History of Camp San Luis Obispo

Camp San Luis Obispo derives its name from the city of San Luis Obispo, five miles away, a community with a normal population of 9,000 which grew up gradually through the years around the Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa, founded in 1772 by Father Junipero Serra.

The camp nestles in Chorro Valley at the foot of the Santa Lucia mountains of the Coast Range, midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and a short march from the Pacific Ocean at Morro Bay.

The region, with its thriving beef cattle, dairy, and other agricultural pursuits, is rich in scenic beauty and the historic influences of Spain and Old Mexico. Three flags have flown here—those of Spain, Mexico and the Republic of California—before the Stars and Stripes of the United States of America were unfurled over the presidios along the California coast.

The camp site was formerly Camp Merriam, summer training ground of the California National Guard, marked by a cluster of administration buildings. Construction of the present federal establishment—at a cost of more than $17,000,000—was commenced in the fall of 1940 and completed in the early summer of 1941. The camp was first a city of pyramidal tents among miles of roads and streets, parade grounds, ranges and basic utility installations, but in 1942 the tent frames were converted to wooden huts. The huts, each of which accommodates a maximum of six men, are small cabins with windows and gabled roofs, and are heated with oil-burning stoves.

Infantry divisions and other units have received training here, and tens of thousands of men have gone from Camp San Luis Obispo to various theaters of combat throughout the world.

The picture story in this book is necessarily limited to fragments of camp life and activities, because of restrictions for the security of military information. It is attempted, however, to tell part of the story of each man's activities here, and to give an insight into the camp routine and recreation enjoyed as the soldier prepares for combat.
A soldier and his girl stroll the beach at Morro Bay, with famed Morro Rock in the background.
Popular meeting place is the beautiful U.S.O. Club, on Santa Rosa Street, in San Luis Obispo.

Colonel Henry T. Bull assumed command as Camp Commander while 7,000 workmen were still on the job of construction in December 1940.

The color guard marches by on the Main Parade grounds.
Camp Headquarters building is typical of administration buildings.

Many hut areas are beautified by flowers.

Camp San Luis Obispo is a city of hutments. A segment of camp.
The Elephant Train is the Camp's free transportation system.

If a soldier has served at this post the Locator will find his address.

"Home, Sweet Home" to every soldier at Camp San Luis Obispo—hutments!
Color guard on the march.

A soldier may have guests at the Guest House.

(below) A row of jeeps under the garrison flag.
The Main Store of the Post Exchange is one of 14 "PX's".

The Post Exchange even operates a Beauty Parlor, at the Station Hospital.

Repair of shoes is an important economy item.
First stop after the pay tables is the Post Exchange.

Plenty of clothing at the Quartermaster warehouses.

Great warehouses for food, clothing and supplies.
MEDICAL CARE

Expert dentistry is provided.

One thousand beds are provided at the Station Hospital.

Wounds and broken bones are cared for in the Surgery of the Station Hospital.

Laboratory technicians are on the job.

Completely equipped X-Ray room.
Relic of Early California days is this old adobe, standing in the heart of camp. It has been dedicated to worship as the Shrine of the Centurion.

Sacred rites are read in the field.

Nine chapels in camp welcome soldiers to worship.

Services for men of every faith are held each Sunday, with occasional mid-week services.
The soldier in his hutment uses a needle.

Civilian women drive cars and trucks.

Where the soldier goes, there goes his dog.

A branch bank is located on the Post.
Administration buildings have been beautified.

The branch Post Office is a convenience near the Service Club.

Opening a Christmas package...under a palm.
Soldiers study at the Service Club library.

Each company has its dayroom, where soldiers may gather for recreation.
The camp newspaper, "Shot 'n Shell."

(below) The lineup begins early at the War Department theaters.

Every soldier is anxious to sign the payroll!
Many men now fighting on many fronts have marched on the post Parade Grounds.

Half tracks and jeeps pass in review.
Those purple hills! Marching forward to a formal retreat ceremony.

Advance! Attack is the tradition.

Formal parades are a part of every soldier's training.
Major Samuel Woodfill, "outstanding soldier of the AEF," watches machine guns spray live fire over the heads of crawling infantrymen on the infiltration course.

On the firing line. The Santa Lucia mountains form a natural backstop for small arms and artillery.
Close combat fighting. A design for quick death—Judo.

The log ladder is a muscle builder.
Up shipside on the obstacle course.

Judo is a rough game.
A refreshing pause in a long march.

The Army dog.

The Ordnance worker must be precise.
A specialist instructs an Army cook in meat cutting and preparation at the Cook's and Baker's School.

They don't need any practice for this course.

(below) Green vegetables for the table.

Picnic grounds with barbecue pits for off-duty gatherings near rifle ranges.

Army cooks are made, not born. They receive instructions on the preparation of food, Army style, at the Cook's and Baker's School.
A soldier takes it in his stride — kitchen police.

Come and get it! Chow line at a company mess hall.

A mess hall kitchen. Well prepared food by Army trained cooks.

Bread from the ovens of the Quartermaster bakery.

Filipino soldiers prepare a pig roast.
Right on the button! Fighting man throws butt stroke on the bayonet course.

Cold steel! Soldiers close in for the kill.
Camp entertainment is enthusiastically received.

Service Club Cafeteria affords the finest of facilities.

A song at the picnic grounds near the barbecue pits.
Army Nurses sing in the Amphitheater at a worship service.

The Amphitheater design was inspired by the Early California missions of the region.

Thousands can gather in the Amphitheater for military assemblies.
A Service Club is the place to go for off-duty relaxation.

Soldiers crowd around a Service Club fountain.

Jitterbugs take over at a Service Club dance.

Girls from neighboring communities are faithful in attendance at the Service Club dances.

A soldier and his girl enjoy refreshments at a Service Club.
The crowd gathers for a show at the Field House.

All-out attendance at the Field House during a visit by Bob Hope.

The huge Field House is amply equipped for all forms of athletics.

Boxing draws throngs to see the leather pushers.
Aquatic fun in swimming pool provided for all military personnel.

Screen celebrity Rita Hayworth serves as official decorator of soldiers' dayrooms.

Baseball diamonds are to be found in every open space.

Wrestling mats are provided for the heavies.

Station Hospital patients find recreation at the Red Cross recreation building.
Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa, founded by Father Junipero Serra in 1772. From this mission the city, and Camp San Luis Obispo, were named.