



# Newsletter



## Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, Inc.

5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, NC 28465

2023

Website: [www.caswellriflerange.com](http://www.caswellriflerange.com)

Welcome to the second newsletter published by the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range (FFCRR). While the intention was to distribute more frequent newsletters, illnesses caused delays.

The Fort Caswell Rifle Range is officially 105 years old on **May 20, 2023**. The south wall of the 184 ft structure shows a barely legible date inscribed.



On **January 21, 1918**, the United States War Department proposed the construction of a rifle range adjacent to Fort Caswell, NC, for small arms training of soldiers “in view of the immediate necessity for instruction of men destined for over-seas duty” in World War I.

In 2011, Caswell Dunes landscape committee volunteers were working on the common grounds, weeding and preparing for a new season. The dilapidated concrete structure was nearly obscured by the growth of vines, weeds, trees, and debris. Historians identified it as the 1918 rifle butts of a rifle range. This discovery set in motion an effort to resurrect and preserve the 1918 structure.

*To continue reading about the formation of the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the years dedicated to the effort, an overview is presented at the end of this newsletter, beginning on page 7.*

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Mission : To stabilize and preserve the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range. Additionally, to research, publicize, and preserve the legacies of the men and women of Brunswick County who served in the World War.

#### **Officers:**

President: Norma Lee Eckard

Vice-President: Ronald M. Eckard

Secretary-Treasurer: Thomas Luken

#### **Directors:**

Gwen Clemmons Causey

Lorraine M. Eckard

Webmaster: Amy R. Eckard

*Note: All of our members are volunteers and receive no compensation.*

## **Join us to commemorate the date the US entered World War I**

The Commemoration of the date the US entered WWI will be held on **Tuesday, April 4, 2023**, at 11:00am. This date is typically celebrated on April 6, but has been moved due to Easter events. Bring a folding chair, and park in condo lots. Thank you!

### **Do you remember this 8th Grader?**



In the spring of 2018, Ethan Pannkuk, an Eagle Scout candidate from Troop 210 in Carolina Beach, chose the 100 year old rifle range as his project. His fellow Boy Scouts and friends completed two days of grueling work at the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range, removing debris from the floor of the target pit.

Ethan Pannkuk is shown here in 2018 with the remnants of the target fixtures that were found under the debris.



Ethan received his Eagle Scout badge in January 2019.

After his high school graduation last spring, Ethan completed Army Basic Training (pictured at far left).

He is now enrolled at West Point (pictured at left).

Ethan's older brother is also pursuing a military career. He has completed pre-med as a Second Lieutenant in

the Army Reserves while he finishes medical school. Upon graduation he will be a doctor in the active Army.

Good luck to both of the Pannkuk men!

### **Anonymous donation keeps giving**

Charitable donation management company Benevity now supports corporate donations to FFCRR. Since early summer they have delivered over \$466 worth of donations to the rifle range mission. The previous *Blackbaud Giving Fund's* anonymous donor provided us with a monthly check for a year. Duke Energy was involved and it appears they are now connected to Benevity. The Friends of Fort Caswell appreciate Benevity and the donors for their support for our mission to preserve the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range.

## In memory of Norman Sprinthall, our Friend of the Fort Caswell Rifle Range



Dr. Norman Sprinthall passed away on March 8, 2022.

Norman and his wife Lois were early supporters of the stabilization and restoration of the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range. The effort began in 2011.

Norman's father served in World War I and their large donation in honor of his father, Sergeant Archie Sprinthall, helped to fund the WWI memorial that was installed at the rifle range on the Centennial.

“My father joined the war effort in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and he would have wanted me to help save this rifle range located in our residential area in Caswell Beach.” ~ Norman

When the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range published *Brunswick County in the Great War*, Norman and Lois purchased several copies for the Caswell Dunes clubhouse library to help educate the community not only about WWI, but about the priceless historic structure, the 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range, which was located in their own neighborhood.



“What is funny, well not really funny, is that I've been passing the rifle range so often since we purchased our condo back in 1985 and never thought to find out what it was or what it was used for. So now that we all know that it was used to train the military to perfect their marksmanship before leaving for France in World War I, why not put our heads together and make it a memorial for all residents in NC to honor, especially Caswell Beach? This historic structure tells us a story of our past going back 100 years ago.”



Norman and daughter Jayne Rankin

Norman and Lois were present at nearly all of the fundraisers, events, and Roll Calls, and continued to donate funds or finance anything they felt needed attention, such as No Trespassing signs as the work continued on the rifle range bunker. Photos were published in local newspapers to document their involvement.

Norman Sprinthall will forever be embedded in the fabric of the rifle range restoration story.

## The Dr. Norman A. Sprinthall Memorial Fund

The Dr. Norman A. Sprinthall Memorial Fund was established at the request of his family. Over \$2000 has been received by the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range in honor of Dr. Norman A. Sprinthall. The Friends give many thanks to all who contributed.

We have shared the loss of friends in the past, and donations were also made to the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range in honor of them. Many of you may not recognize their names but those of us who knew them still remember and miss them: Dr Horace Baker and his wife Dorothy, the Bakers' daughter Ruth Ann Baker McClelland, Harriet Barlowe, Tommy Freeman, Jody McCann, and Rae Pace. All of them contributed in many ways to the rifle range.

## Our Veterans Day event resumed in 2022

The Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range and the Brunswick Town Chapter NSDAR presented their joint program on Monday, November 14, 2022, at 11:00am beside the rifle range. The program was moved from November 11 due to Tropical storm Nicole.



Caron Myers as Nurse Susan

After a 3 year delay caused by the pandemic, the Roll Call of the names of the 718 men and women from Brunswick County who served in the Great War was resumed.

DAR members led the following: Norma Eckard, president of FFCRR, welcomed the group; Jayne Rankin gave the Invocation and led the Pledge to the Flag. Mary Sands, DAR VP Regent for Brunswick Town presented the Chapter's wreath; and Dale Spencer introduced Caron Myers who portrayed Navy Nurse Susan Adkins Williams who was raised in Southport. After the completion of the Roll Call, Caron Myers sang *God Bless America*.

The next newsletter will include Caron Myers' research about Susan Adkins Williams and the last member of the Williams family, a great niece who resides in Maryland.

## Website Statistics

Our website, *[caswellriflerange.com](http://caswellriflerange.com)*, continues to serve as a resource for WWI history and military enthusiasts. In 2020, when *Brunswick County in the Great War* was published, a record 9600+ visits were recorded. 2021 saw 8000+ visits, with 2022 nearly as many as 2021. Visitors from around the world read the website, with North Americans and Europeans being the most common. The link clicked most often is the listing of Brunswick County WWI veterans.

Referrals to our website include Facebook, which was the most common referrer, followed by Wikipedia, the Appalachian State University nursing website, and local websites such as the

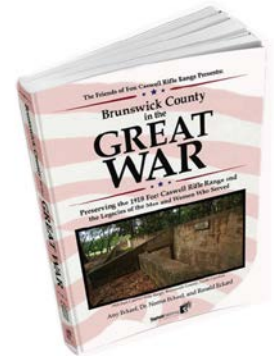
Caswell Dunes HOA, DAR Brunswick Town Chapter, John N. Smith Cemetery, local media, and the website of our book's publisher, *carolinabeach.net*.

### Update: Brunswick County in the Great War book sales

To date, all of the hardback books have been sold and we have 50 soft backs remaining.

Currently, there are two books in each of the five public libraries of Brunswick County, and one copy each in the State Archives of North Carolina, Brunswick Community College, and the National Society of the DAR in Washington D.C. We are preparing to donate books to the libraries of the three high schools in our county.

We recently received a request from the North Carolina State Department of Cultural Resources to purchase a book for the state library.



Books may be purchased by calling Norma Eckard at **910-278-7584**, or by sending email to [ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com](mailto:ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com).

Credit cards may be used with PayPal for an additional low fee.

*Note: This is not a fundraiser. The price of the books was chosen to cover the costs to research, publish, print, and ship the books.*

### More thanks to Okey Tucker



In last year's newsletter, we thanked Okey Tucker for his extensive pro bono work on the rifle range, including a plexiglass window, lowering the shoring, modifying the steps, and installing a gate.

Okey returned with his brother-in-law Alan Martin from Charles Town, WV, to build a message center in front of the rifle range.

The message center will display upcoming events and a map of the grounds showing the firing line of the rifle range and the famous pigpen where the military housed pigs to feed the men at Fort Caswell.

Thank you for your help, Okey and Alan!



## Pelican Prowash, transforming the rifle range

In July 2022, Lucinda Arnold from Carolina Paint recommended a new business to clean the rifle range walls. Pelican Prowash offered a spray that was gentle enough for our rifle range and the environment. They demonstrated on the back side of the rifle range storage room. After the demonstration, FFCRR consulted with Jim McKee, site manager at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson, and he agreed we could move forward. As a result, Pelican Prowash cleaned the walls inside and out, and the floor. What an amazing transformation! Many compliments were received about how the rifle range popped after the cleaning.



A great deal of research, effort, and contacting experts was required to find an appropriate business with an affordable price to clean over 105 years of mildew from the walls of the rifle range without damaging it.

Pelican Prowash recently shared that they submitted before and after pictures of our rifle range in a competition of historic sites. Good luck, Pelican Prowash!

### Future Needs

- Purchase three 50 pound bags of river rock to prevent soil from washing into the rifle pit and to control mud after heavy rains.
- Survey to identify and mark the firing line and hog pens.
- Maintain the property, including mowing and debris removal inside and out.
- Build the storage room roof.
- Move soil back in place behind the north wall after the doorways are fixed.

Please sign up for volunteer work if you are interested in any of these tasks. Please call Norma at **910-278-7584** or send an email to [\*\*\*fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com\*\*\*](mailto:fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com).

## From our Mailbox

This touching note was received from the descendant of Herbert Burnell Ward, a WWI soldier from Brunswick County who was KIA while capturing the St. Mihiel salient during the drive to and ultimate defeat of the Hindenburg Line. Corporal Ward was honored in our book, *Brunswick County in the Great War*.

*Hi, I received my book yesterday! I am just blown away at this history book and cannot imagine the time and research it took to bring forth such an endeavor. My uncle Herbert lives on through your interest and dedication through this project.*

*My grandmother Mary Ellen Ward (his mother) died at the young age of 61 from a stroke. I cannot help but believe her broken heart from so many deaths in her life contributed to her death. Thank you again. God bless all of you,*

*Kathy Ward Formyduval*

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## Fort Caswell Rifle Range: Highlights from 2011 to present



### 2012

- Jim McKee, historian and current site manager for *Brunswick Town/Ft. Anderson* State Historic Site assisted by visiting with staff from the State Historic Preservation Office, along with several engineers and history buffs to inspect the structure.

### 2013

- The first of seven years of the Derby Day fundraisers began in May.
- The Fort Caswell Historic District and the discontinuous rifle range target pit was officially added to the National Register of Historic Places.

### 2014

- Lowes Home Improvement donated lumber to brace the damaged lintels (doorways).

### 2015

- The Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, Inc was accepted as a nonprofit with 501(c)(3) status.
- The town of Caswell Beach contributed \$5000 for ongoing stabilization efforts.

### 2016

- The Historic Wilmington Foundation selected the rifle range as one of the most threatened historical places in the Wilmington and the lower Cape Fear region. The rifle range was also

selected the following year.

- 17 trees that were damaging the north wall were removed. A hydrological study was performed in two places behind the north wall near the lintels.
- The website [www.caswellriflerange.com](http://www.caswellriflerange.com) was established to report research findings to the public and to generate interest.
- The passageway wall was shored up to prevent the wall from collapsing.
- Soil pushing a section of the wall inward 6 inches was excavated to reduce pressure on the wall.

## 2017

- Military archives along with other research tools were used to identify Brunswick County men and women who served in the Great War.
- The Brunswick Town Chapter of NSDAR and the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range commemorated the US entry in the Great War on April 6, 2017.

## 2018

- The 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range was designated a National WWI Centennial Memorial by the United States World War I Centennial Commission and the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. 100 sites in the nation were chosen and each received a \$2000 grant.
- The WWI monument was unveiled to honor all military who served from Brunswick County.

## 2019

- Conversations began regarding publishing a book and selecting a publisher.

## 2020

- The book *Brunswick County in the Great War* was published as the pandemic began.

## 2021

- Okey Tucker completed pro bono work, installing a window, gate and steps into the pit.

## 2022

- Pelican Prowash cleaned the mildew-blackened walls of the rifle range.
- Okey and his brother-in-law Alan Martin built and installed the Message Center.

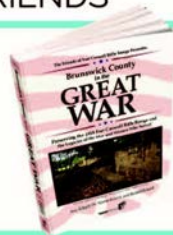
### GIVE THE GIFT OF HISTORY TO YOUR FAMILY OR FRIENDS

Buy, **Brunswick County in  
the Great War**

Learn about the men and women who  
gave so much to preserve freedom.

*A gift they won't forget!*

email: [ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com](mailto:ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com)



Send Check to:  
Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range  
5 Foxfire Trace  
Caswell Beach, NC 28465  
or call, Norma Eckard to order  
at 910-278-7584

\$50 Soft Cover  
+ \$6.00 shipping



## 2023 Membership Campaign

Please consider donating funds to complete the tasks detailed above. We appreciate your generosity in restoring and maintaining the historic 1918 Fort Caswell Rifle Range, as well as helping to publicize the sacrifices made by our local Brunswick County families serving and supporting our military during World War I.

If you wish to support our mission, detach the form below and mail to the address listed.  
*We appreciate those who made donations in 2022! Thank you!*

### 2023 Membership Campaign



*Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range  
5 Foxtire Trace  
Caswell Beach, NC 28465*

**Name:**

**Address:**

**Telephone:**

**Email:**

**Annual Dues: \$25**

**Lifetime Membership: \$150**