

Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS
An Oral History Interview with Daniel Huebner
Son of Chaplain Reginald James Huebner
1965-67
Interviewed by Elaine Harmon, NPS
May 24, 1980
Transcribed by Mary Rasa 2011



Postcard of Fort Hancock Chapel from 1960s.

Photos courtesy of Gateway NRA/NPS

Editor's notes in parenthesis ()

EH: This is Elaine Harmon who is (a) park technician museum personnel who are interviewing a young man who happened to wander into the Museum today sort of unexpectedly announcing that he lived in Building 16 on Officers' Row as a child between the ages of 11 and 13 more or less and worked in the Gas Station and Bowling Alley and all kinds of other assorted tidbits of information. We thought we would take the opportunity to tape record him since he is here from Texas and document his recollections. Let him introduce himself.

DH: My name is Dan Huebner. I reside at 1906 Westridge in Austin, Texas.

EH: Tell us what years you were out here, where you lived. Describe the house.

DH: We were here from 1965 to '67. We lived in Officers' (Row) 16. My dad was Post Chaplain at the time.

EH: And his full name is...?

DH: Reginald James Huebner and I believe he was a major then and as kids we wandered all throughout this area. Found lots of artifacts and relics. Went in places we weren't supposed to go in, all the forts.

EH: Describe the house. We are interested in what it looked like.

DH: It was very big. It was three stories and let's see we had a third story which had the stairway going up was just beautiful. It just was. I believe it was walnut.

EH: At that time it was just natural wood? It wasn't painted?

DH: It was stained brown. You know a light stain on it. It was very nice. I can't remember the stairs but it seems like they were natural too. You went and had some nice fireplaces. I believe we had five fireplaces.

EH: That's right.

DH: We had a fireplace in our bedroom upstairs where my brother and I slept and that was the front one that overlooked the Bay. We got a big kick out of the basement because it was so big. We had a rec room down in the basement. In fact, in Building 16 the south room towards the front of the Bay, we wrote a lot of stuff on the wall. Not graffiti but well we wrote wipeout on the wall in big red. We put a lot of handprints on the wall in red paint.

EH: We'll have to look for them.

DH: You might look and see in the basement. That's not the boiler room or the one next to it. It is, you know, the one on the south side. We used the, you know, downstairs for a workshop. The big tubs, there were two big washtubs down there and we had washer machines and washed our dogs in there and all the upstairs were natural wood floors and I believe tile in the bathrooms.

EH: Was the furniture supplied or was your family constantly transporting a whole lot of furniture?

DH: Well, we had a whole lot of furniture, but I think we could check out certain items and have them put in there.

EH: From the Quartermaster?

DH: From the Quartermaster. I don't think we did much of that because at that time it was getting pretty much towards the end of his tour and he was pretty much had a lot of the stuff. The thing I remember was the old radiators they had in the house. Old water radiators were the heaters, steam heaters.

EH: Did they have a warming oven on top to them, the unit and extra unit?

DH: No. They were just regular radiators.

EH: Okay.

DH: You know, I remember them real good because they always made a noise at night. You could hear them.

EH: Clanging.

DH: Clanging. Yeah and the kitchen was real nice. I remember it was real big and it had a like a pantry that connected the kitchen with the a...

EH: Dining room.

DH: Dining room and there was an old room back off to the east side I guess that we used that for an aquarium room.

EH: An aquarium room?

DH: Yeah. We had lots of aquariums in there. My brother kept his stuff....

EH: It would have been the officers' study.

DH: Yeah.

EH: It was a separate room.

DH: I believe we had our deep freezer in there. (laughs)

EH: Huh. So, it was an all purpose room for you.

DH: There were so many rooms in the house and you would go up stairs and my sister had her own room and me and my brother shared a room, my older brother had a room and my parents had the big bedroom on the north side, the south side I guess.

EH: The master bedroom

DH: Yeah. It had a connecting bathroom between them. And then the attic we stored a lot of stuff and then above there was another attic that you could crawl through up in the ceiling. We didn't go up there much except with flashlights, but we at one time were going to try to use the upstairs, you know, the attic for living but that was the servants' quarters.

EH: Right.

DH: But we didn't have any, of course, but they had the buttons up there. I don't know if you show the house where you could ring for the servant. They wouldn't ring it. The button was on the wall.

EH: On the third floor?

DH: There was a button. No. There wasn't a button on the third floor. If I'm not mistaken you come out of the master bedroom, right to the right there was a button where you could press it and they would come down. It was right on the wall. It seemed that was where it was because when you came up the stairs on the second floor was a big square and the rooms went back and there was a bathroom on the east side.

EH: With an old tub or a modern bathroom?

DH: I believe it was an old tub. Were they replaced now?

EH: A lot of the original tubs are still in the houses.

DH: I believe it was an old tub. It seems like the one connecting the two was a built in tub you know. It wasn't a round tub.

EH: Can you describe how your father got to be here? Where was his previous post?

DH: Okay. We lived in Alaska before we came here. He wanted to get a tour on the coast and this is what they gave him and we really enjoyed it.

EH: Where did he go from here?

DH: We went, let's see he went back to, I believe we went back to San Antonio and I believe he went Korea then.

EH: Really?

DH: Yeah. He went onto Korea and he came back and we went to Fort Hood and he then went to Vietnam and now he is retired and lives in Texas. He has a church there in (inaudible)

EH: Is that his native state? Is that where he grew up?

DH: Texas. Yeah. He was born in Dallas, Texas. Grew up mostly near there and lived on a farm. Joined the service. (He) went to the ministry school.

EH: Where was that? Where was the school?

DH: I believe it was in....

EH: Was it a chaplain's training school?

DH: Yeah. I believe it was in Ohio. I don't know for sure if that was it. That's where he met my mother and she is from Pennsylvania. And she is from Castle Shannon, Pennsylvania.

EH: In the family how many children were there?

DH: There were four of us. I was the youngest of three brothers and we have a younger sister.

EH: What was it like to go to school out here?

DH: Well, we went to, we didn't go to school on the base. We went to across town to, my brothers went to Middletown High School but I cannot think of, I believe it was in Red Bank. A school called Fairway.

Unknown person: Fairview.

DH: No. I can't remember the name of it.

Unknown person: Fair Haven.

DH: I think Fairway was up in Fort Hood.

EH: Well, you moved around a lot.

DH: Yeah. We have.

EH: So, it's easy to get names...

DH: I've got ...

EH: It's not that important.

DH: ...school card from them.

EH: Who were your neighbors next to Building 16? Do you have any recollections of people on either side of your house or the people that you really palled around with?

DH: Yeah. I palled around with a guy in Officer (Row) 15, Building 15. I can't recall his name offhand but I believe they had one son, a daughter and down from us lived I think it was Colonel Johnson at the time. He had two daughters. I remember one Julie Johnson and then Clapsaddle I believe was the commanding general at the time. General

Clapsaddle and he had a son named Pete Clapsaddle which my brother clowned around with and they really clowned around.

EH: What was the general atmosphere like?

DH: Laid back. It was very casual because you could wander around practically anywhere. If you did wander into the forts and the cops see you they would give you a chase but I always outrun them. They were really primarily interested in Battery Potter since back in that area there was an old recreation area that the Army ran for civilians which had a big game room and a cafeteria and a rental shop and an office and then there were five barracks back in there where you slept. That was right across the street from the Officers' Club. (This was known as the First Army Recreation Area. It was created in 1965 as a vacation location for military families.)

EH: These are long white wooden building of World War II vintage.

DH: Yeah. They are boarded up now.

EH: Right.

DH: I saw them this morning.

EH: Who are the people who stayed there? You said people slept there.

DH: They were civilians who had come in just to go camping, not camping but stay on the beaches and that was the place for them to sleep.

EH: And there were bike rentals?

DH: Yeah. Bicycles and there were some other rental but I can't think of them. I remember the bicycles because I used to get them. There was a chef, my brother was head chef and his name is Don Huebner and he worked with an older man, a real older man who used to chew tobacco and his name was Shibel it seems like. Old Man Shibel we'd call him. In fact, he used to drop his cigar in the chili and he would never tell anybody about it. (laughter)

EH: Oh my goodness.

DH: But I had worked in there a little bit. I didn't work in there as a, I worked as helping my brother. I would peel potatoes. I would put them in the potato peeler and peel them. And you know you drop them in the thing...

EH: gadget...

DH: Bin and shed the peel off there.

EH: So, this was where young people would hang out around these recreation buildings?

DH: Yeah. Well it was, well not mainly young people it was people that would come in from New York and around the area.

EH: How was the general public admitted though?

DH: They would, I believe just get a pass at the Gate. The, was the, you know, the Main Gate where we would go through at nights. That was the police station at the time.

EH: The MPs. The Guardhouse.

DH: And behind it was their station because that is where they took me when I got caught one time.

EH: Okay. That is now the patrol office (Ranger Station).

DH: Now, I don't know about the one that is way down right when you come into the Highlands. That seems like that was built it was there the whole time and that was to get into the Base and this one there was to get into the main Fort area and the Nike site was off to the right.

EH: Right.

DH: We never went in there. My brother had gone in there. They had like three fences around and had guard dogs.

EH: Really?

DH: Yeah and we could go down the beach and we would always whistle to the dogs but they didn't pay attention to us. They were German Sheppard's in there.

EH: Was it considered very tight, top secret then?

DH: Yeah. More or less.

EH: Mystery type?

DH: Yeah. They used to have tests, you know, what you call them, you know, just tests where they would check everything and go through the whole thing and they would block off the area even on the main road.

EH: Were people notified in advance? Was there a general announcement?

DH: I think you knew what was going on even if you weren't notified. There was no way of knowing what was going on because there wasn't a paper. There wasn't any

radio or anything. It was just hearsay. It was very casual back then. You know, after school we could walk across to the PX (Post Exchange). At night, we would go bowling or we would go down to the old movie house they had here. My brother used to run the projector there at the movie house.

EH: Was that the Post Theater?

DH: Yeah. Worst theater you ever went to. They'd always get the movies mixed up. (laughter)

EH: So, you never knew what was playing?

DH: Well, they always put on the first reel and then they would put on the third reel and it would be the end of the film and then the second reel. It was real crazy. You know, there wasn't a whole lot going on. There weren't many people there. It was a pretty big theater if I am not mistaken. It was pretty much like the other, you know, Army theaters just like the chapel was it was pretty much standard (of) the chapels.

EH: Could you describe the interior of the chapel if you could remember it?

DH: You mean what was on the walls, no.

EH: No. What was it like I mean...

DH: Well, when you walked in, my father's office was on the right. His assistant was on the left and I believe there were stairs going up to the balcony there. They had an old, at that time they had an old organ up there. Not an organ itself but the amplifiers. I believe the organ was up there too at the time.

EH: Not anymore. It's gone.

DH: And then the pews and the standard, you know, altar up there. Then there were two offices off to the back and they connected around back and I think there was one office back there and on back there was a whole bunch of cabinets where they stored the communion glasses and the paperwork and such.

EH: Did you father have a staff, actually?

DH: Yeah. I cannot remember his assistant's name but he sure does. He keeps in contact with him.

EH: And they lived also on Fort Hancock?

DH: Yeah. I don't know where they actually lived. It seemed like they lived over by the cannon that is out there now.

EH: You mean the Rodman Gun?

DH: Yeah. The Coast Guard didn't have the fence across at the time and you could drive way back there. In fact, his girlfriend lived way back on the Coast Guard Base. Her name was Dee Barrett. He was I think a specialist 5 or something and he worked at the Coast Guard Station and we kind of fooled around back of where that water tower was in those forts. There is a wall back there. Now, I think is not really completed. Their plans was I believe to make that wall go a lot farther. One time they did and there is a lot that is knocked down and this is all you can see. There are mine tanks and water tanks that we used to drop stuff in so, if you ever dump them out you may find stuff. It seems like to my recollections that a lot of bombs that were found, not bombs...

EH: Projectiles.

DH: Yeah. It seems they dropped them in there. I wouldn't say for sure but...

EH: Are you talking about the mine testing, the cable testing?

DH: Yeah. There were three places. There were three...

EH: Very large structure that have almost like swimming pool size vessels.

DH: Exactly.

EH: That actually contained chemicals for testing mine cable.

DH: It seems in my recollection too that my dad had always thought that there were mines down in there, but, you know, how are you going to pump that out without permission. Yeah. You drag it though and hit something. But there is probably something down in there. They have probably never been empty and we used to shine lights in there and drop rocks in there. It was very spooky back there. But we would go through all those and we would go back in Battery Potter and there were lots of caverns back in there.

EH: Were there any rumors about tunnels connecting Potter and different batteries? Did any of the children sort of get excited about these rumors and explore things?

DH: Yeah. We found a lot of tunnels. We would follow some down and they would be caved in. There was a rumor when we were here that my dad was trying to prove that all of these batteries were connected by various tunnels. It had seemed like he had proven there was no way to really prove it unless you knew someone who had built these tunnels. But there was also a rumor at the time that during the War there was a ship that Potter torpedoed and it had gotten lodged in the peninsula out by Battery Potter and that it is lodged out in Battery Potter someplace. And now that is rumor. I'll check up on that with my father and see what he says about that. But it was fired in and they were always that's what the cops would always say when they would catch us. They would say,

“Well, you know, there is a live torpedo in here.” But George Moss probably knows something about that.

EH: How did your father come to know George Moss?

DH: I don't know. I really don't know. I know when we came out here we started wandering and started finding these things because my parents were very active in finding antiques and stuff. I believe they had found this stuff and somebody had told them about George Moss and they got together and we would always use his metal detector. He had a really good metal detector we would use. And we would comb the area out by the north beach because that was a big, the picture on the wall in your Museum showed how it used to look but we would find lots of ...

EH: Mostly metal

DH: Metal, coins, we found lots of coins out there. It seemed like a lot of the stuff he donated to Aberdeen.

Unknown voice: I have a question for you.

EH: This is Scott Wayne who is a new volunteer for the park service.

SW: In the time you were out here was there any rumors going around that there was an old train engine buried somewhere's in the middle of the Hook? Did you kids ever hear about it or get excited as to be compelled to look for it with Mr. Moss' metal detector?

DH: You know, you say that and it sounds real familiar. I know there were trains back in here. There was something when we were out here there was always something we were looking for big. If you ever came across it you would need a crane to get it out. I don't know if that was it or not.

SW: That was probably the train engine. It was an old steam engine which due to reports we can not prove was supposed to have died and they just knocked it over into a big hole and filled it in and I was just wondering if during your time out here you had heard anything about it.

DH: Well, as far as my recollection is it doesn't ring any bell but it sounds familiar. I might be getting these mixed up but there is an old and I don't know if it is still standing it was the Post Stables. The Post Stables is it still standing? It was across from the Officers' Club. There were used to be gardens there and you could set up garden and right across the street was the old stables. You hadn't heard anything about that? It was that street that comes down and intersects with the Officers' Club it was behind the Firehouse.

EH: Right.

DH: If you go down there is another long building and on this side there should be the foundation for it. That was the old Post Stables.

EH: Building 36 which is still there. Right.

DH: Is it still there?

EH: Right. It is a yellow brick building.

DH: No. This was red brick if I am not mistaken. It was real close to the Officers' Club it was cattycorner to it and it was always locked and you know my dad had gotten permission to go in there. It was an old horse stable. It's pretty close to Battery Potter. In fact, that street that comes in front of Battery Potter and then the street that turns on this side of the Officers' Club the south side and the street that turns directly off to the left that used to go to all the old barracks back in there. That whole area used to be covered in barracks. They must have been thirty or forty barracks in there.

EH: They were there when you were here. Correct?

DH: Yeah. Because we used to go in them and there was one barracks that I remember for sure because we used the boiler room for a graffiti room and as such so and so plus so and so if you are going to get mad at somebody, you know, you are going to write it on the walls. And, you know, we would go up to all the other barracks and they wasn't anything in them. You would get in them and go upstairs but they are not there. When we were here the old so called telegraph towers were there. Mr. Hoffman was telling me that they were not telegraph towers that they were fire control towers.

EH: Right.

DH: If I am not mistaken, my dad had an old picture of them that has a caption of them being telegraph towers.

EH: I'd love to see it.

DH: But they were still standing and we climbed up in them. They had the first ten feet of stairs taken out. Ten feet is not a far way to go to get up there. A lot of people would go and put magazines up in there and it was a hang out. That was what it was a fort.

EH: How did you come to work in the PX building and what did it look like? The Post Exchange which is behind the Museum.

DH: Okay. I never worked in the PX itself. I worked in the Bowling Alley downstairs and you would go up the stairs and walk in and to the immediate right was a phone, an old phone, a pay phone and you go inside and the whole area to the right was the Barber Shop and to the left side it seemed was a cleaners and you go through the door and that was the café or the what you call it. The Army has a term for everything.

EH: Canteen.

DH: Something like that and it had a line where you could go to the end. It had a serving line off there where you could sit down and had two pinball machines and a stamp machine and the door to the south side was a PX and the cash register was to the right when you walked in and to the left was magazines. I would always go there because that was where the comics were.

EH: The comics and newspapers?

DH: And exactly

EH: And cigars?

DH: Small items, you know they had shampoo and stuff like that you know the necessities, cokes, potato chips and stuff, candy bars. The stairway where you went downstairs was right at the door back to the northeast. There was a stairway going down and that was where the Bowling Alley was. There was a hallway to walk down. The left side was, you know, where you paid and got your shoes. It seemed like there were only three alleys. I don't know how many there were or if I am right on that. But we used to three lanes and we used to set pins. They were manual set pins where you had man them back. If somebody knocked the pins you had to get the pins and put them in the racks and pull the cord and set them back up and I was told they changed the pins on us to automatic pins. But we used to work off tips down there and finally they started paying after I quit. I couldn't stay in those jobs too quick, too long because it was too time consuming. I would rather be out on the beach or something so I got my money from my parents.

EH: Also you said you worked in the Gas Station. What was that like and what did it look like inside?

DH: Okay. I believe it was a Gulf Station when I was there because everything was orange.

EH: Gulf gasoline.

DH: Yeah. It seemed like it was but I can't remember the guy who worked there but it seemed like it was a civilian that operated it and I would pump gas for him and we didn't do anything like change the oil.

(Voices talking in background)

DH: We would mainly pump gas and we would play with it was a hydraulic jack, a big car jack. I don't know if it is still there.

EH: Mmm hmm.

DH: It is? We would play with that and crush oil cans.

EH: Was there actually a staff, a paid mechanic?

DH: No. There was one guy who would come. I don't think they had any mechanical work done because back in that area he stored his oil and a few items he did have. I would go up there when I wanted to because he was lazy and I would pump gas for him. But he was a good old guy and it was extra spending money you know.

EH: Were people, did the officers have cars?

DH: Oh yeah.

EH: Did every family pretty much have a car?

DH: It was pretty, there was a lot of cars driving around at the time you know. There was always someone driving around. I don't know what they actually did back here. You know before it was military but I think it was touring for people who wanted a coast side tour. We would always go down to the Coast Guard Station and fish and boat because we knew a lot of the people who worked down there, the sailors. My brother would go out they used to have at the time they would go out in the evening on a boat and the morning. They would take you out. You had to pay I believe not much but you would go out on the ocean and you could fish off a bit. It was Coast Guard Cutter.

SW: In the evenings did the military do any kind of closing formations for lowering the flag? Did they make it seem like it was a military life or did it seem more like a civilian life? Did they have a retreat ceremony or a taps, sun up ceremony?

DH: They had something every morning it seemed because a guy would go out and blow a horn.

EH: Bugle.

DH: Yeah. Bugler and they would raise a flag and I believe they had a cannon sitting out there. A small, you know, two wheel conventional one that they would fire off.

EH: Daily?

DH: I believe so.

SW: That usually on a military thing they would play taps.

DH: And this out here Pershing Field, Pershing Field?

EH: Mmm Hmm.

DH: Yeah. They would hold all their ceremonies out there. There used to be gobs of things going on out there on weekends. During the summer they used to have things out there for the kids. Races and all different sort of activities and at times they would have twenty-one gun salutes out there.

EH: You mentioned at one point that you were a dishwasher in the Officers' Club. Can you give us a, you know, a brief account of the interior?

DH: Okay. The only real thing I remember is my brother was a bartender in there. There was an old chandelier in there and it hung from the ceiling. They were tall ceilings I believe. There was a fireplace that I remember that you when you came to the fireplace you would walk around the corner and go to the bar and then out from the bar. Well, from the bar you would kind of go northwest and then out through the kitchen area and there was a big patio out there with little, with trees and little fences and I washed dishes back there periodically. At times, it would get pretty hectic and they would have two or three hundred people out there especially when the General would have a party or something. There were events going on there a lot. I imagine it was pretty cheap to have a party back there on a base this small. You know, people would come from Fort Monmouth.

EH: Was there a lot of connection with Fort Monmouth or Fort Dix?

DH: It seems to me that the kids that were for school you could go to Fort Monmouth or you could go to a public school. It seems vague. I don't know if that is true or not but we went to a public school off the base out towards Middletown or Red Bank.

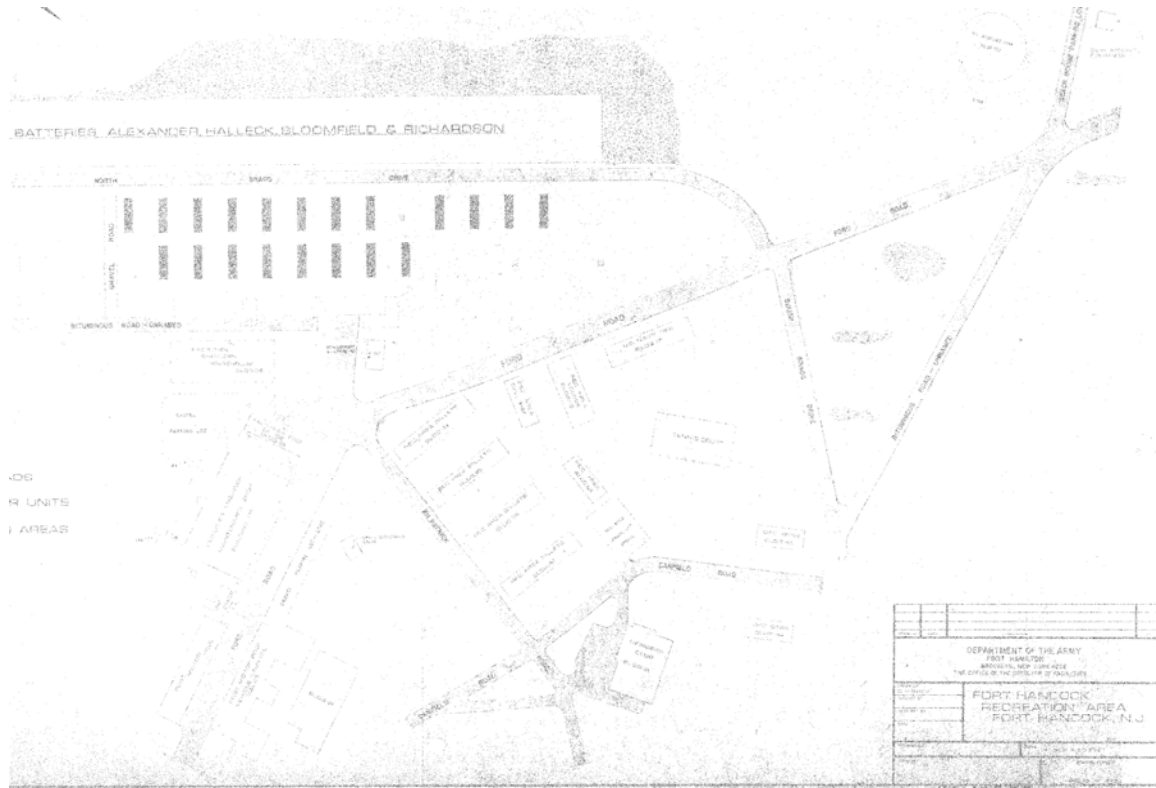
EH: You mentioned that the person who was in charge of the Officers' Club actually lived there. Was there a caretaker?

DH: There was a caretaker it seemed that lived upstairs. You come in the front there and there was a hall where you would go up the long steps. There was a room off to the right and one off to the left. It seemed like the guy that took care of it at night was a, you know, somebody who worked in the service. And he would make sure it was locked up at night. And crank everything up when they had a party.

EH: And lastly, just describe the long white wooden buildings and what their uses were which are just north of the Officers' Club?

DH: Those were when we were here they were recreational areas for the people who lived here and also civilians. I believe it was open to the public and I believe it was on weekends only. My brother was a cook there and he eventually became the head cook. It had four or five living areas in the back it had a rental area where you could rent bicycles and there was a bigger hall next to it that had a couple of coke machines and ping-pong tables and it had a pool table in there and then there was a cafeteria that was due south. It

was like a mess hall. That's what it was. If I am not mistaken that whole area was, you know, when it was real big with all the barracks on the northwest side that was their mess hall and after they cleared out they turned it into a rec area because there were gobs of barracks back in this area or wide barracks.



First Army Recreation Area map, c. 1965.

EH: It was also used as sort of a motel, almost a motel facility?

DH: Yeah. Motel in the respect that you could come in there and pay like six or five or six dollars or something real cheap and have a room and they would have two or three maids and they were I know one of the maids was my girlfriend's mother, you know, she would go through and change the bed linens.

EH: Housekeeping.

DH: And they lived out on the house right before you get to the main base where the road forks off and goes around all those trees. They lived back in that big white house towards that maintenance area back there. It was a big house. They had like six or seven kids in there.

EH: That is near the pumping station and water treatment facility you described.

DH: Yes. And I believe he ran the pumping facilities out there. He was in charge of that. His name was Sergeant Harper.

EH: Harper. Okay.

DH: And her name was Alicia.

EH: The last question I have for you before we sign off it what was the present day Museum used for when you were here? Was it the Post Jail? Was it an active...

DH: It was I believe...

EH: Post Stockade?

DH: I don't believe they ever locked, there wasn't anybody ever locked. I believe those were like, they used them for offices back in there. I believe that was the military...

EH: MPs

DH: MPs Headquarters up here. There other headquarters was the Gate where you came in. The building behind the Main Gate. But I ...

EH: Were there any incidents of you know major...

DH: No. The only time...

EH: Violations.

DH: They would stop you for speeding and going in the old batteries and vandalism sometimes and you know teenagers going you know sixteen, seventeen years old would come out here and drink beer along the beach and they had a curfew I think it was ten or eleven o'clock. You could camp on the beach, you know, stay out there.

EH: Nothing really earth shattering went on?

DH: No. No.

EH: Okay. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW