Camp Shoemaker During World War II

Need a Ride To The Society Meeting On March 20th? Contact Bill Lloyd.
Visit — SRVHistoricalSociety.org

Over 43 Years Looking Back!

First Class Mail

SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. BOX 521 • DANVILLE, CALIFORNIA 94526

RECORD

NEXT MEETING
THURSDAY,
MARCH 20TH
BLACKHAWK RANCH HISTORY

SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

RECORD

March 2014 ALAMO · BLACKHAWK · DANVILLE · DIABLO · SAN RAMON

Camp Parks During World War II — 1942 T0 1946 — Remembered At Our January Meeting

Camp Parks in Dublin between 1942 and 1946 was the topic of the January 16th dinner meeting. Steven Minnear is Vice President of the Dublin Historic Preservation Association. His book on the history of Camp Parks is scheduled to be published soon.

During 1942-1946 Camp Parks encompassed the area between Dougherty Road on the west, Highway 580 (then Highway 50, the Lincoln Highway) on the south, Tassajara Road on the east, and just across Alameda-Contra Costa county line on the north.

Construction at Camp Parks began October 15, 1942. The facility was commissioned on January 19, 1943. It was named after Rear Admiral Charles W. Parks, Civil Engineer Corps, who was chief of the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks in World War I.

The main facilities were Camp Parks, Camp Shoemaker, and Shoemaker Naval Hospital. Camp Parks was for Naval Construction Battalions (the Seabees). They built bases in the Pacific. Camp Parks and Shoemaker Naval Hospital were designed to support the Seabees. Camp Shoemaker, located between the two other bases, was a naval personnel training and distribution center. It was designed to handle naval personnel on their way to and from the Pacific theater.

At the beginning of WWII, Navy personnel were often sent to Camp Shoemaker, after basic training, for a period of two to six weeks before being sent to the Pacific. At the end of WWII, personnel returning from the Pacific were at Camp Parks two to six weeks awaiting discharge. In 1946, between 1,000 to 1,500 sailors were discharged each day at Camp Shoemaker, in total about 1.5 million personnel.

Sailors received a considerable sum of money including back pay and clothing allowance at the time of separation . Best of all, they were allowed to go home.

(Continued on Page 2)

Blackhawk Ranch History To Be Discussed At Our March 20th Dinner Meeting

Our next stop on our tour of historic places in the San Ramon Valley takes us back to the days of the renown Blackhawk Ranch. Famous for its herds of Shorthorn cattle and Shire horses (large work horses with feathers at the ankles), Blackhawk Ranch won top honors in breeder shows year after year. Cattle buyers and horsemen flocked to the ranch to see all the prize winners. Years later mega homes at Blackhawk Country Club replaced show cattle and horses. At our March 20, 2014 dinner meeting David Behring shares the story of the ranch in its many iterations. Barns and helicopter pads were replaced with swimming pools and golf tees but still as always an elegant place. The story of Blackhawk Ranch supplements the Museum's current great exhibit "Cowboys and Cattlemen". Be sure to come to learn how the two fit together so neatly.

The meeting will be held at the San Ramon Golf Club, 9430 Fircrest Lane, San Ramon. We will gather at 6:30 pm, eat at 7:00 pm, and enjoy our speaker. We hope to see you there.

Camp Parks During WWII — 1942 To 1946 (Continued)

One Seabee back from the Pacific and being discharged got a message that his father was dieing. He put his wallet down and took off for home. Forty years later when Shoemaker Hospital was being demolished the wallet was found. Papers and the driver's license from 1946 were inside. The Seabee's money was gone. The Deputy Sherriff at the scene contacted the DMV, who contacted the owner. The wallet was returned to the owner.

Following the end of WWII, the Navy transferred the disciplinary barracks to Alameda County. The facility became the Santa Rita Rehabilitation Center, also known as the Santa Rita Jail.

A photograph of the Iron Horse Trail taken from Dublin Blvd. shows a palm tree, next to a gate. There are 2x4 and 4x4 posts at an angle. That is all remaining of Camp Shoemaker. Maps showed roads serving Camp Parks in the 1942-1946 period, Highway 50 running east-west and Highway 21 running north-south.

Highway 50, was a three lane road. In three lane roads the middle lane was the passing lane for both directions. These highways were known as suicide highways. From 1906 to 1940, the Dublin newspaper had many stories of automobile accidents.

Highway 21 jogs a little near Dublin. The story is that the road was changed to accommodate the results of the 1865 earthquake.

A photograph showed a point on a ridge near Dublin from which to view the valley. There is a nice park at the top and beautiful views of the valley.

In 1942 the area was sparsely populated. There were about 200 people in Dublin, about 1,000 people in Pleasanton, and 1,500 people in Livermore. The attack of December 7, 1941 meant the United States was faced with a war not only in Europe but also in the Pacific. There was little infrastructure to conduct this war.

The Seabees were drawn into the military not because they were volunteers, but because they were volunteers with a trade. While the sailors tended to be 18-20 year olds, the Seabees were older. There are stories of grandfathers serving in the same unit with their grandsons. The Seabee uniforms were the worst looking ones in the military. The Seabees were unconcerned. They had a job to do.

The Dublin area was chosen as a site for a base. The committee reasoned that if Japanese ships made it into San Francisco Bay, their guns could not reach the Dublin area. There were other advantages. There was a lot of open space, a lot of cheap land and not a lot of people to relocate. U. S. Highways 50 and 21 and the transcontinental railroad was close.

About 50 to 60 families were paid for their land and were provided money for moving. Some families were allowed to move buildings from their land to another location. It is not clear that eminent domain laws were used.

All of the original appraisals were found in the vault area of the Museum on Main in Pleasanton. Photographs of the land were also found.

A photograph of Dublin today identified many current facilities that are on the former military land.

An old Camp Parks sign is on Valley Road. That sign is now on the National Historic Registry. The sign was designed by a Seabee who was an architect. After years of neglect, the sign will be moved to the new main gate.

The architect is Bruce Goff from Tulsa. He enlisted in the Seabees in 1942 and wound up at Camp Parks after serving in Alaska. While at Camp Parks, he designed the entry gate sign, the Hostess house, and the McGann Chapel, which was later moved to San Lorenzo.

The Camp Shoemaker Hospital structure lasted into the 1990's. It was designed for 1,000 beds. During the war, people were treated and recuperated there for months. There was no need for a hospital that large in the area after WWII. In today's medical practice, hospital stays are often much shorter

The hospital was the only building painted. The other buildings were unfinished wood. Buildings were linked by wooden walkways so as to avoid the mud during rainy seasons..

The Camp Parks, Camp Shoemaker, and Shoemaker Hospital were said to be as large as the Great Lakes Naval Training Center, the largest in the USA during WWII. During WWII, about 4 million American men and women were in the service. Between 50% to 60% of the Naval personnel went through the Dublin facilities.

(Continued on Page 3)

The Sales Table — Nancy Ramsey

(Nancy Ramsey)
Packets of cards depicting Mount Diablo, Front Street, Southern Pacific Depot, Tassajara School, "Grand Dames" of San Ramon, Alamo Grammar School 1876, and a collection of assorted historical scenes are available. Each packet contains 8 cards and 8 envelopes. Member price - $3.50 per packet. Historic scene postcards are $0.20 each.

Do stop by the Sales Table.

Need a Ride
To The Society Meeting
On March 20th?
Contact Bill Lloyd.

Visit — SRVHistoricalSociety.org

RECORD

Published by
San Ramon Valley Historical Society
Founded 1970
P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

OFFICERS
Karen Stepper *President*
Jerry Warren *Vice President*
Kathy Halverson *Secretary*
Frances Lloyd *Treasurer*

DIRECTORS
Lee Halversen
Steve Larmore
Bill Lloyd
Jean Mello
Judy Sandkhule

Member's Memorial Gift

NAMES HONORED BY MEMORIAL AND COMMEMORATIVE GIFTS, AND NAMES OF DONORS, ARE ENTERED IN A BOOK OF MEMORY AND WILL BE PLACED IN OUR MUSEUM. For tax purposes, we are a non-profit organization. You may make your donation to the Society or to the Museum — Please check box, below.

Make check to: San Ramon Valley Historical Society Memorial Fund.
Mail to: SAN RAMON VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526
This contribution to the Society REMEMBERS ( ), HONORS ( ),
EXPRESSES APPRECIATION ( ), OTHER ( ). Please check one.

This Donation for:
☐ SRVHS ☐ MSRV

NAME _____

DONOR(S): Name(s) _____

Address _____

PLEASE NOTIFY: Name _____

Address _____

Dinner Reservations

Thursday, March 20, 7 p.m.

$20.00 per person

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO S.R.V.H.S. (Deadline March 18, 2014)
Mail to: S.R.V.H.S., P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Clubhouse
9430 Fircrest Lane
(North off Alcosta Blvd., San Ramon)

NAMES:_____

_____

Camp Parks During WWII — 1942 To 1946 (Continued)

There are stories of local young women signing up to attend the USO dances. This worked if the sailors were from Camp Shoemaker. It did not work if they were Seabees from Camp Parks. Many of the Seabees were older and married.

Many Waves were assigned to Camp Parks, Camp Shoemaker, and Shoemaker Hospital. They were mainly in administrative, service and medical staff jobs. The Waves usually traveled by bus. There are stories all through WWII of women doing extraordinary things.

One reason Steve became excited about Camp Parks is the story of Tommie Simpson. She joined the Waves near the end of WWII and went through basic training. She was then given a choice: take a ticket to someplace, or accept money. She took cash rather than a train ticket. She hitched a ride in an airplane from a local Army post. She was a 21 year old woman who had never been out of the Midwest. She rode across the country in a DC3 with a bunch of paratroopers returning from Europe. They built her a private section in the tiny plane. The plane hopped from city to city. She made it to Los Angeles and caught a train to San Francisco. The streets were covered with confetti in celebration of the war's ending.

She finally made it to Shoemaker Naval Hospital. Tommie was AWOL. She was scolded and told not to get caught in such a situation again.

A base newspaper included an article about Tommie Simpson marrying a sailor. She started the Camp Parks History Center in 1995 which continued to 2010. (Tommie spoke to the SRVHS on January 16, 2003.)

Camp Parks and Camp Shoemaker stories continue to come to light and are being added to the history.
Camp Shoemaker closed in 1946. The Navy deeded the land to Alameda County. The Santa Rita Jail was built.

Camp Parks was closed in 1946 and sat unused until it was used by the Air Force as a basic training center from 1951 until 1957. Known as Parks Air Force Base, the Air Force found it necessary to completely rebuild the base. The sea of Quonset huts and two-story wooden barracks had been dismantled following World War II. The Air Force named all of the streets after Air Force Generals. The facility functioned as a basic training center, overseas replacement depot, and air base defense training area during the Korean War.

In July 1959, the installation was transferred to the United States Army. From 1959 to 1973, it was operated in a standby status under the jurisdiction of the Sixth United States Army, Presidio of San Francisco. Steve ended his story at this point.

Questions: Will the Main Gate be moved? The Camp Parks Main Gate will be moved about 1,000 feet north of its present location, and the land will be developed.

Question: What happened to the Quonset huts? Over 600 Quonset huts were purchased by individuals and wound up a many locations in our area. The Alamo Hay and Grain has one.

The Camp Parks Barracks

Camp Parks During WWII — 1942 To 1946 (Continued)

After the camp was shutdown, people could buy a building, a barracks, or a church. A church sold for $1,000, was disassembled and taken away. To see a 1940's Navy chapel
visit the San Lorenzo Community Church in San Lorenzo. A member added that the flooring in her house was the original hardwood flooring from one of the gymnasiums.

Buildings were constructed to be used only during WWII. At the height of the war, there were about 30,000 sailors at Camp Parks on any given day. At Camp Shoemaker there were another 30,000 people and at the hospital another 600 people.

Vice President Jerry Warren, Our Speaker Steve Minnier, And Our President Karen Stepper.

The Main Gate To Camp Parks

At Camp Shoemaker, there were 40 bowling lanes, 4 gymnasiums, 3 swimming pools, and 20 tennis courts. Camp Parks had 3 theaters. Each could seat 300-400 people. There were Hollywood shows and radio shows back then. There were large amphitheaters where Hollywood stars performed. The service men and women were constantly entertained.

Some 75 Battalions of Seabees, made up of 200 to 300 people each, were sent from Camp Parks. These Seabees constructed roads and infrastructure in Alaska and many bases in the Pacific. They cleared portions of islands and laid steel rod grid work for runways. There are stories of them laying a 6,000 foot runway in five days - in 110°F heat with 99% humidity.

One of the main goals of the Naval personnel was to go to Oakland and San Francisco on liberty. Nobody went to Hayward except to catch the train They took busses and hitchhiked. It was patriotic to give rides to military personnel.

The archives at the Camp Parks Museum includes letters. One letter is from one of the wives sitting outside the camp waiting. When you think of the Navy, you think of trim white uniforms. The letter describes the most scruffy looking people imaginable coming from the camp. The Seabees didn't care much about uniforms. Tops and bottoms were often raggedy and mismatched.

(Continued on Page 6

Camp Parks Update

On October. 1, 1994, Parks Reserve Forces Training Area (RFTA) became a direct-reporting installation of Fort McCoy, Wisconsin, United States Army. Camp Parks is the only training facility within a short drive for 11,000-plus reservists in the San Francisco Bay Area. Firing ranges and a wide variety of training facilities are available. Parks RFTAs area of responsibilities include providing services and training support to military units (active and reserve) and to other requesting organizations and activities. Reserve units permanently stationed there conduct weekend inactive duty training throughout the year, and reserve component units travel here for their two-week annual training.

Camp Parrington is home to Detachment D of CBMU 303. The camp, consisting of a small building at the northwest corner of 5th Street and Fernandez Avenue, became home to the Bay Area Seabees two years ago after Naval Station Treasure Island closed. Although it may not be the newest unit to train at Camp Parks, Detachment D of CBMU 303 is certainly the most "historic." Camp Parrington, named after retired EOC Russ Parrington, is home to 94 Seabees Reservists. CBMU 303 is headquartered on Naval Air Station North Island in Coronado, California.

The Seabees provide a valuable service to Camp Parks. Since their mission upon mobilization is to maintain an advanced base, they train by repairing Army facilities on the sprawling base. In addition to refurbishing their own building, Building 611, last year the Seabees poured over 1,000 linear feet of new sidewalks on Camp Parks, according to Ens. John Hurlburt, OIC of the detachment. This year the detachment will construct a rappelling tower and renovate houses for the multi-service reserve base.

The History Center of the Parks Reserve Forces Training Area preserves artifacts from Camp Park's three military eras. Since late 1942, Camp Parks has been home to the Navy, Air Force and Army.

The information above was taken from www.militarymuseum.org/CPParks.html.

Museum News

January 28-May 4, 2014 Cowboys and Cattlemen

The exhibit focuses on cattle ranching from an historic perspective. Cattle first came to California with the Spanish in 1769 and ranching has been a part of the state's economy since that time. In the San Ramon Valley, cattle were raised by the first American settlers. Their ranches covered both hill and valley land. Some of the ranches which focused on cattle included Blackhawk, Dougherty, Wiedemann, Rasmussen and Elworthy. Many others had livestock as well as planting grains, hay and orchards, such as the Wood, Stone and Glass Ranches.

There will be maps, saddles, branding irons, barbed wire and beef displays in the museum. Each saddle will include a story of its owner. Art work showing landscapes and ranch life will be shown. On Saturdays ranchers will come to the museum and talk with visitors about ranching. Several special events are planned, included a branding demonstration and ice cream social, a Cattlewomen's Association program on beef, and opportunities to try using a lasso.

Town of Danville Tours — Tours will resume in April 2014.
Hap Magee Ranch Park — Saturdays March 8 & 17 — More Details On Next Page
Alamo Historic Cemetery Tours — Saturday, April 26, 2014 10:00am

General

When the Museum is open, a trained docent is always on duty and can provide exhibit tours for visitors who drop in. Reserved tours are available during open or closed hours by appointment. Large groups are encouraged to call ahead to assure that a docent is available specifically for your group.

The Museum of the San Ramon Valley is located on the southwest corner of Prospect and Railroad Avenues [P.O. Box 39, Danville, CA, 94526, (925) 837-3750]. Hours: 1-4 pm Tuesday-Friday, 10 am.-1 pm. Saturday.

The information above was taken from the Museum's informative website, www.museumsrv.org.

Programs on Ranching from the Museum of the San Ramon Valley

Every Saturday during this exhibit, ranchers will be present to talk with visitors at 205 Railroad Avenue, Danville. Open hours: Tu-Fri 1-4, Sat 10-1, Sun 12-3. museumsrv.org 925-837-3750 Here are the March and April programs, all at the museum unless noted.

March

1 Sat. 11 am Nancy Schaefer from the California Rangeland Trust: "Grazing and Habitat Preservation"
8 Sat. 2-3:30 pm History tour of Hap Magee Ranch Park at the Park on La Gonda Way. Join historian Beverly Lane for a tour and a look at the special Magee "brand room." Co-sponsored by the Town of Danville.
15 Sat. 11 am Historian Beverly Lane and rancher Don Wood: "Ranching in the San Ramon Valley, history and stories"
20 Thurs. 7 pm SRV Historical Society program from David Behring: "The Blackhawk Ranch " at the San Ramon Royal Vista Golf Course, 9430 Fircrest Ln, San Ramon $20 (includes dinner and talk) Reservations: 925-837-9382
23 Sun. 12-3 Meet a horse -- the EBRPD Public Safety patrol will meet and greet people with their calm horses.
29 Sat. 11 am Rancher Jim Holmes: "Interesting Facts about Today's Cattle Business"

April

5 Sat. 11 am Sheila Barry from UC extension: "Cows, Cattlemen and Conservation"
17 Thurs. 10-11:30 am History tour of Hap Magee Ranch Park at the Park on La Gonda Way. Join historian Beverly Lane for a tour and a look at the special Magee "brand room." Co-sponsored by the Town of Danville.
27 Sun. 1-3 pm Ranching Roundup with a branding demonstration, ice cream social, horses from the EBRPD Volunteer Safety Patrol. Alameda County Cattle Women's program on beef, including great recipes, tours of the ranching exhibit.