

U.S. Army General Hospital No. 2

Fort McHenry, Baltimore, Maryland

From 1917 until 1923, Fort McHenry was the site of U.S. Army General Hospital No. 2 which provided medical facilities for the troops returning from World War I. It was the largest military hospital in the United States with over 130 temporary buildings constructed outside the walls of the star shaped fort.

In October 1917 the Army established a fire department at the hospital, organized and manned by soldier firefighters from Fire Truck & Hose Company #304 at Camp Meade, MD. An architectural rendering of the complex indicates the fire station was located near the northern most star point of the fort just outside the original walls. Typical of other WWI Army fire stations the building was of wood construction, 1-story, with a single bay for fire apparatus. A postwar photo of the station documents this and illustrates 4 civilian firefighters manning a 1918 Brockway-LaFrance chemical and hose truck. This was typical of other postwar Army fire departments as military firefighters were often replaced by civilian personnel.

Several pieces of fire apparatus served at the hospital during the years including a 1918 Brockway-LaFrance chemical and hose truck and a 1918 American LaFrance Type A6 chemical and hose truck. During 1923 an American LaFrance Type 75, 750 gpm pumper was delivered.

During construction of the hospital complex a fire protection engineer from the National Board of Fire Underwriters was on site to supervise the construction features relating to fire protection, assuring proper construction and protection from common hazards. Fire breaks were left, and spacing between buildings was such to eliminate, as far as possible, danger from a general conflagration. Fire hydrants were installed and several fire reporting telephones were installed on utility poles. Since the hospital was located within the city limits of Baltimore it is quite possible that a Baltimore Fire Department fire alarm box was installed at the hospital fire station to summon assistance if needed as the quarters of Baltimore Engine 17 and Truck 19 was located about a mile from the entrance to the hospital.

Some early information on fire protection at Fort McHenry.

1888, if a fire occurred the alarm was sounded by trumpet which mustered all hands to turnout. Designated soldiers would report to the fire shed, which contained the fort hand drawn fire apparatus which they would pull to the location of the fire. Other soldiers would report to the fire scene and under the direction of the Quartermaster fire marshal would fight the flames. A hydrant system was in place, supplied from the Baltimore City water system. Two and one half inch hose, carried on hose reels would be connected to the hydrants to fight the fire. Fire apparatus at the fort during 1888 included; 4 hook and ladder wagons and 1 hose carriage. A total of 2500 feet hose was on hand.

During 1891 the roster of fire apparatus included; 4 hook and ladder wagons and 2 hose carriages with a total of 1500 feet of hose.