



*Today, little remains of Camp Funston, the largest of America's sixteen World War I army training cantonments.*

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# Training in Kansas for a World War

## Camp Funston in Photographs

*by Jonathan Casey*

**T**he fighting in Europe and across the globe that began in 1914 seemed like a world away from central Kansas. America declared itself neutral and although willing to sell its material resources to warring nations, it was not willing to commit its people. But when the United States entered the Great War in April 1917, the American people were called on to make personal sacrifices. In May 1917 Congress passed the Selective Service Act, requiring all eligible men to register for military service at local draft boards. Those drafted would form a national army, trained at cantonments across the country.

All that remains of one of these cantonments, Camp Funston, located on the Fort Riley Military Reservation along the Kansas River between Junction City and Manhattan, is a limestone foundation and chimney on top of a hill overlooking a modern army post. Nearly ninety years ago it covered more than two thousand acres, contained fifteen hundred buildings constructed with more than forty-seven million feet of lumber, had twenty-eight miles of paved streets, and was a temporary home to over fifty thousand men. Today a sign at the bottom of the hill reads, "Camp Funston—World War I Headquarters of Major General Leonard Wood."<sup>1</sup>

Camp Funston, named for Brigadier General Frederick Funston of Allen County, Kansas, was constructed from July to September 1917 at a cost of roughly ten million dollars and was the largest

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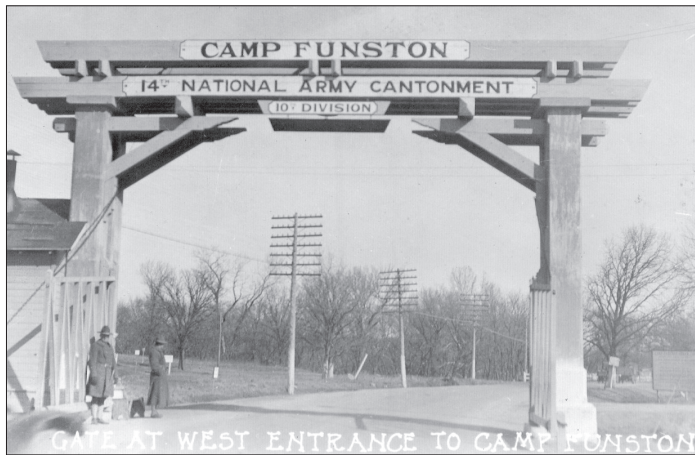
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1. Benedict Crowell, *America's Munitions 1917–1918* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919): 535–40; *National Army Cantonments: Plans and Photographs, June 1918* (Washington, D.C.: Construction Division, War Department, n.d.); *Cantonment Life: Camp Funston Illustrated* (Kansas City: Baird Company Engravers, 1918).

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Camp Funston #2



CF #3



CF #4



CF #5



The total "Zone of Camp" complex, a privately financed collection of movie theaters, restaurants, and much more, stretched two thousand feet.

of the sixteen national army training cantonments.<sup>2</sup> Those training at Funston came from Kansas and several other Midwest states. These men became citizen soldiers of a military city complete with everything a civilian would expect and in many cases probably more. Besides living quarters, it comprised general stores, theaters, social centers, infirmaries, libraries, schools, workshops, and even a coffee roasting house.<sup>3</sup> (*Images nos. 2, 3, 4*) In addition, Funston was the only cantonment to have a "Zone of Camp," a privately financed collection of movie theaters, pool hall, barbershop, bank, drug store, and an interior arcade of dozens of retail booths and restaurants. The total complex stretched two thousand feet.<sup>4</sup> (*Image no. 5*)

Of course Funston's mission was to train soldiers. Most of the draftees trained at the camp made up the Eighty-ninth, or "Middle West," Division. Others became part of

various units in the Ninety-second, an African American division. Both divisions served in the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in France. The Tenth Division also trained at Camp Funston but did not go overseas.<sup>5</sup>

New arrivals went through a specific routine, beginning with three weeks in detention camp as a quarantine measure and to receive required inoculations. A draftee's first experience was a cold shower and inspection for communicable diseases. Mess kits consisting of a tin plate, knife, fork, spoon, and drinking cup were distributed in time for the soldier's first meal, after a long wait in line. Military arms drill, guard duty, or office or kitchen duty consumed a draftee's work hours. Recreational or entertainment activities filled the off hours. Draftees also spent time sitting on a barrack cot writing letters home to family

2. *Cantonment Life: Camp Funston Illustrated*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Order of Battle of the U.S. Land Forces in the World War (1917-1918) Zone of the Interior* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1949), 1312, 1316, 1329.

or friends describing their experiences and eagerly waited for a reply. James H. Dickson, who served in the 356th Infantry Regiment of the Eighty-ninth Division, described his Funston experience to a friend back home: "Eunice don't be to [*sic*] long about writing for news is scarce out in Kansas the wind blows it all away."<sup>6</sup>

Due to shortages of olive-drab or khaki field uniforms, draftees drilled wearing denim fatigue uniforms. As draftee Otto Bruner also explained to a relative, "we drill most of the time in overalls and jackets to keep our uniforms from getting so dirty, the dust and sand blow here pretty bad at all times."<sup>7</sup> Because the army also lacked enough actual rifles, draftees usually shouldered wooden "dummy" rifles or simply wooden studs. Artillery gun crews serviced wooden artillery pieces and shells and rode on wooden artillery vehicles and horse teams. (*Images nos. 6, 7, 8, 9*)

New soldiers spent long hours on the rifle range, miles from the nearest barrack, drilling, marching, and eating in the field. Only extremely cold weather kept the men from their daily drills. Sore feet were so common as a result of marching in light cotton socks to the Smoky Hill Flats and the rifle range, company commanders were instructed to issue light wool socks to remedy this problem.<sup>8</sup> (*Images nos. 10, 11*)

CF #6



6. James H. Dickson to Eunice Saunders, May 9, 1918, Dickson Collection, National World War I Museum, Kansas City, Mo.

7. Otto Bruner to Mrs. J.R. Muse, October 21, 1917, Bruner Collection, *ibid.* See also George H. English Jr., *History of the 89th Division* (N.p.:War Society of the 89th Division, 1920), 27.

8. Daily Bulletin No. 55, February 24, 1918, Daily Bulletins and Announcements Collection, 353d Infantry, Eighty-ninth Division, National World War I Museum.

The basic housing unit was the company barrack, 43 x 140 feet and two stories high. Each barrack provided a kitchen, mess hall, company commander's office, supply rooms, and squad rooms or dormitories. The sleeping quarters were planned for 150 men, the size of an infantry company in 1917. They were built large enough, however, to accommodate more, so when the size of a company later increased to 250 men, room was available. Iron-frame cots with straw-filled bed ticking lined each wall and filled the middle of each of three squad rooms.<sup>9</sup> Officers' quarters were one-story structures, 25 x 150 feet and served as the battalion commanders' quarters and offices and mess. These structures provided electric lights and hot-water showers and were heated by stoves or to a controlled seventy degrees by a central plant using steam radiator heat.<sup>10</sup> (*Image no. 12*)

Not all those serving at Camp Funston were Americans. Allied officers from Britain, Canada, and France helped school and train American boys in modern warfare, termed "war of position" and commonly known as trench warfare. Important identifying signs, such as the one over the door of Fire Station No. 1, were written in English and in French. Each cantonment had several fire stations whose personnel had civilian

CF #7



9. Crowell, *America's Munitions 1917-1918*, 540; Fred A. Sasse, *Rookie Days of a Soldier* (St. Paul, Minn.: W.G. Greene, 1924), 206.

10. Sasse, *Rookie Days of a Soldier*; Crowell, *America's Munitions 1917-1918*, 535; *Cantonment Life: Camp Funston Illustrated*.

CF #8



CF #9



fire-fighting experience. Fire-fighting preparedness was vital in protecting a wooden city. (Image no. 13)

Besides soldiering, opportunities existed for socializing and entertainment. The draftees from Kansas were nearly all assigned to the 353d Infantry Regiment of the Eighty-ninth Division, earning the nickname the "All Kansas" Regiment. The Kansas Building, a massive wooden structure with crenellated battlements, provided a spacious interior with a theater stage and a boxing ring. One regimental daily bulletin mentions a "smoker" for the entire regiment whose "guests of honor" would be 504 men transferring overseas. Church services also were held in the Kansas Building, and

another bulletin notes a regimental "hop" asking how many officers are interested in attending.<sup>11</sup>

Entertainment included a concert by the St. Louis Symphony orchestra. According to an official announcement dated January 1918, the opera diva Madame Schumann-Heink, who had a son posted to Camp Funston, was to perform with the orchestra. (Images nos. 14, 15) Otto Bruner, a soldier training at Funston, who later served in Company M, Thirty-eighty Infantry, Third Division in France, mentions the occasion in a letter of February 1918: "Last Thursday night I went to hear a big orchestra from St. Louis there were about eighty in it, it was fine. I also heard Madam Schumann-Heinke sing. I sure like to hear her sing. I don't know whether I spelt her name right or not but guess you will know who I mean."<sup>12</sup>

Other entertainments derived from Funston's Old West, frontier setting. A Christmas sports program including a Wild West show was presented in 1917 at a corral on the Athletic Field. According to a daily bulletin, the Wild West show "will be very elaborate and will be well worth seeing."<sup>13</sup> (Image no. 16)

Athletics, combining physical and recreational activity, played a major part in the soldier-in-training's routine, whether as a participant or spectator. Organized events like boxing matches and football games between men from different companies, regiments, or training camps; tugs-of-war between regiments; and unorganized activities like pickup baseball

11. Daily Bulletin No. 59, February 28, 1918, Daily Bulletins and Announcements Collection; Daily Bulletin No. 11, January 11, 1918, *ibid.*

12. Otto Bruner to Mrs. J.R. Muse, February 4, 1918, Bruner Collection; Announcement, January 1918, Daily Bulletins and Announcements Collection.

13. Daily Bulletin No. 107, December 20, 1917, Daily Bulletins and Announcements Collection.

CF #10



CF #11



CF #12



CF #13



games could replace the scheduled military athletic exercises. (Image no. 17)

In this living environment for thousands of people constantly sharing space, communicable diseases were an ongoing threat and fear. Many daily bulletins and special orders addressed soldiers' general hygiene and sanitary living conditions, and frequent inspections checked on bedding, barracks' ventilation, and quarantine regulations. Measles, German measles, mumps, meningitis, and tuberculosis were major concerns; soldiers and sometimes entire companies were examined and quarantined for these diseases. One bulletin asked company commanders to refer to an earlier bulletin for information regarding flytraps and flypaper and construction and care of garbage and trashcans.<sup>14</sup>

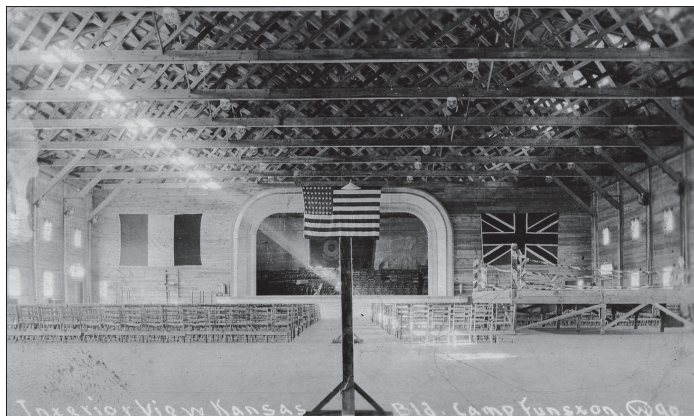
Wendell A. Link from Emporia, who would serve as a sergeant in the Thirtieth Infantry Regiment, Third Division, wrote to his mother about his stay in Detention Camp No.1 because he may have been exposed to mumps. "Here I am with four other fellows in a tent boarded up at the sides, 14-16 ft square with a stove made by enlarging the bottom of the stove pipe. It is a good heater tho [sic] and I have six blankets besides my poncho and overcoat so don't worry I am going to keep warm." Link considered the food at the detention camp "better

14. Daily Bulletin, No. 105, April, 15, 1918, *ibid.*

CF #14



CF #15



CF #16



seasoned” than that dished out in the regular camp, and as a personal touch he stated, “We always toast our bread before our stove which makes a difference.” Link remained in the detention camp for three weeks awaiting symptoms to surface. If another soldier exhibited the sickness, Link would be removed and the other soldier kept for an additional three weeks. Link felt lucky he had to stay only two months. He signed one letter, “your detained son.”<sup>15</sup> (*Image no. 18*)

John L. Barkley, who would be awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions against the Germans while serving in the Third Division in France, trained at Funston as part of the 356th Infantry Regiment. He also combated the threat of communicable disease. His letters home describe being quarantined for measles and spinal meningitis.

I am at the detachment camp out of sight of Camp Funston, quarantined [*sic*] for the spinal trouble. The whole Co. is quarnteen [*sic*]. It is sure some bad disease, we live in little tents just room enough for six men, when one man gets sick with it he is moved out to some place where he can get better treatment. Just across the other tent about ten feet, all six of its occupants died with it in one nites [*sic*] time.<sup>16</sup>

The most infamous and far-reaching episode of disease associated with Camp Funston was the pandemic influenza of 1918–1920. Commonly known as the “Spanish” flu, it is estimated to have killed fifty million or more people. It is believed to have started with a few cases of infected soldiers from Haskell County in March 1918.<sup>17</sup> With soldiers constantly coming and going from Funston to other camps, home on leave, or to embarkation ports, the disease quickly spread to other parts of the United States as well as overseas on troop ships.

15. Wendell A. Link to Mother, January 28, February 3, 1918, Wendell Link Collection, National World War I Museum.

16. John L. Barkley to Mother, December 5, 1917, John L. Barkley Collection, *ibid*.

17. John Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 4.

CF #17

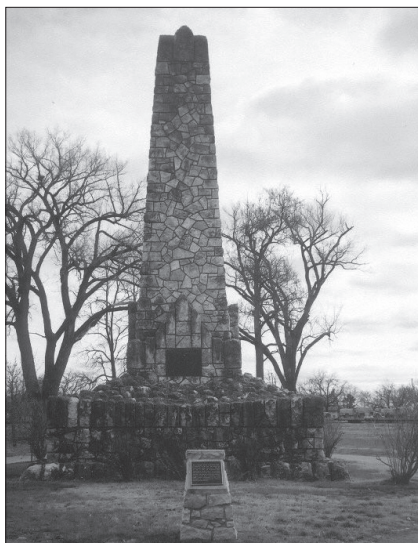


CF #18



Detention Camp No. 1, Camp Funston

CF #19



CF #20



Camp Funston performed its assigned duties as a training ground for the draftees of the national army. Like other national training cantonments, Funston was part of the war-making machinery of a new global power that transformed hundreds of thousands of civilians into soldiers to serve and fight for ideals that shaped the twentieth century. The physical enormity of Camp Funston is gone, leaving only the remains of General Wood's headquarters; a short distance away, a stone obelisk bears a plaque that reads, "To the Men Who Trained at Funston for the Great War." (Images nos. 19, 20) The memory of Camp Funston survives in the official records and private words of those who experienced it while training to fight for their country in a world war. KH