CAMP SEVIER, 1917-1918

FRANCES MARSHALL WITHINGTON

Preparation of this paper was one of the most difficult tasks I have ever undertaken for two reasons:

1. Lack of data, concerning why and how the camp was located in Greenville, who engineered the deal, and the names of citizens who interested themselves in it.

2. Memories had a way of intruding and keeping me from sticking to the few facts I had gleaned – which of course was delightful, or sad, as the case might be–but not material for a paper before such an august body as the Greenville County Historical Society. So, I decided to start with the facts, and end with the memories.

My sources of information include bits and pieces from the libraries of Broadus Bailey, and Henry McKoy, the papers of the late William G. Sirrine, Frank Barnes' *The Greenville Story* (1956), and a few newspaper clippings. The Greenville County Library had practically nothing, and my efforts to get anything from the Chamber of Commerce or from Washington proved fruitless. A book published in 1936 by Elmer Murphy and Robert S. Thomas, *The 30th Division in the World War,* and owned by Broadus Bailey described events leading up to the need for a Camp Sevier. From that source I should like as a starting point, to quote from President Wilson's remarks to the joint session of Congress, April 2, 1917:

> It is a fearful thing to lead this great peaceful country into war, into the most terrible and disastrous of all wars, civilization itself seeming to be in the balance. But, the right is more precious than peace, and we shall fight for the things we have always carried nearest our hearts–for Democracy, for the rights of those who submit to authority to have a voice in their own governments, for the rights and liberties of small nations, for the universal dominion of right by such a concert of free people as shall bring peace and safety to all nations, and make the world itself, at last free!
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> To such a task we can dedicate our lives and fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood, and her might for the princi-

> ples that gave her birth and happiness and the peace that she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other!

The extraordinary session of Congress called by the President, ended with a declaration of war which the Senate approved by a majority of 82 to 6, and the House by 373 to 52.

Preparations for active participation of American troops in the war followed quickly. The Regular Army was recruited to full war strength. The National Guard was called into the Federal service. Among the first National Guard units so ordered up were the following: 1st N. C. Field Artillery, Col. Albert Cox, commanding; Co. C., N. C. Engineers, Capt. Edward Myers, commanding; 2nd Tenn. Infantry, Col. Charles B. Rogan, commanding; Troop A, Tenn. Cavalry, Capt. Bruce Douglas, commanding; and 1st Tenn. Field Artillery, Lt. Col. Luke Lea, commanding. The Selective Service Act of May 6, 1917, provided for the enrollment of every able-bodied man between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-one with selection made by local Draft Boards according to quotas prescribed by the War Department of persons for induction into military service.

Since the War Department owned no forts or training installations adequate to house military forces of the size planned, the government decided to build large, temporary cantonments mainly in the southeastern United States to take advantage of its mild climate and accessibility to Atlantic ports. General Leonard Wood was appointed to locate the cantonments. He had been a comrade-in-arms of Capt. William G. Sirrine and Col. Oscar Mauldin in the Spanish-American War. These two men interested the Chamber of Commerce (of which Capt. Sirrine was President) in seeking a cantonment for the Greenville area. An option was taken on about a thousand acres of land north of the city and the Chamber invited General Wood to Greenville to show him what the area had to offer. The visit of General Wood was described by Charlie Garrison in the Anderson *Independent* of April 17, 1968:

> General Wood came to Greenville in May 1917, and spoke to a huge crowd in the City Park [now McPherson Park] on N. Main Street. Greenvillians had been clamoring for one of these camps since the outbreak of the war the month before. General Wood had inspected the proposed site.

> Every inch a soldier, the General held the attention of everyone in his audience, as the biggest news story, possibly in Greenville history was about to break. Without wasting too many words, he announced his decision to locate a camp here! In closing his speech, he made this declaration:
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> "I do not believe the American people will realize the full extent of the war, until the casualty lists begin to come in." How right he was.

The area where the camp was located was at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, on a plateau about three miles southeast of Paris Mountain between that elevation and Lowndes Hill. Most of the land belonged to the Finleys, Greenes, Blacks, Edwards's, and Ballengers. It was believed to have been leased for from eight to ten dollars per acre. The total area was about 2000 acres. The main line of both the Southern and the Piedmont and Northern railroads passed through the property. About one-fourth was cleared land, the rest in tall timber. The first troops to arrive were put to work sawing down trees, leveling drill grounds, building roads, and constructing wooden floors on which to pitch the tents used to house the troops. Henry McKoy says his 105th N. C. Engineers helped lay out the camp, and he has pictures to prove it. Broadus Bailey also has a picture book, and there is one at the Library. Mr. McKoy says the paved road through the camp was the first in the county.

The first unit assigned to the camp for training was the 30th Division consisting of National Guard units from the Southeast. Many of the elements of the division had been in service on the Mexican border in 1916-1917 and were recalled to active duty as experienced, seasoned troops. On July 10, 1917, Co. C. of the 1st S. C. Infantry arrived in Greenville, and took up quarters at the camp. It was quickly followed by other units of the same regiment. Training of troops and building of the cantonment progressed simultaneously with troops continuing to do much of the work. One company of the 118th Infantry did so much land clearing, it referred to itself facetiously as the "South Carolina Land and Development Co." On July 16, Maj. Alex C. Doyle, Constructing Quartermaster of the U. S. Army, arrived and conferred with J. E. Sirring, Engineer, J. F. Gallivan, contractor, and Fiske-Carter Construction Co about building the camp. Allen Bedell was Sirrine's engineer on the site, according to his sister, Madeline Haynsworth. By the

time construction started, there were 745 men at the camp, including the elite Charleston Light Dragoons, with whom we girls had been romping on the beach and in the surf at the Isle of Palms. Having left their horses at home, they were made part of Headquarters Co.

On July 25, 1971, the remaining National Guard units of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee were called into the Federal service, and ordered to the new Greenville camp, as yet unnamed. Included in the 118th, the 119th, and the 120th infantry regiments were organizations whose history reached far back into the early period of our national life. Co. C, 1st N. C. Infantry, called the "Forsythe Riflemen", was organized originally in February, 1812, and served both in the Confederate Army, and in the Army of Occupation in Cuba in the Spanish American War. The Tennessee and South Carolina Regiments had served in successive conflicts since Revolutionary times. The 3rd Tenn. Infantry, in the Civil War, had divided its allegiance between North and South.

On August 2, 1917, the camp became officially "Camp Sevier" named for John Sevier, Indian fighter, hero at King's Mountain, general in the United States Army, member of Congress from North Carolina, and first Governor of Tennessee when that state was admitted to the Union. By this time, Col. Van Metts of the 2nd N. C. Infantry was the commanding officer of the some 3,000 men in camp. By the end of the month, around 30,000 would inhabit Camp Sevier.

One of the first problems created by advancing military technology, was what to do with the calvary units! For the most part, they became artillery and machine gun companies. The Charleston Light Dragoons under Capt. Henry Porcher became officially the Headquarters Company of the 30th Division. This Division was nicknamed "Old Hickory" in honor of President Andrew Jackson who was claimed by all three states represented at the camp (I read somewhere that Miss Emmie Asbury a beloved teacher at Greenville High School, and A D.'s aunt, suggested it).

The winter of 1917-1918 turned out to be the coldest winter since 1898. The physical facilities of Camp Sevier proved inadequate for men not yet hardened to army life. There were

no barracks, steam heat or other luxuries, and the men lived in pyramidal tents in rows along company streets. Influenza of a deadly variety, swept the camp and never a day passed that one or more funeral corteges wended their way down West Washington Street (where we lived) enroute to the Southern depot where caskets were stacked like cord wood awaiting transportation home to loved ones. The muffled roll of the drums cast a deep pall over the town. Other diseases took their toll, also, meningitis and small pox particularly. Literally hundreds were quarantined, sometimes whole companies.

Command changed in the various units at the end of 1917 and conditions must have seemed very discouraging to the officers taking over the reins. Besides the severe illnesses among the troops and shortages of material and equipment, there was the terrific weather which drove everyone to seek cover in whatever form it might be found. Regular Army and Reserve officers took up the task and plunged boldly into the work before them The realization of the magnitude of the job was felt in every echelon, from the lowliest private to the generals, and almost insurmountable handicaps were overcome. Utmost discipline was maintained and heavier training schedules imposed in order that the work might be accomplished. General John J. Pershing from his headquarters of the American Expeditionary Forces on January 5, 1918, had urged more vigorous training: "General deficiency and ignorance, commands incorrectly given, lack of training and confusion when enemy lines are broken do not produce highest efficiency." So, in spite of handicaps, the units at Sevier concentrated their training efforts. Machine gun classes and instruction in the use of automatic rifles was immediately begun, and by mid-February, work was resumed on the target range despite the fact that widespread smallpox, meningitis and mumps still required quarantining whole companies. Training in the use of gas masks was curtailed as a concession to respiratory infections, but, by March the Division was beginning to have "graduate riflemen, bakers, horseshoers, cooks, bayonet fighters, machine gunners and advanced artillery men." Due to the type of warfare in Europe, training in the use of mortars became increasingly important.

In the meantime, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker set up the War Department Commission on Training Camp Activi-

ties, an outgrowth of the investigation of conditions on the Mexican Border in 1916. Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, set up a similar Commission and the two operated as a joint group led by Raymond B. Fosdick. This group called on the Playground and Recreation Association of America to organize the War Camp Community Service in the communities outside and adjoining the newly built camps and installations. This group undertook to coordinate into a definite and ordered program the resources of the war camp community, to supplement these resources with others from the folks back home, and "to temper the whole into a wholesome nationwide movement for hospitality keyed to harmonize with the training camp program of the War and Navy Departments." The Association sent its own trained organizers into these communities. Within a matter of weeks, the "War Camp Community" was a vital organism.

Here in Greenville, a map of the town was made to give all service men and contained the following:

1. List of all downtown churches and their location
2. Soldiers rest rooms – at all churches, the Y. M. C. A., Knights of Columbus, Community Club for Enlisted Men, (at Coffee and Laurens Streets, opposite the Opera House), and the Colored Soldiers Club 113 E. Washington Street.
3. Cleveland Hall, at Main and East McBee. The third floor was used for dancing at nominal cost, chaperoned by the ladies of Greenville, and I mean chaperoned!
4. Poinsett Club, North Main Street, "gentleman s club," for officers only.
5. List of Lodges: Masons, Knights of Pythias, Elks, Odd Fellows, Red Men, Woodmen of the World, Greenville Typrographical Union, other Labor Unions, and the Rotary Club.
6. General information about Greenville.

This map was made by W. F. B. Haynsworth, City Engineer, and a copy is owned by Henry McKoy, Greenville.

Social activities at Camp Sevier centered around a Hostess House which served homecooked meals at cost, and afforded a meeting place for the soldiers with their families and friends. The YMCA maintained four buildings on the post with a staff of twenty-five under the direction of E. D. Langley. John M. Holmes was one of the most active and useful. Felicia Perry Holmes was also very active. Ellen Perry says the YWCA helped at the Hostess House. There were picture shows nightly in the "Y" buildings. A Liberty Theatre brought stage groups to perform in every medium from burlesque to grand opera! Also, a Divisional Theatrical Troupe comprised of comedians and singers, entertained and a Base Hospital Minstrel Show was a favorite.

There were recreational buildings maintained by the Red Cross, Knights of Columbus, and the American Library Association that afforded gathering places for the men to write letters, read magazines and papers, play billiards, and sing around the piano. Songs were sung with gusto night after night, the theory being, "If you can't make it fake it." Morale among the men was high and it was an inspiration to be able to contribute a little to their time off from the deadly monotony the training schedule made necessary by modern warfare. Educational classes were held at regular times in these buildings under the direction of Dr. H. F. Holtzclaw, in co operation with Army Chaplains. Church services were held on the base each Sunday for all creeds. The spiritual welfare of the men was given every thought and care.

Social activities in town were many and varied. Greenville soon became a composite settlement of native residents and families of soldiers at the camp. Women assisted in YMCA activities, serving endless food, especially in the War Camp Services Building. Others served coffee and sandwiches in canteens downtown. Mary Ellen Woodside Wallace remembers one particularly, near the corner of Main and East McBee where her mother took her to help at the tender age of ten! She swears she also went to the dances at Cleveland Hall, when her mother had to chaperone. One night a soldier kept asking her to dance. Finally she asked him why he picked her instead of the older girls like the Marshalls, Richardsons, and Houstons, to which he replied that they had a little girl at home just her age. Elizabeth Perry Collins had a tea room on the opposite

corner, a very popular place. Maybe thats where she met Joe! Mrs. Barrow, Julia Robertson's mother, also had a tea room down town, but I've been told it was in the Christ Church Parish House, which had just been completed. As I recall, all the churches had organized social activities and recreation. The old Imperial Hotel, now Hotel Greenville, had a Saturday night dances. The Piedmont and Northern railroad ran trains every fifteen minutes to accommodate the men at Camp Sevier. There were also bus lines and "jitneys."

Mrs. Duke (of mayonnaise fame) who lived in an apartment on Manly Street, got her start making sandwiches for the many canteens, using her special recipe for mayonnaise. She had a beautiful daughter, Martha, who was dubbed "The Sandwich Queen" because she entertained her friends in the kitchen spreading sandwiches! Mrs. Duke's recipe was sold after to C. F. Sauer of Richmond, Virginia, who still markets it.

Probably the happiest times for all were the nights when the service men were invited into the homes. We lived on the corner of West Washington Street and Butler Avenue which was very handy to get to. Many a night there would be fifteen or twenty men to eat and sing. My mother never tired of fixing food – she was no different from hundreds of other women–and of course, the girls were "carried away" by so much attention. I remember an eighteen-year old North Carolina youngster, who brought an officer into town in a side car. He spent the evening in the kitchen, fed by my mother, until the officer was ready to return to camp. Its hard to realize he would be nearly seventy, if he is still alive.

But I have disgressed enough. By April 15, 1918, the first troops trained at Camp Sevier were getting ready to leave. Physical examinations were given to separate the ones who would be going overseas from those who would stay in this country. The 30th Division, 30,000 strong was now seven months old and in its last parade down Main Street, to spur a Liberty Loan Drive, it showed a marked improvement over earlier appearances for a similar purpose. Gas training which had been curtailed during the winter, due to the weather and so much illness at camp, was now emphasized. Finally, on April 30, 1918, an advance party left Sevier for Camp Mills, Long Island, to be followed on May 1 by the Division, trained and

equipped for the war zone. They moved by rail, leaving at daybreak which was supposed to be a secret but every girl in town was on hand to tell them goodby and wish them well, solemnly promising to wait till the war was over!

The 81st Division was shifted immediately to Camp Sevier, and stayed until July 1918:

> The 81st Division was organized at Camp Jackson, Columbia, August 25, 1917, and was composed mainly of Carolinians and Floridians plus 6000 draftees. At Jackson, the latter had come from Chicago, New York, etc.
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> The Division was named the "Stonewall Jackson," for the great Confederate soldier, but its nickname was "Wildcat Division" which came from a creek at Camp Jackson.
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> Shoulder insignia was a circle in five colors, designating various organizations, as follows:
> White – 161 Infantry Brigade.
> Red – 156 Field Artillery Brigade–
> 306 Ammo.
>
> Blue – 162 Infantry
> Black – Div. HDQRS.
> 306 Engineers and Train
> 316 Machine Gun Bn.
> 306 Train Hdqrs. Military Police
>
> Orange – 306 Field Signal Bn.
> Green – Sanitary Train
> 306 Supply Train
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> This was the first Division to appear at a Port of Embarkation wearing a distinctive shoulder patch. General Pershing adopted the idea for the A. E. F., and afterwards, it was adopted by the War Department for Divisions training at home.[1]

The 20th Division was formed in August, 1918, and stayed at Sevier until February, 1919, though the war was over in November, 1918. Later an AERO Squadron was housed at the Camp for several months. In all 100,000 men were at one time or another at Camp Sevier.

After the war, the Camp base hospital was used by the

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[1] Submitted by Mrs. Mildred Whitmire based on Yates Snowden, *History of South Carolina* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1920, 5 vols.), II, 116.

Army until 1925 as a tuberculosis hospital. The whole state, through the rehabilitation program of the American Legion Auxiliary, furnished comforts and foods to the men.

What is left of Camp Sevier? Not much except some street names and treasured memories to remind us of such a valuable place in 1917-1918. The most pretentious marker is that one erected in 1938 by the American Legion on the north side at the intersection of the highway 29 and Artillary Road which has the following inscription:

> This Camp, named in honor of John Sevier, Lieut. Col. N. C. Militia, 1777, Colonel 1781, Brig. Gen. USPA 1798, was approved as a cantonment site May 21, 1917 The 30th Division trained her from August 12, 1917 to May 1, 1918. The 81st Division from May 18, 1918 to July 16, 1918, and the 20th Division from August 12, 1918 to February 28, 1919.

When the 30th Division held its first reunion in Greenville in 1920, it erected the first marker commemorating the site in what was then the Camp Hospital area and is now Piedmont Park. In 1934, Post No. 3, American Legion, erected a modest stone column on a triangular plot where Lee Road joins Paris Road which the Auxiliary continues to maintain. It has a bronze plate inscribed with this legend:

> In memory of the men who trained here, and those that made the supreme sacrifice in the great World War.