

**Sandy Hook, Gateway NRA, NPS  
Oral History Interview with Albert Germaine,  
Child at the Fort Hancock, 1931  
by Melissa Kozlowski, Monmouth University, NPS intern  
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Transcribed by Melissa Kozlowski 2003**



Al Germaine, second from right, posing by disappearing gun, 1931



Al Germaine with Melissa Kozlowski, 2003

Today is Wednesday, March 26<sup>th</sup> 2003 and this is the beginning of an interview with Albert Germaine at the Education Center on Sandy Hook, NJ. Mr. Germaine spent family vacations with relatives stationed at Fort Hancock and attended school in the base in the 1930's.

Question: We'll start with an easy one. When and where were you born?

Answer: Newark, NJ. Sept. 20<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: I went to school in Newark, we moved around a little bit, I went to St. Aloysius School in Newark, a parochial school, and then I went to St. James high school. That was in 1939, and then the war came, and I had to go to war.

Q: Was your father, or your grandfather, in the military?

A: My father did, he was in the Coast Artillery, and he went in in 1912, I guess.

Q: How did you become involved at Fort Hancock?

A: Because my father and this friend of his went in together, now my father had to leave the service because of hardship, in those days they had a lot of diseases and his sister and father and brother died of influenza, so he had to get out of the service for hardship reasons and he had to support the family. He got out of the service and it cost him sixteen dollars and forty-two cents to get out, that was unusual in those days but he had to pay it to get out. Isn't that something? So, he got out of the service and his friend, who was Louis Razga, he stayed on. He went to WWI and he became an orderly for General Pershing, and then after he came back to the service he was at Fort Eustis and then he went to the Philippines and then he went to Panama, and he eventually went to Sandy Hook. I don't know exactly when he came here to Fort Hancock but he retired from here in 1936, I guess, or '37. So, that was the relationship between my father and he, and that's the reason why I am here at Sandy Hook today.

Q: When do you first remember coming to Fort Hancock?

A: Probably in 1931, about 1931 I guess.

Q: And when was the last time that you were here as a boy?

A: Probably 1938, because he had retired and I have documents showing his retirement here, and they had a parade for him.

- Q: Did you know anything about Fort Hancock before you came here?
- A: No, I was only a little peanut.
- Q: Please state the name and rank of the person you were living with here.
- A: Master Sergeant Louis Razga, R-A-Z-G-A.
- Q: Thank you. And his job here?
- A: He was in charge of C Battery, [52<sup>nd</sup> Coast Artillery] he was the commander of the C Battery, which was an enlisted man that, as far as the enlisted men were in charge of, a Master Sergeant was something like, almost like an officer, as far as an enlisted man goes, that's as high as he can go. He was a very respectable man, and very disciplined. He looked like little general, and he acted like it, too. His stature, and when he talked to you, and his actions, very dignified. You don't see that today, and I was impressed by that as a youngster.
- Q: What building did you live in?
- A: 73A.
- Q: You attended school at Fort Hancock at one point, didn't you?
- A: Yes, I was, right here, right in his building [Building 102]. I was probably six years old at the time, and kids today, they go to kindergarten when they're four, or pre-kindergarten, right? Well, I was probably five or six when I went to kindergarten here, probably in that other room.
- Q: What do you remember about attending school here?
- A: Not much, not much. I remember we came in on that one side of the building, and we came in the other side there someplace, you know, I was only a little kid and I don't remember too much about that.
- Q: Do you remember anything about games, activities, or entertainment while you were here?
- A: Oh yeah, for sure. We, I can remember one at the new movie house. They had an old movie house, but they built anew one in 1933. In those days, that was pretty luxurious. In the lobby of it, Sergeant Razga's daughter bought me a Milky Way, a frozen Milky Way. That was the first frozen Milky Way I ever had, it was huge. 5 cents. And they had that in the lobby of the movie house. And then, as you went into the movie, all the seats were velvet, and each seat had an emblem of the United States of America on it. I can remember that. It was really beautiful. I guess it was velvet, it was maroon colored you know. Can you visualize it? I

remember that, and it was great because they moved the old movie across the street and that's the old chapel now.

Q: Did you attend any religious services while at the Fort?

A: I don't recall really.

Q: Do you remember any servants, minorities, or women that were working at the Fort?

A: Well, I knew the Sergeant, Master Sergeant Gooch and Bonnett, and they had daughters and sons, and we became very acquainted with the Gooch boys. There were four boys, I believe, and one girl, Juanita. I have photographs of Juanita here now. They were from Kentucky, their father was a Master Sergeant and he moved around like Uncle Louis did, in the service, and he was in charge of one of the batteries too. You had A Battery, B Battery, and C Battery, and there are a lot of men in each battery, and they were in charge of them.

Q: Did you go to the beach while you were here?

A: Oh yes, all the time. We went to the beach, the fishing was tremendous, and nobody was there on the beach except us.

Q: Which beaches did you go to?

A: North Beach, mostly always North Beach, because it was close by, in fact, you could run right out to it now.

Q: Did you take any trips to New York City while you were here?

A: No, no. In fact I don't go to NYC even now. I haven't been to NYC in 20, 25 years. In fact I had an uncle in New York that left me a will and I wouldn't go over to get it. That's what I think of New York.

Q: Was this a fun or a boring place to stay?

A: Oh, it was exciting. At 5 o'clock retreat the flag would go down, and the bugler would bugle, and everybody would stand at attention. It was quite a light ceremony, and Sgt. Razga would say to me, "Now you stand up straight," and he'd make me salute. He, I was a little six-year-old kid, saluting like little John Kennedy in Washington. There were a lot of things; there were the ball games, Sgt. Razga was an umpire. He was an umpire for those games, and there again he had a blue serge suit on just like a regular umpire, which was what they wore in those days, and he was behind the plate and I remember watching him, and he was just like a general, like I told you. He controlled the game. Like I said, the beach was tremendous, it was great. Believe me, this was like a big playground

for us children. Here, I'm 77 years old and I still come here and it's a playground for me now. I get goose bumps coming in. That's the way this place affects me. This is a great place. In fact, if they allowed it, they could bury me here.

Q: Tell us about any particularly humorous stories you may have.

A: We used to sell beach plums. You know how kids sell lemonade, and so forth? Well, we would have a little table on Sergeant's Row over there, and beach plums were plentiful and people loved them because they made jam out of them. We'd sell a thing like this for 5 cents, you know, 5 cents was a lot of money in those days. There were always things to do, you know, because there was always activity going on with the soldiers. Don't forget there were probably hundreds of, or thousand, two thousand soldiers, I don't know exactly at the time but there were always a lot of things going on. We would come down from the city on a Friday night, and we'd stay, and leave Sunday night, and all the soldiers would go to the Highlands on a Saturday night and they would get smashed. So, consequently, they would wind up in the jail here, the guardhouse they called it. That's the museum now. These fellas had a little rascality, and they put them in jail, in the guardhouse for a day or two. I can also so remember they had denim clothes on, and the jackets had a big white "P" on the back. It was like they were in a big jail or something. So, over in back of [Building] 75 and Sgt.'s Row, they had a road there, and the road was for the trash. The mules came with a little cart, a triangular shaped cart, and this big mule pulled it, and they emptied the garbage in there and you know who was emptying the garbage? The prisoners, with the big "P" on the back. And the guard he had a gun on his hip, and he made sure that, this seems ridiculous, but they had to maintain discipline, no matter how strict it seemed. I look at it from a little kid's viewpoint, but I do remember that. I liked the mules. They had the mules right here at the stables. They didn't have fancy vehicles in those days, so that's the way they operated.

Q: Do you recall there being vehicles on the Fort?

A: Not many of them. Now Sgt. Razga's son-in-law married his daughter, of course. So, he was an M.P. He was in charge of the M.P.'s, and he looked like a movie star. He had square jaws, a beautiful, rugged face with wavy black hair, and he had, he would polish his buttons, and they all took the buttons off, you know, and they polished them and they put them back on because, and they polished their shoes, their shoes were like looking in a mirror. So, now Sparky, his name was Sparky Adams, he thought he was hot stuff. He was a little proud of himself, but nevertheless he was in charge of the M.P.'s, and he had his motorcycle. I watched him get onto that motorcycle, and he looked like a million dollars, a movie star. I mean, can you visualize this guy? Beautiful, black hair, wavy. Boy he thought he was something, going down Hartshorne [Drive] down there. And he was in charge. As a kid, I admired him.

Q: Were Sparky and Sgt. Razga's daughter married at the Fort?

A: I don't know where they got married, but the both of them went to Panama eventually, and she acquired yellow fever and she died. So, Sparky had a son, and he lived in Mt. Laurel, New Jersey and he died of cancer as a young person. Margie, she died, like I said, and she was buried at Kenneth Square at the DuPont Cemetery where Sgt. Razga was buried. The whole family was there. The reason that I say the DuPont Cemetery was when Sgt. Razga retired here at the base, he had a job with Brinks, Brinks Armored, for a short period of time. And then Mr. DuPont, one of the richest men on the world, probably the richest man in the world at the time, wanted to acquire a security man, in Delaware, on his 75 room mansion. They looked for Uncle Louis, Sgt. Razga, and he went down to inquire for the job, and he got it. So he was, every night he would go up on the hill. This is very impressive, the estate in Delaware is 12 miles by 24 miles and that included all the DuPont ancestors and in-laws and so forth. And it still is that way. The DuPont's, there's thousands of them integrated and so forth. In fact, I have a family tree of all that, but anyhow, Sgt. Razga, when he retired he went down there, and this house was up on a hill. It was about a half mile around, the railroad car went around it, this huge high hill, and that house sat up there, that 75 room house. Today it's a hospital, I think. Sgt. Razga would go up there every night at 8 o'clock, and he would have a .45 strapped on his blue serge suit, and he would go, through a period of the night, he would check the house periodically. And then about 7 o'clock in the morning he would come down the hill and Mr. DuPont gave him this little cottage down there free for utility, you know, free room and board and all that. A beautiful little cottage he had down there. And I can remember Mr. DuPont giving him, around Christmas time, in 1940, five one hundred dollar bills. You know what five one hundred dollar bills in those days was worth? If you had five dollars in your pocket you were rich. For Christmas, that's what Mr. DuPont gave him every year. So, that was an interesting place. That's down in Brandywine. So, we had a lot of fun down there, too. So, you see, what happened out of the companionship of my father with Sgt. Razga. He became a very interesting man, like I'm telling you. So, consequently it was exciting for us kids to be here, in this place, our little domain, here, our playground. We used to run around in the nine gun batteries. So, those were exciting days.

Q: To this day, are you in touch with anyone that you met while you were at Fort Hancock?

A: Yes. I'm in communication with Juanita Gooch, Sal Giovenco's wife. They got married here on the base at the little chapel in 1942, they both of them. Juanita was a friend of Eleanor Razga, Sgt. Razga's daughter, and they were very good friends. They were both beautiful girls. Sgt. Razga's daughter became an Army nurse and she was a Lieutenant nurse. During the War and she went to England as a nurse.

- Q: Is there anything else you would like to add that we haven't covered in the interview?
- A: There's things that probably I will dig up later, but Sgt. Razga, you see when he retired he stayed on the base as a Superintendent for the CCC. The CCC's were the Civil[ian] Conservation Corps which was young boys that didn't know what to do with themselves. So they had a, President Roosevelt created this, the CCC's. And Sgt. Razga had a whole bunch of boys here on Sandy Hook and they did chores and they moved the 20 inch Rodman Gun, the big gun, they moved that. That's been moved three times since I can remember. The first location, I believe, it was facing south, somewhere in back of the old movie [theater]. Later, I think probably during the War, they wanted to get rid of it and they moved it right here facing west in between the roads by the stable. That was facing there until probably the mid, when the National Park Service came in they moved it. I forget when I can look at my pictures and see, they moved it where it is now. I used to slide down that, stick my face out of the front of it. There's only two of those Rodman guns, I believe the other ones in Brooklyn, and this is the other one here. It was never fired, either one of them.

### **Conclusion of Interview**