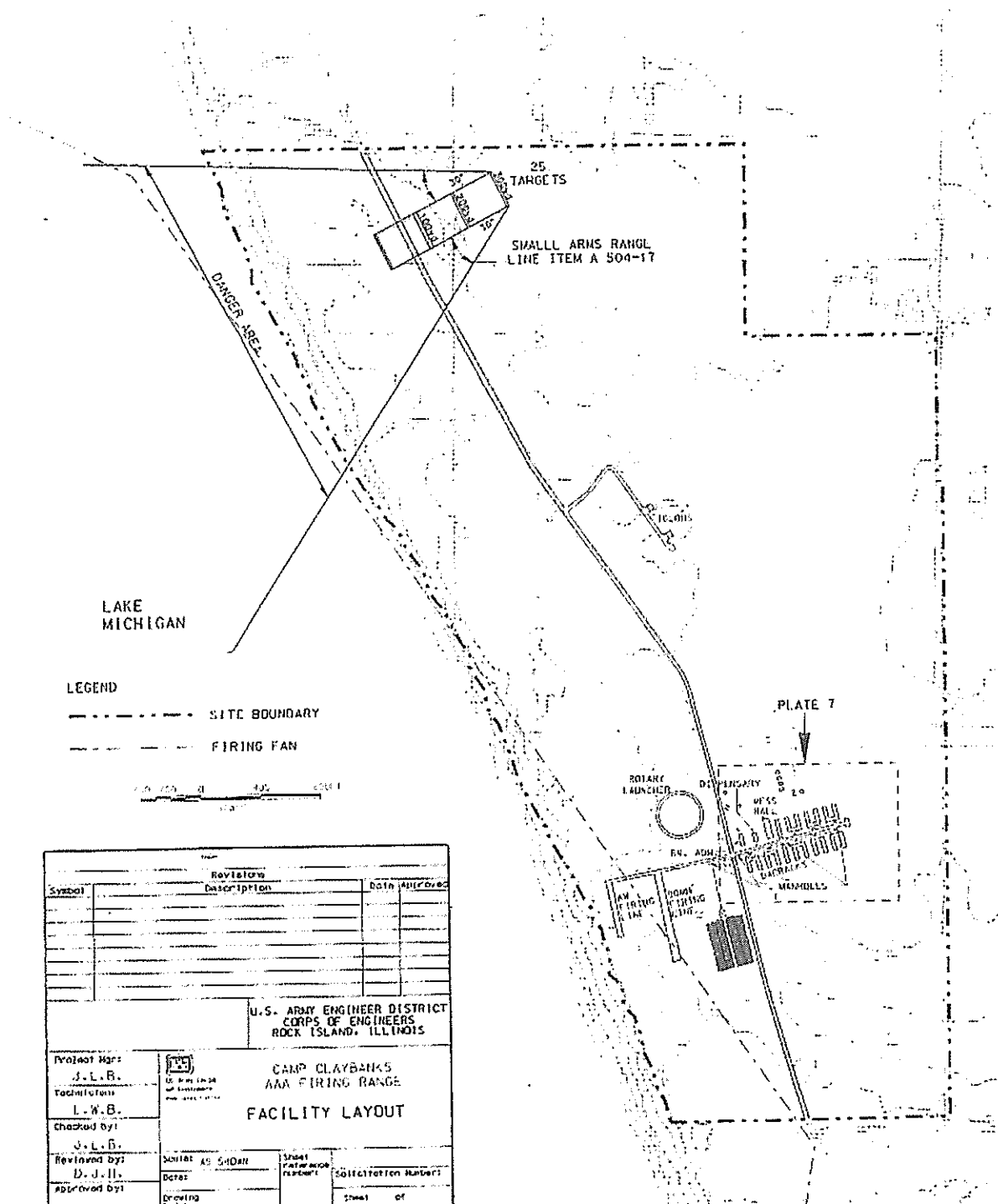


Camp Claybanks



Symbol	Revision Description	Date	By
U.S. ARMY ENGINEER DISTRICT CORPS OF ENGINEERS ROCK ISLAND, ILLINOIS			
Project No: J.L.B.	CAMP CLAYBANKS AAA FIRING RANGE FACILITY LAYOUT		
Checked by: L.W.B.	DATE: 10/15/44 BY: J.L.B.		
Reviewed by: D.J.H.	SCALE: AS SHOWN	SHEET: 1 OF 1	DISCREETION NUMBER:
Approved by:	DRAWING TITLE:	SHEET OF:	SHEET OF:

Presented to the White Lake Historical Society

By Art Grumm

July 18, 2019

Introduction

I was born in Claybanks Township in 1936, attended Girdle Road country school and Montague high school where I graduated in 1954. I immediately went into the service for a period of over four years, so I was not in residence during the active time of Camp Claybanks. My military experience was in airborne artillery. We had 105 mm Howitzers that were small enough to be dropped from aircraft. Also, my first unit was the 508th Regimental Combat Team which contained a battery of anti-aircraft quad 50 caliber machine guns that were mounted on halftracks, so I've had some experience with what we are talking about here.

Most of the information that I'm going to talk about today is from a collection of information gathered by one of the enlisted men that was stationed at Claybanks during the time the camp was active. His name was John Tom) Royalty, of Kentucky, who married my cousin Carol Friday in April 1954 and after his discharge made his home here in Claybanks. John served at the camp from 12 June 1953 to 4 March 1957 as a member of the 5106th A.S.U. Hq. Michigan Military District, 5th Army and was in the supply section at the camp.

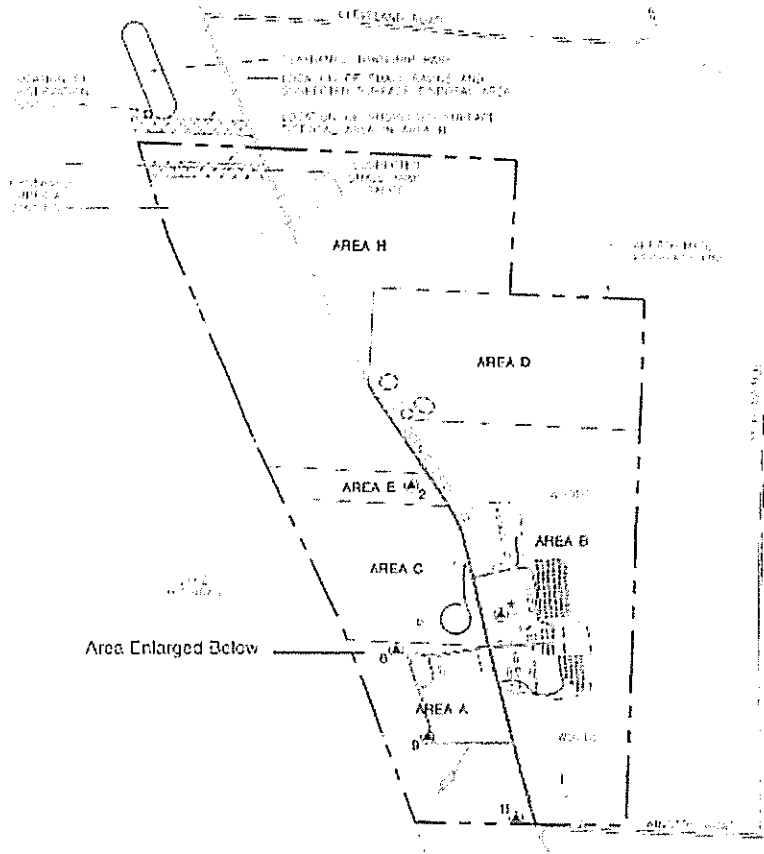
John served in the Korean conflict (Company E, 5th Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division). In September 1951 he was in the Battle of Heartbreak Ridge. The battle took place from September 13th to October 15th, 1951. On October 3rd his squad was pinned down by machine gun fire from a Chinese bunker. While his squad provided cover fire John crawled forward and with hand grenades blew up the bunker for which he was awarded the Bronze Star. Then on October 11th he received a gunshot wound in the upper left arm and shrapnel wounds to his right arm and over his left eye and his neck for which he received the Purple Heart.

Unfortunately John is no longer able to answer the many questions that I would like to ask in preparation of this history. However I am thankful to Carol Royalty for giving me access to John's collection of photos, clippings and maps.

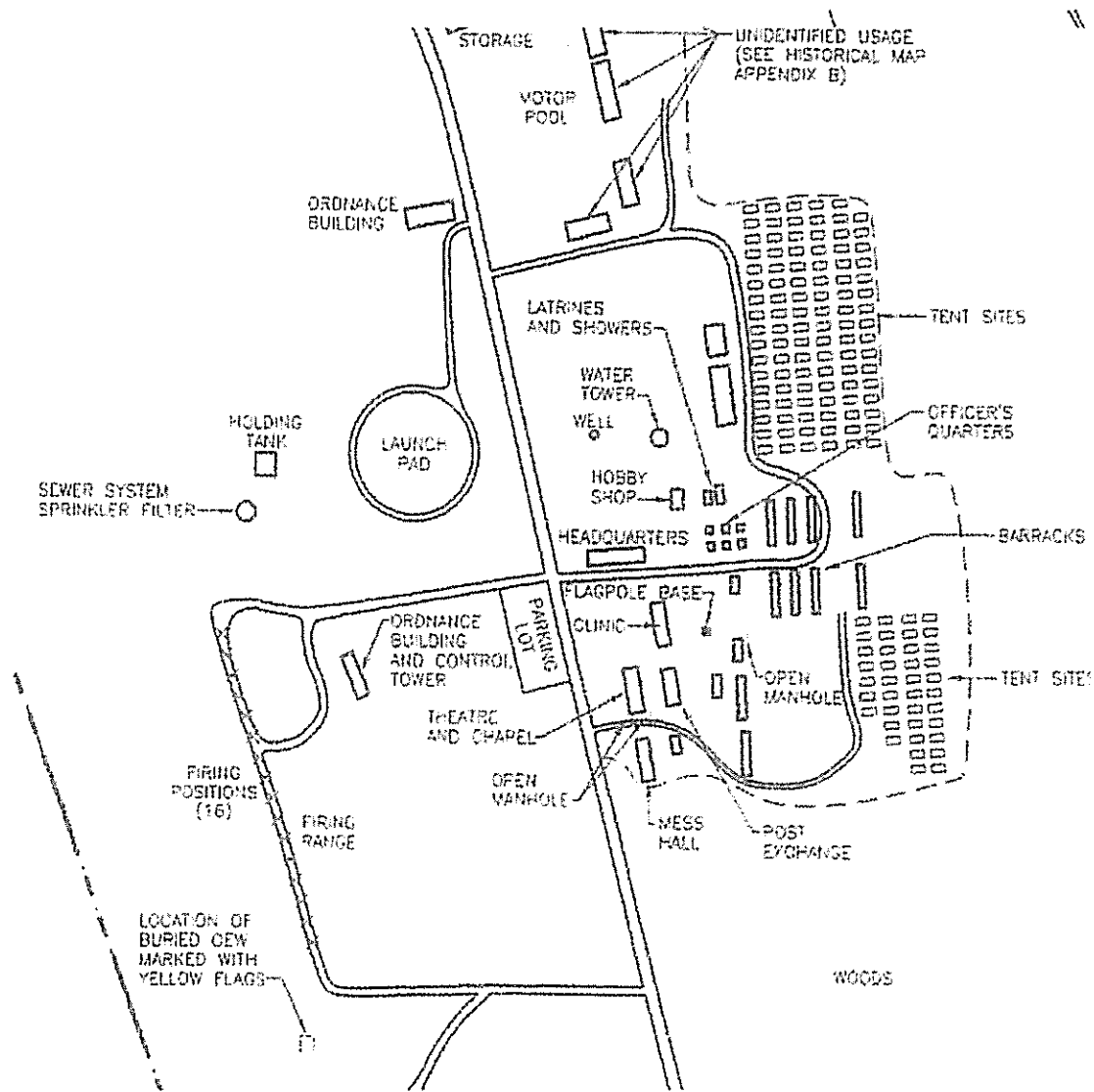
Tanya Cabala and others have written brief histories and news articles over the years that have defined the dates and operations at the camp. A notable history (Shelling Lake Michigan – the Short Life of Camp Claybanks) was written by John H. Sicard and published by the Historical Society of Michigan is recommended reading. I also used the internet to collect additional information and photos.

Art Grumm

July 2019



Map of the camp from the 2005 US Army Corps of Engineers environmental Update that shows the physical size of the 434 acre camp that extended from Winston road to the south boundary of Claybanks Park. The areas noted on the map define the usage and potential environmental issues that might turn up.



Enlarged area of the above map showing more details. (2005 Corps of Engineers Update)

Startup

Camp clay banks was built to train anti-aircraft gunnery to nearly 3000 Army, Guardsmen and Army reservists from the states of Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Indiana. The plan was to accommodate 500 to 600 trainees at a time with approximately a hundred Army officials as permanent residents at the camp. The Army allocated \$782,000 to establish the camp a sizable request approved by Congress. That amount of money would have about the same buying power as \$7,500,000 as of 2019.

The roads were a problem for the Army because they were challenging in wet weather and after the frost went out in the spring. The Army offered to help upgrade the roads but the Oceana Co. Road Commission refused their offer. Webster road in particular was a muddy mess and the Army tried to keep it passable on their own.. There were no blacktop roads in Claybanks Twp. at that time.

Camp Layout

The first year the personnel lived in tents heated by drip oil stoves. Then they constructed Quonset buildings, also known as Jamesway huts that were insulated and heated by fuel oil space heaters.

An open house was held on May 15th 1954. With the completion of the camp a civilian open house was held on the weekend of May 21 & 22, 1953, corresponding with Armed Forces Day. There were tours and live firing demonstrations like occurred at larger military bases.



Camp Claybanks – looking East

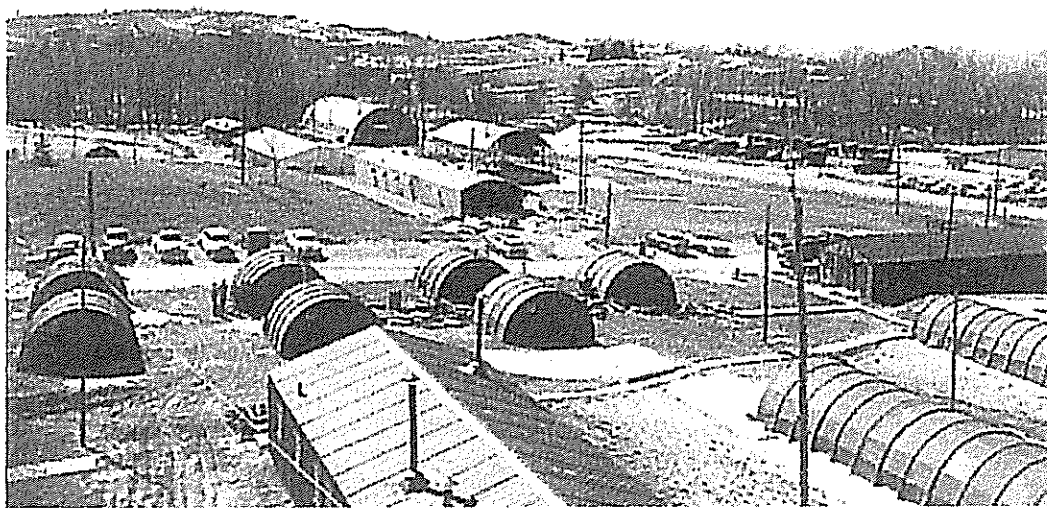


Photo taken during the demolition phase

Personnel

The camp had a permanent detachment of 80 enlisted men, 10 officers and 10 civilians.

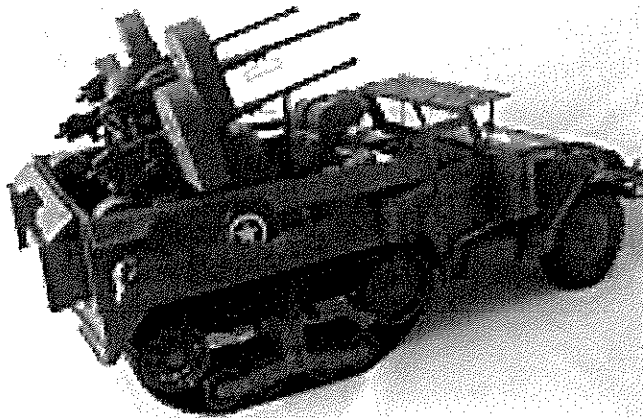
Historical Society of Michigan by John H. Sicard - *“Picture an Army private reporting to Camp Claybanks from a far larger base with many amenities. He found himself living, working, and eating in tents, while actual buildings and recreational facilities were scarce. The nearest community was the small crossroads village of Rothbury, about 5 miles east, which had little to offer a serviceman. The picturesque and more populous White Lake area, including the towns of Montague and Whitehall, was about seven miles south. To a soldier without a car it was an isolated and lonely existence.*

However, the outside world soon noticed and reached out to help. By December of the camp’s first year, White Lake – area residents grew concerned over the living conditions at Camp Claybanks – a red flag for many was its lack of recreational facilities. The Whitehall Chamber of Commerce asked for the camp commanders input on how the town’s business community could help. It is not hard to imagine that members of the chamber who had served in World War II or Korea saw the conditions at Clay banks is a reflection of what they themselves had recently lived through. Help also came from the Whitehall and Montague school systems, which offered free passes to athletic events. Area churches extended a welcoming hand with invitations not only to worship services but also to social events.

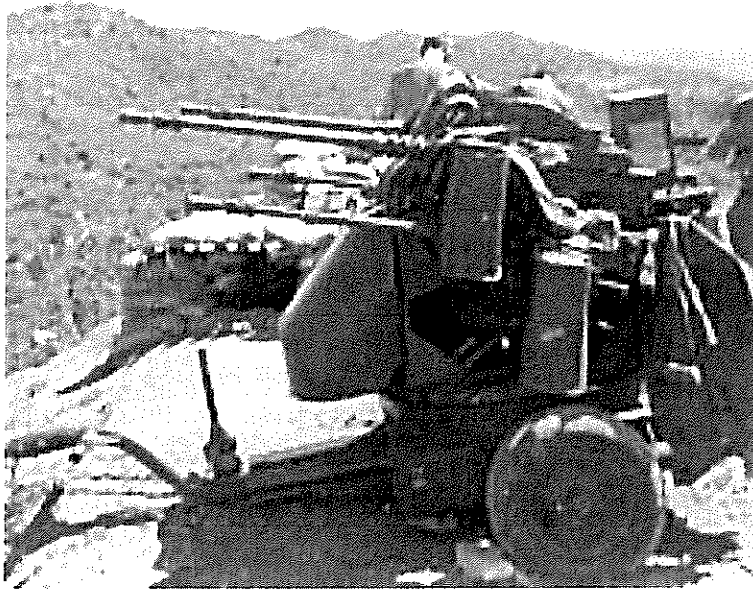
Conditions at Camp Claybanks began improving in 1954 when several buildings were added to the camp. Quonset hut barracks may have been far from palatial, but they were a vast improvement over tents. By 1955, the camp had a total of nine buildings, including mess halls, a post exchange, a chapel, and a long-awaited service club building. That same year, a motor pool was also installed and the camp roads were upgraded. As a result of the structural improvements, a greater number of troops began training at Camp Claybanks.”

Antiaircraft Artillery

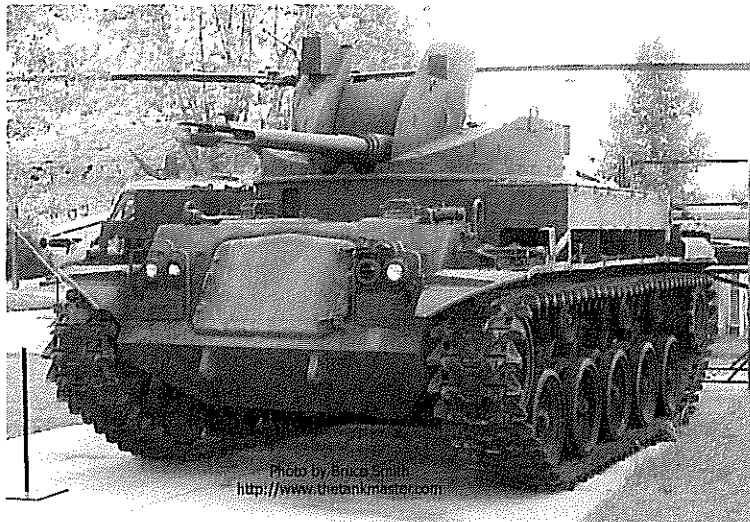
It is unclear in this research what 50 caliber and 40 mm configurations were used by the units that trained at Camp Claybanks, or whether they were actually used.



A 50 caliber anti-aircraft system (Quad 50) mounted on a halftrack Army vehicle..



Quad 50's were also mounted on trailers or on trucks.



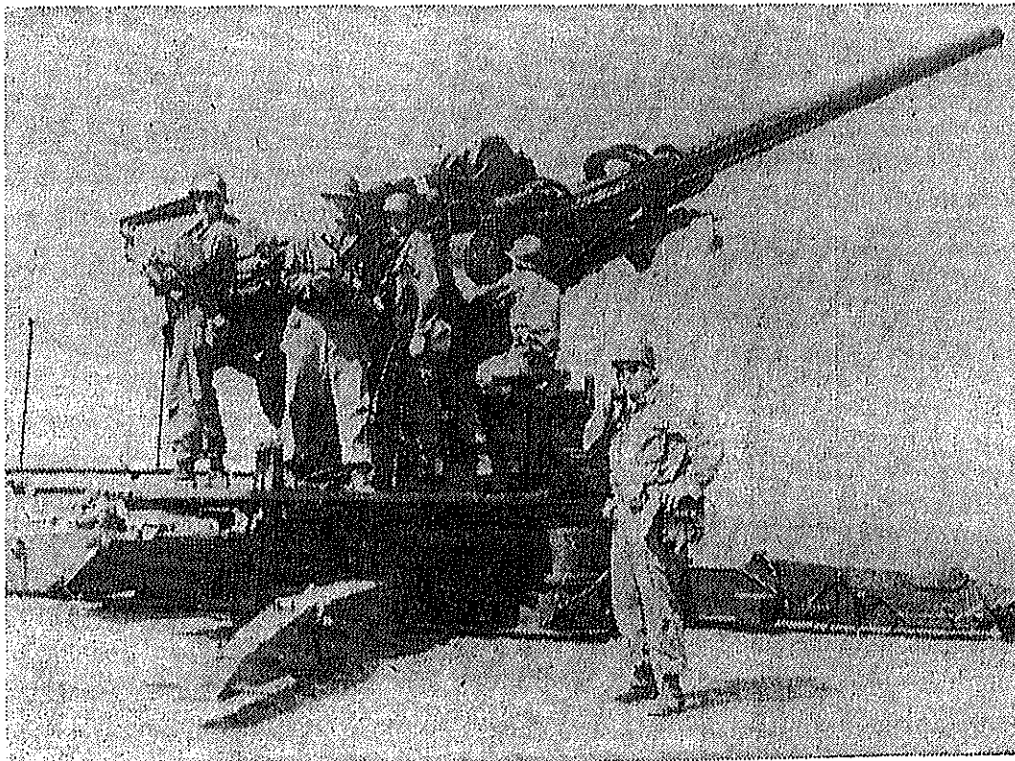
The above photo shows a M42 "Duster" Self-Propelled Antiaircraft Gun similar to what was used in the Korean Conflict. The basic 40 mm Bofors gun was used in many configurations by the different services; one, two and four barrel configurations with trailered and mounting variations.

THE FIRING LINE, CAMP CLAYBANKS
New Era, Michigan



90 mm guns on the Camp Claybanks firing line

Basic Information: Weight 19,000 lb, Range 12 Miles, Max altitude 43,500 ft, 8 man crew



120 mm gun

Basic Information: Weight 64,000 lb, Range 15 Miles, Max altitude 60,000 ft, 13 man crew

Restricted Area

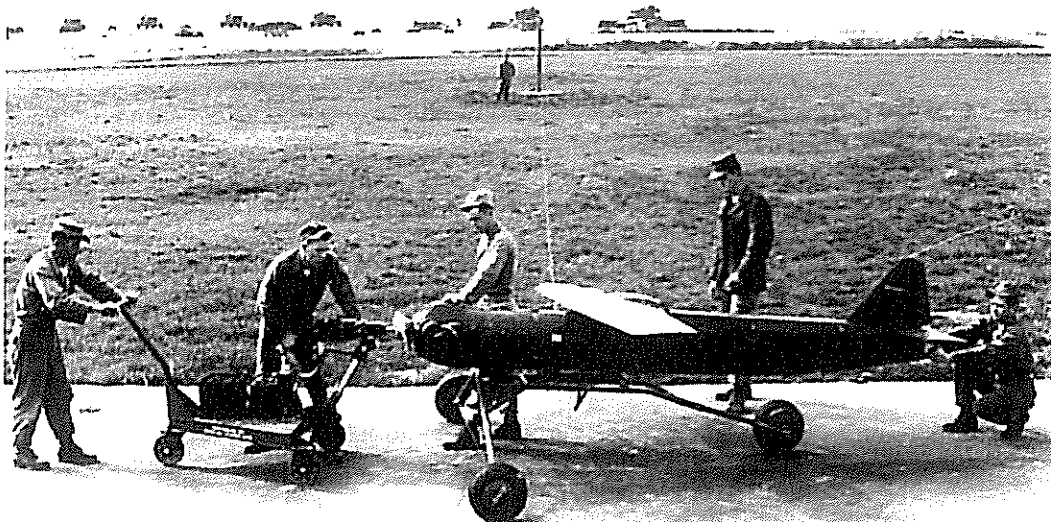
Historical Society of Michigan by John H. Sicard - *"In 1955, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed the restriction of Lake Michigan waters not only adjacent to the firing range but also below the White Lake channel. The restricted zone encompassed an area some 7 miles south of the camp, about the same distance north to Little Point Sable and 13 miles out into the Great Lake. That did not set well with boaters, commercial fishermen, and resort communities along the lakeshore. In fact, the town of Pentwater, which was farther north of the proposed area, threatened to file a formal protest.*

The year 1957 saw many tides turn. A major blow to the future of Camp Claybanks came when the state of Michigan passed legislation in June requiring the Army to obtain a permit before firing artillery rounds over Lake Michigan. That same law also required permission for beach access, which hampered the use of the camp's amphibious vehicles".

The original restricted area was from White Lake channel to Little Point Sable and 10 miles out into Lake Michigan with hours restricted from 7 AM to 7 PM. With the addition of 120 mm guns the range was increased to 15 miles out into the lake. The state law requiring permits to use Lake Michigan passed in 1957 restricted the hours from 8 AM to 5 PM.

Targets

Two different kinds of aircraft were used to provide targets over Lake Michigan. The first aircraft was the OQ-19D drone that has a wingspan of 11'6", length of 13'5", weight of 430 pounds, max speed of 184 mph and a range of about 122 miles. They were launched from a circular pad on the base and were radio controlled and the object was to shoot close behind the target and obviously not hit the drone. When it came time to land they would circle over the camp cut the engine and descend by parachute.



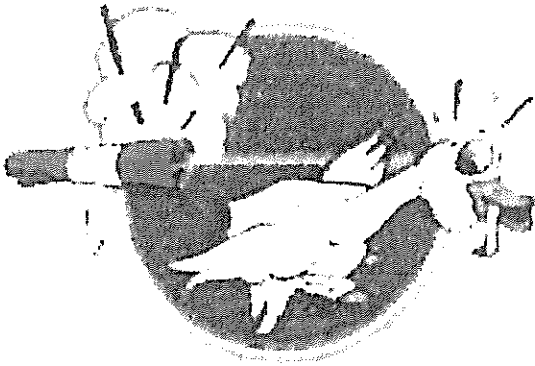
LAUNCHING THE RCAT - CAMP CLAYBANKS, - *New Era, Michigan*

RCAT - Radio Controlled Areal Target

B-26 aircraft were also used to tow targets. These are manned light bombers that were also used for other functions, including towing anti-aircraft artillery targets.

The 2nd Tow Target Squadron supported the camp, flying out of the Muskegon airport. The targets (cloth sleeves about 3 ft in diameter and 18 ft long) were towed on a cable a couple of thousand feet to a mile behind the aircraft.

2nd TOW TARGET SQUADRON



Controversy

As Tanya Cabala noted in her short history, the facility was controversial from the start. A letter published in the Chicago Tribune on July 4, 1953 describes concerns of a neighboring cottage owner who had been a seasonal resident for decades. *“The site selected and now being used is in the heart of a popular vacation area, with summer camps, resorts, and summer homes which have been established for many years adjacent to the camp. Many people of modest means who have invested their funds in summer places in this area are seeing their investments and recreation facilities ruined by this activity. People who have already gone to their summer places nearby report that if the noise from the artillery were not enough annoyance, the noise and danger from low-flying airplanes towing the targets are worse.”*

John H. Sicard’s history gets into the how the camp commander, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Hilty attempted to calm the opposition to the camp. This included commercial fishing, boating and issues involving enlisted personnel. He came to an agreement with the local fishermen who offered to purchase and install marker buoys to warn other boaters. Hilty assured local merchants that he was as close as their telephones to deal with issues like enlisted soldiers being transferred to other bases leaving large unpaid bills.

Closure

Historical Society of Michigan by John H. Sicard - *“In September 1957, Camp Claybanks was downgraded to a summer-only training installation for National Guard units. A small caretaking crew was to remain year-round. Lieutenant Colonel Hilty was transferred to Fort Totten in the New York City borough of Queens, while the officers and men under his command were scattered to other units.”*

“The death knell came in February 1958 by way of a terse official announcement from the headquarters of the Fifth U.S. Army, which ordered Camp Claybanks closed. All buildings were dismantled, while the camp's equipment was moved to Camp Haven near Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The men packed everything up, shipped it out, and cleared the land. At last, the curtain had come down after training 1, 200 active duty soldiers and 2,800 reservists and guardsmen during tense years.”

As the cold war matured the anti-aircraft technology was evolving to controlled missiles like Nike and BOMARC. By 1957 the Regular Army AAA units had been replaced by missile battalions. During 1958 the Army National Guard began to replace their guns and adopt the Nike Ajax system. Anti-aircraft missile systems had been under development since the 1940's and were being made operational. These missile systems had a huge advantage in range and effectiveness over guns firing ballistic projectiles.

The Nike Ajax anti-aircraft missile had a range of 30 miles and a speed of mach 2 and by 1958 was upgraded to the Nike Hercules with a 75 mile range with a speed of Mach 3.

The Air Force developed their own missile, Bowmarc, which had a range of up to 400 mile and a speed of Mach 2.5. The Air force and the Army fought both politically and in the press about who would have responsibility for the anti-aircraft systems. These systems eventually became obsolete with the introduction of ICBM's.

Aftermath

US Army Corps of Engineers

On June 19, 1992, a landowner of a portion of the former camp contacted the Detroit District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This landowner and other landowners reported that they found both expended and live belts of .50 caliber ammunition, and at least one unidentified projectile, presumably a mortar round. This suggested that the former use of the site as an AAA firing range may still have the presence of ordnance or explosive waste hazards. A site investigation consisting of ordnance sweeps to verify and quantify the presence of ordnance was recommended in June 1993.

A Muskegon Chronicle article dated May 11, 1993 covered the history of the camp and the discovery of live ammunition by residents. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers probed the camp and produced a report that was sealed and making its way through the chain of command. However, any further study may be years down the road because of funding and the camp was considered a low priority.

In May 1996, the Detroit District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers conducted a site visit and recommended hazardous, toxic, or radiological waste (HTRW) testing for possible lead contamination in the soil and groundwater. The site visit confirmed the possibility of contamination and identified specific debris used by the Department of Defense.

The Corps of Engineers hosted a public hearing in June 2005 after studying the camp and recommended the appropriate action should any further hazardous material be found.

