



# WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Fred Zumbalen riding "Tony" outside the ammunition depot stable in 1942.



Chimney and remnants of the old barracks.



Park supervisor Steve Gammon and Fred Zumbalen near barracks's flag foundation.

## Finding the Old Barracks in a Small World

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

Marine veteran Fred Zumbalen of Weymouth discovered his former quarters, or what's left of it, last month. With the help of park supervisor Steve Gammon and myself, we located the ruins 400 yards from the Leavitt Street gate.

Zumbalen was stationed at the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot and Cohasset Annex as a guard from February 1942 to July 1943.

After his duty here, Zumbalen served in the Pacific during World War II, earning the Purple Heart Medal for battle wounds suffered on the island of Saipan.

Zumbalen was born on June 3, 1925 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He comes from a strong Marine Corps lineage. Both his father and uncle were "Leathernecks" in World War I.

After the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, he decided to continue tradition and headed to the Marine Corps recruiter the following week and signed up.

He has nothing but fond memories of his stay here.

"By golly, it's all coming back now!" Zumbalen exclaimed. "Every now and then, I would wonder to my wife Mary whether anything is left from the old barracks. Now I know."

"I believe that's the area right over there," said Gammon. "That's the flag foundation behind the tree, and there is the barracks chimney back to the right 50 yards."

"Not much left of it now," said Zumbalen. "When I first came here this barracks was brand new. At least there is still some ghost of a foundation left. It was a nice configuration then, shaped like an "H." We had a mess hall, infirmary and a movie theater here. Plus, we had dances for any women who wanted to meet a muscle "Jarhead" (Marine).

"This place was heaven for a Marine post. In fact, it was considered an old man's post. When a Marine did his 20 or 30 years, the Corps placed

them here before discharge.

"When I first came to Hingham, I was assigned as a guard over at the Mainside, now Bare Cove Park. It was in the middle of winter, and I froze while walking my duty. As a result, I requested mounted patrol with a horse instead. The Corps fixed me up with "Tony." We got along swell except for one embarrassing incident.

"Our stable's door opening was not that tall. One night, while coming back from duty, I dozed a little in the saddle. Tony always knew his way back, but he had a mind of his own. As he entered the stall I was knocked out of my saddle and on to the ground. What a rude awakening!

"While on duty we only carried 45s for pistols. We got rifles later. Off hours we would hang out at the Colonial Lunch bar (now, *The Snug*) and the Old Mill Grill (now, *Liberty Grill*). People there knew we were coming because we smelled like horse

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## *Finding the Old Barracks and in a Small World (continued)*



*Zumbalen sits with mascot "Gregory" in 1942.*

manure. They would usually blurt out 'Wew...here comes the mounted!' Therefore, we weren't too popular with the ladies.

"During Christmas, people would invite us into their homes and let us stay awhile. There were dances at the Annex, the Mainside, Paragon Park, and the USO club on Route 228. That's where I met my wife Mary.

"We also billeted the French navy at the Annex. In the early days of the war, a French battleship, the *Richelieu*, was torpedoed in the North African Campaign. She was sent to Brooklyn to be repaired while the crew were sent here in the meantime.

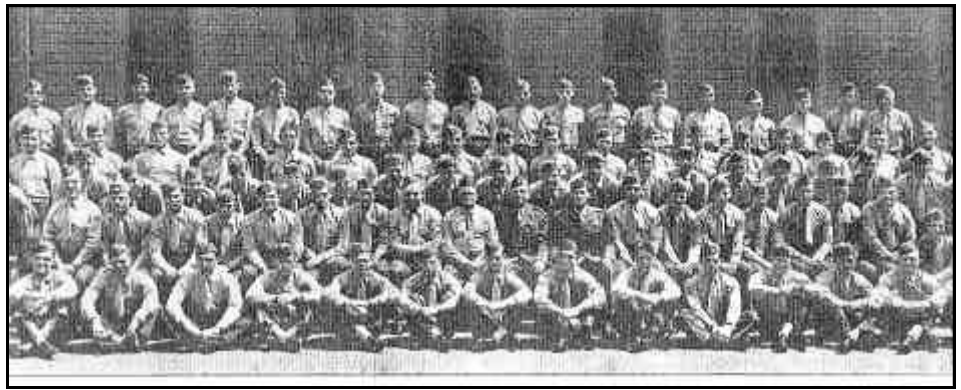
"They couldn't speak English, and we couldn't speak French. But we got along fine through sign language. We alternated bunks.

"What I found fascinating about them is that they carried small hunks of cheese with them. And every now and then they would take out a paring knife and eat it when they got hungry.

"They were a big hit with the ladies. They had that accent plus they wore a blue tam with a red tassel on top. To us, they looked like a bunch of sissies. But they weren't. They were good drinkers. The Hingham girls were really taken aback by them.

"While on guard duty there were never any security breaches. The Depot furnished ammunition not only for the U.S. but also for Britain, France, Russia and Canada. We even had our Navy subs pick up torpedoes here during high tide.

"One of my best friends at the Depot was the Marine bulldog mascot called "Gregory." Off duty he fol-



*Marine guards pose in front of Annex barracks in 1944.*

lowed me everywhere. I can still hear him panting next to me.

"After my stay here I was sent to the Pacific. On the way over, we had this captain who had a high pitched voice that scared the hell out of us.

"When he first came on the intercom he squeaked, 'Attention, this is the captain speaking.' Us Marines said, 'Scheezus! What the hell was that? Is there a little kid at the helm? Now we are in for it.' But everything worked out. We got to port on time.

"I first saw combat on the island of Saipan. That's the place where I got wounded. I was the only one left on an eight-man patrol. It took me a year to recover.

"I was glad when that battle ended. We encountered bonsai charges, hand-to-hand combat and Japanese women jumping off cliffs. They were told by their army we would kill them. We talked some of them out of it through interpreters. I read someplace that 8,000 jumped. That I'll never forget.

"While convalescing on all those hospital ships, I eventually came down with asbestosis. That stuff was used on ships as pipe insulation. It was hanging down everywhere. We didn't know what it was. I'm fine now.

"The most memorable event of the war took place at the hospital in Honolulu, Hawaii while bed-ridden with my wounds. That's when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt pinned the Purple Heart Medal on my chest. He surprised us all when he showed up in a wheelchair. He kept his illness hush-hush so not to look weak in time of war. He died less than

a year later.

"After the war I went into the hotel business as a food and beverage manager. I was also commander of the VFW in Quincy in 1951. Now I'm happily retired. Well, sort of. I need a cane for my arthritis."

Steve Gammon said the barracks was burned down in the mid-1980s. Now it is a lone chimney surrounded by concrete remnants hidden among the tall weeds.

I first discovered Fred Zumbalen from Hingham's former veteran director Mike Cunningham. While I was researching the ammunition depot's history, Mike called and said he located one of the former Marine guards.

I contacted Zumbalen and eventually interviewed him for the Library of Congress Veteran's History Project.

The name Zumbalen always sounded familiar to me. It turns out he was my former boss while I worked at the Sheraton Boston as a cook.

After the Sheraton Corporation, Zumbalen worked for the Red Coach Grill where he became "Manager of the Month" and won a car for his managerial efforts. He beat out 849 other contestants for the award.

His wife Mary turns out to be the niece of the late Nazareno Casna (nicknamed "Poppy") who was my customer when I ran a Quincy Patriot Ledger route in the early 1960s. He was my uncle Angelo's (nicknamed "Shibi") best friend in high school.

I asked Fred whether it is true that there is no such thing as an "ex" Marine. He emphatically responds, "You better believe it!" ■