

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

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Wartime Adventure

Throughout the Middle West there surely are many old scrapbooks, filled with brittle, yellowed clippings and unidentifiable souvenirs. These are mementos of a period when thousands of raw recruits became trained soldiers at Camp Dodge, the World War I Cantonment near Des Moines.

Fond recollections of Camp Dodge personnel and the busy, exciting daily life at the great Cantonment flood my memory. The concern and friendship shown by Des Moines people and other Midwestern communities for those trainees are recorded in my scrapbook, now falling gently apart, here on my kitchen table.

In it are reminders of some of my happiest experiences in a half century of newspaper reporting. From the opening of the Cantonment in 1917 until the 88th Division of the National Army was demobilized in 1919, Camp Dodge was my beat, as a girl reporter for the *Des Moines Daily Capital*.

The 88th was one of a number of infantry di-

visions making up the National Army, all composed of men brought into service by the draft. The National Army was one of three component parts set up by Act of Congress approved May 18, 1917, and composed of the Regular Army, National Guard, and National Army. Although the term was abolished on August 7, 1918, those American divisions numbered from 76 to 102 inclusive were popularly spoken of for years as our "National Army."

My job was to report the human interest side of the sprawling, teeming training center. Everyone there, from Major General E. H. Plummer, the camp commander, to the newest recruit cooperated enthusiastically in my assignment of telling the world how the new soldiers were responding to army life. Each day I tried to tell our readers what the trainees did for fun, what they ate, and how they were being cared for — mentally and physically.

Many celebrities visited the camp, and interviewing them was a delightful and educational task. Jack Newman, a top-notch reporter, covered the straight news of the Division. Charles Darlington was photographer and humorist, recording many funny incidents. As a threesome, we tried to give our readers a well-rounded picture of army camp life.

The *Capital's* publisher was ex-Senator Lafayette Young, Sr., a dynamic writer and patriot.

Managing editor of the *Capital* was William C. Jarnagin, now publisher of the *Storm Lake Pilot-Tribune*. We addressed him informally as "Boss."

The paper thoughtfully provided our little staff with a Model-T Ford car, in which we journeyed cheerfully to Camp Dodge each morning. When sub-zero blasts penetrated the isinglass windows in "Lizzie's" flimsy side curtains, an army blanket was supplied as a lap robe. Once in camp, the blanket became "Lizzie's Throw," and was draped over her hood to discourage radiator trouble.

All of this was nearly fifty years ago, and a far cry from Central High School in Superior, Wisconsin, and a brief academic sortie at Lawrence College. When my father died, during my sophomore year, I had to find a job. Some happy fate led me through the looking glass into the magic world of reporting for the *St. Paul Daily News*.

Far from being ended, my education was just beginning. Editor H. B. R. Briggs and City Editor Vance (I never dreamed of calling him anything but MR. Vance) were stern and splendid teachers. Reporting for the *News* in St. Paul was exciting, and it was excellent preparation for my later adventures.

I was pretty well established as a sob sister when the telegram came from Bill Jarnagin of the *Des Moines Daily Capital* proffering me the

Camp Dodge assignment. The challenge was too alluring to decline.

And if I had not gone to the *Capital* I would not have met Fred Pownall, a talented writer and editor, to whom I have been gleefully married since 1918. Nor would I have enjoyed the delightful company of our daughters — Eleanor and Dorothy.

Both the *Des Moines Daily Capital* and the *St. Paul Daily News* have succumbed to modern consolidation. After Senator Young's death, the *Capital* was purchased by the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*. The *News* merged with the *St. Paul Pioneer Press and Dispatch*.

The pieces in this modest account do not by any means profess to be a history of Camp Dodge. They are simply a girl reporter's view of some of the everyday happenings in the lives of young men preparing for war.