



1947 Barracks Fire

Pine Camp (Fort Drum), NY

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Final Report

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A special thanks to Carolyn Leps and Elizabeth Barbee, daughters of Captain Frank Turner. Without their desire to find out more about the fire that took the life of their father, this book may not have been written. They also provided many images and the story of the fire as told in their family.

INTRODUCTION

Exercise Snowdrop and Barracks Fire

In the winter of 1947-1948, Pine Camp was the location for Exercise Snowdrop, an 82nd Airborne Division exercise involving infantry paratroopers and various support units. The exercise ran from November through February and was designed to test the use of airborne troops and equipment in winter conditions. Several of the officers visiting Pine Camp for Operation Snowdrop were housed in Building T-2278, a two-story wooden barracks. Early in the morning of December 10, 1947, a fire engulfed T-2278 and took the lives of five men.

The Army was investing heavily in Exercise Snowdrop, and most of the named officers in the barracks fire were decorated, very experienced World War II veterans. Troubling, though, is the lack of information on the sequence of events in the early morning of December 10. It is known that there was an intense fire in an officers' barracks that, according to the daily fire log, killed four people, injured six, and at least six officers escaped without injury. Six decades later, the cause of the fire is still debated, the heroics of the victims were perhaps undocumented, and the official inquiry into the fire has not been located. Although a minor incident in the historic

scope of the military, the 1947 barracks fire at Pine Camp eventually had broad legal implications and left many unanswered questions about official military procedure. A unanimous U.S. Supreme Court decision known as the Feres Doctrine resulted from lawsuits filed by the bereaved. This doctrine addressing military liability is still being challenged by some soldiers and their families today.

The story told in this booklet presents the known facts about the fire and Exercise Snowdrop. There are many questions about the events of that cold winter night. Why these men? Why were they at Pine Camp? What brought these men together in one building? What were the circumstances that resulted in the conflagration? And what can this tragedy teach us about fire prevention?

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

The striking story of the December 10, 1947 barracks fire is mostly told through newspaper articles, scattered personnel records, and small town obituaries. The *Watertown Daily Times* sent a photographer to capture the burning building and again the next day to document the extent of the damage. The progression of news articles draws out the story of Exercise Snowdrop. As WWII ended, military strategists determined the necessity of training troops for combat in extreme arctic conditions with an eye toward fighting the Soviets. For the Army Ground Forces this training included logistics, combat, and survival tactics in cold regions. In a two-day inspection trip, officers from four commands: the First Army, Army Ground Forces, 82nd Airborne Division, and Air Corps determined Pine Camp was an ideal location for the planned winter maneuvers. Pine Camp was selected because of its harsh winters, and instructors were temporarily assigned from their home bases. Officers from Fort Bragg and Camp Carson were on hand for paratrooper instruction and cold weather survival.

By early December, the training exercises had been underway for a month, with activities tracked in regular articles by the *Watertown Daily Times*. Among the officers on the inspection trip months earlier to scout possible Snowdrop locations was young Captain Frank Turner from the Quartermaster General's Office. He was an



Officers meet at Pine Camp to plan Exercise Snowdrop. Captain Turner is second row, fourth from left (Watertown Times).

expert on arctic conditions, working for several years with the Product Design and Development Office. This work took him to the North Polar Regions in September 1946. A year later, after Exercise Snowdrop maneuvers were underway, Captain Turner was back at Pine Camp on another inspection trip.

In addition to the troops participating in Exercise Snowdrop, a group of officers had been assigned to attend the maneuvers. These officers were selected for this assignment due to their combat experience and technical skills. For example, Captain Turner was skilled in equipment evaluation, Lieutenant Robert Manly in extreme winter survival, and Lieutenant John Futoma and Captain Thomas Terry were instructors in snow mobility such as skiing and snowshoeing. Some of the officers were there to provide hands-on instruction for the troops, while others acted as observers and analysts.

Fourteen of the officers attending Exercise Snowdrop were quartered in barracks T-2278 on the night of December 9. Some of the officers had been staying in the barracks for weeks and others were only on short assignments. That night, only ten officers were staying on the second floor and four on the first, although the barracks could have accommodated nineteen officers in two room suites that each opened onto a central hallway.

Officers in Building T-2278

Captain Robert Dodge grew up in Petersburg, Virginia, and had been living in the barracks for a week. He was a reserve officer reporting to Pine Camp for a two-week training period.

Lieutenant Robert Manly, a member of the ski troop from Camp Carson, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas but had moved to Manhattan, Kansas when he was young. He was a product of the Manhattan school system and a graduate of Kansas State College where he was a cadet in the Reserve Officers' Training Corps. He was 30 years old upon arrival at Pine Camp and had served in the Army since 1942. Since enlisting, he had spent 26 months in the Aleutians and almost two years fighting in the European theater. Manly had been at Pine Camp since late October when he was transferred from Camp Carson, Colorado. He was assigned to the 38th Infantry Division which was

training members of the 505th Airborne Combat Battalion in extreme cold weather survival.

Lieutenant Wallace Swilley was from High Springs, Florida. He served in WWII, receiving two Purple Hearts, an Air Medal with Oak Leaf Cluster, and a Soldier's Medal. He was involved in operations in Naples, Foggia, Anzio, Rome, Arno, southern France, Central Europe, and the Rhineland, while serving for two years with the 141st Field Artillery. At the time of his death, he was a member of the 456th Field Artillery.

Lieutenant Rudolph Feres was 31 years old and was living in Binghamton, New York, with his wife and 11-month-old son. His Army career started in 1935 at the

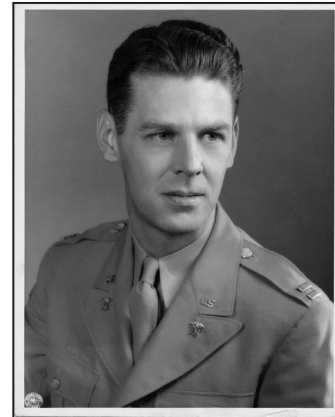


Lt. Rudolph Feres (Binghamton Press, December 11, 1947).

age of 19, when he enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army. He married Bernice Bunnel on January 17, 1940 in New York. In an odd twist of fate, their ceremony was held at the Pine Camp chapel. He went on to fight in Europe through WWII, earning three Bronze Stars, the Oak Leaf Cluster, a Combat Badge, and the Croix de Guerre from the French government, while becoming an experienced parachutist. He was a member of the 456th Field Artillery and the 505th Combat Airborne team. He was a veteran of airborne invasions of the 101st Airborne Division in Normandy and Holland and fought in the Battle of the Bulge. With his 304 parachute jumps, he was promoted to paratrooper instructor at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. Feres returned to Pine Camp, this time as part of Exercise Snowdrop.

Captain Francis Turner, 25, was born in Binghamton, New York. Turner graduated from the Elmira Free Academy in 1939 and enlisted in the Army in 1941 after working in a theater for five years. He had started working there during high school and was eventually promoted to manager. In 1942, he married Jean Marie Louise McSparron while he was stationed in Oklahoma. Captain Turner had lived in upstate New York until his military service moved him between New York, Oklahoma, Europe, New Jersey, New York, New Jersey, and Virginia. In his tours of duty, he served in the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Czechoslovakia, and the north

Polar Regions. For this he was awarded the European-African-Middle Eastern Theater Ribbon with three bronze service stars for the Rhineland, Central Europe, and the Ardennes campaigns. He also received the Army of Occupation Medal, the WWII Victory Medal, the American Campaign Medal, and the American Defense Service Ribbon. Turner was survived by his wife and three daughters, ages one, three, and four years.



Captain Francis Turner (Photo from Mrs. Carolyn Turner Leps).

Captain William Sheridan had grown up in nearby Canton, New York and graduated from St. Lawrence University in 1939. He had lived with his aunt in Port

Leyden and maternal grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Infantine before joining the Army in 1942. In December 1947, he was living in Hopewell, Virginia.

Lieutenant Charles Reynolds grew up in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He was a platoon leader with an infantry company of the 505th Combat Team of the 82nd Airborne Division.

Lieutenant John Futoma and **Captain Thomas Terry** were members of the ski cadre from Camp Carson, Colorado, who were temporarily assigned to Pine Camp for Exercise Snowdrop. Futoma was from Utica, New York, and Terry was from Portland, Oregon. Terry was head of the ski cadre from Camp Carson.

Lieutenant Harry Sanders and four unnamed officers were also in the barracks. Details about these other officers and even the total number housed in Building T-2278 are unknown due to lack of published information and loss of records.

The Fire

Building T-2278 was heated by a boiler located on the first floor across from both the main entrance and the only staircase in the building. It was an unusually cold winter and an especially cold night with lows well below freezing, likely requiring continued use of the boiler for a prolonged

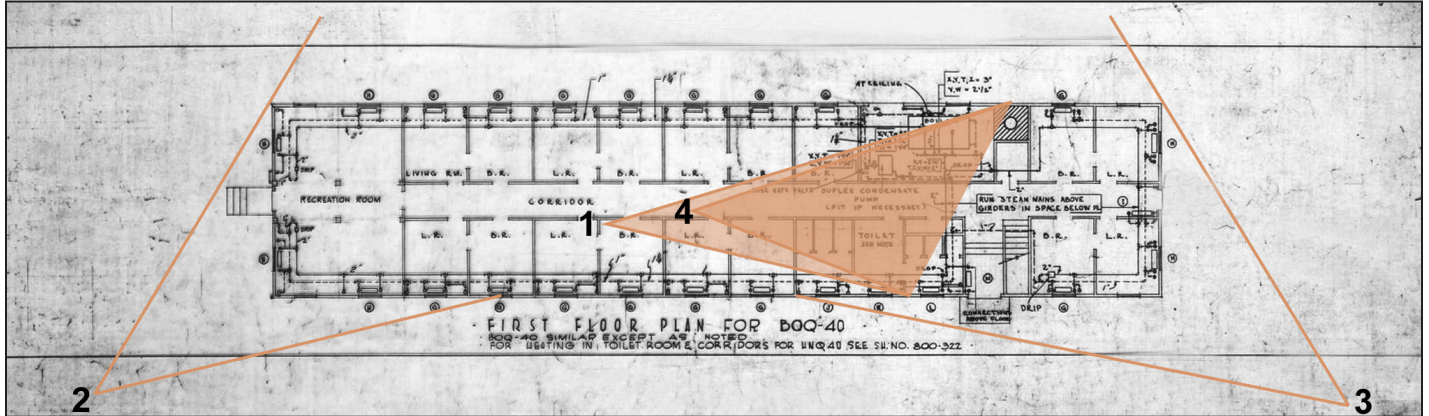
period. By 2:30 the morning of December 10, a fire in Building T-2278 was discovered. Any fire is a disaster, but this one had a peculiar series of mishaps that made it even more tragic.

At first, the night watchman who spotted the fire thought it was in an adjacent building. Reports from that night are thin on details, and it is unknown exactly what happened between when the fire was spotted and when the fire department was called. The only record is the fire chief's report mentioning there was a delay in contacting the fire department. Perhaps this was because the watchman thought the fire was in another building, or he rushed to wake people instead of reporting the fire. In any event, the fire was quickly out of control and was later classified as a flash fire.

It was reported that Captain Turner was running up and down the halls of the burning building, raising the fire alarm and waking his fellow officers, just nine hours after his arrival at Pine Camp. It is unknown if Turner was able to spread the alarm through the whole building, but it is known that he waited, helping other officers, until the last moment before trying to escape. In this instant, according to his daughters, Turner jumped from a second story window only to catch his wedding ring on an exposed nail. There, hanging from the window, Turner suffered severe burns over all of his body.

The Post Fire Chief's final report states that four officers died instantly while sleeping. But by the morning of December 10 facts were still being pieced together. The morning edition of the *Watertown Daily Times* ran the initial story reporting that three men had died and one was still missing. Later, the fourth officer was found and so the final report listed two of the dead on the first floor near the middle of the building, still in their beds, close to windows, and lists the other two officers on the second floor near the back of the building. In addition to the story the *Watertown Daily Times* published several photos showing the destruction of the fire, which are on pages 8-11.

Photograph 1 on page 8, shows the ruins of the barracks with a bed frame in the lower right corner. Photograph 2 shows the charred front of the building, including the escape ladder and the now missing platform from the second story emergency escape door. Photograph 3 captures the rear of the building, showing an escape route that may have been blocked by the burning staircase and boiler room across the hall. Also of note is the lack of a secondary exit from this side of the building. Photograph 4 shows the debris around the boiler room still smoldering. A corner of a bed frame in the foreground is visible and in the background on the right is the collapsed second floor.



Location of images taken after fire (HQ, USACE, History Office).



1. Building T-2278 interior ruins (Watertown Daily Times).



2. Fire investigators inspecting the damage of T-2278 (Watertown Daily Times).

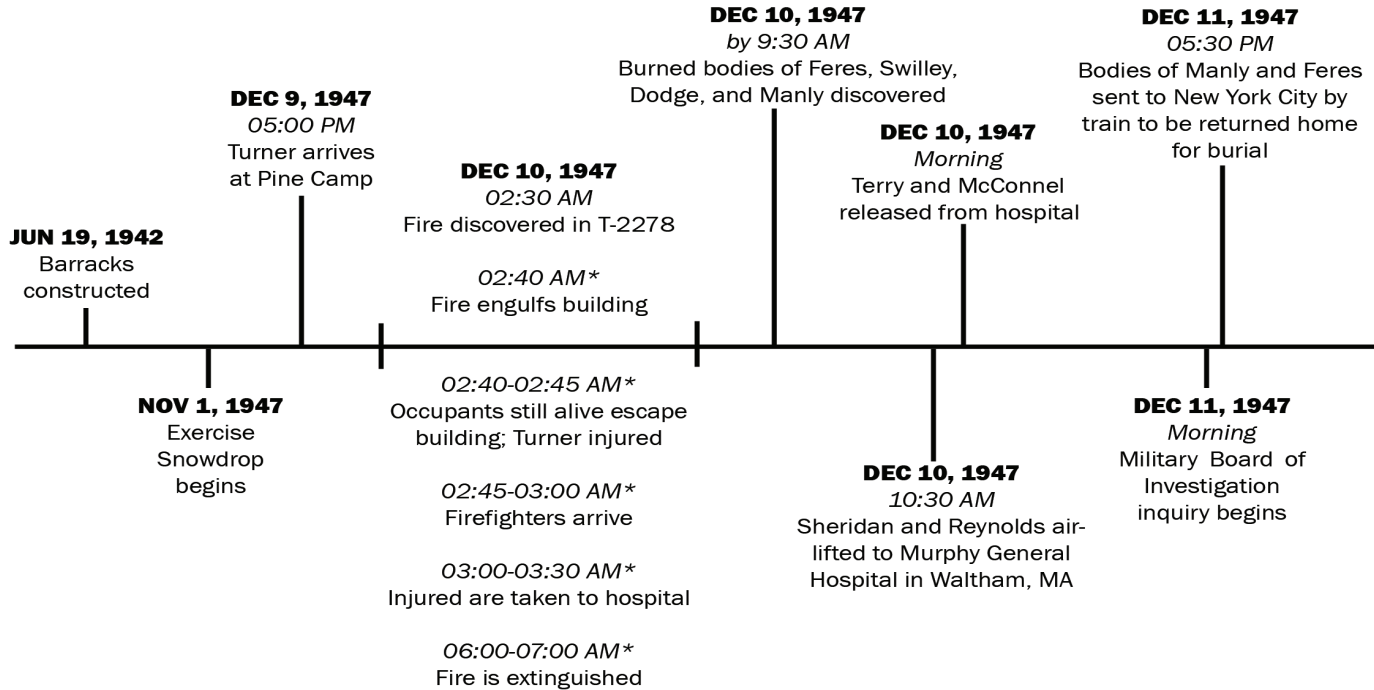


3. Rear and side view of T-2278, note that side exit door appears blocked by fire damage (Watertown Daily Times).



4. Progressing closer to rear of building interior damage (Watertown Daily Times).

TIMELINE OF EVENTS



*All times are estimated based on available data.

DEC 28, 1947

03:50 PM

Turner dies at Pine Camp
Hospital from injuries
sustained in barracks fire

AUG 19, 1948

Bernice Feres sues the United
States for \$100,000 for
negligence of a faulty heater
that led to the death of her
husband

OCT 12, 1950

Feres appeals to
U.S. Supreme Court

OCT 10, 1949

Feres appeals to
2nd Circuit Court
of Appeals

FEB 8, 1948

Exercise
Snowdrop
concludes

FEB 10, 1949

Northern New York
District Court judge
dismisses case on
basis of the Federal
Tort Claims Act

NOV 4, 1949

2nd Circuit Court of Ap-
peals upholds District
Court ruling

DEC 11, 1947

10:00 PM

Bodies of Dodge and
Swilley sent to New York
City via train to be
returned home for burial

DEC 4, 1950

U.S. Supreme Court up-
holds decisions of Cir-
cuit and District Courts

Casualties

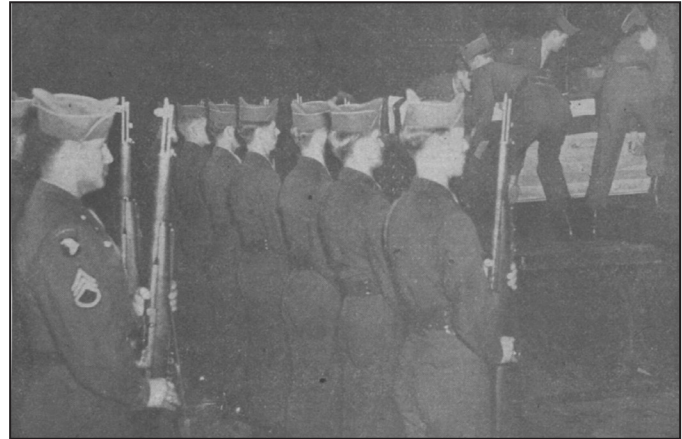
The fatal injuries report to the Commanding General of the Army Ground Forces for the week ending December 12, 1947, lists the four officers who burned to death at Pine Camp on December 10. The four officers were Captain Robert Dodge and First Lieutenant Rudolph Feres of the 505th Parachute Infantry Regiment, First Lieutenant Robert Manly of the 38th Infantry Regiment, and First Lieutenant Wallace Swilley of the 456th Field Artillery Battalion.

It is known that Lieutenant Manly and Captain Dodge had quarters on the second floor of the barracks, and Lieutenants Swilley and Feres had quarters on the first floor. It is likely that Swilley and Feres never woke up, because their bodies were found on top of fire-charred bed frames.

By December 11, after the next of kin were notified, the names of the dead and injured were released, and the Associated Press published the story across the country. At the time, the newspaper reporting focused exclusively on the dead and injured; the articles provided only the bare facts about the victims and what had brought them to Pine Camp. The dead officers were recorded with their names, hometowns, and military ranks and decorations,

but not much else of their personal lives was revealed.

After recording the officers who died in the fire, reports went on to mention the five officers and one enlisted man who were injured. The five officers suffered from varying degrees of burns and other injuries. Initially, all the injured were taken to the post hospital for immediate stabilization. Due to the level of destruction, it's hard to imagine that anyone could have escaped the fire. *The*



Twenty-man guard of honor during loading of bodies onto trains for transport home for burial (Watertown Daily Times).

Watertown Daily Times images taken after the fire show only a shell of a building, its interior hardly recognizable. The fire suppression and alarm systems were woefully inadequate by modern standards. The real property record for the building lists extinguishers as the only fire protection equipment and the building didn't have any alarm system.

Lieutenant John Futoma and Captain Thomas Terry suffered minor burns and were treated at the Pine Camp hospital. Terry was released the same day and Futoma was released sometime later. Private James McConnell was a Pine Camp firefighter who suffered from smoke inhalation. He was treated and released from the post hospital later on December 10.

Captain Francis Turner's burns were so severe that he could not be moved from the Pine Camp hospital. According to news reports, two days after the fire, Turner's wife and mother were by his side. For over two weeks his body struggled to heal. Several days after the fire, the Elmira Star Gazette cautiously reported that Captain Turner's condition was still very serious, but that he was "holding his own." Three days later on December 18th, the Star Gazette reports that Turner's condition was "very much improved," according to the Pine Camp doctors. Just two days later, newspaper reports gave little hope for Turner's recovery. But Turner tenaciously lived

for another eight days before finally succumbing to his burns and dying on December 28th, 1947. After a military ceremony he was buried at Woodlawn National Cemetery in his hometown of Elmira, New York.

Lieutenant Charles Reynolds suffered first, second, and third degree burns to his arms, back, and lower extremities. Captain William Sheridan, quartered on the second floor of the barracks, was caught by the raging fire, and could only escape by jumping from his window fracturing his back. Early on December 11, Sheridan and Reynolds were loaded into a cargo plane to be transferred to Murphy General Hospital in Waltham, Massachusetts. Although there was a military hospital in Plattsburg, New York, the Army decided to send these two victims to Murphy General because a C-82 "Flying Boxcar" was waiting at Pine Camp to fly to Westover Field to aid in a Labrador plane crash and Murphy General Hospital was on the way. There the plane was met by an ambulance and Army doctors who rushed the men to the hospital. By the afternoon, the men were placed in a ward and were receiving treatment for their injuries. The newspaper reported the remaining injured would also be transported to Murphy General Hospital for treatment, but newspaper reports later explain the remaining men were released from the Pine Camp hospital.



Loading injured to be airlifted to Murphy General Hospital, Waltham, MA (Watertown Daily Times).

Aftermath

The day following the fire, on December 11, a Military Board of Inquiry was established to begin investigating the cause of the fire. The board was made up of at least three people and included Lieutenant Harry Sanders, the only uninjured survivor known by name. On the day Captain Turner died, the fire chief's final report on the fire was submitted to the post engineer. This fire report references the investigation conducted by the Board of Inquiry whose supplementary report went directly to the First Army without the fire chief's review. Post Fire Chief Cyril Donovan, was clearly unaware of what the investigative report details and stated in the first paragraph of his fire report that he is waiting to see the contents. For whatever reason, experienced researchers were unable to locate this investigative report despite intense efforts. Without the Military Board of Inquiry's official report, it is impossible to reconcile the fire chief's report with the board's determinations and know if the two were perhaps conflicting.

The daily fire log reported that it took firefighters three engines, 1,950 feet of water line, and three hours to extinguish the inferno. Fire Chief Donovan wrote that this fire burned with more "furious intensity than any other type of fire" in his knowledge and experience. He believed a fire of this type could happen again and made

recommendations for the Army's Chief of Engineers to study how to change the standardized design of the barracks. The fire chief's six recommendations for change illustrated the glaring dangers of the building and starkly showed how the tragedy could have been minimized. His first two recommendations directly related to the lack of fire safety and escape strategies in the barracks. The building, he wrote, needed "closed stairways leading from the first to second floors using a self-closing door which will close automatically" in the event of a fire. The second called for the installation of permanent escape



**Pine Camp Fire Department battling the blaze
(Watertown Daily Times, December 10, 1947).**

ladders and doors on “each end of this type of building.” Relating these two improvements to the night of the fire, he stated the “loss of two lives and injuries could have been prevented.” He then placed his suspicions regarding the cause of the fire on the boiler and heating systems in the building with the next four recommendations. While not explicitly stating the building caught fire because of the heating system, he said the building was most likely dried out from the overworked boiler, making the wooden structure burn more rapidly. Pragmatically, he then called for the necessity of incorporating an alarm system with the boiler so that in the event of a fire there would be sufficient warning to the building occupants. The final two recommendations concerned fire-proofing the boiler room with flame-retardant wallboard and buffering the steam pipes away from the walls.

The report subtly reflected a conflict between the post fire chief and accusations made against him, perhaps by the Military Board of Inquiry. In his rebuttal, the fire chief wished to “contradict any accusations against the Fire Department’s response or their operations at the fire.” He excused the performance of the firefighters by stating there was a delay in the discovery and notification of the fire alarm to his department. Again he defended his department by writing they “operated as efficiently as possible under the circumstances,” including the fact that two-thirds of the fire department’s personnel had been at

their jobs for less than three months and others no more than five months. The fire chief concluded with another excuse for performance by comparing his men with firefighters trained for work in cities. In cities, he wrote that, it takes four years of training to make a first class fireman, and “it could not be expected that our firemen be first grade with so short a training period.” Although the fire chief’s final report made sound recommendations for building improvements, the overall conclusion of the report seemed to reflect a conflict between the Board of Inquiry and the fire department.

The cause of the fire was never reported to the public, but was potentially either a cigarette or a faulty heating system in conjunction with an overly dry building. In news reports, Captain Turner was credited with saving the officers who escaped. As those who escaped watched the barracks burn, it was reported that two officers had to be physically restrained from reentering the building to save their friends.

Exercise Snowdrop brought together fourteen officers from around the United States. Housed in WWII temporary barracks, the officers were innocent victims of what would today be considered poor building design. Had the barracks been adequately fitted with a fire alarm, the flash fire on the morning of December 10, 1947, might not have resulted in such a loss. The results are tragic: four officers

died immediately, one died two agonizing weeks later, and four other men were hospitalized with varying degrees of burns and injuries. While newspaper articles refer to the several men who did manage to escape the fire, no other records exist of their names or personal histories and so, the probable cause of the fire is still unanswered. Was it the unattended cigarette the daily fire report lists, or was it sparked by a faulty heating system and an unusually dry building implied by the post's fire chief? Why was the

fire department so unprepared to fight such an intense fire and what were the final conclusions reported by the Military Board of Inquiry? Regardless, the tragic results of the fire illustrated the danger of the WWII standardized barracks and the immediate need to incorporate fire suppression and alarm systems into standardized building planning and design. Later barracks designs did incorporate fire suppression and alarm systems and were also constructed out of concrete block to be permanent.



Building T-2278 site November 2010 (CERL).

WHY PINE CAMP?

The Fort Drum area first gained of military interest in 1908 when the U.S. War Department was looking to create an upstate New York training area. Ten thousand acres along the Black River at Pine Plains became Pine Camp with the arrival that year of 2,000 Army troops and 8,000 New York militiamen for summer training. A compound with temporary and semi-temporary structures was constructed in 1920 and used until 1940. An additional 9,000 acres were added to the post in the mid-1930s.

As the War Department began its mobilization and expansion program in anticipation of hostilities in the wake of Germany's invasion of Poland, Pine Camp became the site of a WWII training facility in 1941. This expansion involved the purchase of 75,000 acres of land, and the construction of 800 buildings and an airfield within a 10-month period. During the war, three divisions trained at Pine Camp: General George S. Patton's 4th Armored, the 45th Infantry, and the 5th Armored Division. In addition to U.S. troops, the installation housed German and Italian prisoners of war. After WWII, Pine Camp became a sub-installation under Fort Devens and continued its tradition of summer training. The installation was also used for winter training for active duty soldiers from 1947 through 1952.

The post-war quiet at the camp disappeared with the outbreak of the Korean War, when Camp Drum (renamed for Lt. Gen. Hugh A. Drum in 1951) was again utilized for wartime troop training. The post's sub-installation status ended in 1974 when it was designated Fort Drum and assigned a permanent garrison. Ten years later, Fort Drum was named the home of a new light infantry division (the 10th Mountain), necessitating large-scale expansion and construction efforts. An entire new cantonment was created for the division between 1986 and 1992. Today, Fort Drum supports training activities and mobilization efforts for approximately 80,000 troops annually from all services.

Development of WWII Training Camp

As the shadow of Nazi domination spread across Western Europe, the US military establishment began to augment its forces and industrial capacity to meet whatever threat materialized. With the National Guard called up and the draft instituted, the Army increased troop strength from a low of 230,000 to over 1.6 million by December 1941. This rapid influx of soldiers resulted in a tremendous need for construction including expanding existing military installations, and creating new training camps from scratch.



Aerial view of Pine Camp, 1941 (NARA College Park).

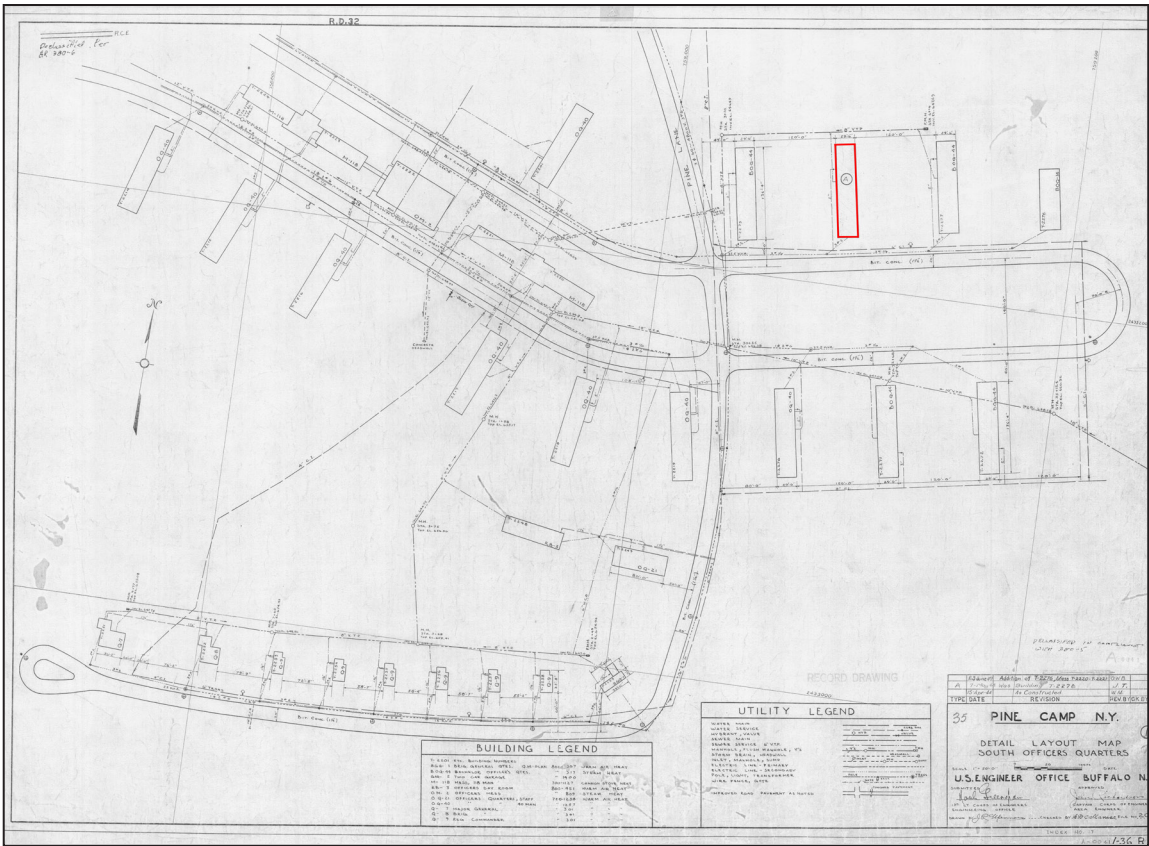
Design for the buildings placed in the new cantonments proceeded rapidly through standardization. Many individual types of mobilization buildings were designed, providing every necessity of life in these virtual towns. Plans were created for laundry facilities, bakeries, motor pools, administration, hospitals, officers' quarters, chapels (one per regiment), athletic arenas, clubs, warehouses, communications, etc. The initial designs (700 series) of new standard plans provided adequate housing and support for the expanded Army, primarily through temporary timber-frame structures. The 800 series of standard building plans supplanted the 700 series during 1941, providing more space in the standard two-story barracks, and simplifying construction to speed up the process.

With construction proceeding on an assembly-line basis with framing crews moving from one building to the next, the physical labor was also formalized for efficiency. The combination of standardized camp layouts, standardized building plans, expedited alterations, and specialized crews resulted in cantonments that seemed to leap into existence. Between August 1940 and June 1941, the Quartermaster Corps built facilities for nearly one million troops.

At the upstate New York installation, the standard layout was put in place and remains largely intact. There is a linear arrangement with the outer road containing transport/motor pool facilities and industrial sites, and an inner road lined with housing, administration buildings, community buildings, and classroom facilities. Specialized facilities, including officer housing and the station hospital, were located below the inner road, in more open areas. Nearly all buildings were of the WWII temporary standard plan designs. Division Hill was the original headquarters area for the installation. The highest point around, it has a 360-degree view encompassing the cantonment to the north and the officers' housing loop to the south. This loop consists of a winding road lined on the outside with two-story barracks. Community buildings occupied the center, but as is the case with most of the WWII buildings, they are now demolished.



Pine Camp general site plan with Officer's Quarters in red, September 8, 1950 (Fort Drum, Master Planning).



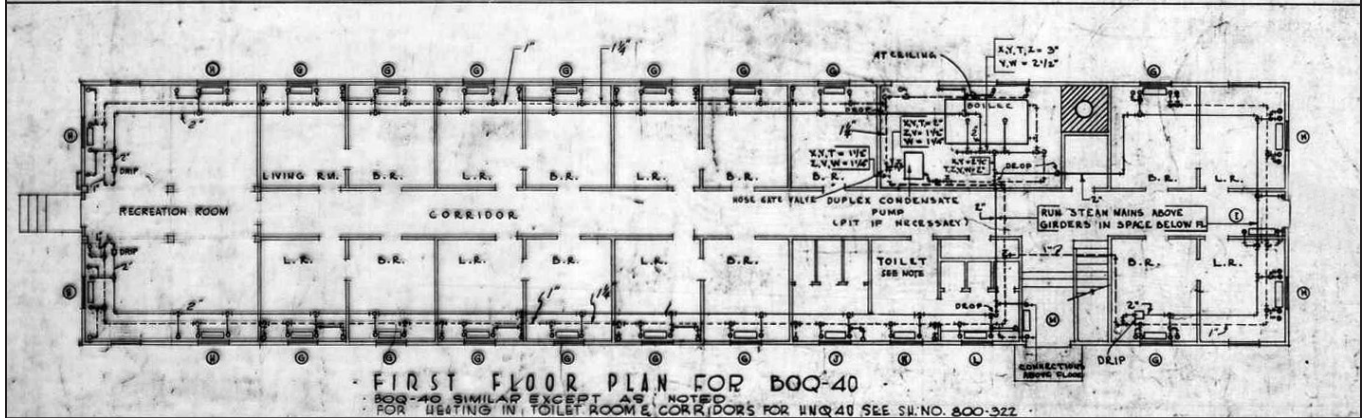
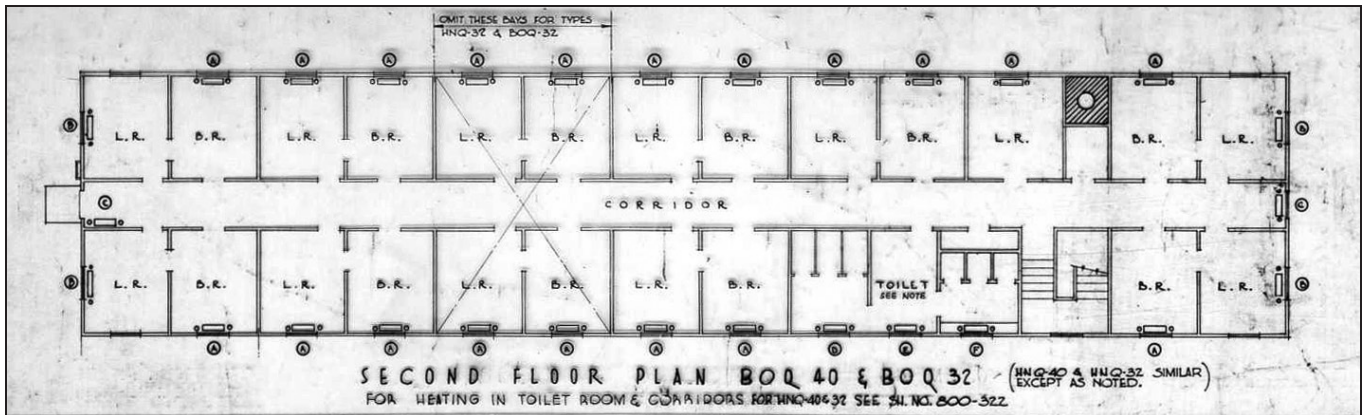
Pine Camp officers' barracks area with location of Building T-2278 in red, June 13, 1949 (Fort Drum, Master Planning).

Building T-2278

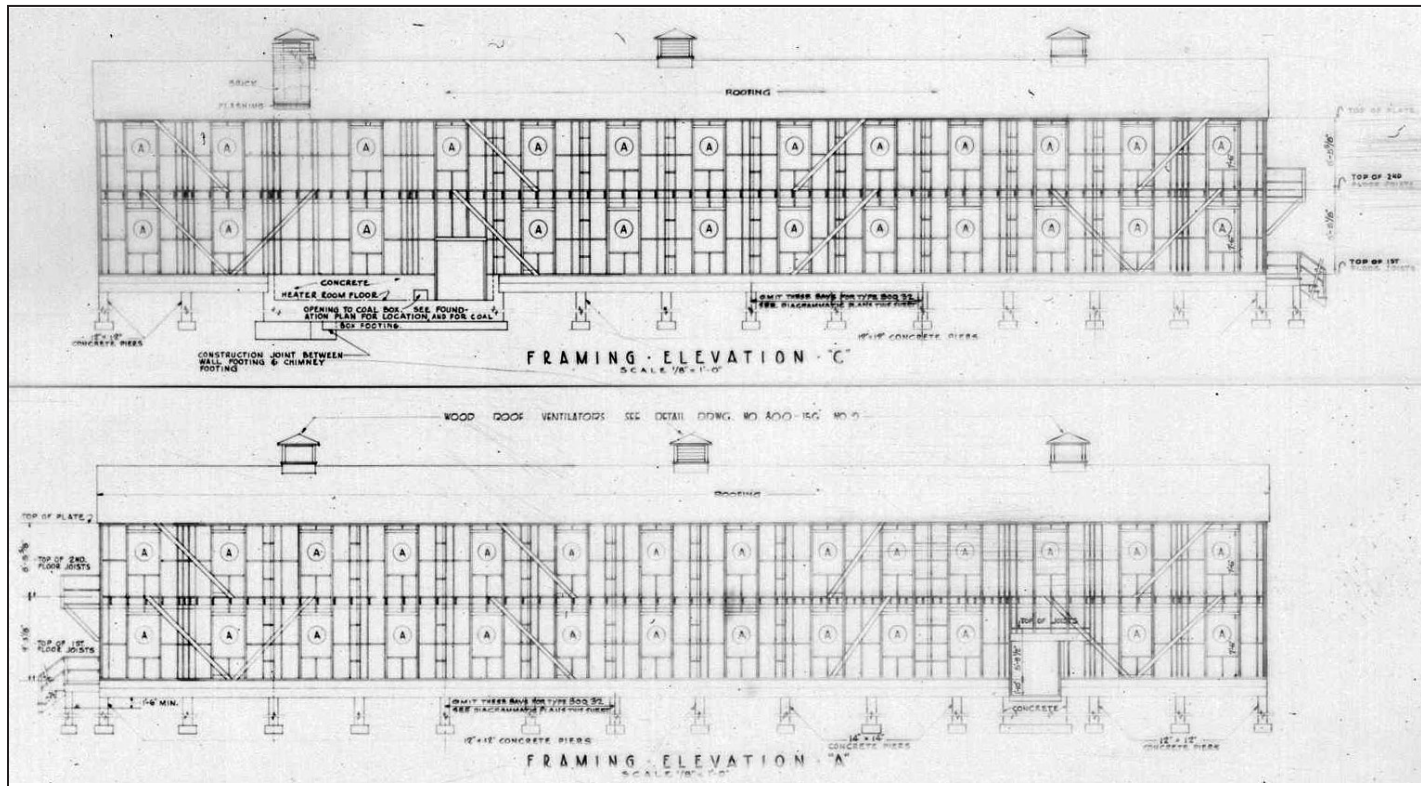
The officers' quarters involved in the December 10, 1947 fire was Building T-2278, located in the eastern part of the officers' housing loop. As one of four structures on the northern side of the road, T-2278 was the center of three identical structures (including T-2277 and T-2279), all Bachelor Officers' Quarters (BOQ) used for visiting officers. Two identical BOQs were constructed across the loop to the south, and a smaller BOQ was located at the northern end of the loop.

The three larger BOQs were all built from the 800 series Mobilization Building Standard Plan design for a 44-man BOQ (Without Mess), created by the Construction Division, Office of the Quartermaster General, and dated September 11, 1941. On January 27, 1942, the standard plan was modified to combine the four first-floor rooms into a large recreation room, thus reducing the occupancy from 44 to 40. Construction on T-2278 was completed on June 19, 1942. The barracks plan was a 29'-6" by 136'-4" rectangle, enclosing 8,044 square feet and costing \$28,919. The two-story structure was built with a concrete foundation, wood and concrete floors, wooden walls, and a shingle roof. As with similar barracks in the area, T-2278 was heated by a coal-fired boiler, producing steam released through radiators in each room.

The floor plan on the following page shows the entrance to the BOQ was through a central door on the narrow end of the building, directly into the recreation room, which extended across the building and was 20' deep. Beyond this room, there was a central corridor extending the length of the building. For most of its length, doors opening onto the corridor led to living units, with each officer given one living room and an adjoining bedroom. Further down the corridor, there were shared bathroom facilities on one side, and the heater room across the hall. Just beyond the bathroom were the stairs leading to the second floor. On the first floor, the stairs began at an exterior door. Another two sets of living quarters were at the end of the corridor, across from each other. The second floor consisted entirely of living quarters and another set of bathroom facilities. A ladder for emergency exit was reached through a door leading onto a small platform directly above the main entrance door. The ladder was bolted to the outside of the building just to the side of the front entrance.



Building T-2278 floor plans, September 11, 1941 (HQ, USACE, History Office).



Building T-2278 framing elevation, September 11, 1941 (HQ, USACE, History Office).

OFFICERS' QUARTERS, PINE CAMP, N. Y.



1941 postcard showing other 40-man Bachelor Officers' Quarters, similar to Building T-2278 (Wm. Jubb Co., Inc.).



44-Man Bachelor Officers' Quarters, adjacent to Building T-2278 April 2011 (Fort Drum Cultural Resources).

1. STATION Pine Camp, New York		2. DESIGNATION Barracks, BCG-44	
3. DATE 9 June 1947		4. DRAWING NO. 300-317 to 320	
5. COST ACCOUNT CODE 610-22		6. BUILDING NO. 5 B-2278	
7. DIMENSIONS		8. MATERIALS	
a. MAIN BLDG. 22'6" x 130'11"		a. FOUNDATION Concrete Piers & Walls	
b. OFFSETS none		b. FLOORS Wood & Concrete	
c. WINGS none		c. WALLS Wood	
d. BASEMENT none		d. ROOF Wood Frame & Shingle Roof	
e. ADDITIONS none		10. NO. OF USABLE FLOORS	
12. FIRE PROTECTION FACILITIES Extinguishers		9. SPACE HEATING	
		a. SOURCE 1 Boiler, Nat. Rad. No. 7	
		b. FUEL Coal 1710 lbs	
14. REMARKS Two Floors		11. HOT WATER FACILITIES	
		a. CAPACITY 257 Gal.	
		b. TEMP. RISE	
		13. UTILITY CONNECTIONS	
		NO. SIZE CAPACITY	
		a. WATER 1 1/2"	
		b. SEWER 1 1/2"	
		c. ELECTRIC 1	
		d. GAS none	
		e. STEAM none	
		f. CONDENSATE none	
DATE COMPLETED	VOUCHER NUMBER	DESCRIPTION	DESIGNED CAPACITY
6/19/42		ORIGINAL BUILDING \$28,919.00	8044
2/14/48	664-48	Destroyed by Fire 10 December 1947	
		Exterior Painted Surface	6275 sq. Ft.

WD AGO FORM 5-47
1 NOV 1945

Building 2278 real property record, June 9, 1947 (Fort Drum, Master Planning).

WHY WERE THESE OFFICERS AT PINE CAMP?

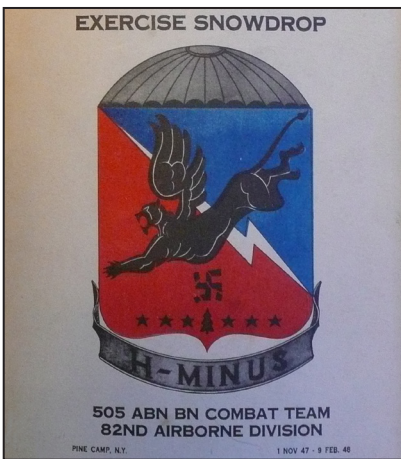
Exercise Snowdrop was part of a series of Army Ground Forces efforts to determine effective tactics, equipment, and logistics for fighting a potential Arctic war. There had already been field exercises in Alaska, Wisconsin, and the Aleutians in 1946-47. For Exercise Snowdrop, the field experience lasted for four months (November-February) at Pine Camp, New York, with periodic maneuver exercises designed to replicate combat conditions and activities. The troops involved were from the 82nd Airborne Division, stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. The general purposes were:

- Indoctrination of cold weather operations for elements of the general reserve.
- Develop airborne and air transport tactics and techniques in cold weather operations, particularly “over-snow” operations.
- Develop and test airborne equipment essential to “over-snow” operations.
- Develop resupply and evacuation by air, involving dropping of equipment by parachute, landings and take-offs of gliders, on ice, snow, and other unusual conditions.
- Develop such aspects of an organization, and the operation of an initial airhead as the means and personnel will permit.

Units Involved

- 505th Airborne Battalion Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division
- Battery “A”, 456th Parachute Field Artillery Battalion, 82nd Airborne
- 1st Platoon, Company “B”, 307th Engineer Battalion, 82nd Airborne
- 307th Airborne Medical Company, attached to 82nd Airborne
- Detachment “A”, 82nd Airborne Signal Company
- 316th Troop Carrier Group, Ninth Air Force
- Detachment, 82nd Airborne Parachute Maintenance Company
- 416th Ordnance Medium Maintenance Company, Fort Bragg
- 2nd Mobile Army Surgical Hospital, attached to 82nd Airborne
- Detachment, 407th Quartermaster Company, 82nd Airborne
- Transportation Corps personnel
- Company “D”, 716th Military Police Battalion, First Army

In addition to the troops participating in the exercise, there were also official observers from the Quartermaster Corps, who were interested in acquiring information on the performance and utility of combat and personnel equipment in the harsh environment. There were also instructors from the ski cadre at Camp Carson, Colorado, members of the 38th Regimental Combat Team. The Army's Mountain Training Center at Camp Carson was the only Army facility offering this type of training in the immediate post-WWII period. The instructors assisted the 82nd Airborne troops with cold weather tactics and techniques during the exercise.



Exercise Snowdrop insignia (New York Public Library).

Activities

Exercise Snowdrop was the largest over-snow airborne maneuver that the Army had undertaken at that point. Under the command of Lt. Col. Robert H. Wienecke, the exercise involved parachute jumps, combat training, snow marches, logistical support, and testing of equipment in cold weather. The exercise was divided into four phases:

1. Individual training and indoctrination, November 1-30, 1947

All combat team personnel receive training in over-snow operations, including survival procedures for bivouac, snow shoe and ski training, maintenance of arms and equipment in extreme cold, use of toboggan and sleds, leadership of troops under conditions of extreme cold (officers), physical and mental conditioning for cold weather operations, field firing, and airborne training.

2. Small Unit training to include Squad and Platoon, December 1, 1947 - January 10, 1948

Training included three squad and platoon 24-hour problems, including a parachute drop, various small unit tactics such as defensive and offensive operations in snow and sub-zero weather, extended order drill on



**Paratrooper standing with his equipment
(Popular Science, March 1948).**

skis and snowshoes, and cross-country marches and bivouacs.

3. Company training, January 11 - 24, 1948

In this phase, there were ground and airborne company-level problems lasting up to 72 hours, offensive and defensive tactics, field sanitation, and cross-country marches and bivouacs.

4. Battalion Training, January 25 - February 8, 1948

Finally, at the battalion level the training included: one 48-hour battalion ground problem to include attack and defense and cross-country operations; one 48-hour battalion airborne problem; and one 72-hour battalion combat team airborne maneuver to include an airhead operation.

There was phased training also given to specialists supporting the 505th Battalion Combat Team, who included drivers, maintenance personnel, communications, intelligence, staff, and weapons personnel. Jumpmaster and Pathfinder schools were conducted, as well as officers and non-commissioned officers' schools.



Exercise Snowdrop loading plane for parachute exercises, 1947 (NARA College Park, SC 292161-S).

The final field exercise in early February brought together all the skills and knowledge gained since early November. The maneuver scenario required the establishment of an airhead behind the front lines of an enemy force, followed by a ground offensive to rout the enemy. This three day maneuver included 500 paratroopers of the 505th Airborne Battalion Combat Team jumping into three feet of snow, along with their gear and weapons. For the paratroopers, winter conditions required a massive amount of clothing and equipment, including 35 pounds of special clothing, a 40-pound set of two parachutes, a 60-pound rucksack, weapons, and snowshoes. This could easily double the men's weight when ready to jump. Once on the ground, he had to deal with his gear and the cargo bundles also dropped by parachute, which contained heavier weapons such as mortars and howitzers plus ammunition, along with skis and sleds. Once packed on the sled, the men would pull it to the area they were designated to take and hold while the airstrip was constructed.

Results of Exercise Snowdrop were used to provide input into the development of doctrine, tactics, techniques, organization, clothing and equipment for subsequent cold weather airborne operations. The exercise confirmed that small-scale operations in snow and extreme cold were feasible by ordinary troops, but the constant struggle against the elements seemed to rule out large-scale extended wartime operations. For the short operations,



Paratrooper preparing for a combat jump with 145 pounds of equipment (Popular Science, March 1948).

protective materials must be provided rapidly, clothing needed to be less cumbersome and lighter, ski and snowshoe bindings were too complex, and ways to keep food and water from freezing without fires was very difficult. Overall, valuable operational experience was gained in the areas of supply, clothing, shelter, equipment, and subsistence.



Assembling a 75-mm howitzer in less than seven minutes (Popular Science, March 1948).



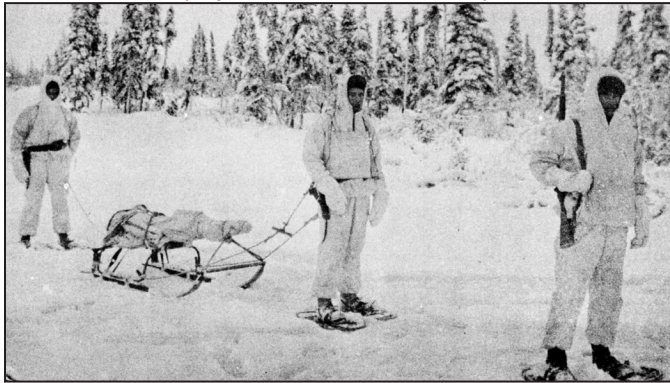
Parachuting, 1947 (NARA College Park, SC 292161-S).



Parachute landing, 1947 (NARA College Park, SC 292161-S).



Loading equipment on a sled to be hauled to the battle area
(Popular Science, March 1948).



Paratroopers on snowshoes (Exercise Snowdrop Observer's
Briefing Manual, NARA College Park, SC 292161-S).



Exercise Snowdrop ground training, 1947 (NARA College Park,
SC 292161-S).



Exercise Snowdrop training during snowfall, November 25, 1947 (NARA College Park, SC 292161-S).

LEGAL LIABILITY?

In the aftermath of the tragic fire, some of the affected families sought recompense for their loss. The widows of Lt. Rudolph J. Feres and 1st Lt. Wallace H. Swilley each sued the United States for \$100,000 for negligence of a faulty heater, and the widow of 1st Lt. Robert D. Manly and the mother of Capt. Francis H. Turner sued for \$150,000 each.

Judge Stephen W. Brennan of the Northern New York District Court dismissed all four of the barracks fire cases brought to him in early 1949. Judge Brennan dismissed the Feres case, citing in his decision lack of established jurisdiction for hearing this suit. The case brought by Bernice Feres, the widow of Lt. Rudolph Feres, was the only one appealed to the level of the U.S. Supreme Court.

Mrs. Feres appealed the February 10, 1949 District Court decision, bringing the case to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals in October 1949. The District Court decision was upheld by the Court of Appeals in November 1949. Mrs. Feres then appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. The Feres case was one of three combined for the Supreme Court appeal, all addressing the liability limits of the United States under the Federal Tort Claims Act in regard to military personnel injured by other military personnel during activities incident to service period. The

other two cases were *Griggs v. United States*, involving a wrongful death claim due to medical malpractice by Army physicians, and *Jefferson v. United States*, seeking medical malpractice damages for injuries received by an Army soldier resulting from an operation while on active duty. In December 1950, the U.S. Supreme Court dismissed all three claims. Also known as the Feres Doctrine, this decision effectively prevents military personnel from pursuing claims under the Federal Tort Claims Act for injuries incurred from activities incident to service. It also bars family members from filing wrongful death suits when a service member is killed.

The Feres Doctrine is still being challenged today as the limits of military liability continue to be debated. Courts continue to uphold the Feres decision, and attempts to overrule it by legislative means have not progressed. The most recent Supreme Court challenge to the Feres Doctrine came from the family of an airman who was left in a vegetative state after alleged repeated medical mistakes following a routine appendectomy in 2003. His family made the difficult decision to end life support three months later. On June 27, 2011, the Supreme Court declined to hear the case.

WHY DOES THIS STORY MATTER?

This story is important because it honors and commemorates those whose lives were taken or changed due to this event. It teaches us that fires can occur without warning and can spread rapidly, eliminating escape plans. It emphasizes the need to be constantly prepared for the possibility of fire and the need for maintaining readiness. This story is also important because it led to a series of precedent-setting legal decisions regarding military liability. Finally, the story resonates more than most due to the unanswered questions surrounding the fire.

Could current fire investigation techniques, possibly aided by archeological investigation, tell us more about what happened? Similarities exist between techniques used to investigate the origins of fires and archaeological methods, particularly in terms of collecting physical evidence to recreate events. Just as forensics experts reconstruct crimes, archeologists work in reverse to tell a story. Using a combination of witness accounts, investigative results, and evaluating artifacts, it can be determined where fires began and how they progressed through a building. A fire investigation may help determine the cause of the T-2278 barracks fire, especially since the investigative fire report is still missing.

Additionally, the photographs taken of the barracks the morning after the fire likely contain a wealth of information about the source and path of the fire that could be analyzed by a professional fire investigator.

The compelling events of December 10, 1947 focus our attention on the tragic loss of these Army officers. All were heroic soldiers, with experience, talent, and a laudable sense of duty. They deserve to be commemorated by telling their story.



Burned barracks, December 11, 1947 (Watertown Daily Times).

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