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DAVIDS ISLAND TO LIVE ON IN VIRTUAL EXHIBIT

Collaborative effort will commemorate history in records, photos, maps and interviews

Dauids Island may no longer have any physical structures, but memories of the historic Army post and the role it played in New York's military history will live on in a new "virtual exhibit" web site to be launched Monday in honor of Veterans Day.

"The Army's Century on Davids Island" will be inaugurated by Westchester County and the City of New Rochelle with a virtual ribbon-cutting on **Monday, November 9 at 10:30 a.m.** at the Ossie Davis Theater of the New Rochelle Public Library. Congresswoman Nita Lowey and Colonel John Boulé, the New York district engineer for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, are expected to attend, as well as representatives of the people who lived and worked there. *The event is by invitation only (and for any interested media).*

Now part of Westchester County's Virtual Archives section, the web site at <http://davidsisland.westchesterarchives.com> commemorates the history of Davids Island and particularly the years of Fort Slocum by presenting selected historic and contemporary records, photographs, maps and other materials. The 87-page section focuses on the story of Fort Slocum's military mission not only from images and plans of now-demolished buildings and other historical traces on the island, but also most importantly from the shared testimony of men and women who served, lived and worked at the post.

The web site was a collaborative effort of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, its contractor, Tetra Tech EC, Inc., the Westchester County Archives and Records Center, the Westchester County Historical Society, New Rochelle's city historian and the New Rochelle Public Library and the Fort Slocum Alumni & Friends organization.

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Patty Dohrenwend, director of Westchester County's Archives & Records Center, noted the need for this web site in order to preserve and provide immediate public access to the historical record.

"Davids Island was critical to Westchester -- and indeed the entire nation -- first as a Civil War hospital for wounded soldiers, later as an embarkation point for troops sent to the Spanish-American and two world wars, and, finally, as an integral point in the missile defense system for New York harbor during the Cold War era," she said.

The materials included in the web site are a sample of the digital records collected and created by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, as well as an extensive collection of archival materials gathered by the Fort Slocum Alumni Association and the New Rochelle Public Library. Additional materials will be accessible through the Davids Island Digital Repository of the New Rochelle Public Library's local history collection.

Until the first decade of the 2000s, remnants of approximately 100 buildings and structures from former Fort Slocum covered the island. Almost all were severely deteriorated or in ruins. They posed serious safety hazards and impeded renewed use of the island. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers carried out the demolition project, removing asbestos from buildings and ruins, demolishing structures and disposing of debris.

In its initial evaluation of the planned demolition project, the Corps of Engineers' found the work would remove most of the district's key features, such as the historic buildings, and greatly diminish its overall historical qualities. The Corps took several steps to mitigate, or offset, this adverse effect, including making a detailed permanent record of the buildings and other structures in the historic district before they were demolished. Digital photographs played a key role in making this record, but the Corps also shot video footage of the buildings and prepared written descriptions of them. Another important element was to interview some of the men and women who lived, worked or served at Fort Slocum between the 1920s and the 1960s.

"The website provides unique and universal access to the long and diverse history of Davids Island and Fort Slocum. Like a high-quality museum exhibit, it is visually compelling, informative and moving," said Barbara Davis, city historian for New Rochelle and community relations coordinator for the New Rochelle Public Library. "The library is pleased to assist with the preservation of the island's remarkable heritage by

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maintaining the Digital Repository of the vast archival and contemporary materials amassed as part of this project.”

Gregory J. Goepfert, the Army Corps of Engineers Project manager noted, “Fort Slocum is gone, but not forgotten. The virtual archive is etched into the internet, and will be a lasting memorial to those who served at Fort Slocum, and to the contribution of Davids Island to the history of the United States and the local community. The Corps is proud to have played a part in its creation.”

“Chronicling the role Davids Island has played in our nation’s history will help us all gain appreciation for this landmark,” said Congresswoman Nita Lowey (D-Westchester/Rockland), who has secured millions in federal funding for environmental remediation on Davids Island. “This new ‘virtual exhibit’ will provide a vital link to the past for students, residents, and others.”

New Rochelle Mayor Noam Bramson expressed his appreciation for the efforts of all involved, noting, "This unique partnership will help ensure that the remarkable history of Davids Island is more accessible to the public than ever before."

Among the former residents to be in attendance at Monday’s event are a New Rochelle man whose father managed the commissary until 1965; a Mass. man whose father and grandfather were stationed there; and a long-time sergeant from N.C. who knows Fort Slocum so well he can recite distances between buildings from memory.