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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF WORLD WAR II MILITARY SITES IN TENNESSEE



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Division of Archaeology
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TENNESSEE**

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Cover photo: Tennessee Maneuvers, Second Army, Company F., 347th Inf. Reg., 87th Inf. Division, standing for inspection, May 8, 1943 (Signal Corps Photo No. 164-007-43-989,



Figure 2. Soldiers in mock battle in Tennessee Maneuvers (Farm Security Administration - Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Photo No. LC-USW33-000261-ZC DLC, Library of Congress).

for over 700 men. The American Legion fed another 500, and the Service Center placed 240 soldiers in private homes for Sunday Dinner. Many families took soldiers home with them after church services. The Service Center mailed 1,033 letters for soldiers, while many more soldiers mailed their own (The Sumner County News 10/1/1942). Soldiers were treated to other recreation as well. Weekly Saturday night square dances were held at the lodge in Cedars of Lebanon (The Nashville Tennessean, 3/20/1944).

Subsequent problems during this phase of the Maneuvers had the Red and Blue armies facing off from opposite sides of the Stones River. Soldiers dug trenches and foxholes for defense. Early in October 1942 the Blue Army drove southward from the Cumberland River to capture the railheads at Shelbyville, Tullahoma, and Manchester. The fighting started with a street battle on the Lebanon Public Square, and by the end one Blue Infantry Battalion reached Manchester. This problem saw the use of a large armored force of General Grant tanks and combat aviation as well as the use of propaganda. The Blue Army dropped leaflets on the Reds that read, "Prisoners on our side have good food and three blankets with fires at night to keep warm" (Sumner County News 10/8/1942).

The Army held four more Maneuver phases in 1943, beginning

April 26, July 5, September 13, and November 22. The last phase of the Tennessee Maneuvers began on January 31, 1944, and future exercises were suspended because of the great need for troops in Europe. Middle Tennessee was not without an Army presence between Maneuver phases. Besides the regular training being conducted in the area, Signal Corp and Engineer troops came in before and stayed after the combat troops. The Signal Corps strung miles of wire for field communications and outfitted the message center that connected the Maneuver Director Headquarters in Lebanon with the Second Army Headquarters in Memphis and with officials in Washington, D.C. The Signal Corps also maintained messenger pigeons to carry messages between headquarters and front line troops. The photographic section of the Signal Corps maintained a visual record of the Tennessee Maneuvers. The engineers had the task of repairing some of the damage to area farms, roads, bridges, and anything else that the mock fighting had damaged. Landowners could also file claims for compensation for damage incurred. Army inspectors settled claims as quickly as possible (Sloan 1995). Some of the troops left behind for damage repair were black soldiers. A resident of Bellwood in Wilson County remembers black troops camping near his farm after a Maneuver phase. They were in the area to repair fences.

The Nashville Tennessean (3/26/1944) reported in March 1944 that the Rents and Claims Headquarters was seeking to wrap up all damage claims within 60 days, attesting to the promptness with which the Army took care of most Maneuver damage. The Second Army was to keep several thousand engineer troops in the Maneuver area until the end of May. About 10,000 claims had already been settled. Congress then approved a bill for \$5 million to repair the Maneuver damage in Tennessee and Louisiana (The Nashville Tennessean 4/1/1944). Nine battalions of engineer troops were still in the Tennessee Maneuver area in April 1944, repairing roads and bridges and operating quarries (The Nashville Tennessean 4/2/1944).

Clarence R. Pearce from Missouri was a First Lieutenant stationed in Tennessee beginning in November 1943, and his job was Special Claims Adjuster. Pearce and two other officers had farming experience, and they replaced claims adjustors who had a legal background but no experience with farming. Without farming experience, the previous adjustors had not been able to make accurate damage estimates. Some farmers had become reluctant to talk to the adjustors, but when they learned that the new adjustors were farmers, too, the process went smoother than before (Fletcher 1994a)

One of the more interesting and somewhat mysterious engineer units was the 1800th Engineer Battalion, which was composed of American soldiers of German, Italian, and Japanese ancestry. The 1800th camped for a time in Lebanon near the airport, and they were often thought to be prisoners of war. Locally they became known as the P-W Battalion. Their presence gave rise to several stories remembered by informants interviewed during this project about a prison camp on the west side of Lebanon and the prisoners that were forced to work in the area. Some local residents were no doubt surprised when the musicians of the 1800th gave a concert at Castle Heights Military Academy in Lebanon on June 10, 1944 (Sloan 1995).

The Tennessee Maneuvers resulted in the deaths of 268 soldiers and 10 civilians. Many of these deaths were the result of vehicular accidents while driving in blackout conditions at night. The

highest ranking officer to die was a major whose jeep was hit by a train while he tried to cross the rails in a heavy rain. Twenty men died in 1942 when a truck skidded off an overpass in Nashville, and many others died in crashes involving jeeps, motorcycles, halftracks, and tanks. Two tanks fell off a pontoon bridge while crossing the Cumberland River during a night crossing in October 1942, and six men died. Nine died in plane crashes during the Maneuvers (this does not count several deaths from crashes of planes involved in regular training in Tennessee), and many died from drowning. The greatest single loss of life came on March 23, 1944 at the end of the last Maneuver phase when an assault boat crossing the Cumberland River at night capsized. Twenty-one of the 23 soldiers in the boat drowned in the flood-swollen river. Other men died from lightning strikes, explosions, weapons accidents, and natural causes such as heart attacks. There were three homicides, two resulting in court martial death sentences. A tornado in Lebanon killed one soldier when the high wind picked up a fighter aircraft and dropped it on the barracks in which the soldier was sleeping (Zepp 2005:3B; Sloan 1995; The Nashville Tennessean 3/24/1944).

As the Tennessee Maneuvers progressed the Army laid down many rules for the soldiers. In March 1943 Lieutenant-General Ben Lear, commander of the Second Army, issued a set of rules on conduct for soldiers in the Maneuver area. Each soldier was expected to conduct himself like a gentleman. Officers and men were to only patronize businesses that had been inspected by military authorities and posted as acceptable. Hitchhiking was prohibited. Troops were required to drink water only from inspected sources. Crops were supposed to be protected, and trees were not to be damaged by driving nails into them. Troops and vehicles were to move to the side of the road when they were stopped. Food could only be bought at approved establishments, and troops could only use approved barber shops (Sumner County News 3/13/1943).

Interaction between soldiers and civilians was supposed to be limited during the Maneuvers. While the Army encouraged citizens to take soldiers into their homes on weekends when they were off duty, a soldier on duty was not to enter a civilian home or barn or accept food from civilians. However, a common theme throughout the research for this project was the interaction of soldiers and civilians. Troops camped in close proximity to farmhouses during the exercises, and many families fed soldiers while they were in the area. Most people interviewed during the survey said that their mothers (most of the informants were children during the war) cooked for soldiers and sometimes did laundry. Farmers allowed soldiers to sleep in the barns, always with the warning to not smoke. Some even allowed soldiers to sleep in the house. One Wilson County resident remembered that after a night of heavy rain, they found that a soldier had slept in the family car. One Smith County resident remembered that her mother invited soldiers from a camp across the road to sit at the family dinner table and eat with them. She remembers being horrified that one of the soldiers, an Italian-American man from New York, sang at the table.

The soldiers repaid the kindness as best they could. Though families insisted that they didn't want payment, most found money under the dinner plates after the soldiers had left. A dairy farmer in Wilson County said they stored milk that they took to Watertown to sell to the Carnation plant there. Soldiers camping nearby would enter the barn at night and drink the milk, but they would always leave

money for what they drank. Sometimes they drank all the milk, but they left more money than Carnation would have paid for the milk.

Many people have stories of things that the soldiers left for them. Sometimes these items, usually rationed commodities like coffee and sugar, were left at the door when the soldiers left the area. They were supposed to bury unused provisions, but knowing that they were throwing away things that many people could not get, they would often bury the goods in holes with only a tarp over them and maybe a small amount of dirt. The soldiers would then tell the families where they had buried the supplies. Informants told stories of receiving coffee, sugar, lemons, apple butter, flour, condensed milk, and canned fruits. Soldiers left one farmer two large cans full of gasoline, one received fence wire, and two were given towing chains.

Sam Perkins remembered that a large group of soldiers camped on his father's farm in New Middleton during the Maneuvers. The Army set up seven field kitchens in the feed lot around their house, and the family traded eggs and fresh vegetables to the soldiers in exchange for sugar, coffee, apple butter, and orange marmalade. One soldier gave Perkins an old Royal brand typewriter and some books that the soldier was tired of carrying (Perkins 1994:14).

Local boys seem to have been most affected by the soldiers' presence, and the soldiers seemed to be happy to let the boys stay around the camp. Children often became entrepreneurs when the soldiers were close by. Several people interviewed told stories of buying candy bars and reselling them to the soldiers. Some boys had shoe shine kits with which they polished soldiers' boots. A Shop Springs resident sold egg sandwiches to soldiers who manned a gun position on the hill near his house. A Smith County resident, whose farm still bears the scars of tank treads, said that one night the soldiers set up a projector in camp, and he watched Last of the Mohicans with the soldiers. One of the more unusual interaction stories came from a Wartrace man who, while a teenager during the war, was allowed to drive a halftrack around the farm fields.

The meeting of soldiers from large northern towns with the rural Tennessee farm folk made for interesting encounters and many stories, some probably apocryphal, others documented. Private Mitchell Dabrowski of Massachusetts wrote home on June 17, 1943 asking his family to "please write pretty often because it will be pretty dead up there in that hillbilly country. I bet they have a lot of moonshiners there". Dabrowski wrote on July 4 that he and other soldiers had asked a lady to fry six chickens for them. When they returned later that night, she served them fried chicken, hot biscuits, milk, and raspberry pie for which they paid \$8 and thought it worth the price. He also wrote, "The way they live in the shacks around here is a crime. They are nothing but rough boards with clay pasted between the boards. I wouldn't live here for anything. But the people around here seem to be very accommodating" (Dabrowski 1943).

Private Dabrowski wrote home on August 9, 1943 complaining of the canned rations that the Army issued. He said that in the previous week he and some other men became separated from their unit and asked for food at a farmhouse. "We had the lady fix us up a short snack of milk, fried eggs,

cake, and tomatoes." He also said that anyone caught getting food other than Army rations could face a court martial, "but it seems like even the looies [lieutenants] do it here" (Dabrowski 1943).

Tennesseans also had their opinions of this second "Yankee" invasion. Informants told many stories during this project about soldiers who had never experienced farm life. Some didn't know where milk came from, and a few got their first, and maybe only, experience with milking a cow. One Wilson County resident said that a New York soldier once asked which cows gave the chocolate milk. A Cannon County resident remembers that many of the troops camping on her family's farm took the green tobacco leaves from the barn where they had been hung to cure, and tried to chew the leaves. Most of the soldiers who tried this became ill.

The Maneuver action during one January had passed around a farm where the farmer and his son were busy slaughtering hogs. When the two were unable to hoist a 500-pound hog to the scalding trough, the boy asked two soldiers standing in the front yard to help them. The two men pitched in, helping hoist the hog and taking orders from the farmer. The two soldiers were Major-General W. A. Burress, commander of an infantry division, and Brigadier-General John B. Murphy, artillery commander (Sloan 1995).

The Army learned valuable lessons throughout the Tennessee Maneuvers, which, by design, gave realistic combat experience to the soldiers and commanders. At the conclusion of each week's problem, officers met to discuss the exercises to determine what worked and what did not work. "We are here," said Lieutenant-General Ben Lear in 1942, "To toughen the men for dirty work". General Leslie McNair, speaking at his field headquarters in June 1943, said, "Maneuvers are a dress rehearsal for the grim and dirty business. When the chips are down, lessons learned in Middle Tennessee will make the going easier from the beaches to Berlin". Several foreign dignitaries also observed the war games. It was rumored that President Franklin Roosevelt secretly visited the area to meet with Chinese General Chiang Kai-Shek (Sloan 1995).

The soldiers had another perspective on the Tennessee Maneuvers. Pfc. Mitchell Dabrowski wrote home on July 4, 1943, "These Maneuvers are pretty tough. In fact it's about the toughest thing I ever had in the Army." He wrote again in August, "They want to make a hillbilly out of me the way they keep shoving me from one hill to another hill." Dabrowski was looking forward to the end of the Maneuvers and being able to sleep in a bed again, but he wrote, "Maybe I'll have to put rocks in the mattress to make me feel at home, I'm so used to sleeping on the ground" (Dabrowski 1943).

There is also a story about a member of Merrill's Marauders, a specialized unit that operated behind Japanese lines in the jungles of Burma, who had been lost in the jungle and was found near death. When a hospital attendant later commented, "It must have been hell in there," the soldier responded, "If you think where I've been was rough, you should have been on Tennessee Maneuvers" (Sloan 1995).

As rough as the Maneuvers were, many soldiers returned after the war and met with the locals who had befriended them. A Wilson County resident remembered that soldiers from Wyoming, who had camped on their farm during the Maneuvers, returned after the war to visit. While they were in Tennessee they help break some horses that the family had just purchased. Other men came back and married local girls that they had met here. Some took their new brides home and some stayed in Tennessee.

Velma Apple, whose son Frank was in the service during the war, once gave some cold milk to a soldier who was passing by the house. He had been willing to drink it warm straight from the cow, but Mrs. Apple would not let him, nor would she accept payment. After the war, the soldier and his wife came from Missouri to Tennessee so that he could seek out and thank all the locals who had been kind to him. The Apples invited the couple to stay the night. They left after breakfast the next morning, and while cleaning up, Velma Apple found that each had left \$20 under the breakfast plates (Fletcher 1994b).

A Watertown resident remembers that three soldiers whose vehicle had broken down near his family's farm were left behind by their unit until the vehicle could be recovered. They stayed about two weeks in December, and on Christmas Day, the family invited the soldiers into their home and shared Christmas dinner with them. Such hospitality seems to be typical of what most soldiers experienced.

Marion King, a soldier who had been on Maneuvers in Tennessee, wrote a letter to the editor of The Nashville Tennessean (3/30/1944) saying, "The people of Tennessee and all other towns and cities of the Maneuver area and nearby have exemplified the willingness of most civilians to cooperate with the armed forces." He further stated that, "The enlisted men of my outfit, and, in general, all I've spoken to have remarked on the attitude of the people of Tennessee. We're truly grateful to them. 'A home away from home' was brought to our attention very forcibly. I can only say, 'Thank you.'"