

1943 History House Christmas Key Points

A) Officer's homes had three main purposes -

(1) Private Residence - The officer's family lived in the home. Many officers had servants and they also would live in the home. Some homes have "servants" stair cases for separate access to the 2nd and 3rd floors. Servants usually lived on the top floor of the residence.

(2) Social - officers were expected to entertain and the kitchens were very well equipped for the time period to support entertaining. Senior officers often entertained local community leaders. Brigadier General Gage often entertained local leaders - the most significant being in 1941 with Mrs. Hartshorne to convince her to sell Hartshorne Woods to the Army to build Battery Lewis and Battery 219. It was typical for officers to host parties in their homes for subordinate leaders. Generally entertaining invitations were to those who were junior to the host - but not always. Sometimes, senior leaders would ask that junior leaders host parties to give them experience in hosting parties. This was often done with those officers that senior leaders felt were of promotion potential.

(3) Working office - All of the officer housing at Fort Hancock were built with an office on the main floor. This office had a separate entrance to allow junior officers and NCOs to access the officer without disturbing the family. This office often had a direct telephone line to the Officer's Battery or unit.

B) Officer pay was considered well below that of similar positions in the private sector. High quality and spacious housing were seen as a non-monetary benefit offsetting low pay. The pay disparity did not get addressed until the 1980-82 time period when a total pay increase of over 35% was implemented.

C) The Army typically worked six days a week, and the Sunday church service was generally a required event. Saturdays were normally reserved for inspections, performance counseling of subordinates, preparation for the coming week and logistical analysis.

D) During the Christmas Season, officers would visit the homes of their fellow officers and leave a "calling card". This was done after duty hours (1700 hours) and typically was short in duration (15 minutes maximum). A "Calling Card" was a high-quality card stock with the officer's name on it - and nothing else. A tray was normally kept in the foyer of the home to receive these cards. Leaving a calling card was seen as a courteous reminder of your meeting with the officer.

E) The enlisted men of Fort Hancock celebrated Christmas as part of the Battery/Company of which they were assigned. They held parties and dinners in their barracks and mess halls (by 1943 few were in tents). Every Battery/Company would host a Christmas Dinner in the

unit's Mess Hall. Traditionally in the US Army, the officers and senior NCOs would serve the soldiers during Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinners. Wives (spouses) typically attended these unit dinners. Separate events were typically coordinated by the Chaplains and wives for the children of the garrison's officers and men. After the mobilization of 1940, the majority of the NCOs and officers who were married did not have family at Fort Hancock. For these officers and NCOs, the private parties at the residences of those officers with families took on special meaning. Additionally, many local community families would host officers and soldiers who were otherwise away from home. This was often coordinated by the Post's humanitarian officers such as Chaplains, Rabbis, Red Cross and Salvation Army personnel.

- F) Starting on 9 December 1943, the enlisted men of the post put on a Burlesque play titled "It Ain't Kosher" - which ran through the month. After the show closed (at the end of the month), the cast of 75 was then treated to a celebration hosted by the Lambs Club - a New York Theatrical membership organization
- G) For many of the enlisted men, the parties and dances hosted by the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and the USO Service Club (United Services Organization) became the focal point of their social lives. Dance lessons were taught at the Service Club.
- H) Starting Christmas Eve, carols were played on the half hour and played over the loud speakers across the post and at the Batteries. The YMCA and Service Clubs hosted dances and parties on both days. Officers, enlisted men and WACs participated in the parties hosted by the YMCA and Service Club. The Annual Christmas Children's Party started at 1400 hours at Post Theater #2 with gifts distributed by Major O'Brien. Christmas Carols and a movie were highlights. At the Service Club, the Church of Mary Immaculate (Highlands NJ) distributed 100 gifts to holders of lucky numbers distributed at the dance held that evening in the service club.
- I) With the review of service classifications of soldiers in August 1943, the Army began implementing its plans to greatly reduce the size of the garrison. The German seaborne threat was diminishing and new gun batteries were being completed that were far more effective than the ones they replaced. This made many of the older batteries obsolete and they were eventually scrapped. In 1943 there were over 5,500 soldiers at Fort Hancock. By the spring of 1944, the garrison would be reduced to less than 2,000 officers and men. The 1943 Christmas would be the last of the "Grand Christmas Seasons" at Fort Hancock.

** Much of the information in paragraphs E-I was taken from the FogHorn newspapers from December 1943.*