YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Camp Reynolds Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 526

PATRICK GREENE

Interviewed

by

Georgeann Ryan

on

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YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: PATRICK GREENE

INTERVIEWER: Georgeann Ryan

SUBJECT: World War II, Community Reactions, Soldiers, Shenango Replacement Pool

DATE: October 17, 1985

R: This is an interview with Patrick Greene Jr., for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Camp Reynolds, by Georgeann Ryan, at State Line Road, Pennsylvania, on October 17, 1985, at 2:00 p.m.

Okay Mr. Greene, can you tell me a little bit about yourself, where you were raised, your brothers and sisters?

G: I was born in Brooklyn, New York in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn. I have two brothers and one sister. I went to St. Cecilia's Parochial School in Greenpoint and then went to Queens Vocational High School. I graduated from high school and went to work and shortly thereafter war was declared and I enlisted in the service in 1942, August. I was in the service until I was discharged in February of 1946. I took my basic training at Camp Croft, South Carolina and was sent to various Army camps. I was also then sent to what was known inthose days as the Shenango Replacement Depot, which now is known as Camp Reynolds.

R: Do you know why they changed the name?

G: No. It had no definite name when it was opened up. It was just a POR camp, which was what they called a pool of replacements. It was to get troops ready to go overseas. In other words, before they went overseas they went to a port of embarkation, a POE. But they were outfitted and got all their medical stuff and their equipment from a POR camp. From there they were sent to a POE. From the POE they left and went overseas.

I was there eleven months. We were one of the first ones there. At the time there were only tar paper, long barracks, shacks you might call them. They had potbellied stoves in them and there were no roadways, no nothing. It was just a big mud holein those days. They were still working on part of the camp when we got there. We put in walkways; they weren't sidewalks, but they were walkways with gravel that some of the officers had gotten donated through the gravel companies around the area. We had walkways then.

There were twenty battalions and each battalion had a battalion day room. There were four companies to a battalion.

R: A day room, is that where they would spend their time during the day? What did they do in that room?

G: We had a pool table, and if memory serves me right, it was donated by the Henderson's--all the day room equipment. They eventually, years later, had the Henderson Library built. That is where your day was spent. It wasn't a training camp; there was no training. You just sat around and the commanding officers of each company had to dream up something to keep the men busy. We used to just give them close-order drill and different companies had to stand guard; they took their turn standing guard at the stockade or guardhouse. You marched them down there and you marched the other ones back. That was the extent of anything military going on at the camp. The thing that always struck me, every day room, that's where they used to pay you off all of the time. They always had a fish pond and we had one too. All your change that you got in your pay you had to throw in that swimming pool. I often wondered who cleaned out the swimming pool. What happened to all that money every month that was thrown in that swimming pool?

The camp itself, there was no laundry. You had battalion mess halls. There were approximately 50 men to a barrack in double-deck bunks. I think there were ten barracks to a company. That made 500 men to a company, 2000 men at full strength. You were never up to full strength. That is what could have been in there. Troop trains going through Sharon were a dime a dozen. Every time you turned around there was a troop train leaving out of Camp Reynolds going to a POE someplace.

R: How long did the men usually stay once they got to Reynolds?

G: Most of them were lucky if they were there long enough to draw a pay at the end of the month. Three weeks and it was a fast turnover. I imagine a couple of million

men passed through there. Those that did collect the pay were the cadre and some were there longer that were specialists, like cooks and bakers and stuff like that. The need for them wasn't as great as regular troops. The regular troops got a fast turnover. It was on an average of three weeks that they were there.

R: Did they seem like they would get frightened because they knew that was the last stop before they were shipped overseas?

G: No. I couldn't say that they were. After all, they were in the Army. They knew they were going to go overseas. It was just a matter of getting them clothing or whatever they needed, shots, and getting them on the lists. Then the orders would come down for some of the men. We got them ready. You told them who was shipping out Wednesday or Thursday to be ready at 8:00. Then you would line them up and march them down to the train sighting and put them on the train.

R: Did they tell you which men were going?

G: Yes, the company commanders used to get a list. The orders were drawn as to who in the camp was going.

The camp itself, we had no facilities whatsoever. There was a battalion mess hall, no laundry; you did your own laundry or sent it out, or if you knew people in town that that you were friendly with, as I did, they did the laundry for you. They had the buses running from Sharon to Camp Reynolds and also from Greenville to Camp Reynolds. I remember one way was 30¢, round trip was 55¢ from Reynolds to Sharon. There were three gates, the main gate and two others. What company wasn't on detail, what was left of the company you would take for a hike. It wasn't a hike, you just said, "Let's go," and you went. If you went two miles out you said, "Okay, take a break." A couple of hours later after a snooze you said, "Okay, let's go back." There was no military training whatsoever. For the cadre that was there, such as I was, we had a lot of time off because of the lack of things to do. Almost everything was done by 11:00 in the morning that had to be done with the troops, as far as getting them clothes or shots. Then you had the rest of the day. Once a month you got a three-day pass plus the weekend, so you would get a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday pass and the weekend--Saturday and Sunday. You could leave Thursday afternoon. I used to jump on the old Akronite, the train out of Sharon. The Erie Railroad had one going as far as Hoboken, New Jersey, and I used to go home every month. I didn't have to be back until Thursday morning. Actually, you got a week off every month. That didn't count against

your furloughs; you still had thirty days every year furlough coming.

R: What aboutthe other weekends or the days when you would get done at 11:00 in the morning?

G: The time was our own. If you wanted to go to town you went to town. If you just wanted to lay around the barracks, you laid around the barracks. If the company commander said, Take the troops for a hike," you took them for a hike, They didn't want the men laying around, so they had to try to implement something for them to do.

There were no weapons there. They got their weapons at the POE. I don't recall any weapons. The cadre had weapons, but I don't remember troops having them. It was just a pool of replacement; it was a replacement camp.

When I got there I wrote home where I was. I said, "Where is this Shenango Replacement Depot?" They said, "Someplace around Philadelphia." I said, "That's for me," coming from New York. I wrote home and told my parents where I was stationed. I got a letter back with a clipping, what did I do wrong in the Army to be sent to that camp as cadre. Drew Pearson was a columist in the New York Daily Mirror who wrote that Shenango Replacement Depot was a camp for deserters and criminals and everything else. That's what he was telling the people that Camp Reynolds was for, which it was not of course. My parents read that in the paper and there I am saying that I'm at Shenango.

It was a good camp. The men themselves and the officers in charge made the camp a place that you could live, because when we first got there it was just one, big mud hole. We had no laundry and we walked in mud. Your clothes got so muddy that we used to rip them and then put in for salvage and get new clothes rather than spend the money for cleaning. We hadthe PX's where they had dry-cleaning, but it cost you money. In those days we were making $50 or whatever it was a month. They started off at $36 and I was making $56 a month or something like that. You couldn't afford the laundry like that because you could only wear the pants one day and they were full of mud. We wore them more than one day, but then we would take them to salvage and get a new pair. Towards the end, all of the officers and companies and battalion commanders had the men putting in the walkways and everything and it became liveable.

R: So they had the men doing a lot of work out there to keep them busy?

G: Yes, just to keep them busy.

R: What about the buildings, did they work on them?

G: No. Those were put up by contractors. We put in our own walks and stuff like that. You took care of the grounds more or less and got everything in shape. It was tough doing it because you just had ordinary people doing it; you didn't have professional people doing it. You had your day room to keep you busy, but that was only so big. When you have hundreds of men you can't use that one, little day room.

R: The people who fixed the meals, were they permanent personnel like you were?

G: Yes, they were Army people. They were cadre attached to the camp; they were Army cooks. The provisions used to come in big trucks because they had to keep provisions on for a maximum amount of people. You never knew when you were getting train loads in.

R: It would be very uncertain?

G: That's what it was. Nothing was certain so they had to keep provisions. The cook might quit at 4:00 in the afternoon after supper and the next morning he has 1000 for breakfast where he had 400 for supper the night before. They came in at all hours of the day and night from all over the country. They had to keep enough food on hand there for a maximum amount of people for that battalion. Like I said, the battalion mess hall was divided into four barracks where each company actually had their own mess hall. In the center of it was the mess hall itself, the kitchen and stuff.

R: Then rooms off of it?

G: Yes.

R: Getting back to what you said about the newspaper article, that it was a camp for deserters and criminals, where did he get the idea of that? Was that a common idea?

G: No. I carried that column in my wallet for fifteen years after, until it got so bad I had to throw it away. That had to be in 1942 or 1943 when he wrote that. Drew Pearson, the writer, was one of the big names in the country.

They had a camp in California and the name was Camp Pepsi-Cola. What the correct name was or if that was the correct name I don't know. That was the other POR. On that side most of them went over to the Pacific and ours went to Europe.

R: So there were only two of them?

G: Only two POR's that I know of in the country; one on the west coast and the one here. That was Pepsi-Cola and this one was known as Shenango Replacement Depot. They all passed through there. They would get their shots and you would bring them back. Our job was to lay out their clothes. You would look at their clothes. You looked at the list, what was needed, what they should have. If they didn't have it we marked it down to see that they got it. It if needed replaced we marked that down. They got everything that they had when they left Camp Reynolds.

R: What all did you give them, new clothes, new boots, blankets, anything like that?

G: Socks and stuff like that. Whent hey left here they had everything they needed to go overseas.

R: How did it run out there? With so many men coming through were there any type of problems like coordinating all those people?

G: No it seemed to run rather smoothly for the amount of men that went through here. Everybody of the cadre knew what their job was. In the morning when you went in to the orderly room the first sergeant said, "Okay, here's the list of men. Get them lined up. Get them ready to go." Then I would get that and I would get all their things and fill out the requisition form. I would take them down to the supply barracks which are today the Westinghouse warehouses. Then they would line up and I would stand there at the counter with the guy giving out the stuff. I would read his name and call out the stuff that he is to get. He would get it and back we would go. That's how they were processed.

R: How many cadre were there?

G: Offhand I don't know. There were two cadre to each barrack. That would be eighty men to a battalion so there were probably about 800 permanent people up there.

R: You stayed right in the barracks with the men who were going through?

G: Yes. It's possible that later on we did separate, that one barrack was for the permanent party. In the beginning we slept right in with the men. Later on it strikes me that we were all cadre. On pay days we would all chip in and one guy would go into town and buy extra food and stuff that we would keep in our barracks that we would have if we were playing cards or something like that and we wanted something to eat.

R: What did the men do when they went into town?

G: I would imagine the majority went in to drink beer and maybe pick up a girl or something like that. That's what it was during the war: wine, women, and song while we are here and tomorrow we die.

R: Were there any big places that stood out more than others?

G: Not in the valley here. There were over in Youngstown, but I never went over to Youngstown. Two of the towns having the best treatment of the soldiers here were Sharon and Sharpsville. People took them into their homes for Sunday dinners. Through the United Service Organization that they had set up, people would say, "I want a couple of soldiers for Sunday dinner." They would have lists and stuff. The treatment to the soldiers was terrific in the valley. There was no resentment of a camp being here or anything else. A lot of places don't want an Army camp.

R: So they treated them like part of the community?

G: Yes, they did.

R: You met your wife her too didn't you, when you were stationed out there?

G: I met her family. I didn't go with my wife until after I was out of the service. I met her family and her relatives. Her Aunt Grace was the one that did my laundry. That is how I got to know the rest of the family. After the war I was coming back on vacation every year. I worked for the United Parcel Service in New York and had been back here on vacation. I started to go with my wife and we wound up getting married.

R: Did a lot of men meet girls from around here and end up staying?

G: Yes, quite a few.

R: They were probably more of the people who were permanent out there.

G: Yes, more or less. They weren't the ones that were coming in as replacement. The permanent people that were here, a lot of them did marry local girls. I was here for eleven months. I met an awful lot of people here, business people at the Slovenian Club. All the people that you met treated you like you were one of their own. They were always close here. It seemed like now that their own were away, somebody came in that they took to them to be close. They were very,

very good. There were no problems in the city of Sharon. The camp itself was a godsend for the merchants. Come pay day, when you're getting millions of dollars a month extra, other than from what plants you have like Sharon Steel, this was great, the payrolls from the Army. There was a lot of money coming into the town. They used to pay us at the beginning with the $2 bills, and that way they could keep track of how much money was spent in a given town through the banks when the banks got the $2 bills.

R: The Army kept track of the merchants?

G: Not the merchants, but the Army would pay that and they were able to say where the money was being spent and stuff.

R: The men who were going through, they got to come into town as well?

G: Yes, they could leave at 5:00 in the evening. They had to be back for roll call in the morning. They would get passes. All they had to do was go into the orderly room and say, "I want a pass to go to Sharon."

R: So they could really leave any time they wanted as long as they had a pass?

G: Right.

R: Was it that way in training camps, or is that unusual because it's this kind of situation?

G: In regular training camps you had a work day. When I was in training camps I got up for reveille in the morning and you weren't allowed to go until retreat. Here if a guy had nothing to do and he came in at 2:00 and said, "Hey, how about a pass?" they would issue him a pass. There was a lot of free time since it wasn't a training camp.

R: The men didn't end up in fights or arguments because they were bored and had nothing else to do because of this.

G: Yes, for all the men that passed through this valley out of Camp Reynolds, it was amazing how little of that there was. I think it's only because they were treated so well by the people.

R: Did they have civilians working out at the camp?

G: No, not that I know of. Other than the ones who built the barracks they had no civilians working at the camp on a steady basis.

R: What stands out in your mind when you think about the time that you spent there? Are there any certain incidents that really stand out that you think about?

G: No, not really. While I was there they had that little riot, but that wasn't a big thing anyway now that you look back on it. The best you can say about the camp was that it was every day; you lived from day to day. There was nothing that you would say we're going to do this next week or we're going to do that next week. The most you said was, "I wonder how many men will come in tomorrow," or "I wonder how many men will go out tomorrow." You lived for tomorrow.

R: What was the riot about?

G: I don't remember. It was all rumors and things at the camp.

R: Not every many men knew about it?

G: No. It wasn't that big of a thing.

R: How did you feel when you knew you were going to have to leave, when your notice came through?

G: I asked to leave. When you are there a year and you're not doing anything really, and you're young, in those days you wanted to go. I asked my company commander if it was possible to get me shipped out with the group. He asked me why and I told him, "No reason. I've had it. I'd like to go out and go overseas." He told me okay so I was transferred then to an armored division in Kentucky and then went overseas with them. After the war we came back and Camp Reynolds was out of existence by that time. They closed the camp and brought German prisoners in.

When we came back we went to the west coast to go over to the Pacific. While we were on our rehabilitation furloughs the war ended in the Pacific. We wound up in Camp Cook, California with absolutely nothing to do again. We played ball from 8:00 in the morning until 5:00 in the afternoon; it was that bad. The war ended so abruptly nobody knew what to do with the troops. It wasn't like Camp Reynolds.

R: When you were shipped out then did you go back through one of those replacement camps?

G: I went to a division and my division went right to a POE. We were equipped there because we were in a division. The people that came to Shenango, to camp Reynolds, would be like those who finished their basic training, thirteen

weeks, and weren't assigned to a division. They were the replacement and they would come here.

R: When they got there they assigned them to one?

G: Right. When they got overseas then they went to the different outfits they were joining, or some of them joined outfits from here. Maybe the first armored needed one hundred men for their quota, well they would send one hundred men there.

R: The way they got assigned was if there was a need and their name was on the list; that's how they decided who went where?

G: Yes. When I was discharged I was sent from California back to Fort Dicks; that was out discharge center closest to home.

R: They tried to wind it down pretty quick then once the war ended?

G: Yes.

R: Do you know what they did with the camp out here as soon as the war ended after they got rid of the German prisoners?

G: I have no way of knowing. Evidently it was sold to industry. I don't know how many years it stood idle.

R: The last time when you saw it, when you were ready to leave, it was basically finished?

G: It was completely finished. It was almost done when we got there in the first place.

R: Were you one of the first to come in when they started?

G: Yes, we were one of the first. The camp was almost done at that time. The troops came right in afterwards.

R: When you were talking about the potbelly stoves in there, that's how it stayed? That wasn't temporary?

G: No. That was your hat. We used to have a fire guard. One man was appointed from the barracks to stay awake all night in the winter time to throw coal on the fire and to make sure it didn't get too hot and burn. I remember when I was in Fort Benning they used to have a sign up in the barracks: This barrack burns in fifteen minutes. The mess hall burned in eight. They were only tar paper shacks more or less.

R: There were never any accidents from it getting too hot?

G: No, not that I know of.

R: If you had been running the camp can you think of anything you would have done differently?

G: I would have been a nineteen year old soldier running the camp. Looking back, the way the camp was operated, I couldn't. Everything seemed to run smoothly for what the camp was put there for. Everybody of the cadre and the officers knew their job, what had to be done, what their job was.

R: When they shipped out the men they took them by bus?

G: No, they marched them right down to the railroad sighting. The railroad sighting was where the warehouses are. The trains were right in Camp Reynolds, that's where the trains loaded.

R: I know you said they came in at all times during the day. Did they have calls to send them out at 8:00 at night?

G: No, I don't remember anybody ever going out at night time. It was in the morning and afternoon.

R: Did the troop trains look like regular trains?

G: They were regular trains. It was not like the comfortable trains you have today though.

The men were only there three or four weeks, so you didn't make any lasting friendships. Other than the cadre, you didn't make any lasting friendships.

R: What are cadre?

G: Cadre are permanent personnel.

R: Are they a certain rank?

G: No. They are just people sent by the United States Army to be a permanent party. Each company had a table of organization.

R: What was the highestrank there as far as a permanent officer?

G: You had a brigadier general, I believe, who was the head of the camp.

R: He was there all of the time?

G: Yes.

R: Is there anything you would like to add about the camp or your experience there?

G: I never regretted the eleven months I spent at Camp Reynolds because of the people that I met down there. I knew more people when I was stationed here probably than I knew in Brooklyn; that's how well we were treated. The eleven months that I spent here were a good eleven months.

R: Thanks very much.

END OF INTERVIEW