

Features

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Soldiers train using smoke grenades during the 1940s at Camp Reynolds in Pymatuning Township in this photo from the collection of Art Williams.

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GREENVILLE AREA

Call of duty

Man's mission is to chronicle history of Camp Reynolds



Tom Davidson/Herald

When Art Williams played “army” as a boy, he did so in people’s yards and wooded areas where real Army men once drilled in preparation for service during World War II.

Williams, now 63, of Greenville, grew up in Reynolds, the neighborhood named after the Army camp that graced more than 2,500 acres there from 1942 to 1946.

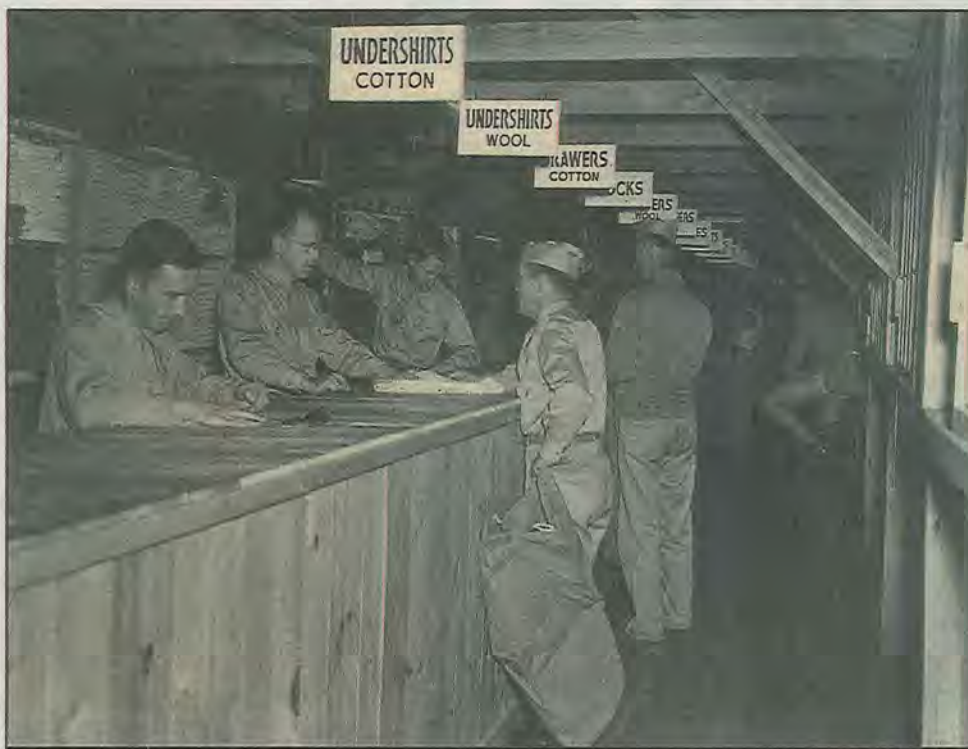
The area, now a “Census designated place” officially called Reynolds Heights is an unincorporated part of Pymatuning Township between state routes 18 and 58, south of Greenville.

Williams, now 63 is a videographer and computer-chair historian. He grew up near the Reynolds VFW Post and has a lifelong interest in the lore of the area that started when he was a boy, playing “around all that stuff over there,” he said.

That stuff was the stuff of history. Camp Reynolds was one of the largest Army camps in the country during World War II.

An estimated 1 million soldiers served there, according to histories of the camp written by the late Greenville journalist Earl Miller and revised and corrected by Williams.

“Its purpose was to receive, process and forward both officers and enlisted men to the European and Pa-



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Camp Reynolds served as a personnel replacement depot during World War II. Troops were outfitted with uniforms as they prepared to be shipped overseas to fight the war. At right, troops march on a parade ground.



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cific theaters of operations,” according to Miller’s history of the camp, which is now presented in a booklet published by Williams.

The camp was named for Pennsylvania Civil War hero Gen. John F. Reynolds, who was killed at Gettysburg.

Williams has been infor-

mally working on what he calls the “Camp Reynolds Project” for a couple decades; that work is starting to bear fruit as Williams digitizes artifacts and presents them on a webpage and works to finish a history of the camp on DVD.

He’s also awaiting refurbishment of a metal state historical marker that he recently recovered after it was stolen in 1999.

“One of my goals was to get the marker back up,” Williams said.

He thought he was going to have to reach out to civic and history-minded donors

Greenville videographer and “computer-chair” historian Art Williams talks about the Camp Reynolds Project.

to pay about \$2,000 for another marker, but the original turned up at a Sharon salvage yard in May.

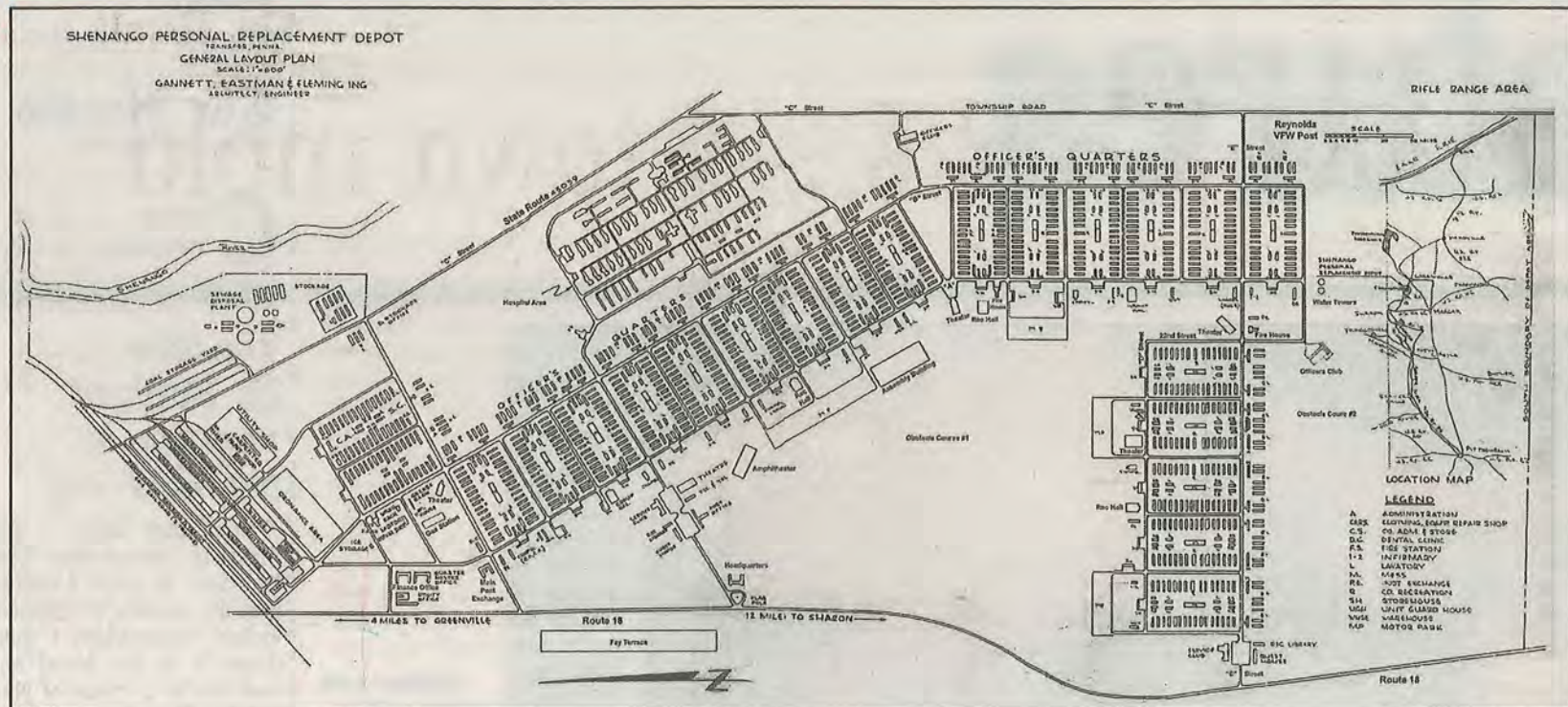
They sold it without knowing its significance, or that it was stolen, Williams said. He was able to track it down and the man who bought it, Dion Magestro of Masury, turned it over to Williams after he learned it was stolen state property.

The marker’s being restored at a Clearfield-based company and Williams hopes to reinstall the sign later this summer, he said.

The story behind the marker’s return is but one example of what Williams called “the good Lord’s” nudging to keep the project alive, even as those old enough to remember the camp are dying off.

“I’ve just kind of been slowly developing this,” Williams said from his office on North Mercer Street in downtown Greenville.

Two computers and numerous flash drives are filled with digitized documents, contributed photos and other ephemera that detail the life and times of the people who were part of the Camp Reynolds Shenango Personnel Replacement Depot, as the camp was formally



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Camp

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known.

"My goal is to share and preserve," Williams said. "To honor the 1 million guys who were there."

Williams has more than 200 photos from the U.S. Army Signal Corps and has preserved 80 of 86 issues of the camp's newspaper "The Victory News." He has camp phone books and maps and recorded memories of those who remember what it was like during that time.

"That's the part that's fascinating," Williams said. "You hear people talk who say you couldn't move in downtown (Greenville) then."

Williams would like to



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Troops exercise with a medicine ball at Camp Reynolds. At top, a map details the compound.

lead tours of former sites of the camp and give presentations to students of all ages.

For more on the Camp Reynolds Project, visit www.campreynolds.com