

#17 Army Life Begins at Camp Funston



My last blog mentioned a letter published in the *Graphic* on Sept 27, 1917, which was written by Raymond A. Smith from Camp Funston to Sheriff G. D. Hoffman of Kinsley. Sheriff Hoffman was the Registration Officer for Edwards County. Raymond was the son of Oren and Mary Smith and graduated from Kinsley High School in 1912. He had been placed in charge of the squad as they traveled to Camp Funston. Smith describes Camp Funston a little later in his letter.

"Seven states send their quotas here. About 25,000 men have arrived already and they are pouring in by the thousands every day. I guess we will have plenty of company. There will be between sixty and seventy thousand men here when they all arrive."

Guy Lee Crawford graduated from Lewis High School in 1913. He then attended dental college and received his degree in Dentistry. Upon graduation from dental school, he was drafted into the army. On October 5, 1917 he wrote to his parents a description of those first few days of army life at Camp Funston.

"Well this is the end of my first full day of army work, so will let you know how I like it as far as I have gone. We arrived Thursday morning and an officer took charge of us immediately, marched, or rather walked us away, and divided us according to our counties and states. Then we "bathed". It was some cool, too. However, a fellow feels better after it is over. We got in the way of clothes: one shirt, one pair sox, two blankets, one hat, one canvas bag to be filled with straw for our cot, one poncho, and mess kit and toilet kit consisting of tooth brush, comb and hair brush. Most of the fellows had the articles in our toilet kit with them when they came.

Yesterday afternoon we had a small amount of drilling. Col. Sims and Josh Gibson were to see us yesterday afternoon. Col. Sims had quite a bit of fun with me about the way in which my overalls fit me. They didn't. They were 40s. I traded them for a smaller pair today. The Edwards County bunch had to do guard duty one hour each yesterday. My stunt was from 7-8 in the evening. I was appointed a temporary corporal today and was informed just now that I and three of my men were to do guard duty from 9:15 to 11:15 tonight.

All of the fellows seem to be pretty well satisfied. Personally, I like it. Of course it is new and after the novelty wears off, it may become monotonous, but I like it now. I have stood all of the work and drilling fine. Our officers seem to be a mighty fine set of fellows. We have a negro cook, then he has helpers. Guy Belcher has been in the kitchen since he came...."

Another letter written by Robert Benner, son of Mr. and Mrs. Calvin of Lewis, was published in the same issue of the Graphic. In researching to know more about him, I came upon the notification that he was killed in action on the battlefield in France on September 13, 1919. That knowledge adds perspective and poignancy to this blogging project. It is good to remember Robert's sacrifice today through his words as a new recruit. He is writing to his brother Jim who would be drafted one year later.

"I received your letter the other day, and was sure glad to hear from you. Well, I am sure tired tonight. We are putting in 8 hours a day. They take us out to the field at 7:30 in the morning. The first thing when we get there is to put us on double quick, that is a stiff run for about a quarter of a mile, and they have been running us a little farther each day, and then make us climb the hill and then drill up there and then bring us down for dinner. We are getting it a little stronger each day. Have not taken us on any hikes yet, but will get that sometime soon...."

They are going to put about 250 men in each barrack. There are about 225 in this barrack, and we are sure packed in, but there is more room upstairs. I sleep down stairs. I sure dread tomorrow's work. In the morning we have to go through all these drills, and about half of them on double quick before the major. He comes around every so often to see how we are getting along...."