



Military units parade down Ashmun Street in Sault Ste. Marie in 1940.

the fort and was later used as Army Camp Lucas from 1950 to 1960.)

Many people extended themselves to the troops, supplying services and assistance with confidence that their kindness would be repaid when veterans came back after the war as tourists.

Emergency drills were held regularly, with civilians and soldiers alike participating, and occasionally the military units paraded down the Sault's main streets.

Draw Down Begins Early

Just when the townspeople had gotten used to having the military in their businesses and their backyards (where anti-aircraft weapons were sometimes positioned), the buildup was reversed. The War Department ordered that the Sault contingent be reduced to 2,500 officers and men by September 1, 1943. In January 1944, the aircraft-warning installations and anti-aircraft emplacements were also abandoned. By the end of that year, there was only one company of men left at Fort Brady.

Why were the troops withdrawn before the war even ended? The military's operations division decided that, even if the locks were attacked, any damage could be repaired quickly and would not tie up traffic for long. The design and construction of the MacArthur Lock in record time reinforced this opinion.

When peace was declared in Europe, a sigh of relief was breathed in Sault Ste. Marie. Though war raged on in the Far East, the Japanese were never viewed as much of a threat to sabotage the locks—so distant from their

homeland. (An August 16, 1945 article in the Sault paper revealed that three unmanned Japanese bombs, attached to balloons, did make it to Michigan. The nearest was spotted southeast of DeTour Village, about 40 miles south of the locks. None of the devices ever exploded.)

Remnants of the War

Judging Fort Brady to have outlived its usefulness, the Army reassigned its remaining personnel and closed the military installation in October 1945. But local and state officials were quick to see

the potential of the site. In just three months' time, the buildings were adapted for use as the Soo branch of the Michigan College of Mining and Technology (Michigan Technological University). In 1970, the institution was granted its autonomy under the name Lake Superior State College. In 1987, it attained university status.

After the war, the two oldest locks—the Davis and the Sabin—slowly became obsolete; they were closed to all traffic a few years ago. The MacArthur Lock—built to last in the 1940s—still exists, but is limited by its size to serving the smaller “salties,” or seagoing vessels. Today, about 80 percent of the canal's traffic travels through the Poe Lock, which was rebuilt in 1969 to accommodate the 1,000-foot “lakers.”

While security at the locks was relaxed slightly after World War II, the days of people being able to walk across the gates and right up to the lock walls never returned. Fences erected during the war still separate the public areas of the park from the locks themselves.

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, security in Sault Ste. Marie was tightened even more. Procedures were adopted to screen visitors to the locks, and the guards were armed as a further deterrence.

On one day each year, however, the public is allowed more access to the facility. Visitors attending Engineers' Day, scheduled on the last Friday in June, then grasp a little of what it was like before World War II came to the Sault.

Deidre Stevens is a freelance writer and historian who spends her summers sailing for Soo Locks Boat Tours.