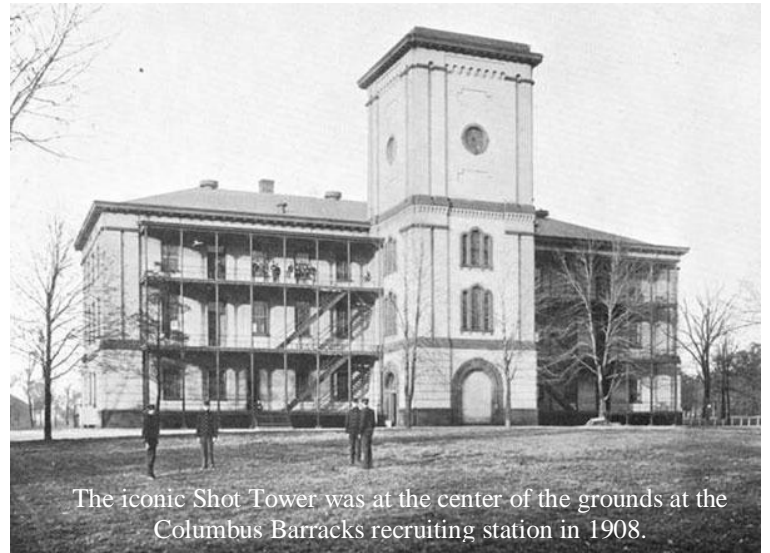


As it were...

## U.S. Army in 1908 was more 'exclusive' than one might think

The iconic Shot Tower was at the center of the grounds at the Columbus Barracks recruiting station in 1908.

By the fall of 1908, the United States had not been at war for several years. And with the successful conclusion of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine Insurrection, America would not be involved in another major conflict until the outbreak of World War I in 1917.



But that did not mean that the military could not use a few more good people from time to time. To that end, signs were seen in public places around Columbus that simply said "WANTED — Able-Bodied Men for the U. S. Army."

A young man wishing to become part of that army was directed to what was then the second-largest Army recruiting station in the United States: Columbus Barracks on the northeast side of downtown Columbus.

Originally opened in 1861 as the Columbus Arsenal at the outbreak of the Civil War, the facility was used a storage and distribution facility until 1875, when it became a recruiting station as well and its name was changed to Columbus Barracks. Expanding in size and complexity over the years, by 1908 it consisted of a number of buildings in addition to the iconic Shot Tower in the center of the grounds. These included barracks and even a bandstand for the musicians of the post.

A reporter from a local paper in 1908 decided to see how a young man became a soldier. He visited Columbus Barracks and wrote a lengthy article about what he found. A few excerpts from the article will tell us a little about the post itself as well as the soldiers in training there.

"Down by the gate, a sentry, chosen from one of the permanent companies, his clothing as spic and span as if he had just stepped from a fashion plate, swings up and down on his beat, his rifle polished and glistening in the evening sun's rays.

"A bunch of applicants — some in half military dress, some in workman's clothes and few in derby hats and long-tailed coats — is just coming through the gate. They have been temporarily 'passed' by some minor recruiting station in Zanesville, Cincinnati or some other point, and are here for their final examination.

"Their names are taken, each is given a bath, and after supper are tucked away in row upon row of iron beds, built one over the other, like berths in a steamboat."

In the days that follow, the men are closely examined, outfitted and prepared for service in the army. The process begins:

"The men are now clean, registered and have expressed a desire for the branch of the service they wish to enlist in — cavalry, infantry, coast artillery, etc. Different branches of the service require different builds of men. For instance, the coast artillery has different regulations about adenoids and lack of certain teeth than does the

infantry arm. ... All must have eight connecting 'grinders' however, for sometimes in the field, salted horse and hard tack are the only food for days. ...

"The medical examination from start to finish is thorough. The applicant must be single (for the first enlistment) and physically perfect. ... He must have good sight, else the weapons the government is to give him would be as a broomstick in the hands of a child; he must have no germs or tuberculosis lurking in the system; no tendency to hoard disease or other maladies. ...

"All recruits must be between the ages of 18 and 35. He must not be under 5'4" in height. At that figure he must weigh at least 110 pounds. ... If he is physically sound and has come up to all the medical requirements, he is now sworn into the U. S. service as a recruit.

"He gets a toilet kit first dash out of the box. This is all done up like a pair of shoes, in a neat box. There's russet and a black belt and shoe polish, a hair brush, a tooth brush, a razor, soap, two towels, a whisk broom and a 'housewife' — a little packet containing threads, needles, buttons and whole lot of other things a man might want when his pants gets hung up on a barbed wire trocha. ... This costs Uncle Sam \$3.01.

"The applicant also gets tooth powder, a box of Tripoli to shine his buttons with, a gun brush, a shoe brush and a 'button stick.' ... The button stick is a piece of board, having a slot cut in it. This is slipped over the button and Mr. Applicant can shine his buttons to a fare-you-well, without getting any white powder on his clothes.

"He gets a \$6 olive drab blanket, not one of those National Guard affairs that years ago used to be used as a minnow seine between sleeps, but the real, frost-defying article. He gets an olive drab coat, trousers, leggins, three changes of underwear and six pairs of socks. In addition he is served with four pairs of white medium weight gloves for dress affairs, and a cap and overcoat. ... To the heavy artillery, the outfit served is blue rather than olive drab. Then comes more clothes — a fatigue uniform (like overalls) but the color of new clear coffee is issued.

"For 15 days or more, the embryo soldier learns to 'guide right,' 'about face,' 'to the rear march,' 'fours right about' and the other little details that are necessary to tell the right hand from the left — quick! Then he gets a gun and its 'shold hawms,' 'c'rry hawms,' 'p'rade res,' until he can't see. He learns the gun drill and is ready in about 30 days to be transferred to some command that is 'shy' on membership ... the first year — in peace times — he gets clothes, board, medical attendance, washing and \$13 a month. ... If Mr. Applicant gets to be a good shot he gets \$2 a month extra for marksman; \$3 for sharpshooter and \$5 a month extra for expert rifleman. A sergeant in charge of a mess gets \$6 a month extra. There are all kinds of ways to make extra money in the army.

"In 15 days he is carrying a gun and learning the rudiments of the Manual of Arms; in three years he is the finished product, the finest type of man on earth — the American soldier."

In 1922, the name of Columbus Barracks would be changed to Fort Hayes in recognition of Civil War soldier and American President Rutherford B. Hayes. The post would continue to be a recruiting center through the Vietnam era. Today, most of the site serves as the Fort Hayes Metropolitan Education Center of the Columbus school district.