

## Clint Eastwood's memories of being a lifeguard at Fort Ord pool



Actor-producer Clint Eastwood shares his memories of working as a lifeguard at the Fort Ord swimming pool. (Brian Phan — Herald correspondent)

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MARINA – The abandoned, graffiti-covered swimming pool on the former Army base contains a history that many have forgotten.

But not for one local who was a swim instructor and lifeguard at that pool – Clint Eastwood.

When the famous actor-director-producer read my story in the Herald about the pool in November, it brought back a flood of memories for him from his days in the military. He recently visited the Fort Ord pool with me and shared his experiences of being a lifeguard and swim instructor there in 1951-52.

"I actually lived down at that pool," Eastwood said.





When actor Clint Eastwood read Brian Phan's story in the Herald about the Fort Ord swimming pool he reached out and the two arranged to meet there and discuss Eastwood's memories of working as a lifeguard. (Brian Phan — Herald Correspondent)

A Division Faculty captain took down their names and as they were leaving the building a man came in and said, "They need three or four guys down at the pool." Eastwood thought he was talking about the motor pool. The Fort Ord motor pool was where military vehicles were stored and worked on.

"So we were thinking this will be good. We'll go to the motor pool, we'll drive some cars and keep our mouths shut," he said. "That would be cool. We won't be



"Now we are talking," said Eastwood. "I had to swim a lot when I was very young."

## Up his alley

Eastwood, 91, had been a competitive swimmer at Oakland Technical High School in the late 1940s. After high school, he had also been a lifeguard in Washington state. The possibility of being a lifeguard at the Fort Ord pool made his day.

The officials took the names of Eastwood and his friend and the next day they got a call from the captain. "They want you down at the pool."

Back then the pool the 50-yard, 10-lane pool looked a lot different than today.

It was outdoors with a 6-foot high wooden fence surrounding it. It had three wooden diving boards all set at different heights.

Along one side there was a wall that had a dressing room for men and one for women. At one end of the pool was a two-story building that contained a sand filter for the pool water.

The site has changed considerably since then. The drained pool now sits inside a building behind a chain-link fence. Marina city planners have plans for an aquatic complex and gym at the site and hope to one day see the public enjoying the facilities much as the military and Eastwood did 70 years ago.

## Teaching soldiers to swim

Soldiers would dive into the deepest part of the pool, which was 10 feet deep, to see if they could swim.

As Eastwood got to the pool there were several older soldiers who had been teaching the enrollees and running them through calisthenics.

Eastwood recalls he had to convince them, using his charm, to hire these two rookie soldiers who just finished basic training.

Using their "best selling voices" they got the assignment.

For a couple of weeks, Eastwood lived in the barracks. He remembers getting up in the foggy cold mornings in Marina and walking over to the pool, helping with swim classes. He would then leave in the afternoon.

After some time, the older soldiers who worked at the pool with him shipped out, moved out, or finished their service and went home. Eastwood and his friend, who were hired at the same time, started teaching the swim classes.

They were there at the pool together for a couple of weeks when Eastwood's friend was deployed to Korea.

"All of a sudden he got shipped out," said Eastwood. "You never know how they pick people that are shipped out in those days, it was classified."

Eastwood told me he still wonders about it today.

"My friend got sent out but I didn't. I never could figure out why that was."

As the other soldiers got reassigned or deployed, the then 21-year-old Eastwood spent the remainder of his service running the pool, teaching and saving people from drowning.

## Life at the pool

Eastwood said he was at the pool 24 hours a day, seven days a week. On one side of the pool there was a little room that Eastwood convinced the company commander to allow him to move his bunk to so that he could "take care and watch over the pool."

"While everybody else was getting up at five in the morning, in the cold air, I was sleeping," said Eastwood. "I didn't have classes until about 10 or 11 o'clock or whatever they were that day. It was a good life for me."

Eastwood's job at the pool was to make sure soldiers knew how to swim. To test this, he would line up a dozen or so soldiers in their swim trunks next to the diving boards and tell them to jump in.







Brian Phan's story about the Fort Ord swimming pool brought back a lot of memories for Clint Eastwood. (Brian Phan — Herald correspondent)

Many of the soldiers knew how to swim but decided to fake drowning. That was easily explained Eastwood said. The alternative to taking swim classes with Eastwood, he said, was running 10 miles with packs and rifles in the cold morning.

"It was kind of funny because everybody was trying to fake that they couldn't swim," said Eastwood. "They all wanted to stay there and have lessons then go out in the field and run with the other guys carrying rifles."

Even after the swim lessons, the pool was a swell place for people to enjoy. Eastwood remembers soldiers would come down and ask if they could have lunch next to the pool or sit for the afternoon.

Members of the Women's Army Corps "would come by a lot, stick their head over the fence and ask if they could come hang out," Eastwood said.

## A life changer

Eastwood told me he was lucky to have landed in that situation, "It saved me from going to Korea. Which was important in those days."

His life probably would have been dramatically different had he been deployed.

"It was a great, great gig. A lot of fun. I actually became an actor because guys like Richard Long, Martin Milner and David Janssen that were all drafted. These guys became my friends."

These were the guys who convinced Eastwood to go to Los Angeles City College instead of going to college in Stockton.

"I followed their careers," Eastwood said, remembering. It "drew me down to LA and started off my career.

"It all started there at the pool."

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