

Part 2, Induction,

Camp Upton, in Yaphank, NY, served as a training center in World War I. It was there that Sgt, Irving Berlin was asked to create an entertainment that could help raise funds for a new facility. He wrote the musical "*Yip, Yip, Yaphank*" that proved a roaring success in the camp, and later on Broadway. His most popular number was "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," sung with real feeling by many thousands of doughboys for years afterwards.

As World War I ended, Camp Upton became a demobilization site, but with that task completed, the camp was inactivated in 1920. It remained idle until it was reactivated in 1940 to facilitate the new mobilization effort.

For four months after our marriage on October 10, 1942, my wife, Lillian, and I lived in a Times Square hotel, frequented almost exclusively by theatrical persons of some renown. One amusing memory of that experience occurred after a waiter tried to deliver a large room service cart that we had not ordered. It took a while to straighten out the fact that the order had been placed by our next door neighbor. Later that night, I was awakened by a knock on the door. Opening it, I was greeted by a beautiful, statuesque showgirl who said seductively, "Hi, I'm Eve." With a quick look back at my wife, who was still sleeping, I answered

"Well, I'm not Adam," and pointed her to our neighbor's door. Just another room service error.



Figure 1 Lillian & Sy

Virtually overnight, on 12 February, 1943, I went from the pampered life of performers who worked late and awoke late, to the "Oh! How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning" existence of a lowly inductee. But that was not my major problem. Since childhood, I have been allergic to wool. When we stripped off our civilian clothes and were issued woolen army uniforms, complete with woolen long johns, I could not bear to put them on. My flesh crawls to this day at the thought of my body not merely touched by something as minimal as a woolen muffler, but completely and tightly wrapped in wool. Absolute agony, and thoughts of desertion never left me until days later, when my wife secretly had a set of full cotton "long john" underclothes delivered.

For the rest of that first day, we went alternately from freezing outdoors on long lines, to undressing in super heated buildings for medical exams and inoculations. Over and over, as we waited to enter the medical hut for multiple injections, we were loudly warned by veterans of at least two days to "Beware of the hook." From the look on many of the recruits' faces, I was not the only one contemplating desertion.

In one of the super heated buildings, we took the standard intelligence test. My mind was completely occupied with allergic suffering, while my hand as it scratched all over my body could hardly hold the pencil. The brutal heat caused perspiration that intensified the discomfort. All in all, it was a miracle that my test score did not indicate an IQ suitable only for permanent latrine duty.

Fortunately, the stay in Camp Upton lasted only a few days, and I soon found myself in the seaside resort of Atlantic City, New Jersey for Air Corps basic training.

Quartered in the luxurious Marlborough–Blenheim Hotel, with only four in a room, we had the daily pleasure of marching along the boardwalk to the rifle range, and to other training facilities. Because of my Marine experience, I was appointed a Drillmaster, with responsibility for shaping a company into something approximating a military unit. In general, I enjoyed the work, despite the great differences between these recruits and the Marines I had trained with.

One somewhat disturbing incident occurred as I was running a dry-firing lesson on the sandy beach. I emphasized the importance of holding the Springfield '03 rifle properly, especially the necessity for gripping it with the right thumb over the stock, rather than upright. This would prevent damage to the eye by a weapon's kickback. As the men lay in the prone position, practicing sighting and squeezing their triggers, I walked among them, randomly gripping a barrel and simulating kickback with a short, backwards movement. One of the men who had a thumb standing up alongside the barrel was slightly cut under his eye by his thumbnail's recoil. He cried loudly and wept unabashedly until I took him to an aid station. I thought this might be a valuable lesson for him, but I certainly hoped that this particular GI would never find himself in a combat situation.

In any event, I was asked to join the permanent training cadre, but I could not accept spending the rest of the war safely and comfortably in the lap of luxury. Shortly thereafter, I was on my way to Fort Monmouth, a principal Signal Corps training base.