

CAMP WILLIAMS  
(128th Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area Subcomplex)  
(Camp Williams-Volk Field National Guard Training Center)  
204 - 219 Holden Street  
Camp Douglas  
Juneau County  
Wisconsin

HABS WI-381-B  
*HABS WI-381-B*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MIDWEST REGIONAL OFFICE  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
601 Riverfront Drive  
Omaha, NE 68102

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CAMP WILLIAMS  
(128<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY REGIMENT CANTONMENT AREA SUBCOMPLEX)

- Location: 204-219 Holden Street  
Camp Williams-Volk Field National Guard Training Center  
Village of Camp Douglas, Juneau County, Wisconsin
- Significance: The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area subcomplex was erected in 1940-1941 and is a significant component of Camp Williams—the Wisconsin Army National Guard’s primary annual training site prior to World War II. It was constructed by the Works Progress Administration and the Wisconsin Army National Guard (WIARNG) as part of a larger effort to provide permanent annual training headquarters and mess facilities to each of the WIARNG’s regiments.
- History: Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Hengels was the architect who designed the 128<sup>th</sup> complex and its buildings. He was born in 1876 in McHenry, Illinois, and studied architecture at Chicago’s Armour Institute, as well as abroad. Hengels eventually located in Milwaukee, where he became known as a specialist in reinforced concrete construction. Enlisting in the Wisconsin Army National Guard in 1917, Hengels was soon appointed by Governor Emmanuel Phillip to the position of State Military Architect and Engineer. He held this position until his death in 1943. Hengels utilized a variety of styles during his tenure. He designed virtually all armories and other National Guard buildings constructed in Wisconsin between World War I and World War II. Three of his armory designs were listed in the National Register of Historic Places: the Mission-style Oconomowoc Armory (1922), the Twentieth-Century Revivalist Janesville Armory (1925), and the Late Gothic Revival-style Whitefish Bay Armory (1928), which is no longer extant.<sup>1</sup>
- Regarding the subcomplex, the advent of the Great Depression brought forth a series of projects at Camp Williams sponsored by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) – an unskilled laborer program. Initially, the WPA and its cousin program – the Public Works Administration (PWA) – did not

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<sup>1</sup>“Hengels Rites to the Military,” *Milwaukee Journal*, 25 November 1943; “Colonel Hengels Dead at 67,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, 25 November 1943; “127<sup>th</sup> Regiment Infantry Company G, Oconomowoc National Guard Armory,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Prepared by Jean Lindsay Johnson and Elizabeth L. Miller (1984), Copy on file at the Division of Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI; National Register of Historic Places Inventory, Material online at [www.wisconsinhistory.org](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org). None of the Hengels-designed armories listed in the National Register remain in use by the Wisconsin Army National Guard. The Whitefish Bay Armory was listed on the National Register in 2002 (after it was sold by the WIARNG) and razed in 2004.

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allow for military construction, rather efforts were directed toward schools, hospitals and other community structures. In response, the National Guard Association, American Legion and other veterans' organizations lobbied intensely and the WPA developed a program to facilitate construction of National Guard structures. Through the combined efforts of the WPA and PWA programs, approximately 500 new armories were built and around 400 existing ones were renovated across the country. Many of these armories were small and designed to house only one company (between 100 and 150 personnel). Initially, the PWA undertook construction of most new armories, but by the mid-1930s, the WPA had assumed responsibility for the more numerous one-unit armories, while the PWA focused on larger headquarters and multi-unit stations. The WPA also completed projects at National Guard annual training sites or rifle ranges. In addition to work at Camp Williams, such activities are known to have occurred at Camp Ripley (Little Falls), Minnesota, and Camp Logan (Zion), Illinois.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1933, a number of one-story buildings for the regimental cantonment areas were planned at Camp Williams – to include 49 mess halls, eleven bath houses/latrines, a post headquarters, as well as an infirmary. The plan called for these buildings to be of a permanent and low-maintenance nature by being constructed of concrete, tile and steel. Work was to begin in late 1933. But federal funds failed to materialize and the project remained in the planning stage. By May 1934, improvements began with the construction of fourteen T-shaped bath house buildings (no longer extant) in the cantonment areas of the 127<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments, the 105<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment and the 64<sup>th</sup> Brigade headquarters. These buildings were constructed of buff-colored, hollow tile and completed in July 1934. While funding for the planned mess halls did not materialize in 1934, Adjutant General Ralph Immell, who also was president of the Adjutant Generals' Association, pursued a \$7 million construction program for the entire National Guard through the PWA/WPA. Wisconsin's share of that amount was to be \$760,000, which would fund further improvements at the camp and

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<sup>2</sup>Roy D. Keehn and the Illinois Armory Board, *The Illinois Armory Board Building Program: A Report Submitted to the Governor of Illinois and the 63<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly* (N.p.: 1943), 3-6; Works Progress Administration, *Report of the Progress of the WPA Program* (Washington, D.C.: WPA, various years/pages to follow): [1938] 70-71, [1939] 3-6, [1940] 80; Public Works Administration, *America Builds: The Record of the PWA* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1939), 203; "History of Camp Ripley," Material online at [www.dma.state.mn.us/cprpley/SpecFeatures/HistCR.htm](http://www.dma.state.mn.us/cprpley/SpecFeatures/HistCR.htm); "Camp Logan National Guard Rifle Range," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Prepared by Heritage Research, Ltd., Menomonee Falls, WI (1999).

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include tile mess halls to replace 47 existing wood structures.<sup>3</sup>

In early 1940, the first round of mess halls was constructed for the 105<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and 135<sup>th</sup> Medical regiments – a total of fourteen.<sup>4</sup> The buildings were 65' long x 25' 11" wide and constructed of 8" x 12" hollow buff tiles, "... practically the same as that used in the new type of bath house" built six years earlier.<sup>5</sup> Each could seat about 100 soldiers. A second round of mess hall construction began in December 1940 as part of a \$453,417 WPA-sponsored program. These buildings were 75' long x 25' wide. Fifteen were constructed in each cantonment area of the 127<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry regiments—to correspond with one mess hall for each of the regiment's fifteen companies.<sup>6</sup> Each regiment also received a regimental headquarters/officers' mess building with a full basement and a porch. The basement under the officers' hall was to be used for classes and conferences, or as a clubroom and post-exchange. All of the buildings were designed by Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Hengels, who was the state military architect.<sup>7</sup>

The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment area was built between 1940 and 1941. The facility was never utilized by the unit because it had been mobilized in late 1940 for training and, later, for service in World War II. Upon reorganization of the WIARNG after the war, all units of the WIARNG's 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division utilized Fort McCoy in Monroe County for annual training due to its large barracks area and 53,000 acres of training area. In 1948, the newly formed Wisconsin Air National Guard sent its units to Camp Williams for annual training due to the substantial airfield assets

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<sup>3</sup>"Kitchens Which May Be Erected at Camp Williams," *Wisconsin National Guard Review (WNGR)* 10:5 (September 1933): 8; "Improvements at Camp Williams," *WNGR* 11:1 (May 1934): 1; "Those New Bath Houses," *WNGR* 12:1 (January 1935): 7; "Track Facilities Greatly Improved at Camp Williams," *WNGR* 12:1 (January 1935): 7; *Historical and Pictorial Review, National Guard and Naval Militia, State of Wisconsin, 1939* (Baton Rouge, LA: Army and Navy Publishing Company, 1939), xxii.

<sup>4</sup>These structures are located in the Volk Field portion of the post.

<sup>5</sup>"14 New Mess Halls at Camp Williams," *WNGR* 17:3 (May 1940): 5.

<sup>6</sup>An infantry regiment prior to World War II consisted of three battalions each containing five companies – one headquarters company and four line companies. Companies A through D belonged to the 1<sup>st</sup> battalion, companies E through H were in the 2<sup>nd</sup> battalion and companies I, K, L and M comprised the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion. A company numbered approximately 100 soldiers.

<sup>7</sup>"Improvements Are Under Way at Camp Williams," *WNGR* 17:8 (December 1940): 12; "Wait Until You See Camp Williams," *WNGR* 18:5 (June 1941): 3; "New Mess Halls at Camp Williams," *WNGR* 17:3 (May 1940): 5.

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constructed on the post during the 1930s and 1940s. Camp Williams was divided in 1953 between the air and army components, with the Air Guard portion designated in 1957 as Volk Field. With the Air Guard operating most of the base, the Army Guard only controlled the Quartermaster's area, a portion of the former 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area, as well as the entire 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area.<sup>8</sup>

While never used for its intended function as a regimental cantonment area, the subject subcomplex has been utilized for a variety of activities. Many of the mess halls were remodeled into barracks and utilized from 1958 to 1995 by the Wisconsin Military Academy to develop future officers through its Officer Candidate School. Thereafter, the Badger Challenge Academy—an outreach program sponsored by the WIARNG for troubled teens—utilized the subcomplex. In 2001, the entire cantonment area became the headquarters of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Separate Infantry Brigade, which deployed to Kuwait in 2005 and Iraq in 2009. The brigade headquarters moved in 2007 to a newly completed armory building at Camp Williams. Today, the 128<sup>th</sup> cantonment area is used for storage and as an administrative and medical processing facility for deploying WIARNG soldiers.<sup>9</sup>

The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area represents an effort to create a modern, sanitary and low maintenance cantonment site for a National Guard infantry regiment prior to World War II. Historically, each regiment in the WIARNG had a specific cantonment area at Camp Williams to which it would return year after year for their annual training encampments – an event lasting between one and three weeks. A cantonment is a temporary, military camp that generally possesses only minimal facilities to house troops and to conduct garrison activities. Training, such as shooting and maneuvers, would go on elsewhere on post. Within the cantonment area, tents were commonly used for living quarters and arranged in an organized fashion that promoted unit integrity. Any of the area's buildings would be of a minimalist nature and often were dedicated to functions that promoted sanitation and organization such as mess halls, latrines and headquarters facilities. This level of military facility fit well with the National Guard model for annual training in that units would only be located on the base for a short period of

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<sup>8</sup>“126<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron is Proud of its Record,” *WNGR* 25:6 (November 1948): 5, 16; Robert Hoagenson, “The History of Camp Douglas, Wisconsin, and Camp Williams-Volk Field,” (July 1966), 14-20.

<sup>9</sup>“Wisconsin Military Reservation Quartermaster Department Historic District,” Determination of Eligibility prepared by Elizabeth Miller, (April 1999); “Volk Field ANGB,” Material online at [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org).

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time and facilities used to support such units would be vacant much of the year. Furthermore, prior to the Great Depression, National Guard bases were developed and maintained with state funds, which generally provided a minimal budget for improving these facilities. Beginning in the mid-1930s, the influx of WPA funds allowed the WIARNG to transform the buildings within Camp Williams' cantonment areas from rudimentary frame structures to modern, sanitary and easily maintained masonry buildings.<sup>10</sup>

An examination of 1920s and 1930s aerial photographs of National Guard bases in a variety of states indicates a remarkable degree of similarity in the layout of cantonment sites. Each cantonment area carries a line of one-story company mess hall buildings that anchor a line of tents, which would house that company's soldiers. Headquarters buildings are positioned in a central location and latrine buildings are scattered and not immediately adjacent to the line of mess halls, which most likely was an effort to maintain sanitation. The subject resource fits this general layout. One mess hall for each of the regiment's fifteen companies line the northern side of Holden Street while the regimental headquarters building is located across the street and centered on that line. While occupied by two parking lots and a 2007 National Guard armory, a large open area to the north facilitated the placement of the living tents for each company. While the latrine buildings for the 128<sup>th</sup> area are no longer extant, a 2001 base site map shows that the latrine buildings in the former 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Cantonment Area (built at the same time as the 128<sup>th</sup>) were located well away from the messing and headquarters structures.<sup>11</sup>

Description:

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area sub-

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<sup>10</sup>General information regarding cantonment areas, National Guard training and garrison living during annual training was gleaned from a general investigation of the *Wisconsin National Guard Review* from 1924 to 1950, the *Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: Democrat Printing Company, 1900-1942), and the author's twenty years of experience in the Minnesota and Wisconsin Army National Guard.

<sup>11</sup>Aerial Photo of Camp Grayling, Michigan, *WNGR* 4:5 (September 1927): 9; Postcard of Camp Ripley, Minnesota (ca. 1955), Image on file at Heritage Research, Ltd, Menomonee Falls, WI; "Where the New York Guard Trains," *WNGR* 6:1 (January 1929): 19; "Where California Guard Camps," *WNGR* 6:5 (September 1929): 18; "Camp Perry, Ohio," *WNGR* 8:6 (November 1931): 6; "Base Site Plan 2001," Copy on file at Heritage Research, Ltd. The bath house/latrine buildings in the 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area are no longer extant.

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complex consists of sixteen nearly identical buildings constructed between 1940 and 1941. Each structure is one-story and built of tan, glazed tiles with red brick accents. Fifteen of these fabrications (205-210, 212-219) were constructed as mess halls and line the northern side of Holden Street, which is a northwest-southeast street at the southern edge of the base. A single building (204), which was designed as a regimental headquarters, is located on the south side of Holden Street and centered on the mess halls. Building 211, which is a circa-1950s, steel-sided structure, was constructed in a one-time open area between Buildings 210 and 212 and was never historically associated with the cantonment area.

2. Condition of Fabric: The condition of the exterior fabric is good. The complex retains much of its original size, scale and massing of its buildings. This despite the fact that four former mess halls have been joined by hyphens to form two buildings (210 and 218-219). Two additional buildings (204, 213) have had small additions constructed. All buildings have experienced wholesale window and door replacement. With regard to the interior, thirteen of the fifteen mess hall buildings were converted in 1958 into barracks. Two of those joined by a hyphen were remodeled into a large, central mess hall (Building 210). Buildings 205 through 209 retain some degree of interior integrity as it regards the 1958 barracks renovation. The rest of the mess halls have over the years been altered to accommodate office and medical examination use. They retain virtually no original fabric. The interior of Building 204 (regimental headquarters) was also renovated.

- B. Setting: The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area is in the Camp Williams portion of the Camp Williams-Volk Field National Guard Training Center. It is at the very southern edge of the base, adjacent to Interstate Highway 90-94. The facility's main entrance is to the east. Two parking lots and a National Guard armory completed in 2007 occupy the area to the northeast. A large parking lot and a modern office building are located to the west. The 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment Cantonment Area (HABS No. WI-381-A) is to the north northwest

Sources:

“127<sup>th</sup> Regiment Infantry Company G, Oconomowoc National Guard Armory.” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Prepared by Jean Lindsay Johnson and Elizabeth L. Miller, 1984. Copy on file at the Division of Historic Preservation, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, WI.

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