



Members of the Daughters of the American Revolution place a wreath honoring veterans of World War I at the Ft. Caswell Rifle Range.



Participants in a ceremony remembering World War I look over artifacts and reproductions of gear used by troops. The items included edged weapons, wire cutters, binoculars, rifles and a gas mask, part of the collection of historical re-enactor Carl Mauny.

Caswell Beach

Ceremony marks World War I at rifle range

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

Supporters of Brunswick County's most visible World War I historic site honored veterans last Friday with a ceremony noting the 101st anniversary of the United States' entry into the Great War.

More than 30 people gathered at the Fort Caswell Rifle Range for presentations, a ceremonial wreath-laying, prayer and a tour of the circa-1918 structure. Once a part of the larger Fort Caswell, the rifle range pit is now just off Oak Island Golf Course and a part of the Caswell Dunes subdivision.

The non-profit group Friends of the Fort Caswell Rifle Range has been working for seven years to clean and stabilize the range pit, once used to train soldiers before they went to Europe to fight. The group is also raising money for a permanent monument to those who served in the Great War.

Speakers told stories of some of the Brunswick County residents who served, part of the contingent of four-million troops the nation sent to help save Europe and the world. They also read aloud the names of many of the veterans and invited the audience to share stories about their relatives who served.

"We don't have a lot of artifacts from World War I but we have this structure here and we're going to save it," said Norma Eckard, president of the Friends group. She pledged to continue the efforts to honor veterans with preservation of the rifle range and with an online registry (www.caswellriflerange.com).

Just a day before the event, the U.S. World War I Commission and Pritzker Military Museum and Library announced that the Fort Caswell rifle range was among 100 recipients of a \$2,000 matching grant for preservation of Great War sites across the country.

The Friends group continues to raise money to permanently stabilize the rifle pit structure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The biggest fundraiser for the effort will be a Kentucky Derby-themed dinner on Saturday, May 5, from 2:30 to 7 p.m. There will be contests for the best-dressed couples and best hats, tabletop horse races, a catered meal and a viewing of the race at Churchill Downs.

For ticket information, e-mail ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com.



Photos by Lee Hinnant

Norma Eckard of the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range leads a tour of the rifle target pit and storage area.

'Much needed, grueling work'

Boy Scouts help preserve Fort Caswell Rifle Range

Seven Boy Scouts and employees of Caswell Dunes took a couple days recently to help clean, clear and preserve the World War I-era Fort Caswell

Rifle Range, a monumental reminder of the United States' involvement in that monumental conflict. Their work is part of an ongoing effort to preserve

Brunswick County's most prominent remaining artifact from the Great War.

Ethan Pannkuk is an Eagle Scout candidate from Carolina Beach Troop 210. At age 14, he is seeking Scouting's highest rank at a relatively early age. Most boys don't work their way to the honor until at least age 16, and they must finish the rigorous requirements before their 18th birthday.

Pannkuk, assisted by fellow Scouts, organized a two-day mission to remove decades of dirt, grime and neglected debris from the massive structure once used to train soldiers in long-range marksmanship before they went to fight in Europe. They cleared out the pit and storage areas and also dug deep behind the north wall of the structure to help prevent further intrusion by tree roots, which threaten the pit's stability.

Friends of the Fort Caswell Rifle Range spokesperson Norma Eckard said the group performed "much-needed, grueling work."

"This work is something the Friends have been anticipating since Ethan presented his proposal," Eckard said. "Many living in the residential community are unable to do the physically heavy work associated with the project taken on by Ethan, and they are grateful for the work that he and the Scouts provided."

Caswell Dunes Homeowners Association president Joyce Crabtree noted that the Scouts cleared a floor drain on the target pit that had not functioned for many years. Their efforts will help preserve a landmark listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



Eagle Scout candidate Ethan Pannkuk, 14, poses with some of the hardware uncovered while he and fellow Scouts cleaned and groomed the Fort Caswell Rifle Range recently.



Photos contributed

Troop 210 Boy Scouts from Carolina Beach get ready to clean and preserve the Fort Caswell Rifle Range.



The Scouts use shovels to remove debris and dirt from the century-old rifle pit.