

# CAMP FREMONT: TRENCH WARFARE IN MENLO PARK

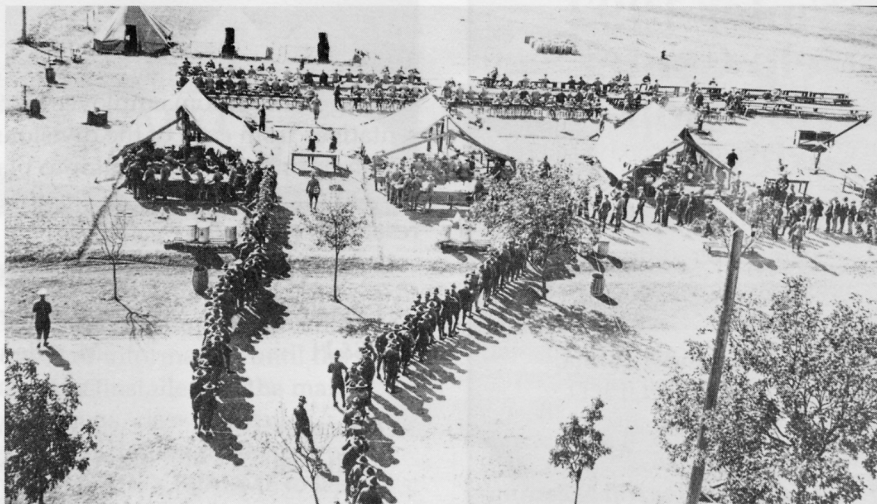
*Following is the last in a series written by summer intern Annette Cords about the history of the land at SLAC.*

WHEN THE US ENTERED WWI in the spring of 1917, Menlo Park was a quiet community of 2300 people, known for the palatial estates and summer residences of San Francisco's wealthiest businessmen, and for its particularly beautiful open landscape, marked by rolling hills and gnarled oaks. Menlo Park was chosen as the site for a military training ground because of its similarity to the French countryside. Camp Fremont, as it was called, was one of the largest training sites west of the Mississippi, and within the brief span of two years, from 1917 to 1919, 43,000 soldiers were trained on its grounds.

Construction on Camp Fremont began on July 1917 with a work force of 2500 men and was rapidly completed by September of the same year. The laborers erected over 1000 temporary buildings that were used as warehouses, mess and recreational facilities. The soldiers lived in a vast tent city of about 6000 canvas tents that filled the expansive area of Camp Fremont. There were also facilities for 10,000 horses and mules. The main part of Camp Fremont covered approximately 1300 acres, bounded roughly by El Camino Real, Alameda de las Pulgas, Valparaiso Avenue and San Francisquito Creek. The entire military reservation covered 7203 acres, including all of the property now known as SLAC and stretching as far as Foothill Park.

With the soldiers also came merchants who opened many shops to accommodate the new population, as well as a 1000-seat theater, featuring vaudeville acts and first-run movies. Within a few short months Menlo Park was converted from a sleepy rural village into a lively town.

Photo courtesy of Stanford Archives.

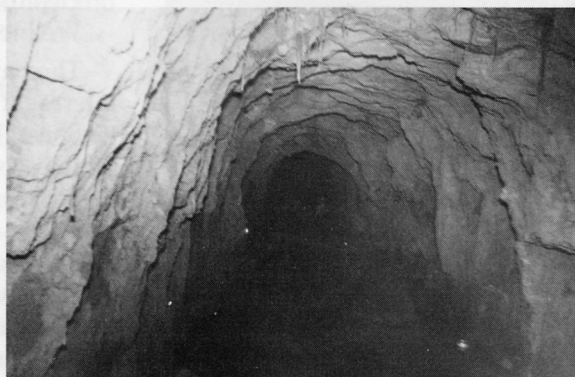


*Soldiers lined up for a meal at the mess tents of Camp Fremont.*

In the open fields and rolling hills of the camp the soldiers practiced trench warfare to prepare for action on the Western Front. To simulate battlefield conditions, miles of trenches were dug from which the men tossed live hand grenades. The soldiers were trained on Springfield rifles mounted with bayonets, in addition to more "modern" equipment such as Browning machine guns and gas-masks. SLAC land was probably a site for artillery practice, and according to references on military maps six tunnels were dug here. The entrances were covered in the 20s to protect children and wandering cattle. Evidence of these tunnels is still uncovered from time to time.

Preparing for war in the pleasant setting of Menlo Park's foothills, many soldiers were eager to fight in France. Very few Camp Fremont men ever made it to combat in France, however, as the Armistice was signed before most of the troops even reached New York. But the 8th Division, trained here, made history as the forgot-

Jim Rutherford



*A picnicking family found and photographed one of Camp Fremont's tunnels in the 1940s. Tunnels such as this were uncovered during construction at SLAC.*

ten Army. They were shipped to Vladivostok, Siberia, in 1918, to guard tons of supplies from the Germans. The troops stayed in Siberia long after the war ended, and it was not until congressional representatives began to intervene on their behalf that the soldiers returned in October of 1919.

Today almost no traces are left of Camp Fremont. Once the war ended the camp was dismantled, the buildings were sold, and Menlo Park again became a quiet hamlet. The most prominent land mark remaining of Camp Fremont, Hostess House, was once the meeting place for soldiers, their families and friends; it is now known as MacArthur Park Restaurant.

—Annette Cords