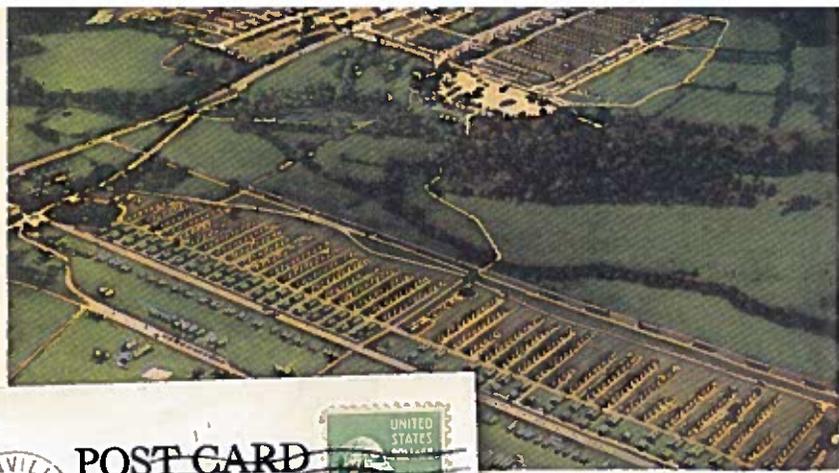


Josh Stahlman

# Training at Indiantown Gap

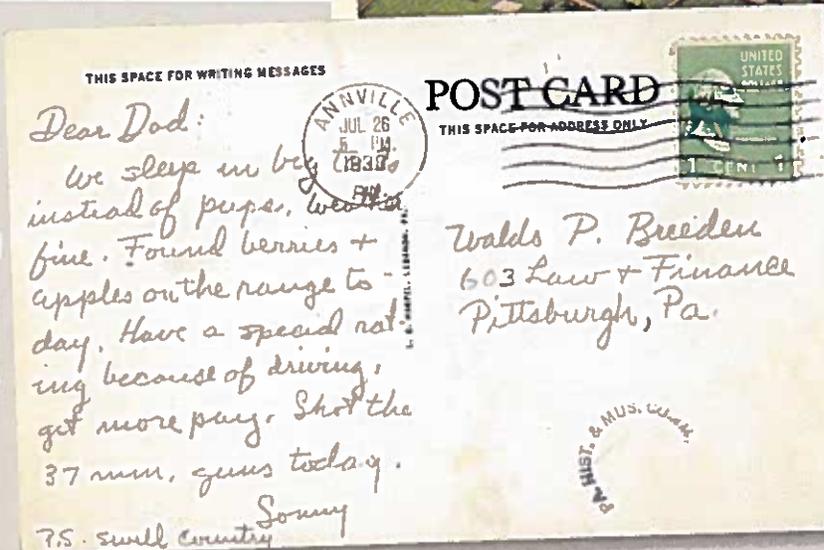


At age 19, Waldo Preston Breeden Jr. sent a postcard to his father in Pittsburgh describing his seemingly pleasant experiences at Indiantown Gap, Lebanon County, in July 1938. He “found apples and berries on the range,” “shot the 37 mm. guns” (a common caliber of antitank gun at the time) and mentioned that he had a special ranking and higher pay because of his ability to drive.

The military reservation at Indiantown Gap followed the Pennsylvania National Guard’s outgrowth of its facilities at Mount Gretna, Lebanon County, which by 1929 could no longer accommodate further expansion. In 1931 the Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs began purchasing land for the development of a military reservation at Indiantown Gap, named for the several native communities historically concentrated in the area and the nearby geological gap in the Blue Mountain ridge. In 1932, amidst a State Emergency Relief Project to clear land for the artillery camp, troops of the 28th Division Army National Guard who were encamped at Mount Gretna became the first to utilize the grounds for maneuvering purposes.

By 1935 additional land had been purchased, improvements continued, and work consolidated under the Works Project Administration. Several military groups had used the grounds through 1936, including 5,450 U.S. Army soldiers, 20,800 Pennsylvania National Guardsmen, and the Marine Corps Artillery Battalion and Basic School. Breeden, who enlisted in the Marine Corps in May 1937, was one of 189 Marines at Indiantown Gap in 1938.

Born in Pittsburgh on September 27, 1918, Breeden followed in a military tradition. His father, an attorney of the same name, had enlisted on May 1, 1898, at the



Indiantown Gap Military Reservation, completed in 1940, entered a 25-year lease with the federal government in 1941 and further expanded to accommodate predeployment preparations for World War II. Following the war it served as a demobilization center and later as a training camp for troops in the Korean War. In recent years it has housed several refugee camps and training facilities for units in the Middle East.

outset of the Spanish-American War, as a volunteer in Company E of the 65th Regiment, New York Infantry, and served seven months before mustering out; 20 years later, he registered for the World War I draft.

2nd Lt. Waldo Preston Breeden Jr. was deployed with Marine Observation Squadron 155, Marine Aircraft Group 15, to Attu, an island 1,100 miles from the Alaskan mainland. In contrast to the fine weather and “swell country” at Indiantown Gap, the inhospitable mountains and tundra of Attu were onerous. The site of the only battle of World War II fought on U.S. soil, the island challenged the inadequately outfitted troops with its persistent snow, mud, fog, clouds, high winds and steep terrain. In addition to 1,697 U.S. battle-related casualties, an additional 2,132 resulted from exposure.

Breeden’s tombstone reads, “Died in a plane at Attu.” He went missing on May 16, 1943, five days after the American landing at Attu—known as “Operation Land-grab”—and less than a month after entering foreign service. At age 24 he was one of 549 Americans to perish in the battle, a successful push by American forces to reclaim the island from Japan.

Renamed Fort Indiantown Gap in May 1975 and now consisting of 19,000 acres, the site remains an active training facility and is home to the Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs, the Pennsylvania National Guard Headquarters, the Pennsylvania National Guard Military Museum, the Indiantown Gap National Cemetery and the Pennsylvania Veterans’ Memorial.



Josh Stahlman is an archivist at the Pennsylvania State Archives.

*Wish You Were Here is a joint feature of PHMC’s State Historic Preservation Office and the Pennsylvania State Archives reflecting the value of postcards as tools for learning about the past. Images are drawn from Manuscript Group 213, Postcard Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives.*