

# Camp Crowder, Beetle Bailey, and the Glasgow Knights of Columbus

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After completing a year of junior college in Kansas City, a young man named Mort Walker enrolled in Missouri University in 1943. Walker had been a successful cartoonist since he was 13 years old. The publications to which he sold his work thought he was an adult.

His initial studies at MU were soon interrupted by WW II. In 1943, Walker was drafted into the United States Army. His first military training was at Camp Crowder, MO. Camp Crowder is located near Neosho in Southwest Missouri. Camp Crowder was constructed in 1941 and named for Major General Enoch Crowder, a native Missourian from northwest Missouri.



Walker was eventually commissioned and served in Italy, where he was an intelligence and investigating officer and was also in charge of an Allied camp for 10,000 German Pows. After the war he was posted to Italy where he was in charge of an Italian guard company. He was discharged as a First Lieutenant in 1947. He then returned college and graduated in 1948 from the University of Missouri, where he was the editor and art director of the college's humor magazine, Showme.



While at MU, Walker created a cartoon character who eventually became Beetle Bailey. Walker often spent time at a popular student hangout called "The Shack". The Shack is no more but it lives on in a room in the MU Student Center.

Walker was the creator of the long running comic strip, Beetle Bailey. Bailey is a soldier at "Camp Swampy" which



was inspired by Camp Crowder. Walker mentioned The Shack in several issues of Beetle Bailey.

The characters on the strip; including Beetle Bailey, SGT Snorkel, GEN Halftrack, LT Fuzz, and others are all based on people who served at Camp Crowder. Walker based LT Fuzz on himself. Mort Walker died in 2018 at the age of 94. His sons have continued the comic strip.

Camp Crowder was a Signal Corps training center. Thousands of Army recruits were trained there in communications related fields. The average population of the camp during the war years was 45,000 personnel.



By 1943, the War Department had acquired a total of 42,786 acres of land in Newton and McDonald Counties that made up Camp Crowder. The built numerous buildings including barracks, mess halls and training facilities. The Post Exchange had twenty-two branches, with three beauty parlors for WACs and female civilian employees. The post also had two cafeterias for civilian workers. There were also four service clubs on post along with guest houses for soldier's guests.



Crowder had six movie theaters on post. There were sixteen chapels with a chaplain for each providing regular religious services. Camp Crowder had its own large well-staffed hospital and in addition had 15 infirmaries throughout the camp and three dental clinics. There was a field house for athletic events and other activities that could seat 5,000 persons. The post laundry accommodated officer and enlisted personnel and was one of the largest laundries in the country. It was a huge complex that provided much local employment.

In addition to Signal Corps training, the camp also trained Quartermasters, Army bandsmen, Women Army Corps (WAC), and was the Army pigeon training headquarters. Pigeons were still used to carry messages in combat areas.



Hollywood actor Dick Van Dyke was stationed at Camp Crowder during the war as well, inspiring fictionalized events portrayed in Episode No. 6 of The Dick Van Dyke Show, "Harrison B. Harding of Camp Crowder, Mo.," that aired on 6 November 1961 on CBS. The show starred Van Dyke and Mary Tyler Moore. Actor and producer Carl Reiner, who served in the Army Special Services unit during 1942-46, also spent part of his World War II days at Camp Crowder.



In addition to the military training provided at the camp, it housed approximately 2,000 German prisoners of war during WWII. When the war came to an end in late summer 1945, operations at the camp began to wind down and the site was eventually closed. Most of those Germans were sent back to Germany after the war. Some requested to stay in the US. The greatly reduced Camp Crowder is still used for military reserve training and has a permanent staff of 11.

When the camp was downsized in the early 1950s, equipment and buildings were offered to the public. The Glasgow Knights of Columbus obtained one of the GP (General Purpose) buildings. This type of building was used for meetings, theaters, church services, etc. During my military service, I was often in similar buildings at Ft Leonard Wood, Ft Bliss, Ft Benning, and Ft Gordon. Some are still in use today.

Knights from Glasgow took their building apart, numbered the pieces, hauled them to Glasgow, and reassembled it where it stands today as the Columbian Hall of the Knights of Columbus. The high basement walls were poured by transporting concrete by wheelbarrow over temporary plank walkways. On one trip to Neosho, the truck's windshield wipers failed and Knights used shoestrings to manually work the wipers during a hard rain. Camp Crowder is 237 miles from Glasgow in southwest Missouri.



Almost everyone in the Glasgow area has been in the Knights Hall for meals, dances, elections, or other community activities. It is very possible that the real life Beatle Bailey, SGT Snorkel, LT Fuzz, Carl Reiner, and Dick Van Dyke once visited the same building.