

# Patriotism and Profit: San Diego's Camp Kearny

By

John Martin

In the late summer of 1917, the cadence of marching feet, the reports of rifles, and the clatter of mounted soldiers shattered the solitude of the sage-and-chaparral covered Linda Vista mesa some ten miles north of downtown San Diego. The new sounds resonated from Camp Kearny, a World War I National Guard training camp. The Army had come to town.

San Diego, in 1917, experienced an economic downturn following the closing of the 1915-1916 fair. The war in Europe, however, changed this picture. As promised, President Woodrow Wilson kept the country on the periphery of the European conflict, but international events ended his idealistic hopes for nonintervention. In April, Wilson requested the Sixty-Fifth Congress to declare war on the Central Powers. For the Allied Powers, the declaration presented an infusion of fresh troops to break the stalemate on the Western Front; for the U. S. War Department it presented the challenge of mobilizing an entirely new army. For San Diego citizens, it represented the opportunity to do their patriotic duty of organizing and supporting war service organizations and boosting the local economy.

If America appeared psychologically prepared for war, the country stood martially unprepared. Public disinterest and government parsimony sent America to war with a Regular Army of about 128,000 men. The army ranked only the thirteenth most powerful in the world, just slightly ahead of Portugal. It was an army whose latest field experience was a punitive expedition into Mexico—one that did more to reveal the deficiencies of the American force than resolve the matter at hand.<sup>1</sup> It was an army that needed to retrain the Regular Army troops

---

**John Martin**, an independent scholar and a native of San Diego, received his BA and MA degrees in United States History from San Diego State University where he studied under Dr. Joyce Appleby. He recently published "The San Diego Chamber of Commerce establishes the U.S. Naval Coal Station, 1900-1912," 56 (Fall 2010): 217-232.



*Building Camp Kearny, c. 1917. ©SDHC 81:9444.*

and National Guardsmen, and completely train the new volunteers and draftees. Wilson tasked the War Department to do this with a training system one military historian called “uncertain and underdeveloped” at best.<sup>2</sup> In the end, it fell to Secretary of War Newton D. Baker—an avowed pacifist—to resolve the dilemma.<sup>3</sup>

A concerted national mobilization effort would provide the men, but the government still lacked the facilities to train a projected million-man army. The



*Secretary of War Newton D. Baker. Internet photo.*

enormity of this task compelled Secretary Baker to create a civilian organization called the Committee on Emergency Construction (CEC) to oversee the undertaking, and assign New York City businessman William A. Starrett as chairman. Starrett and the CEC quickly determined that the size and logistical problems of creating a national training system placed the mission beyond the capabilities of the existing Army Quartermaster CoDivision. Accordingly, Baker and Starrett established the military-led Cantonment Division or Construction Division (CD) to handle the job and named Colonel Isaac W. Littell as head.

Starrett challenged Littell and the CD to complete construction of thirty-two “cantonments” within the \$90,000,000 budget and to do so within sixteen weeks, by September 1917. To appreciate the scope of the project, imagine each facility as a city of twenty to thirty thousand people with paved roads, water and sewer systems, gas and electric connections serviced with storage warehouses, hospitals, bakeries, laundries, mess halls, barracks, storehouses, and assorted recreational facilities, plus parades grounds, and rifle and gunnery ranges. Littell had only months to make this a reality.<sup>4</sup>

## **Bringing the Training Facility to San Diego**

Recognizing the economic impact of a military base in San Diego, the Chamber of Commerce, within a year after World War I began in Europe, campaigned for a camp. In late 1915, officials considered what they would need to offer the national government to pull off the scheme. The Chamber of Commerce queried California Senator John D. Works—a San Diego resident and a member of the Senate’s Committee on Expenditure of the War Department—about the anticipated increase in the size of the armed forces and the need for new camps. About the same time, San Diego’s opportunistic congressman William Kettner took time from his courtship of the Navy to prepare a bill for funding the establishment of an Army base in San Diego.<sup>5</sup>



*Congressman William Kettner, 1915. ©SDHC 8173.*

In February 1916 Major Herbert R. Fay, San Diego’s ranking Army officer, returned from a ten-day trip to Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Francisco in which he had lobbied for an “encampment” near San Diego for the Department of the West’s coming field maneuvers. He reported from his meeting with Colonel Eben Swift, Chief of Staff of the Department of the West, that the Army had considered Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego as potential sites. Fay laid the groundwork for a future proposal with a suggestion to Swift that San Diego, particularly Coronado Heights with its adequate water, forage, and convenient transportation facilities, made an “ideal” location for an encampment.<sup>6</sup>

No stranger to political opportunism, the Chamber of Commerce became

the driving force behind the campaign, instituting a comprehensive committee system to pursue the project. The original Committee at Large consisted of chairman Frank J. Belcher and members H. H. Jones, Charles S. Williams, John E. Roal, Frank P. Allen, Charles S. Hardy, O. W. Cotton, Col. Ed Fletcher, Col. H. R. Fay, G. Aubrey Davidson, Milton McRae, B. M. Wagner, William Steil, Mayor Louis J. Wilde and County Superintendent Joseph Foster. Soon, a plethora of sub-committees began to research the specifics for gaining the camp. The Chamber's other standing committees included the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Committee, the Army Post Committee, the Land Committee, the Railroad Committee, the City Affairs Committee, the Merchant's Association, and the Manufacturer's Association of San Diego.<sup>7</sup> With years of experience in pursuing federal-related civic projects, Chamber of Commerce directors knew the importance of due diligence and detailed preparation and proceeded accordingly.



*Land developer Col. Ed Fletcher. Internet photo.*

Shortly before the United States entered World War I, Chamber of Commerce President Willet Dorland called a special executive meeting to discuss the situation. He asked General Franklin Bell to address the group and outline the government's specific requirements for a camp in San Diego. Bell described the projected \$7 million to \$9 million economic impact of the base, after which the Chamber immediately appointed a new Army Base Committee consisting of Dorland, Frank P. Allen and Lane D. Webber. The Chamber of Commerce then called for "civic, commercial, and other interested organizations" in the city and county to name three delegates to attend a general conference scheduled on December 15, 1916.<sup>8</sup> This meeting resulted in a seven-person Army and Navy Committee chaired by Melville Klauber.



*Mayor Louis Wilde. Internet photo.*

As luck would have it, Mayor Wilde was an old friend of General Hunter Liggett, Commander of the Western Department, and the Army official designated to select the site for the California camp. When the government first considered bringing a training camp to California, Wilde and Liggett held several informal meetings, one of which included a visit to San Diego to inspect potential sites. A site called Linda Vista, north of Mission Valley, was based on the guarantee of San Diego Consolidated Gas and Electric to provide electricity.<sup>9</sup> The mayor noted that his friend found the Linda Vista site very appealing.<sup>10</sup>

At the time, Linda Vista was sparsely settled, with “vast stretches” of open land at the “very door of the city.” The community had a tiny railway station located on the line running north out of Rose Canyon at the top of the grade before heading down the long, winding slope into Soledad Canyon, today’s Sorrento Valley. Edward W. Scripps’s estate, Miramar, was located at the end of Murphy Canyon and between Carroll Canyon and San Clemente Canyon. When the Land Committee escorted General Liggett out to Linda Vista, he pronounced it the “finest” he had seen and generally a “bully camp site.”<sup>11</sup>

Once President Woodrow Wilson confirmed the declaration of war, the city presented its plan. Mayor Wilde, representing both San Diego and the Army Base Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, wired a telegram to General W. Siebert in Los Angeles tendering San Diego’s proposal. The city offered a five-year lease of 8,000 acres of land at \$1.00 per year—essentially a rent-free lease—plus additional land for an artillery range and other land if needed. Significantly, the agreement did not mention the recovery of any damages to the land after the army departed. The city promised to supply the camp with water, gas, electricity, and roads within the designated time frame. As Aubrey Davidson put it, “San



*Camp Kearny, c. 1918. ©SDHC 81:9442.*





G. Aubrey Davidson, c. 1915. ©SDHC UT 9112.1.

Diego's offer was so complete that the department could not afford to turn it down."<sup>12</sup>

After some consideration, Siebert and his advising board of Army officers approved San Diego's proposal—and the Linda Vista location—so long as the city could guarantee the availability of the land.<sup>13</sup> The land committee immediately started talks with property owners in Linda Vista, including Colonel A. G. Gassen, Ed Fletcher, J.S. Mack, the City of San Diego, and The San Diego Land Company. Within days, chairman M.M. Moulton reported "excellent results" in acquiring the necessary land, for which the government would not pay "one cent." The *San Diego Sun* applauded the Chamber's preparation and the "whirlwind work of the land committee."<sup>14</sup>

Once the land was secured, Army officials accepted the city's offer. On May 25, the Chamber of Commerce informed the mayor and several councilmen that the cantonment belonged to San Diego. Wilde called the decision the "biggest compliment to San Diego." Dorland saw the announcement as undoubtedly the "biggest thing that has ever come to this part of the Southland," while Davidson remarked that the city had entered "the biggest era of its history." The *San Diego Sun*, meanwhile, proclaimed the camp to be the "very biggest single project" in city history.<sup>15</sup> To solidify the deal, the Chamber dispatched a committee of three—Dorland, Belcher and H. H. Jones—to San Francisco to meet with Liggett, extend the city's thanks, and iron out the details.

The camp meant good news for San Diego's economy. The *San Diego Union* estimated that the thousands of soldiers taking liberty in the city would generate over a million dollars for local businesses monthly. The presence of families, visitors, and other "curiosity seekers and tourists"—combined with new jobs for local workers and profits for ranchers, merchants, and companies supplying goods and services—made the monetary consequences substantial.<sup>16</sup> The Chamber of Commerce members congratulated themselves on their victory, describing it as the "consummation of a continuous effort extending over the past two years." They boasted that the organization had again "demonstrated its great usefulness to the community."<sup>17</sup>

Congressman Kettner described the Linda Vista encampment as the "hardest

proposition to put over" during his term in Congress, particularly given the fierce competition waged by Los Angeles.<sup>18</sup> The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce had sent lobbyists to Washington D.C. to persuade the Western Department to award its city the training facility. The editor of the *Los Angeles Times* self-righteously posited that the influence of nearby Tijuana, laden with "gamblers, prostitutes, opium fiends and white slavers," would exert a negative influence on the young soldiers, while Los Angeles with fewer "bars and dens of vice" than any city its size, was the "ideal location."<sup>19</sup> At one point, the dispute between San Diego and Los Angeles became so heated that the War Department announced it was becoming "disinclined to locate cantonments in areas showing such bitter rivalry." Littell sent a telegram to Kettner warning there might be "no camp in California" if the cities could not resolve their dispute.<sup>20</sup>

Amid the celebrations, influential businessman and Chamber mainstay Julius Wangenheim took a moment to chide city leaders for losing sight of their true purpose for securing the facility. He beseeched them to relax the "rather mercenary spirit" they had exhibited and to focus less on the profitability of the camp and more on the patriotic nature of the endeavor. He suggested the directors needed to "study what we can do for the Army rather than what the Army can do for us."<sup>21</sup> His noble ideals, however, were swept aside in the race to acquire government contracts.



USS San Diego in San Diego Harbor prior to World War I. It was sunk by a mine in 1918. ©SDHC 2000/99.3.

## Building and Mobilizing Camp Kearny

The Army referred to the Regular Army training facilities as cantonments and the National Guard units as camps, a fact ignored by officials and members of the public who freely interchanged the terms. The major distinction between the two centered on the type of housing units offered: cantonments contained wooden barracks while camps had canvas “mushroom” tents with a wooden platform for a floor.

The War Department christened the Linda Vista facility “Camp Kearny” after Stephen Watts Kearny, commander of the Army of the West in the Mexican War.<sup>22</sup> Congressmen Kettner had headed a local group that tried to buck the government mandate and use the name Camp San Diego. The dictates of the federal government, however, took precedent over local aspirations.

The spelling of the camp’s name became an immediate issue. For the first few months, the Army accepted Kearney with an “e,” as the correct spelling. When an official questioned the spelling, the camp contractor asked San Diego Postmaster J.R. Barrow to check. Barrow said yes, the “e” belonged, but P.C. Harris of the Adjunct General’s Office was not so sure. To resolve the issue, Harris ordered Captain G.A. Christenson of the camp’s Quartermaster Corps to contact the War Department and request “an official ruling.” An unnamed War Department official applied military logic and replied that because Army General Order #95 of July 18, 1917,



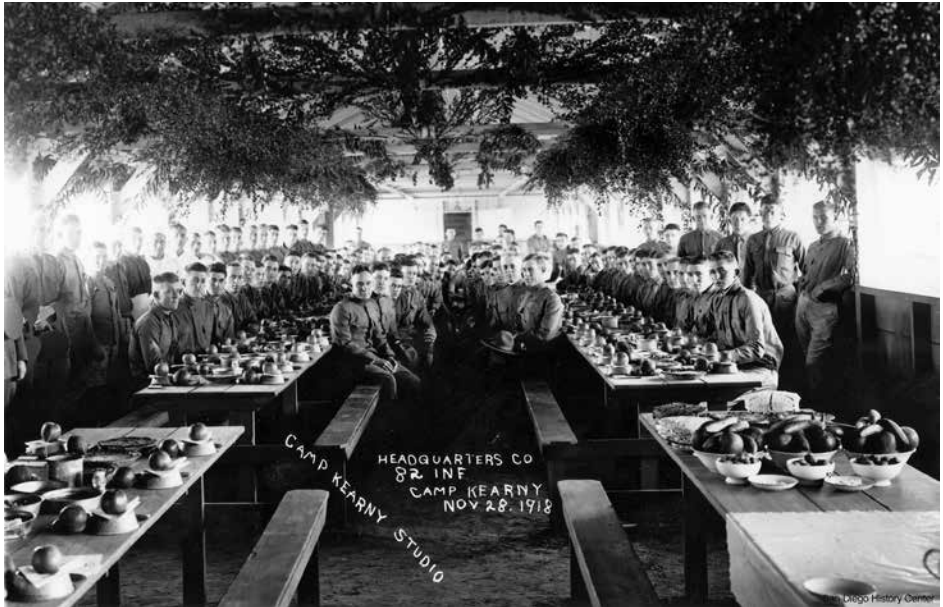
*Camp Kearny, 1918. ©SDHC 81:9652.*



*Patriotism and Profit: San Diego's Camp Kearny*



*Camp Kearny tents, c. 1918. ©SDHC 81:9646.*



*Headquarters Company, 82nd Infantry, November 28, 1918. ©SDHC 1999/027.10.*

used the spelling Kearny—with no “e”—that was the correct version. The *Union* proudly announced that “K-E-A-R-N-Y” was the way to “Spell OUR Camp.”<sup>23</sup>

The government pressed for the rapid construction of the training facility and the city agreed. As soon as building began, area residents would get jobs and local businesses would make sales. The CEC selected the W.E. Hampton & Company of Los Angeles as the general contractor and listed the John Roberts Company of San Diego as the contractor to perform the work on “all additions, alterations, and repairs.”<sup>24</sup> The Construction Division, meanwhile, produced a standard blueprint for construction, devised a staffing plan that conducted the planning and designing of work at the job site, and implemented an “advertise-fixed-price contracts” system in which each contractor would earn a maximum of \$250,000.

In June 1917, the military construction contingent arrived with the first Corps of Engineers. Captain Christenson was the first uniformed soldier on hand while Lieutenant Charles S. Rogers, the head of the Quartermaster Construction Division, was the first officer on the scene. Colonel I.W. Greenbaugh, Captain O.C. Wyman, Major Charles H. Nichols and their flock of assistants followed close behind. With the construction principals on site and the labor force gathering, the *Union* optimistically proclaimed the “Cantonment Work Will be Begun Within 48 Hours.”<sup>25</sup>

The enterprise accommodated virtually every available carpenter and laborer who wanted work. In mid-June, the work force stood at 750 men and, by early August, rose to over one thousand. Major Nichols noted that the project took only “fifteen days to clean up the labor market in San Diego,” causing Hampton to recruit additional laborers in Los Angeles. At one point the latter felt he might need to reach into San Francisco and Oakland to fill the ranks of his industrial Army. When more workers arrived, Hampton planned to institute a ten-hour day with two night shifts to get the work into “full swing.”<sup>26</sup> To avoid lost time, the contractor built on-site bunkhouses so the men could eat, sleep, and walk to their jobs. In addition to the housing, the men received meals and a fair wage.<sup>27</sup>

The construction progressed at a rapid pace. By August, workers had completed ten huge warehouses and foundations for hundreds of other buildings. The construction of a single 130 x 60 foot wooden warehouse in eight hours revealed their speed and efficiency. By breakfast, the workers had the land cleared and graded; by lunchtime, the flooring placed; and, before the end of day, the “last nail” driven in the roof. The workforce as a whole could build, on average, fifteen structures a day.

An agreement between Secretary of War Baker and union labor leader Samuel Gompers guaranteed no labor resistance if the contractors adhered to fair wages and working conditions; nevertheless, some problems occurred. At one point Hampton’s reticence to pay one group the prevailing union wage scale nearly



*Camp Kearny Parade, 2nd and Broadway, 1917 ©SDHC 81:9444.*

precipitated a massive walkout. The leaders of San Diego's individual labor unions met with Hampton and Lieutenant Rogers to hash out the situation and, when Hampton balked, Rogers simply ordered the contractor to comply with the labor demands. With a fair wage and good conditions, the laborers worked a flexible workweek with some ten-hour days that paid overtime. The men worked on Sundays only if absolutely necessary, and if they chose to do so. Board and lodging cost only \$1 per day and included transportation. By the end of September some four thousand workers swarmed over the construction site.<sup>28</sup>

Another short-lived issue involved Mexican nationals working on the job. In September, a rumor circulated that the government would force Mexican citizens into the U.S. Army against their will and send them overseas to fight. Camp Commander General Frederick Strong quickly quelled that rumor. In a statement read in Spanish to the workers at their noon meal, Strong announced the idea as "absolutely false." He said that those who spread the falsehood were "enemies of the United States" and wished to slow the progress of the camp. Satisfied, the Mexican contingent returned to their duties without delay and further disruption.<sup>29</sup>



*Hazard and Gould Company performed grading and leveling while Pioneer Truck Company supplied 100 laborers, 150 mules, and 10 motor trucks. Private collection..*

Contractor Hampton and his chief engineer J.B. Lippincott accepted local contractors from the start. Fred Heilbron won the contract for much of the heating and plumbing, while Hazard and Gould Company performed most of the initial grading and leveling. They also worked on the railway spur line. The Benson Lumber Company announced it had fifteen million feet of lumber available for immediate delivery; the McCormick Company had another ten to fourteen million available. Hampton used it all.

Local businesses rushed to profit from the presence of the soldiers. Major L.O. Matthews, Division Adjutant, estimated that he received at least one thousand requests for permits to do business on the camp—everything from peanut stands to automotive sales. To quell the chaos, he directed the officer in charge of the Post Exchange that no business would be allowed within five miles of the camp except barbershops.<sup>30</sup>

Fresh water presented an immediate challenge. When the city signed the contract with the government, its principal water source at the Lower Otay



Reservoir remained in shambles after the flood of 1916. In addition, the water from the San Diego River was polluted. City Manager Fred Lockwood decided to gather water from several city sources, including the Otay and Morena Reservoirs, Lake Murray, and Cuyamaca Lake, and cache it in the University Heights Reservoir. The water would then be channeled to a pumping station at the foot of Texas Street in Mission Valley for transfer to the camp's fifteen million gallon earthen storage reservoir. Pipes took the water from the reservoir to a reinforced concrete tank for distribution within the camp. The city covered the initial cost of the water system with \$20,000 from the general operating fund and eventually spent around \$83,000 for the system. After treatment, the health officers of the Surgeon General labeled the camp's water quality as "satisfactory."<sup>31</sup>

The installation of the camp sewage system paralleled the water line construction, and both met a major obstacle in the mesa's impenetrable soil. The ground on the mesa consisted of a thin layer of topsoil above a "thick strata of cemented gravel as hard as concrete" which locals called "caliche." Even with the concerted efforts of 1,200 laborers, the hardpan brought the trenching progress almost to a halt. Here, the Army engineers resorted to a proven standby—explosives. Workers placed six sticks of dynamite in holes spaced about fourteen inches apart. After the blast, which threw debris fifty feet high, shovel men stepped in and removed the loosened material. Because of the danger, the supervisors halted all work within one thousand feet of the trench blasting. Contractors applied the same excavation system to create the trenches and foxholes.<sup>32</sup>



*Dust at Camp Kearny, c. 1918. ©SDHC UT 340.*





*Savage Service Station, Camp Kearny c. 1917. ©SDHC UT 6342.*

Dry soil created an unintended problem: dust. Major Nichols recorded that the movement of men, machines, and horses churned up immense clouds of dust that caused extreme difficulties for the laborers and often brought work to a standstill.<sup>33</sup>

The primitive sewage system functioned around two septic tanks, one larger tank located near the main camp and one smaller version adjacent to the hospital and remount station. The system lacked both a filtration system and contact beds, leading the health officers to qualify the system as “not always satisfactory.” Generally, the tanks discharged the “effluent ... into the arroyos to the north and south on the camp” and into San Clemente Canyon. Health inspectors noted that in winter the system emitted little smell, but in the summer the “odor was very strong.” A civilian contractor removed the camps’ garbage and manure from the remount station daily. The official history of the 40th Division noted that, in terms of sanitation, the camp qualified as among the “finest group training areas” in the country, while the officers from the Surgeon General’s office deemed the situation satisfactory.<sup>34</sup>

Road construction projects carried special significance for the city. The Army

required about four miles of smooth permanent interior roadways for the safe efficient passage of motorized ambulances and fire fighting equipment—a project that the John Roberts Company completed for around fifty thousand dollars. In the end, contractors installed just under seventeen miles of road.

The city agreed to provide a road to the camp for transporting soldiers and materials, one the Army hoped would be a “modern highway” starting in Old Town and extending to within a half-mile of the southern edge of the camp. It also reworked several other streets, including the road running from the Santa Fe Depot at Linda Vista and the road from the camp's main thoroughfare, Headquarters Street, to the county highway. It also paved a section between La Jolla and Torrey Pines. The city and county shared the cost for the new Silver Terrace Road, more often and mundanely called Camp Kearny Road, now Linda Vista Road, the major route between the city and the camp. The city also placed a new bridge across San Clemente Canyon to shorten the distance from downtown. To help ease the way for soldiers coming to town, the city organized “Kearny stages” with regular runs between the town and the camp and worked out an agreement with the railroad to conduct four daily runs between downtown and the Linda Vista depot.<sup>35</sup>

As the camp physically grew, the city coordinated the other necessary infrastructure projects. The San Diego Consolidated Gas and Electric Company installed gas mains and placed 450 poles and 37 miles of wire to bring electricity to the camp while the Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company spent \$70,000 on communication systems. The city also persuaded the Santa Fe Railway to extend a three-mile spur line from the Linda Vista depot out to the camp to allow the trains to transport supplies directly to the warehouses. The Santa Fe officials, however, stressed that they needed official confirmation from the Army before initiating work. To prompt the railway, the city contracted the Pioneer Truck Company to supply 100 laborers, 150 mules, and 10 “motor trucks” to assist with the construction. But delay followed delay and workers did not have the spur line and interior tracks in place until late September. Local workers shared in the \$200,000 spent on the project.<sup>36</sup>

Not everything went according to plan in San Diego's great military city. In late September a brush fire erupted and high Santa Ana winds pushed the flames beyond control and threatened the Gas and Electric Company's construction camp to the north of the main camp. The camp's Fire Marshal, Captain Courser, who the government hired from the San Diego Fire Department, rushed eleven truck loads of soldiers and 130 laborers armed with spades, water pails, and wet gunny sacks to the scene where they put out the blaze in about half an hour.

In addition, horses were in short supply, causing some trainees to suffer the



*Mary Pickford entertains the troops at Camp Kearny, 1918. ©SDHC UT 3599.*

indignity of riding wooden barrel horses rather than the real thing. Unwanted spectators became another unexpected problem. Controlling the crowds that trooped out to the construction site to observe and comment on the biggest show in town developed into a serious nuisance. Every day, hundreds of sightseers swarmed over the camp, interfering with workers, clogging the roads, and slowing the movement of the trucks transporting building materials. While the Army and the contractors begged the sightseers to stay away and let the men do their work, the *San Diego Sun* blithely urged everyone to trek out to the construction site because it had to be seen to be believed. Despite the best efforts of the Army and contractors, the construction sideshow took on a life of its own and continued unabated for weeks.<sup>37</sup>

Amazingly, San Diego's war suburb of nearly 1,200 buildings stood near completion by the end of August 1917. Workers had finished the warehouses, the post office, telegraph office, and the 1,000-bed hospital (destined to be the camp's longest standing facility); readied the cavalry's remount station for operation; put the water and sewerage system in place; and set and wired exterior electrical lighting poles. In a remarkably short time, the private contractors and

the Quartermaster Corps had transformed 8,000 brush-covered acres into the semblance of a "well regulated military city."<sup>38</sup>

The War Department designed each facility to serve a Pershing Division of 28,000 men. Designated a National Guard camp, Kearny received its first troops in early September, shortly after General Frederick S. Strong assumed command. Following his initial inspection, Strong laconically categorized the camp as more "suitable" than "could scarcely be imagined." In September, five thousand National Guardsmen from Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado, Utah, and California reported for duty. Men from other camps and an influx of draftees brought the mean strength to approximately twenty-three thousand trainees. The soldiers organized as the 40th, or "Sunshine," Division, so called for the division shoulder patch depicting a bright yellow sun on a blue field. The camp developed into a largely homogeneous group with few non-Anglo troops and just a handful of non-English speakers. The Commission of Immigration and Housing brought in Ms. Christina Krysto of Los Angeles to offer English reading and writing instruction to men deficient in those skills.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps the most noted member of the 40th was actor Buster Keaton who trained for two weeks in July 1918 before being reassigned to Fort Mills. The most celebrated visitor was actress Mary Pickford who became the "godmother" for Battery "D" of the 145th Field Artillery unit.

The 40th division conducted training until departing from the camp in July 1918. Men endured typical army drilling and training activities as well as a variety of athletic endeavors. The camp had an athletic director, John R. Case, who organized sporting activities to offset the traditional training regime. The men participated in boxing along with the bayonet drills. Camp teams also competed against the other local Navy and Army bases in boxing, baseball, football, track and field, with a huge inter-service Olympics-like event held in Balboa Park culminating the athletic season. To prepare the men for long distance trekking, the drill masters took advantage of Southern California's weather and hiked the men extensively around the county, including regular jaunts to Torrey Pines and multi-day bivouacs as far ranging as Lake Cuyamaca. The Construction Division also had plenty of opportunities to march on parade in front of Commanding General Strong and his staff before departing Camp Kearny and heading out for additional training prior to deployment to Europe.

The camps and cantonments constructed by the CD were like none before. Conceived in the waning days of the Progressive era, a time still imbued with the spirit of reform and idealism, the government felt obliged to minister to the moral welfare of the men as they trained to become combat soldiers. Along with the essential military buildings—warehouses, mess halls, hospitals—the camp teemed with the facilities catering to the trainees' spiritual, personal, and moral concerns.

Service organizations filled the camp. The YMCA alone managed five buildings and two tents. The organization supplied the men with writing and reading materials, organized church services, constructed a 3,000 seat multi-use building for large events, and administered to the Hostess House where families and friends could visit with the soldiers. The last was a gift from La Jolla philanthropist Ellen Browning Scripps. The Knights of the Columbus attended to the spiritual needs of Catholics with two separate buildings, while the Jewish Welfare Board did the same for Jewish soldiers. After an initial refusal, then a brief debate, the government also permitted the Freemasons a working space. The Red Cross managed the largest service building on the camp, and the American Library Association actively served along side the Christian Science House and the Church Federation House. The War Department also constructed a Liberty Theater, operated by the Commission on Training Camp Activities, on every camp and cantonment. Kearny's 3,000-seat house presented everything from training lectures to comedy reviews to boxing matches.

A unique space that camp residents called the Civic Center housed the civilian-controlled commercial and amusement elements of the camp. The Army's Division Post Exchange administered the center which included a 125-seat restaurant; a lunch room seating sixty; three photographic galleries; two large billiard rooms, each containing thirty tables; a ten-lane bowling alley; a 1,100 seat theater with another 2,000-seat auditorium under construction; a tailor shop; soda fountain; grocery store and skating rink; the largest shooting gallery in America; a hat-cleaning and blocking service; and a special equipment store for officers. The camp planners designed the center to meet the varied material needs of thirty thousand men and, on completion, became the "largest mercantile establishment in Southern California." The trainees appreciated these services but apparently considered the post office, which processed over 350,000 letters per month, by far the most important building.

To support the moral welfare of the trainees, the War Department created an agency called the Commission on Training Camp Activities that maintained a conspicuous presence at each facility. The Commission strived to make life normal for the soldiers and to keep the environs of the camps clean and wholesome, while suppressing "certain vicious conditions" associated with camp life. The Commission also created Post Exchanges and Soldiers Cooperative Stores and gave considerable attention to the "Control of Alcohol and Prostitution" near the camps. The Liberty Theater hosted many of these informative and mandatory lectures for the trainees.

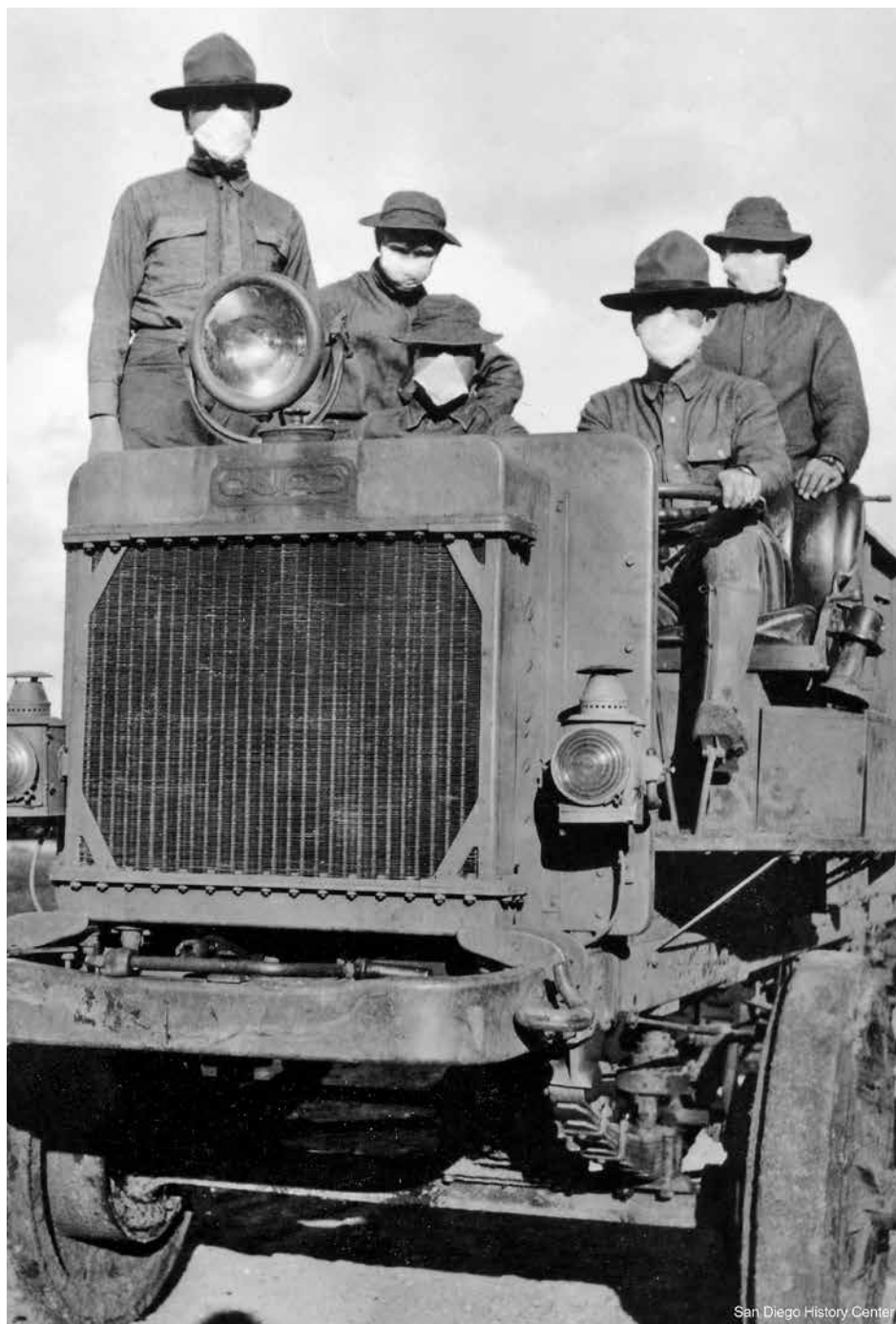
Not to be outdone, the city fathers also took on the role of moral caretakers. City leaders, health officials, and military representatives met to discuss ways to





*Major General Joseph E. Kuhn, Commander, Camp Kearny; Captain I. E. Novak, Commandant, Czechoslovakian Army; and Major Ernest Riall, American Red Cross, July 1919. ©SDHC 83:14670-01.*

“prevent the social evil from getting a foothold in San Diego” and to keep “fallen women from plying their trade.”<sup>40</sup> Mayor Wilde sponsored a resolution to ban dancing in local cafés that sold liquor and refused to allow the City Council to



*Camp Kearny soldiers in flu masks on a four-wheel drive truck during World War I, 1917-1918. ©SDHC 88:16726-2.*

adjourn until the body had settled the cabaret question to his satisfaction. The resolution permitted hotels with 100 rooms to maintain a ballroom, but required smaller cafes to construct a platform for entertainers and prohibit performers from mingling with the guests. The action strictly prohibited "games of chance and gambling" in the cafés and called for all bars within a half of a mile of the barracks to either close or move. The Army also determined not to allow any liquor outlets near the camp.<sup>41</sup>

Like any small city, the camp published a newspaper, "The Camp Kearny Weekly News," while the "Trench and Camp" supplied the soldiers with local and national news. The latter had been founded by Virginia publisher John S. Bryan who conceived the idea of a weekly newspaper for soldiers, and worked through the National Works Council and YMCA to distribute four thousand advertisement-free papers at no cost to the soldiers at each training camp. *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler volunteered and agreed to supply the Kearny edition of "Trench and Camp." Working out of the YMCA building, volunteers selected an editor, organized a staff, and started the presses within a month. The *San Diego Union* also included a daily page called the "U.S. Service Page" filled with general military information and specifics about each installation in town.

Whether the trainees were novices at making war or "sturdy rookies," as General John Pershing called them, they became experts in purchasing Liberty Bonds. Each battalion, regiment, and company competed to subscribe to the most bonds. The government tried to make it easy; soldiers could make an allotment from their monthly pay to spread out the payments. In mid-October 1918, the camp sponsored a special Liberty Day with the goal to push the camp Liberty Drive over one million dollars. On the first day over four hundred men purchased \$78,800 worth of bonds--the largest single-day collection to that point. At the conclusion of the drive, 6,813 soldiers subscribed to \$686,800 worth of bonds, with one sergeant topping the list with a \$600 bond. The Hampton Company also entered the competition, creating teams of workers with prizes going to the winners. The construction workers entered the mania and purchased bonds in the amount of \$202,000 over a three-day drive in late October; out of the approximately 2,800 workers 2,100 subscribed.<sup>42</sup>

The international influenza pandemic dominated the war years and descended on Camp Kearny. A report from the Surgeon General's office noted that the camp suffered 187 deaths among enlisted men from disease in 1917, with the flu accounting for most. After the departure of the 40th Division, rumors spread throughout the city that an epidemic gripped the camp, a situation the camp medic labeled as "absolutely unfounded." The flu did find its way into the camp and camp health officers closed down all the public assembly areas, quarantined



*Official staff uniforms, Junior Women's Club Hostess House, Camp Kearny, San Diego. ©SDHC 83:14670-6.*

the trainees, and required the men to wear masks at all times. But by November 1918 both the war and the flu were over. At that point the two most pressing questions on the minds of the Kearny soldiers became, "When can we go to dances and shows and when do we go back to civilian clothes?"<sup>43</sup>

With the end of the war, Camp Kearny, like most of the other National Guard camps, faded away with little fanfare. The city's exhilaration over the armistice gave way to concern that the city's cash cow was also about to disappear. Looking for ways to extend the camp's life, leaders of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce met with new camp commander General Guy Carleton to discuss the possibility

of converting the camp into a convalescent facility. For a short time, the camp became one of two demobilization centers on the West Coast. Nevertheless, by early 1919, only 3,500 men remained on site and workers had begun dismantling the ordinary buildings and salvaging wood, electrical, and gas fixtures.

Secretary Baker, on a visit to San Diego to inspect the camp, announced to the *Union* that he "highly favored" retaining the facility as a permanent site for the regular army. In 1920 the government improved the hospital but only 300 men inhabited the largely deserted grounds. In the summer of 1922, as 1,100 ROTC students arrived for training, the last vestige of the old camp—a wooden warehouse—disappeared under the hammers and crowbars of the salvage crews.

One interesting incident during demobilization involved the enigmatic Ed Fletcher. He and his neighbor Harry Whitney became the only San Diegans to make a claim against the government for damages sustained to the lands leased to the Army. Fletcher vowed he had a verbal agreement—probably with his friend General Strong—that called for the land to be returned in the same condition as it stood at the time of the lease. Admittedly, the two landowners allowed the Army to excavate six miles of trenches and dugouts and to place an artillery range on the land. Strong authorized an Army engineer—at government expense—to



conduct a survey, appraise the damages, and offer a cost of restoration. The Army Controller General rejected the \$24,000 claim but Fletcher used his position in Congress to pursue the suit for another eight years before the government finally relented and issued him a check.<sup>44</sup>

The city by-passed the opportunity to regain the Linda Vista mesa and the government wisely retained ownership of most of the land. Aside from a failed attempt to establish a dirigible base there in 1920, the only activity came from military and civilian pilots who used the open space as an informal airport. The San Diego-based Ryan Company tested Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* on the old parade ground in 1927 as it offered a perfect site for practicing tricky takeoffs and landings. After the disaster of the dirigible *USS Macon* in 1932, the site went quiet until 1936 when the Navy installed an asphalt landing strip suitable for light aircraft.<sup>45</sup> In December 1939, the Navy acquired some adjacent lands and improved the field for the arrival of the First Marine Air Wing in August 1942. On February 20, 1943, the Navy commissioned the field as Naval Auxiliary Air Station, NAAS, Camp Kearny. That became the last formal use of the name Kearny for the area, but the legacy of the Camp Kearny site continued through the successive installations from the Marine Corps Air Depot to Marine Corps Air Depot Miramar to Naval Air Station Miramar to the present day Marine Corps Air Station Miramar.

It is difficult to assess the precise effect the brief presence of Camp Kearny had on San Diego's economy. Along with the naval training facility in Balboa Park and the expanding Army and Navy aviation installation on North Island, Camp Kearny certainly contributed to San Diego's emerging economy. As the *Sun* averred, the physical presence of so many soldiers and sailors furnished "a big part of the city's activities day and night" and turned the city into "One Great Military Camp." San Diego's wartime population almost doubled with the addition of the 75,000 transient guests, and their spending definitely supplemented the local economy. Despite the city's cabaret ordinances, downtown San Diego became a hot spot.

By the end of 1917, the city had already experienced the leading edge of the Kettner-led military spending agenda. The *Union* noted that San Diego remained one of the few cities in America in which the government expended millions of dollars on military projects. Certainly local businesses and individuals profited. The government spent over \$1 million in the construction phase, including at least \$200,000 on labor and an equal monthly amount over the life of the camp for local goods and services. Conversely, the city and county combined to expend around \$400,000 on the venture and gained nothing monetarily from the \$1.00 per year lease fee, while the county tax rate increased over twenty cents in 1917. But the overall result proved positive.



The patriotic component of the camp's existence is more easily appraised. San Diego's citizens embraced the opportunity to express their patriotic fervor both through their spiritual enthusiasm and their support of the war related service programs. For example, the five Liberty Loan campaigns directed by Julius Wangerheim—programs described by *The San Diego Union* as the barometer of any city's patriotism—proved to be some of the most successful in the United States. With a population of only 100,000, San Diego's first four programs raised an average of \$150 per individual, serving as a model for other cities. In Red Cross drives, War Saving Stamp campaigns, and United War Work Services, the people of San Diego repeatedly went "over the top." San Diego clearly supported the war effort with generosity and enthusiasm.<sup>46</sup>

While the life of Camp Kearny proved fleeting, San Diego's army experience presented the citizenry a chance to assuage their patriotic spirit and gave them a boost during tough economic times.

## NOTES

1. See James W. Hurst, *Pancho Villa and Black Jack Pershing: The Punitive Expedition in Mexico* (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2008).
2. William A. Ganoe. *The History of the United States Army* (New York: D. Appleton Company, 1936), 465.
3. See C.H. Cramer, *Newton D. Baker: A Biography* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1961).
4. For contemporary official views see, *The Report of the Chief of Construction Division to the Secretary of War in the Annual Reports to the War Department* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919) and *Report of the Board of Review of Construction to the Assistant Secretary of War, August 1919* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1920), hereinafter cited as Blossom Report.
5. See Lucille Clark DuVall, "William and Marian Kettner: Brother Bill and the Lass from Tuolumne." MA thesis, University of San Diego, 1979.
6. "San Diego Tentative Location For Camp," *San Diego Union*, February 14, 1916, 1.
7. "Here Are Working Committees Responsible for Big Army Camp," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1.
8. Regular Meeting Minutes of the San Diego Chamber of Commerce, special meeting of the executive committee, December 11, 1916, *Journal* December 1915-December 1916: San Diego Chamber of Commerce meeting, January 3, 1917, and January 31, 1917, *Journal* 1917-October 1918, hereafter cited as SDCCRMM.
9. Iris Engstrand and Kathleen Crawford, *Reflections: A History of the San Diego Gas and Electric Company: 1881-1991* (San Diego, 1991), 68.
10. "May Retain Camp Kearny, Contends General Liggett," *San Diego Union*, September 8, 1919, 1.
11. "Many Obstacles Were Surmounted By Contractors," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1918, 2; "Praise For Camp Here By General," *San Diego Sun*, June 23, 1917, 1.
12. "Officials Of City Jubilant," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1, 5.

13. "Appeal to Patriotic Citizens," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1, 5; Copy of a telegram to General W. Siebert in Los Angeles with San Diego's offer, *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917; copy of telegram to Frank Belcher, Chair of the Army Post Committee, from General Liggett; and acceptance telegram from Liggett 10:47AM, *San Diego Union*, May 24, 1917, 1.
14. "Land Freely Given," *San Diego Sun*, May 28, 1917, 1; "City Will Rush Work At Great Army Camp To Be Built On Mesa," *San Diego Union*, May 26, 1917, 1, 5.
15. "Good News For the City," *San Diego Sun*, May 24, 1917, 1; "Officials Of City Jubilant," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1, 5; "Big Army Camp Occupied Today," *San Diego Sun*, May 26, 1917, 3; "For San Diego And The U.S.A.," *San Diego Sun*, May 25, 1917, 1.
16. "Facts Showing What New Camp Here Means," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1; "John D. Spreckels, San Diego's First Citizen," *The San Diego Labor Leader*, August 31, 1917, 12.
17. *San Diego Chamber of Commerce Annual Report of 1917*. See also, Carl Heilbron. *History of San Diego County* (San Diego: San Diego Press Club, 1936), 1:434; Major General R.H. Van Deman, "History of San Diego and the Army," SDCCRMM, Army and Navy Committee Report in the Annual Report of 1917, November 10, 1917.
18. William Kettner, *Why It Was Done And How* (San Diego: Frye and Smith, 1923), 73. The Chamber's Army Base Committee members included Chair, Frank Belcher, members, Willet Dorland, Frank Allen, John Boal, Charles Williams, Charles Hardy, O.W. Cotton, H.H. Jones, Col. D Fletcher, Herbert Fay, G.A. Davidson, G.C. Trask, William Stell, Milton McRea, and B. M. Warner.
19. The editor of the *San Diego Union* derided the "carping and envious objection" of their northern neighbor, Los Angeles, since San Diego was the obvious choice. "Earl, Attacking San Diego, Says City is Full of Crime," *San Diego Union*, May 27, 1917, 4; "City Will Rush Work At Great Army Camp To Be Built on Mesa," *San Diego Union*, May 26, 1917, 1; "Our Envious Neighbor," *San Diego Union*, May 26, 1917, 4; "Camp Site Decision Is Final," *San Diego Union*, June 1, 1917, 13.
20. Telegram, Littell to Kettner, June 7, 1917, in Kettner, *Why It Was Done And How*, 73-74.
21. SDCCRMM, meeting, June 6, 1917, *Journal*, January 1917–October 1918.
22. Sally Cavell Johns, "Viva los Californios" *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly*, vol. 19 (Fall 1973): 1-13, chronicles the role of General Kearny at the Battle of San Pasqual.
23. "K-E-A-R-N-Y, That's the way to Spell OUR Camp," *San Diego Union*, September 5, 1917, 1. Interestingly in the following years the Army and the government indiscriminately used both spellings in reports.
24. "Prominent Contractor Gets Government Order For Camp Kearny Work," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1918, 4.
25. "Linda Vista Camp Soon To Be Ready For State Troops," *San Diego Union*, July 19, 1917, 5; "Cantonment Work Will be Begun Within 48 Hours," *San Diego Union*, June 10, 1917, 1.
26. "Work Steadily Progresses At Camp Kearny," *San Diego Union*, July 31, 1917, 2; "City To Supply Labor, Material, For Cantonment," *San Diego Union*, July 22, 1917, 1 & 2.
27. To control the crush of applicants that quickly threatened to disrupt the work, Hampton ordered all interested applicants to register at the contractor's downtown office in the American National Bank Building, rather than at the camp. Completion Report of Camp Kearney, Linda Vista, Cal, Charles H. Nichols, Major C. of E. Constructing Quartermaster, NARA, College Park, MD. Record Group #77, Box 148, Camp Kearny – California, 1917, 6 (hereinafter cited as Nichols Report); "Labor Market Combed For Men To Work At Camp," *San Diego Union*, August 10, 1917, 5; "Camp Kearny Fast Assuming Form of Big Army of Workmen," *San Diego Union*, August 16, 1917, 1, 6; "Camp Inspected by Gen. Liggett; Work Is Praised," *San Diego Union*, August 20, 1917, 3.
28. "Wage Scale at Camp Kearny Has Been Satisfactorily Adjusted," *The San Diego Labor Leader*, August 17, 1917, 1.

## THE JOURNAL OF SAN DIEGO HISTORY

29. "Camp Commander Quiets Mexicans," *San Diego Union*, September 15, 1917, 5.
30. "Bar Concessions In or Near Camp; Will Buy in City," *San Diego Union*, September 29, 1917, 6.
31. The use of half steel, half wood-staved pipe raised some questions, but the Chamber Water Committee considered the use of wood pipe, which had only had a life span of five years, appropriate because it was cheap and readily available which translated into a faster installation time. Nichols Report, 8-9; "Spur Railroad Laid One Mile At Cantonment," *San Diego Union*, July 9, 1917, 1; "Outside Water at Camp," *San Diego Sun*, October 18, 1917; *Annual Report of the Surgeon General*, 1918 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1919), I:374 (hereinafter cited as ARSG).
32. Nichols Report, 12; "Ranking Officers Coming Soon to Camp Kearny; Big Blasts Halt Construction," *San Diego Union*, August 24, 1917, 1-2; "Work Progressing Fast At Camp Kearny," *San Diego Sun*, August 11, 1917, 7.
33. Nichols Report, 12; ARSG, 1918, 1:374; Department of the Army, *History of the Fortieth Sunshine Division* (Los Angeles: C. S. Huston, 1920), 42.
34. Nichols Report, 16; "Concrete Roads Specified For Camp; Work Is Commenced," *Camp Kearny Weekly News*, October 3, 1918, 1 (hereinafter cited as CKWN); "Million More Goes to Building of Bigger Kearny," CKWN, October 31, 1918, 1; "To Build Bridge," *San Diego Union*, September 12, 1917, 5.
35. "Many Obstacles Were Surmounted By Contractors," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1918, 2; "Camp Kearny Fast Assuming Form of Big Army of Workmen," *San Diego Union*, August 16, 1917, 6.
36. "Sightseers Bother Men at Mesa Camp: Autos Clog Road," *San Diego Union*, May 28, 1917, 1.
37. ARSG, 1918, 1:374 -75; Christina Krystro, "Bringing The World to Our Foreign-Language Soldiers," *National Geographic Magazine*, 34, no. 2 (August 1918), 81-83.
38. CKWN, March 9, 1918, "Division Exchange," 1; ARSG, 1917, 374.
39. *The War Department Commission on Training Camp Activities* (Washington, D.C.: The War Department, 1917), 3-4, 9, 25.
40. See Elizabeth C. MacPhail, "Shady Ladies in the 'Stingaree District' When the Red Lights Went Out in San Diego," *San Diego Historical Society Quarterly*, 20 (Spring 1974): 1-28.
41. "Vice Evil Doomed In City," *San Diego Union*, May 25, 1917, 1-2; "Moral Conditions Best Here, Declares General J. P. O'Neil," *San Diego Union*, August 16, 1917, 1; "Bar Concessions In or Near Camp; Will Buy in City," *San Diego Union*, September 29, 1917, 6; "Bars and Cafes In the Zone Hit," *San Diego Sun*, August 20, 1917, 1.
42. "Soldiers To Aid In Liberty Loan," *San Diego Union*, October 3, 1917, 6; "Plan Great Drive Today To Reach \$1,000,000 Goal," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, October 24, 1917, 6; "Camp Workmen Praised For Aid In Bonds Sales," *San Diego Evening Tribune*, October 29, 1917, 6.
43. ARSG, 1918, 1:377; "Spanish Influenza AWOL Here, Said: No Quarantine Set," CKWN, October 3, 1918, 1; "Complete Lift of Quarantine," CKWN, November 21, 1918, 1.
44. Ed Fletcher, *Memoirs of Ed Fletcher* (San Diego: Pioneer Printers, 1952), 437-38.
45. The Navy had installed a airship mooring mast for its two 785-foot dirigibles, the *USS Akron* and the *USS Macon* on the old parade ground, which unfortunately precipitated a disaster when during the first docking of the *Macon* in May, strong winds pulled four Navy line tenders off the ground and two dropped to their deaths.
46. "San Diego Is One Great Military Camp," *San Diego Sun*, September 10, 1917, 1; "Many Millions Spent By U.S. In San Diego," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1917, 2; "Millions Being Spent Around San Diego On Military, Naval Work," *San Diego Union*, November 13, 1918, 1; "San Diego, Proud of Record For 1918," *San Diego Union*, January 1, 1919, 1.