to be solved for grades.

On another hot day we constructed the new H-10 steel bridge over Otter creek several miles from our camp area. This bridge has two spans and is capable of handling 10 tons. A Jeep (Scout) car went over the bridge, and we found it had a deflection of one-fourth-inch. This day was also a day of reckoning, because nearly everyone was thrown into the creek at least once.

We also had a good taste of reconnaissance over the surrounding territory. At 7 on this particular day we were each given a map and the coordinates of our boundary lines and instructed to reconnoiter the land within the boundary lines. This meant plenty of hard walking through woods, mountains, and taking notes. Some of the Ohio State University boys remember Snow Mountain, because a number of them were lost there. Our report was to give condition of roads, improvements required to permit supply trains to pass over, and an estimation of the labor required to repair craters and set up temporary roads for use until the craters were repaired. From all the walking we did, some fellows turned out to be Kentucky hill-billies.

The next week and a half was the toughest time the boys put in. For about four days we put up and took down the 1869 ponton bridge and the new portable foot bridge, each bridge about 182 feet in length. Our best time was about 45 minutes for constructing the 1869 bridge and 20 minutes for the foot bridge. Carrying the heavy bulk for the 1869 bridge was the hardest part of this week. These bridges were constructed over Salt River, seven miles from our camp on the reservation. The name of the river is misleading, really it should be called "Muddy River." A number of the fellows were thrown into the river, and there were also a good number of mud fights.

The last three days and nights of our scheduled training period were spent at Salt River. It was early on a Thursday morning that the entire company started marching to Salt River. It was a good long seven mile

march and each fellow carried his complete pack and rifle. This load amounted to approximately 50 pounds. A few miles from camp the boys engaged in a mock battle with the enemy forces, which turned out to be the supply detail that went out ahead by truck. Early Saturday morning company "D" broke camp and started back by foot under a blistering temperature of 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

The last three days were devoted to checking in clothing and equipment and reviewing a few demonstrations.

Now for a few side lights of camp, at least something besides the daily routine. As a rule, reveille was at 5:15 a. m. and we were dismissed around 6:30 p. m. Taps came at 11. From 6:30 p. m. to 11 p. m. everyone indulged in recreation of some sort; some played ping-pong, read, wrote letters, went to the Post theater for a show, or gathered in groups which turned into "bull sessions." Wednesdays from 12 noon to 11 p. m. and from noon Saturday to 11 p. m. Sunday constituted the free time. Louisville and Elizabeth Town were well populated by R. O. T. C. students at those hours.

In our spare time, during the week, we played baseball, tennis, football, and volley ball. There was track, swimming, wrestling, and boxing for further recreation. Company "D" almost won the baseball championship. Don Apple won the R. O. T. C. wrestling championship

in his division, and several other fellows won medals in track and swimming. Vic Filimon, Ohio State University, and Ed Waddell of West Virginia University won the R. O. T. C. doubles championship in tennis.

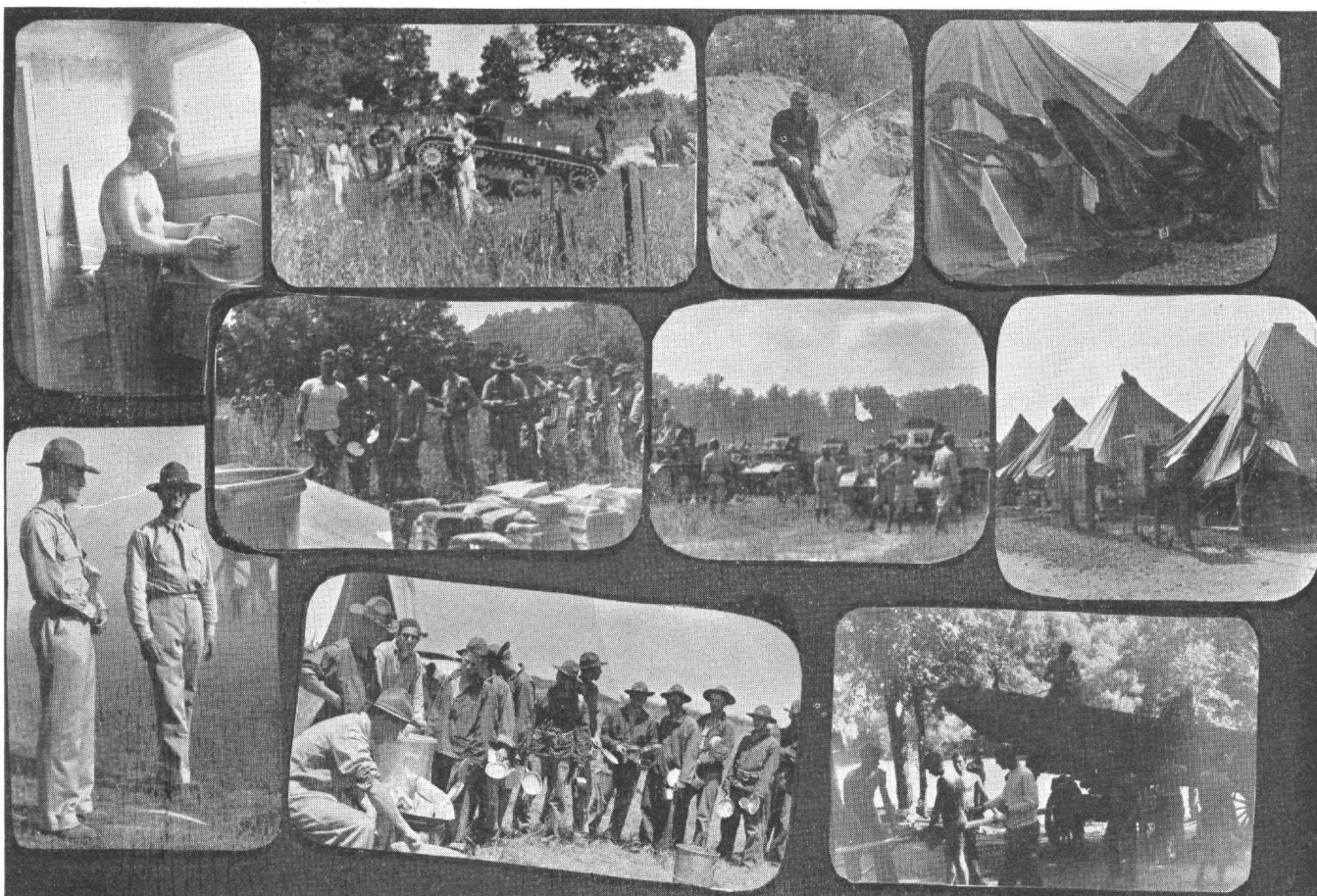
The U. S. Harbor Engineers were kind enough to allow us a full day's cruise on the Ohio River on one of their barges. The trip extended to Louisville where we inspected the locks and the huge hydro power plant built through the efforts of the U. S. Engineers to dam the water at Louisville.

A mechanized cavalry unit gave an interesting demonstration on attacking a ridge with tanks and scout cars employing the aid of an observation plane.

There was also an interesting demonstration performed by an infantry unit in solving a tactical problem with the aid of tracer bullets.

Another incident happened the last night of camp. Ask Rollin Smith who plotted to tear gas the Battery "B" boys who were so enjoyably singing when it happened.

In closing, it was for a number of reasons, a wonderful experience for everyone that attended camp; an experience that I believe no one regrets. It gave each and everyone the chance to observe his good and poor leadership qualities. And then too, the camp provided an excellent opportunity to develop one's ability to get along and work with one another in such a large group.



O.S.U. R.O.T.C. in Action at Fort Knox