

## Fire Protection at U.S. Army General Hospital No. 2 Fort McHenry, Baltimore, Maryland World War I



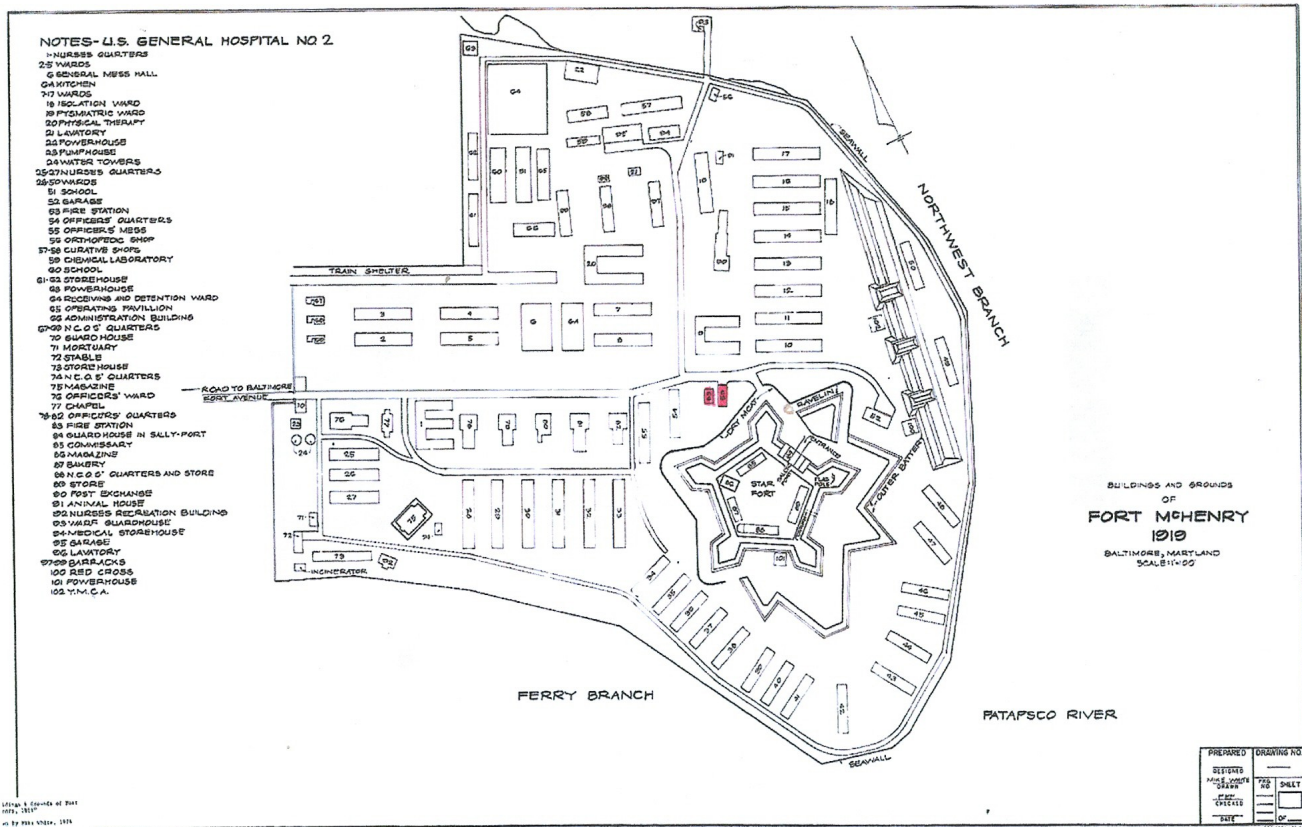
*Fort McHenry Hospital Fire Station, 1918 Brockway-LaFrance*

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 3,000 beds and over 130 temporary buildings constructed outside the walls of the star shaped fort.

The constructing contractor for the hospital, J. Henry Miller Inc., of Baltimore, organized a fire brigade which provided fire protection during the building of the hospital complex. The types of fire apparatus used by the fire brigade is unknown. The fire brigade practiced fire prevention measures insuring that all open burning had been extinguished at the end of the work day and all combustible scrap material had been properly disposed of.

In October 1918 the Army established a fire department at the hospital complex, organized and manned by 10 soldier firefighters from Fire Truck and Hose Company No. 304 at Camp Meade, Maryland. The fire fighting equipment consisted of a Brockway-LaFrance combination chemical and hose truck and seven hand drawn chemical wagons. The fire station was constructed on the west side of Fort Ave, just east of the 1875 era Garrison Administration Building as seen on the map. The station was typical of other Army fire stations constructed at camps and forts across the country during the war, a one-story, wood frame building with a single exit door for fire apparatus. Firemen were quartered in a portion of the Administration Building next to the station.

Throughout the wards and corridors there were 367 soda acid fire extinguishers, and water barrels and buckets were placed at strategic points. In addition to their fire protection duties the firefighters established a fire prevention program inspecting buildings at the hospital, and reporting hazards found



*Red building to right is the fire station, left building fireman's quarters.*

to the Quartermaster Fire Marshall. Fire extinguishers were checked and charged if necessary and sand buckets were placed throughout the area. The hospital staff were instructed in proper fire prevention measures, and instructed in the use of fire extinguishers. Fire drills were held daily by fire department members, and every second Thursday a general fire drill was attended by the entire post personnel. Maps of the hospital complex were obtained and the best routes were drawn out to access the many areas of the hospital. Locations of fire hydrants were posted on the maps along with drafting sites on the banks of the Patapsco River. Fire inspections were made daily, along with firefighting drills for the firefighters. Many of the hospital buildings were equipped with Aero rate of rise fire alarm systems which were wired to the fire station for the rapid report of fires.

In addition to the Brockway-LaFrance, several pieces of fire apparatus served including, a 1918 American LaFrance, Type A6 Chemical and Hose Truck and 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 incorporated, and spacing between buildings was such to eliminate, as far as possible, dangers from a general conflagration. Fire hydrants were installed and placed to provide a given gallons per minute flow to all portions of the complex. Water supply for the hydrants and domestic use was provided by Baltimore City. Alarms of fire were reported by fire reporting telephones mounted on utility poles and wired directly to the hospital fire station a 24 hour watch was maintained. A electrical connected was established from

the fire station to the steam fire alarm whistle at the hospital power house.

Army firefighters continued to provide fire protection at the hospital until wars end. They were replaced with civilian firefighters, as was common practice at most Army camps after the war.

On 21 July 1922, a raging 8 Alarm fire consumed several grain elevators of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at its Locast Point Terminal, adjacent to the hospital at Fort McHenry. Ambulances were dispatched from the hospital, Camp Holabird, Camp Meade and the Baltimore Police Department to evacuate some 500 patients from harms way to the Francis Scott Key Public School on Fort Avenue. Baltimore firefighters were able to control the blaze before it spread to the hospital.

Army Quartermaster records from World War I document several fires at Army General Hospitals and Camp Hospitals during the war. There was no reported loss from fire at the U.S. General Hospital No. 2, Fort McHenry during the period. A tribute to the fire prevention efforts of the hospital firefighters and medical staff.

Fire protection continued at the hospital until 1923 when the last patient was released. During 1925 and 1926 the hospital complex was demolished, the Army fire station was one of the last buildings to be raised.

The Fort McHenry National Monument was established in 1925, and its administration was transferred from the War Department, to the Department of the Interior in 1933.

#### Information on early 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 scene of the fire. Other soldiers would report to the fire scene and under the direction of the Quartermaster Fire Marshall would fight the flames. A hydrant system was in place, to which 2 ½ inch fire hose, carried on hose reels was deployed to fight the fire. Fire apparatus on site included, 4 hook and ladder wagons, and 1 hose carriage. A total of 2,500 feet was on hand.

1889 - Babcock fire extinguishers, 2 hose carriages with 1,000 feet of 2 ½ inch hose.

1891 - Roster of fire apparatus included, 4 hook and ladder wagons, 2 hose carriages with a total of 1,500 feet of 2 ½ inch hose.

1892 - Babcock fire extinguishers, 2 hose carriages, and 1,000 feet of 2 ½ inch hose.

1901 - Babcock fire extinguishers, 2 hose carriages, and 1,000 feet of 2 ½ inch hose.  
Alarms of fire answered by the Baltimore Fire Department.

By  
Ted Heinbuch  
Army Fire Service Historian (c)