

Historical happenings in Camp Dodge history

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Camp Dodge has seen a number of unique and historical events in its 85 years as a military training area. Here are five examples:

In probably the most infamous incident in the history of Camp Dodge, three black soldiers were hanged there on July 5, 1918, and all other soldiers at the camp were required to watch.

The approximately 3,000 other blacks at the camp were stationed nearest the scaffold.

The three soldiers had been convicted in a military trial of the rape of a 17-year-old white woman who had gone to the camp to visit her boyfriend.

The great flu epidemic that swept across the nation in 1918 dealt a particularly hard blow to Camp Dodge.

The camp, which had just opened as a U.S. Army training center the previous summer, was filled with World War I recruits. According to some historians, more than 10,000 men were hospitalized with the flu, and 702 of them died.

There was a minor scandal at Camp Dodge in 1926 when eight people, four men and four women, went skinny-dipping in the

swimming pool.

According to a Des Moines Register account of the incident, the eight arrived at the pool around 2 a.m., hung their clothes on a fence and went for a swim. The Register said the incident was reported to authorities by two witnesses, "neither of whom was blind."

Some members of the Iowa Air National Guard once painted blue a Sherman tank that was parked at the entrance to Camp Dodge, but it took them 23 years to get the job done.

The 132nd Air Defense Wing of the Air National Guard attended summer camp at the facility in 1958, and were restricted to the base as punishment for driving their own cars to camp in violation of orders.

To retaliate, some members attempted to paint the tank but were unsuccessful. But at a reunion in 1981, they finally got the job done.

Camp Dodge was selected as the site of an Army training camp in June 1917 as the United States prepared to enter World War I, and one of the factors considered was the lack of saloons in the area.

Secretary of War Newton Baker, in a telegram to Iowa officials, sought their cooperation in "keeping women of unsavory character away from the camp."

—Bud Appleby