

Camp Shanks Freedom Trail

The goal of the Camp Shanks Freedom Trail project is to memorialize the sacrifice of the nearly 1.3 million soldiers that passed through Camp Shanks. The trail marks the route that soldiers took from Camp Shanks to the Piermont Pier so that others can follow in their footsteps.



At its peak Camp Shanks covered much of present-day Orangeburg. Today, Camp Shanks is marked by a Memorial Park located at the intersection of Independence Avenue and Lester Drive. The park marks one end of the trail, the Piermont Pier marks the other end. A museum dedicated to Camp Shanks is located along the trail at 20 Greenbush Road, Orangeburg, NY.

On September 25, 1942, 500 residents of Orangetown were called to a town meeting. At that meeting Major Eberson told them that the US Army was seizing 1365 acres and that they had two weeks to move out; the land would become Camp Shanks.

The winter of 1942 was the coldest on record, but work didn't stop. By December 1942, 17,444 workers were building the camp. By the spring of 1943 Camp Shanks had nearly 1500 buildings and had begun processing soldiers.

During World War II nearly 1.3 million soldiers passed through Camp Shanks on their way to fight in Europe, including 75% of the Americans who fought on D-Day. In an average month 40,000 soldiers were deployed from Camp Shanks to Europe. An estimated 500,000 of the 1.3 million soldiers departed from the Piermont Pier; the rest traveled on the West Shore Line, which runs along Western Highway, to embarkation points in New York City and New Jersey.

Many of the 500,000 soldiers marched nearly 5 miles from Camp Shanks to the Piermont Pier to board transport vessels on their way to Europe to fight in World War II. Camp Shanks was nicknamed “**Last Stop U.S.A.**” because Camp Shanks was the last place many soldiers set foot on American soil.

When soldiers returned to Camp Shanks at the end of World War II, they were treated to cold milk at the end of the Piermont Pier. Returning soldiers referred to the Piermont Pier as “**First Stop U.S.A.**”, since it was the first place these brave soldiers touched American soil after the war. When they arrived at Camp Shanks soldiers were treated to an all-you-can-eat steak dinner.

The trail descriptions and maps will help you explore this important trail and experience some of what these brave World War II heroes experienced on their way to the European Front, and on their way back home. As you walk in their footsteps take a moment to imagine what they may have been experiencing and thinking during their journey. Sidewalks and pedestrian trails are present along the entire route.

From Camp Shanks		
Post	Trail Marker Location	Description
1	Camp Shanks Memorial Park	From here nearly 1.3 million US soldiers began their journey to the European front to fight in World War II. This trail commemorates their nearly 5-mile journey to the Piermont Pier. You can follow in their footsteps by walking down Lowe Lane to Western Highway.
2	Western Highway & Lowe Lane	During World War II, Lowe Lane was known as Victory Rd. Victory Rd. crossed the railroad tracks and continued to Route 303. Today to make the journey to the Piermont Pier the trail makes a slight detour along Western Highway. Turning left along Western Highway you will walk past a part of Camp Shanks known as Area 7. Immediately along Western Highway was the motor pool. Area 7 also had a mess hall, amphitheater, an officer’s tailor shop, and a beer hall. (See small map on back)
3	Western Highway & Highview Ave.	Turn right onto Highview Ave. The trail crosses the active railroad tracks. On your left you will see a small white structure that was the Orangeburg Rail Station on the West Shore Railroad. The station is marked “RR Sta.” on the small map on the back. Many soldiers arrived and departed Camp Shanks on this rail line.
4	Highview Ave & Greenbush Rd.	Turn left. The trail follows Greenbush Rd. About 250 feet along the trail, on the right, you will notice a semicircular Quonset Hut, this is an Original Structure from Camp Shanks that today houses offices for the Town of Orangetown. Just before you arrive at the intersection of Route 303 and Greenbush Rd. you will see the Camp Shanks Museum , also located in a Camp Shanks era building, on your right.
5	Route 303 & Route 340	This is the longest section of the trail. During World War II there would have been very few homes and buildings along this stretch of the road.
6	Route 340	The trail continues straight at this sign along Route 340.
7	Route 340	The trail continues straight at this sign along Route 340. The Sacred Heart Chapel to your left was part of the landscape in the 1940’s.
8	Route 340 & Kings Highway	Turn right onto Kings Highway. The trail takes a short detour to explore another route that some of the soldiers from Camp Shanks took to the Piermont Pier.
9	Kings Highway & Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	Turn left and follow the Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail. The rail trail was constructed along the route of an abandoned railroad track. This rail line was used to move personnel and equipment from Camp Shanks to the pier during the war.
10	Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	Be on the lookout for a sign on your left and a fork in the trail. Stay to the left.
11	Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	Be on the lookout for a trail sign leading you straight ahead, towards the intersection of Piermont Ave and Main St.
12	Piermont Ave. & Main St.	Depart the rail trail onto Piermont Ave. We rejoin the roads that soldiers used on their way to the pier.

From Piermont Pier		
Post	Trail Marker Location	Description
1	Ferry Road - End of Piermont Pier	For many soldiers returning from World War II the Piermont Pier was the first place that their feet landed on American soil. To returning soldiers it was known as “ First Stop U.S.A. ”. Some of these brave heroes had been away from their homes, family and friends fighting the Nazis for years. They were welcomed home as heroes and given cold milk as they exited the ships, a luxury that they had been without while in battle. From this point they started their journeys back home. They would travel from here to Camp Shanks. This trail commemorates their journey back to Camp Shanks.
2	Ferry Road	Look to your left. You may see some old pilings from some of the original structures that were present at the end of the pier.
3	Ferry Road	Stay to your left and follow Ferry Road into the Piermont Marsh. You will notice a walkway to your right leading towards downtown Piermont.
4	Ferry Road	Continue along Ferry Road through the marsh. The Piermont Marsh is an important part of the Hudson River eco-system. It encompasses over 1,000 acres and lies at the southern edge of the Village of Piermont.
5	Paradise Ave. & Ferry Rd.	At the end of Ferry Rd., the trail turns to the left onto Paradise Ave. As you walk down the road you will see the Sparkill Creek.
6	Piermont Ave. & Paradise Ave.	At the intersection continue straight ahead onto Paradise Ave. Many of the structures that you see today predate World War II. Imagine the pride and excitement of the residents of Piermont as they watched the hundreds of thousands of soldiers returning home at the end of the war.
7	Piermont Ave. & Rockland Rd.	Continue straight on Piermont Ave. Across the street on the left, near the intersection of Rockland Road you will see another trail marker.
8	Piermont Ave. & Main St.	At the intersection of Piermont Ave. and Main St. you will find a sign. Look across Main St. for the next marker which will guide you onto the Joseph B. Clark Rail trail.
9	Piermont Ave. & Main St.	A sign across Main St. is placed to help navigate through this large intersection. The trail leaves the roads to explore an abandoned railroad line that some of the soldiers used on their way from the Piermont Pier to Camp Shanks. Continue to the sign at the entrance to the Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail.
10	Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	You will notice a fork in the rail trail. Look for the sign that leads right.
11	Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	You will notice a fork in the rail trail. Look for the sign that leads right.
12	Kings Highway & Joseph B. Clark Rail Trail	At Kings Highway the Camp Shanks Freedom Trail leaves the rail trail. Make a right onto Kings Highway and follow the sidewalk to Route 340.
13	Route 340 & Kings Highway	At Route 340 make a left and proceed along Route 340. As you walk along this stretch of the trail imagine the sense of excitement the soldiers must have felt on their way home to their families and friends. Also imagine the sense of loss and grief and sadness that they carried with them after fighting in the war and losing friends in battle.

In this modern world of readily disposable products—of used and discarded consumables—it is too easy to plow under the memorabilia of the recent past. This temptation concerning Camp Shanks—a World War II military staging station and part of the New York Port of Embarkation—now as folded into the earth as the nation of Carthage. It was the only modern active military instillation of any size that Rockland County has ever had within its borders.

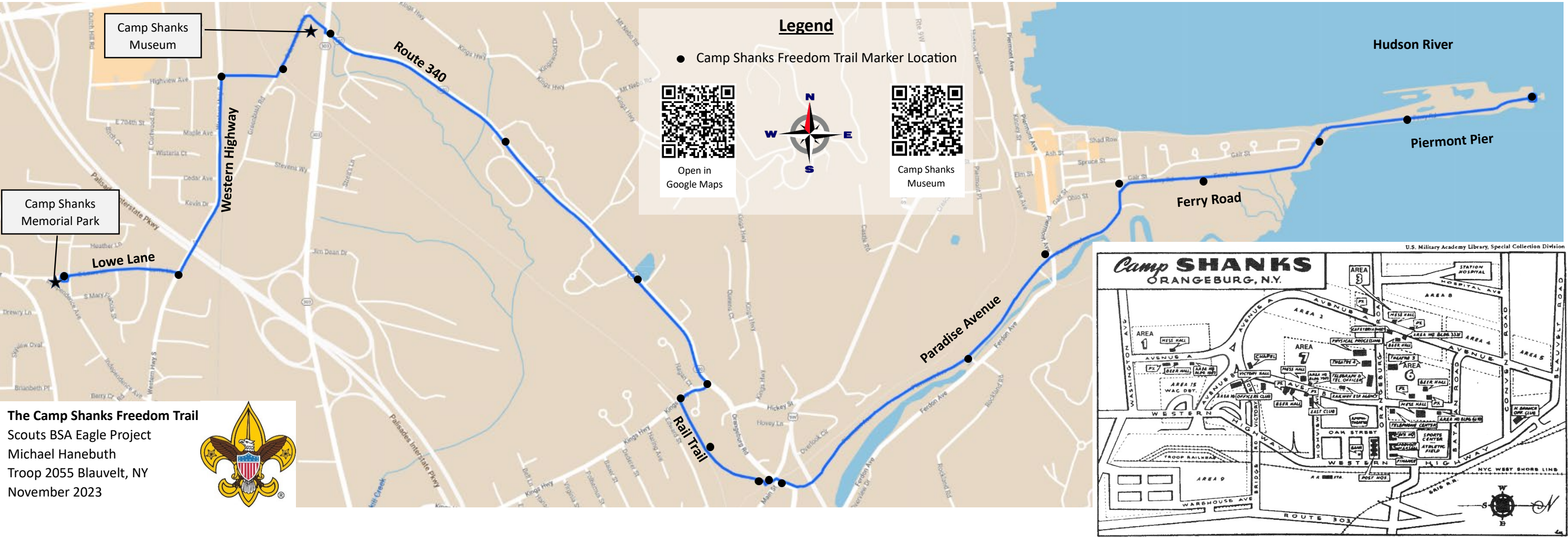
Camp Shanks was vibrant, relevant, and essential to the logistical processes of World War II. The invasion of Normandy, the build-up on the Continent before the battle for the crossings of the Rhine, and (later) the holding and treatment of the returning wounded were all a central part of the "Crusade in Europe" as it was acted out at Camp Shanks.

The saga of Camp Shanks—its birth, growth, metamorphosis, and eventual evolution to sprawling suburbia—is a story worth recording. Those then-young soldiers who staged there and later returned to Shanks to resume their education and begin careers and families will find this a story well told. Indeed, all America will find this a part of history worth remembering.

Maj. Gen. William F. Ward
U. S. Military Academy (1950)
Chief of U. S. Army Reserve

13	Piermont Ave. & Main St.	A sign across Piermont Ave. is placed to help navigate through this large intersection. Continue straight along Piermont Ave. Walking along Piermont Ave. imagine what the road must have looked like with thousands of young soldiers marching toward the Piermont Pier.
14	Piermont Ave. & Rockland Rd.	At the corner on the right, you will see another trail marker. Continue straight on Piermont Ave. (Do not turn right onto Valentine Ave.) As you are walking, imagine what it must have been like to look out your window and witness this green sea of soldiers and equipment on their way to fight in Europe.
15	Piermont Ave. & Paradise Ave	At the intersection continue straight ahead onto Paradise Ave. On your right you will see the Piermont Marsh. The Marsh is an important part of the Hudson River eco-system. It encompasses over 1,000 acres along the southern edge of the Village of Piermont.
16	Paradise Ave. & Ferry Rd.	At Ferry Rd. the trail makes the last turn onto the Piermont Pier. The last mile of the route follows Ferry Rd. through the Piermont Marsh.
17	Ferry Rd.	Continue straight along Ferry Rd.
18	Ferry Rd.	Continue straight along Ferry Rd.
19	Ferry Rd.	Continue straight along Ferry Rd.
20	Ferry Rd. - End of Piermont Pier	Stand here and gaze across the Hudson River, envisioning the moment when soldiers embarked on countless transport ships, transporting these American heroes from the "Last Stop U.S.A." to the European front.

14	Route 340	The trail continues straight at this sign along Route 340.
15	Route 340	The trail continues straight at this sign along Route 340.
16	Route 303 & Route 340	At the intersection continue straight ahead onto Greenbush Road. Across Route 303 and to your left you will see the Camp Shanks Museum. The Museum is located in a Quonset hut that is an original structure from Camp Shanks. A little further up the trail you will see another Quonset hut on the left that now houses town offices.
17	Highview Ave. & Greenbush Rd.	At the intersection of Highview Ave and Greenbush Road make a right and proceed across the active railroad tracks. As you approach the tracks you will see a small white structure that was the Orangeburg Rail Station on the West Shore Railroad. The station is marked “RR Sta.” on the small map.
18	Western Highway & Highview Ave.	Turn left onto Western Highway. You will walk along the tracks (to your left) that would take returning soldiers back home. The roads on the right were part of the original camp. This area had barracks, an amphitheater, and buildings for the camp. (See small map below)
19	Western Highway & Lowe Lane	During World War II, Lowe Lane was known as Victory Road . Imagine walking up Victory Rd. on the final leg of your journey to Camp Shanks.
20	Camp Shanks Memorial Park	Camp Shanks Memorial Park is located near the center of what was once Camp Shanks. Upon their return to Camp Shanks soldiers were treated to an all you can eat steak dinner before being processed and returning to their homes around the United States.



The Camp Shanks Freedom Trail
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November 2023

