

FORT MACON RAMPARTS

a newsletter of the Friends of Fort Macon

Fall 1995

WORLD WAR II COMES TO FT. MACON ON DECEMBER 21, 1941 THINGS STARTED TO CRANK UP...

by Paul Branch

WHEN THE federal government gave Fort Macon to North Carolina in 1924, probably few people believed that it would ever be necessary to use the fort for war again. However, because of the importance of the Beaufort-Morehead City Harbor and the strategic location of the old fort in relation to the harbor, it indeed became necessary to occupy it once more as the United States was thrust into World War II in December 1941.

Although the United States was separated from its enemies by hundreds of miles of ocean, the threat of coastal raids was entirely real. Germany possessed not only a fleet of submarines, but also a formidable surface navy, both capable of the long-range operations necessary to bring the war right to our own beaches and harbors. Within easy range of a submarine deck gun or a warship just offshore was the State Port Terminal at Morehead City, a Navy Section Base on the west side of Morehead City, and a soon-to-be established anchorage for local ship convoys in the area between Cape Lookout and Beau-



The Coast Artillery moved in four 155mm (6.1 inch) guns

fort Inlet. These items of local strategic importance required protection from the possibility of coastal raids and nuisance attacks.

FOR THIS reason, Army officers from the 3rd Coast Artillery District, Fort Monroe, Virginia, contacted state officials in Raleigh on Dec. 17, 1941, and told them that it would be necessary to occupy Fort Macon for military defense.

It took a few days to sink in that a 100-year-old brick fort would be once more used for coastal defense. The state division of parks had to close down and turn over a fully functioning park, with all its buildings and facilities, to the federal government. Also, an agreement had to be adopted for the fort's protection as well as provisions that the fort be returned to the state once the emergency had ended.

ON DECEMBER 21, 1941 a steady stream of noisy, dusty, olive-colored Army vehicles crammed with men, supplies and equipment, moved past the park and headed down to the fort and the Coast Guard



"Hi mom, here we are at Fort Macon, N.C.
Everything is OK."



IN MEMORIAM

**Macon S. Snowden
1925-1995**

In April of this year, the Friends of Fort Macon were saddened to learn of the loss of Macon Snowden. Macon was on our Board of Directors, and had recently been elected to his first term in the state legislature. He was a native of Beaufort, and a resident of Pine Knoll Shores. He was a graduate of the Naval Academy at Annapolis. He had a distinguished career in naval aviation, with many decorations and honors. His future appeared to be every bit as bright as his past. He will be missed, but not forgotten.

Station. Elements of the 244th Coast Artillery had arrived from Camp Pendleton, Virginia, to occupy the fort.

INTENSE activity highlighted the next several days. More soldiers and vehicles arrived, defensive areas established, cooking areas and sanitary facilities set up inside and outside the fort. Most of the park buildings were taken over for Army use.

The battalion consisted of an administrative headquarters battery and two gun batteries (A and B). When at full strength, each battery numbered about 180 men. The whole battalion, with headquarters staff and support services included, numbered about 500 to 600 men.

THE POWER punch of Batteries A and B were four M1918 155-millimeter (6.1-inch) guns each. These were mobile weapons towed into position by tractors and capable of shooting their 98-pound projectiles nearly 11 miles.

The defense complex set up by the battalion was known officially as Harbor Defenses of Beaufort Inlet. Battalion headquarters were established in the Coast Guard Station next to the fort upon arrival, and headquarters also moved inside the fort.

BATTERY B moved its four guns into position in the sand dunes on the ocean side just down from the fort and behind the present park office. Gun positions were hollowed out between dunes, fortified with sand bags and partially concealed with camouflage netting. Ammunition magazines were established in the rear, and 30-calibre machine gun emplacements guarded the flanks of the position.

Two 60-inch diameter search-lights on wood platforms were established past the park bathhouse area, and two base end stations, (60-foot steel observation towers supported



Digging in.

by guy wires), were placed 3,000 yards apart on opposite sides of the inlet. These latter were used to obtain sightings on targets for the guns.

Battery A took a similar position in the sand dunes about two miles west of Atlantic Beach, beyond the present-day Holiday Inn.

While these operational activities were taking place in and around Ft. Macon, the State of North Carolina officially turned Ft. Macon State Park over to the United States on January 1, 1942, through a written lease arrangement subject to renewal after 6 months and annually thereafter.

This lease called for the Army to make no permanent damage to the fort, public facilities or vegetation, and specified that at the termination of the war emergency, the fort and park would be returned to the state.

IN AUGUST the First Battalion of the 244th Coast Artillery at Fort Macon received orders to ship out overseas and left from Morehead City by rail in the second week of that month. As the battalion was leaving, advance elements of its replacement unit, the 54th Coast Artillery began to arrive at Morehead City. This new battalion consisted of white officers and black enlisted men.

Unfortunately, these were times when black equality had not yet been accepted and when local white residents found out about the racial status of the new battalion, they protested to the Army. The result was that the new battalion was rerouted to another duty

station before it had even fully arrived here. In its place came another white battalion of coast artillery.

THE NEW replacement unit was the Fourth Battalion, 2nd Coast Artillery. Similar in organization to its predecessor, its headquarters battery occupied the fort. Battery K was the gun position in front of the fort, and Battery H was the defense at Cape Lookout.

By the summer of 1942, the harbor defense had become somewhat more sophisticated. The four 155mm guns in front of the fort were replaced by two six-inch fixed mount Navy guns installed on two 30-foot-diameter concrete pads. Just behind them, a concrete observation bunker with a plotting room was built on a sand dune near the present park office. Remains of this bunker still stand on the dune, easily visible from the beach near the rock jetty at Fort Macon State Park.

A FEW Army boats docked at the Coast Guard station and worked with Navy sub-chasers and Coast Guard cutters which docked at the Navy section base, then located at Camp Glenn.

Other improvements made during the rest of 1942 and into 1943 included a wooden command post tower built on top of the fort, manned by Army and Navy personnel, and wooden barracks and maintenance buildings north of the fort and west of the present park office. The new buildings meant that soldiers could at last have a bit of comfort and stop eating out of mess kits. The opening of a new mess hall was a major event on the post, with



A 6" cannon in position overlooking Beaufort Inlet

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THE LAST SHOT OF THE CIVIL WAR WAS FIRED HERE!

by Paul Branch

DECEMBER 19, 1941, seemed like any other winter day to Mrs. Virginia B. Humphrey, the caretaker of Fort Macon State Park, until a knock came at her door.

Upon opening it, she found four Army officers standing on the doorstep, dressed smartly in their "pinks and greens" dress uniforms.

One of them stepped forward and introduced himself as Lt. Col. Henry G. Fowler, of the 244th Coast Artillery Regiment. He and his companions had come down from Camp Pendleton in Virginia Beach, he explained, for the purpose of making a preliminary reconnaissance of the Morehead City area and Fort Macon State Park.

It was the Army's intention to occupy Fort Macon again for military purposes in the war emergency and they were there to select sites for artillery in the park as well as establish quarters for troops.

Mrs. Humphrey must have been taken aback. Fort Macon had been a state park for more than 17 years since 1924, and for the 21 years prior to that date, it had been obsolete. But here it was not two weeks since the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, with the official entrance of the United States into World War II made the following day, and the Army was back in need of the old 19th century fort once again.

She was told that the need of guarding the state port, the new U.S. Navy Section Base begun in Morehead City the previous month, and the shipping offshore, made the occupation of the park a necessity.

LT. COL. FOWLER concluded his reconnaissance of the park and returned

to Fort Monroe, Va. to report to Brig. Gen. Rollin L. Tilton, commander of the Chesapeake Bay Sector. After receiving Col. Fowler's report, Gen. Tilton lost no time. Movement orders were issued to First Battalion, 244th Coast Artillery, to proceed to Morehead City to occupy Fort Macon State Park and Bogue Banks for local defense.

The Army had to make some modifications to the fort. These included running in phone lines and electrical power, stuccoing rain leaks in the casemates and outfitting them with wooden floors.

Other repairs included installation of a drainage system and removing the big entrance doors in the sally port.

Tragically, some irreplaceable items of the fort were destroyed during this work. The fort's original zinc gutter pipes were torn out of the parade ground walls and replaced with terra cotta pipes. Two ovens in the fort, one of them an enormous brick Dutch oven that had been used from the earliest days of the fort's existence to bake bread for the garrison soldiers, were callously demolished and removed to make storage space, despite repeated pleas from the state that they be saved.

THE FIRST BATTALION, 244th Coast Artillery numbered more than 500 men and consisted of an administrative Headquarters Battery and two gun batteries (A and B) that were armed with four 155mm guns each. When the movement orders came on Dec. 20, the battalion packed up all its gear except for the eight big 155's and the tractors that pulled them. They would have to come by rail. Once ready, the battalion

then headed off on an all-night ride in a military truck convoy and on the morning of December 21 came chugging into the Morehead City area. It turned off at 28th Street to the Atlantic Beach Bridge and crossed over to Bogue Banks. At the intersection of the causeway and the Fort Macon Road, part of the convoy, Battery A, turned right to establish a camp in the sand dunes two miles west of Atlantic Beach. Headquarters and Battery B turned left and proceeded three miles until the road suddenly ended at a parking lot at Beaufort Inlet. The trucks pulled to a stop one by one and someone shouted, "We're here!" Here? There was little to be seen. The men started climbing out of the trucks and some began strolling around through the dunes. At last, someone stumbled onto the old fort itself nestled down unseen in the brush-covered hill. The fort and surrounding area would be their home for the next nine months.

Troops occupying the fort constituted the First Battalion, 244th Coast Artillery, which was formerly a New York National Guard unit. These were typical young men from the boroughs of New York City with accents that must have seemed as out of place to Carteret County citizens as the local brogue must have sounded to them. And the varied spectrum of unusual names of these men must have been a curiosity to the local folks, as such names like Urbanski, Sczyerek, Chjonacki and Comacchio, which reflected their Russian, Italian and Polish descent.

The area took on a different tone when the battalion's 155mm guns arrived by rail within a couple of days. Lt. Joseph D. Sebes, of Battery B, recalled that they were unloaded

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World War II ... cont from page 2

the soldiers being served their first, and last, steak dinner during their stay at Fort Macon.

In the Spring of 1944, First Battalion, 246th Coast Artillery replaced the 2nd Coast Artillery at Fort Macon and Cape Lookout, manning the defenses until both were deactivated by the Army in November, 1944.

THE ARMY remained in possession of Fort Macon State Park through 1945 and most

of 1946, removing barracks buildings, weapons, searchlights and other installations before turning it back to the state. The fort was never quite the same after Army use, and the state sought compensation for the damages which had inevitably occurred after three years of occupation.

In the end, the U.S. Government's lease on Fort Macon State park terminated at midnight, October 1, 1946, and the park reverted to state control. As compensation for damages,

the state was paid the sum of \$11,450, and allowed to keep a number of miscellaneous items such as pumps, motors, a sewage system and a concrete dock at the Coast Guard station that the government was willing to leave behind.

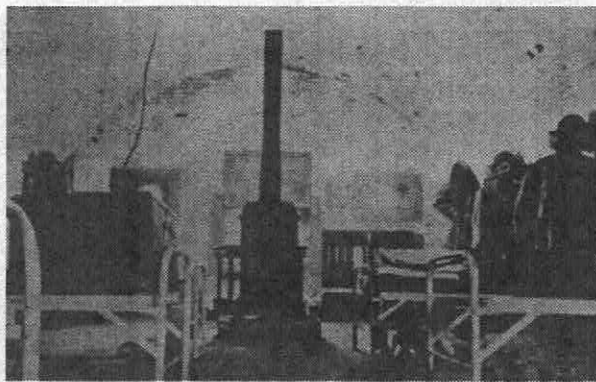
Thus, Fort Macon had been through yet another war, and it is sincerely hoped that World War II will be its last.

off the train at the port terminal and pulled through Morehead City by their tractors. Because of their weight, however, they had to be taken across the creaky Atlantic Beach Bridge one at a time. Battery A's four guns were set up in sandbag beach emplacements west of Atlantic Beach. Battery B's four guns were similarly placed among the sand dunes a short distance southwest of Fort Macon. Live ammunition was brought up from the Ordinance Depot at Charleston, S.C., and the guns were test fired and operational on Dec. 24.

THE LAST SHOT WAS FIRED

It was at this time an unusual incident took place. Just after arriving at Fort Macon and setting up quarters in the fort, a fire was built by some of the men in the fireplace of one of the rooms. However, someone found a couple of old Civil War cannonballs, which had been recovered around the fort, and unthinkingly placed them in the fireplace to serve as andirons. One of the cannonballs was a live shell, which quickly exploded in the fire in a room full of soldiers. Pvt. George Eastep remembered the blast went over him as he lay on his cot, but caught his bedding on fire. Shrapnel rattled against the opposite wall. One man was blown through a doorway into the adjoining room. By some miracle no one was killed. A couple of men had minor injuries but Pvt. Harry Chait had burns that required him to be hospitalized briefly. The entire incident, which was later mentioned in Ripley's "Believe It or Not" newspaper column has been remembered ever since as the "last shot of the Civil War," because the 244th Coast Artillery originally was the Ninth New York National Guard and its men were "Northerners." That included Pvt. Chait, injured by an old Confederate cannonball.

Every night detachments of soldiers had to patrol the entire length of the beach to look for enemy landing parties or raiders. One night a rowboat with two men came ashore. The soldiers questioned them and decided they might be enemies because of their broken English with a foreign-sounding accent. The two men were taken in for questioning but proved to be only local fishermen. The "foreign sounding" down east accent was just as unfamiliar



Typical barracks room with big iron stove

to the soldiers as the New York-New Jersey accents of the soldiers were to the fishermen.

Once the defenses were established, life now settled down to the monotony of garrison duty. Men living in the fort perhaps fared better than the others, because the fort's casemates provided some shelter from the weather. Although these men had metal cots and iron heat stoves, life in the fort was far from ideal.

THE CASEMATES were damp. Rats and mice were ever-present. It took awhile before civilian laborers were able to fit all the casemates with wooden floors and temporary windows to shut out the icy winter winds.

The layout of the fort was established so that headquarters offices, plotting room and infirmary occupied the three eastern wings, and the soldiers' quarters took up the two western wings. A post canteen and guardhouse were established in the two casemates leading off the sally port.

THE SOLDIERS of Battery B, in front of the fort, lived in tents west of the present park office. For all the soldiers, whether inside or outside of the fort, field conditions prevailed. Food was prepared from portable field kitchens, and soldiers ate

out of their mess kits. Drinking water came from Lister bags with spigots. Sanitary facilities were in the form of large metal cans as latrines. Of course, mosquito netting was a must for sleeping, and protective headgear was similarly required for those soldiers sent out each night to patrol the beaches.

Although soldiers remained on a constant semi-alert status, there was much free time for swimming, fishing, reading and other pastimes. This lifestyle was not unlike that of other soldiers who had served at Fort Macon from the earliest times. However, these soldiers usually had to stay on the reservation.

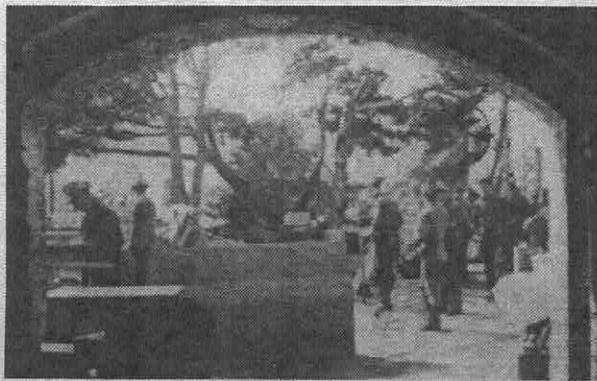
Enlisted men found passes to leave the reservation difficult to obtain, and even if they could get them, they were not usually allowed to leave the island. Consequently, the few amusements offered at that time by Atlantic Beach were about all a soldier could expect to find. Alfred Cooper's Idle-Hour bowling alley, the old Pavilion and the Money Isle Cafe were favorite haunts of soldiers lucky enough to get a pass.

Officers, of course, had more freedom. Later, as the immediacy of the war subsided, married personnel were sometimes granted authorization to obtain living quarters with their families off the reservation. Throughout all of this, many of the soldiers liked what they found in Carteret County, taking local girls as wives and returning to the area after the war.

THE MEN of the 244th Coast Artillery were to occupy Fort Macon for nine months before being sent overseas and replaced by other units. In the months after their initial arrival at the fort in December 1941, things gradually improved for them. Barracks buildings, mess hall, latrines and other buildings were built outside the fort and in the sand dunes near the gun positions.

To improve conditions, electricity was wired into the fort, temporary doors and windows shut out the cold, and more freedom was granted to leave the post and visit the towns.

Thus it was at Fort Macon during the last week and a half of December 53 years ago, when World War II finally made its presence felt in Carteret County.



At work inside the fort.

Paul Branch is the Ranger/Historian at Ft. Macon State Park. Portions of Mr. Branch's two articles have been previously published in the Carteret County News-Times

PAYING FOR A CANNON

HELP US FIRE ANOTHER SHOT

By now you probably know that we have a 32-pounder cannon barrel without a carriage to mount it on. The carriage is a massive structure made originally from large timbers and heavy cast iron wheels and fittings. The carriage has two large components. The gun barrel is attached to the top part of the carriage, which is designed to slide rearwards over the bottom carriage when the gun recoils during firing.

A gun barrel without a carriage is not a cannon, and is quite useless. It will cost the Friends around \$20,000 to have a carriage built to support and hold a 32-pounder gun barrel. Our problem is how to find this much money when we are also in the process of building an expensive hot-shot furnace.

One approach is to find financial support from the State, or from foundation

grants. The Friends are actively pursuing this approach, but so far without success. We are also looking for corporate donors, but most

is where the funding drive spearheaded by Patsy and Jake Dunlop comes into play. So far, more than \$3,000 has been contributed by our members toward the Cannon Fund. If we can increase that amount to \$5,000 our prospects for finding a major donor, or donors, for the balance will be greatly enhanced.

Another effective way that members can help augment our financial capabilities is through the purchase of Lifetime memberships. Lifetime memberships cost \$100 for individuals, and \$500 for businesses. Another alternative is to prepay several years of dues at one time.

There are many ways we can all join in to make our fondest dream come true in 1996 - seeing our first large Civil War type cannon sitting proudly atop Fort Macon's ramparts. Its up to us!



Gun Drill. Practice... Practice... Practice...

corporations are not interested unless they see a substantial financial commitment on the part of the requesting organization. This

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

1995 has been a banner year for this organization. Compared to the number of members a year ago, 1160 have paid for 1995. An impressive record.

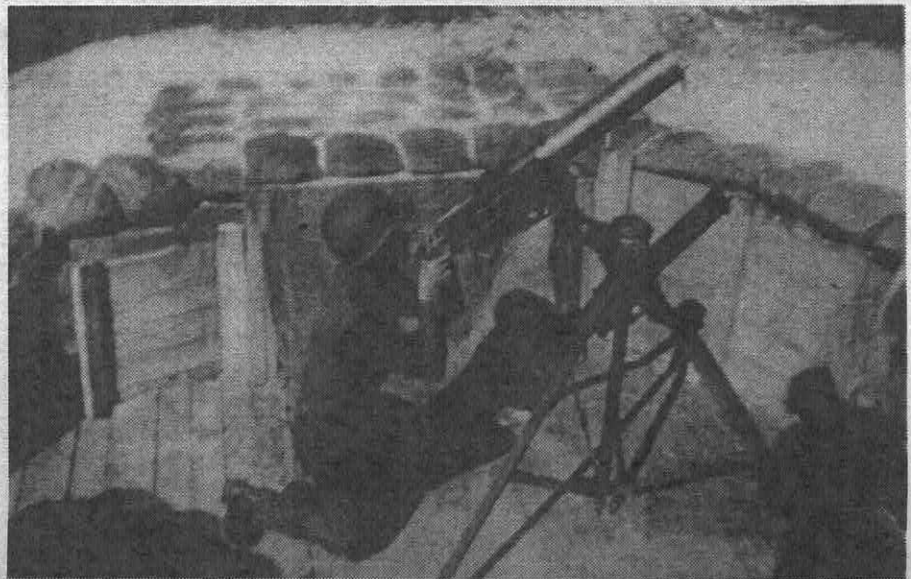
Plans for the hot-shot furnace are moving forward and we again express our great appreciation to the Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association, and the Cultural Resources Division of North Carolina for their financial support. Work starts soon on the tedious repairs to the Fort. So long overdue but here at last. Dr. Phil McKnelly of our state Park System supports these efforts and we look forward to Fort Macon's start of "on going restoration" becoming a reality late this year. Our representatives Jean Preston and the late Macon Snowden have been very supportive as have Senators Beverly Perdue and Patrick Ballantine. Our new representative Jonathan Robinson I'm sure will join in the support for Carteret's special treasure.

The Cannon fund continues to grow and the Finance Committee is considering a number of options to secure the still needed funds to finish the carriage. The Dunlops enthusiasm and work on pursuing funds for the cannon, and Howard Moberg's design contributions have inspired the Board and Finance Committee.

Architectural drawings are in progress for the new Educational Center. Our FFM program for November will be the architect, with Supt. Merritt bringing us up to date on this great addition.

We are a vital group, our Friends of Fort Macon, who are not only supportive of the aims of the Friends organization but who are willing to give their time and financial assis-

stance. This along with the Parks' very capable Raleigh people and the staff of Fort Macon make my job most rewarding. It is exciting to realize by January 1st we will have had our 1996 Membership Drive and will have added many new people to our list who care about Fort Macon. There is no end to what a group like this can accomplish for this part of North Carolina and Carteret County.



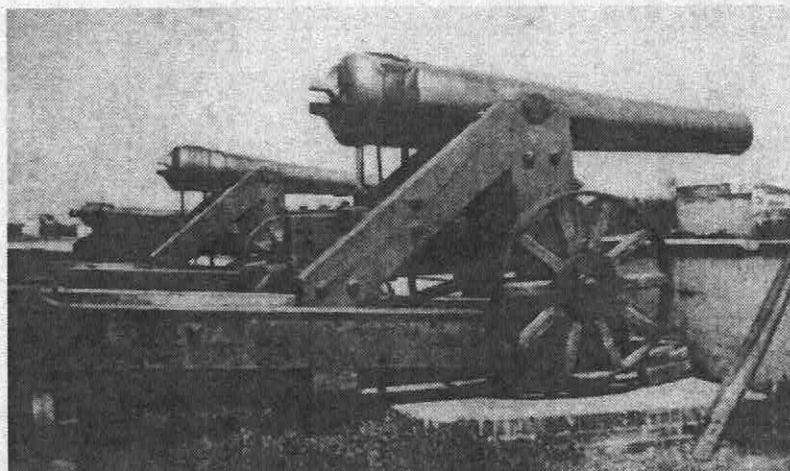
A Browning 30 cal. water cooled machine gun

UPDATE...32-POUNDER CANNON

Fort Macon during the Civil War proudly faced the sea with a complement of 54 cannons guarding her perimeters. They served her well through the Civil War and remained in place during her period as a prison. Sadly, beginning in 1867, her cannons were removed and disposed of in various ways.

It has long been a dream of the Friends and of Jody Merritt and Paul Branch of the Park Staff to once again see large cannons on the walls. A great deal of research has been done in an effort to locate a cannon that might be available but there were few, if any, and the cost of purchasing even one would be prohibitive. Records show that there were twenty-two 32-pounder cannons in place in various locations around the fort. This is the type of cannon that is now in the process of being replicated. Jim Brandon, commander of the Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp 1597, had seen a replica cannon made of fiber glass at Fort Branch near Williamston, and made his photos and infor-

mation available to the Cannon Committee. Dan Taylor, Commander of Sons of Confederate Veterans Camp 1594, put the committee in touch with a Downeast fiber glass boat builder, Richard Bunch, and things began to happen.



This is the CANNON! 22 of these 32 pounders circled the ramparts in 1860. We are building number one!

There are several steps to be gone through in order to turn out a replica of a cannon—a cannon that is true in detail—a cannon so real looking that you KNOW it

could be fired. The first step is to build a plug for the barrel. This is comparable to the armature a sculptor builds in preparation for constructing his masterpiece. The next step is to build up layers of fiber glass and epoxy on the plug until the proper dimensions are reached for the 32-pounder cannon that is being replicated. A mold is then made of this prototype. Once the mold is made you have the capability of producing any number of replicas.

The cost of producing the first cannon is appreciably higher than the subsequent cannons that are molded. There will also be the cost of producing the wooden carriage on which the cannon sits. Some funds have been granted by the County Commissioners, but much more is needed to realize our dream.

We now have the ability to get 32-pounders back on the walls of Fort Macon. All we need is a concentrated effort by the membership to make this a reality. It's in our hands.

UPDATE...HOT SHOT FURNACE

A project of the Friends of Fort Macon that is also in the works is the construction of a hot shot furnace—a very necessary adjunct of the 32-pounder cannon. A generous donation given by the Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association has made it possible for the Friends to begin the process of recreating an authentic replica of the first hot shot furnace to be built at Fort Macon. This furnace was constructed in 1836. The time lapse of almost 160 years presented a challenge, more of a challenge than originally expected.

Researching the project has been very time consuming for several reasons. It was discovered that there were no existing plans for this type of furnace with a front loading firebox. The only plans available were for a side loading furnace and consequently of only partial help in planning construction. It was necessary to use a combination of these plans, an artist's

rendering of Fort Macon in 1862 which showed the front of the furnace and the original footprint or brick foundation base that remains intact within the fort. This footprint has been excavated by a state archeological team and authenticated and is now documented for posterity. Plans have now been completed and will be released to contractors for competitive bidding.

Another time consuming but very important part of the research has been the problem of finding the proper brick with which to rebuild the furnace. This brick is not available at your local supply house obviously. Instead, it must be handled by specialists in the field of producing brick to be used in the construction and repair of historically accurate structures. The bricks are hand formed, then cured or dried for a

period of time and finally are fired. The process applies to the face brick—the visible outside brick—as well as to the interior brick or fire brick. Each type is produced by the same careful, lengthy process. This obviously takes time and indeed it will take at least two months for completion. A source has been found able to reproduce the proper bricks and the order for them has been placed.

Much time has been devoted to planning this project. We are now ready to move ahead and we will keep the membership updated as work progresses. The confidence expressed in the Friends organization by the Atlantic Beach Merchants and Professional Association is greatly appreciated, for without their generous contribution we would not be at this plateau with our plans.

JOIN THE SPIRIT OF '96

Our annual general membership drive is now beginning. It is time for all of us to renew our memberships for 1996 and to ask our friends and neighbors to join us. It is not difficult to recruit new members for the Friends of Fort Macon. If your friends or neighbors have not joined, it is probably only because no one has asked them. In the past, we have relied heavily on lists of prospects to recruit new members. Now those lists are almost exhausted. From now on we must rely on our current members to recruit new members. Each of us should make it our goal to recruit one new member each year.

1995 was a great year for growth and accomplishment. Because we were able to double our membership, we were able to acquire sufficient funds to begin two major projects -- the restoration of the Hot-Shot Furnace and the construction of our first reproduction cannon. If we can continue to grow, we will be able to complete these important projects in 1996. Join the Spirit of '96! Renew and recruit! And don't forget about gift memberships in the Friends to ease those Xmas shopping chores!

FRIENDS OF FORT MACON NAVY KNIT GOLF SHIRTS

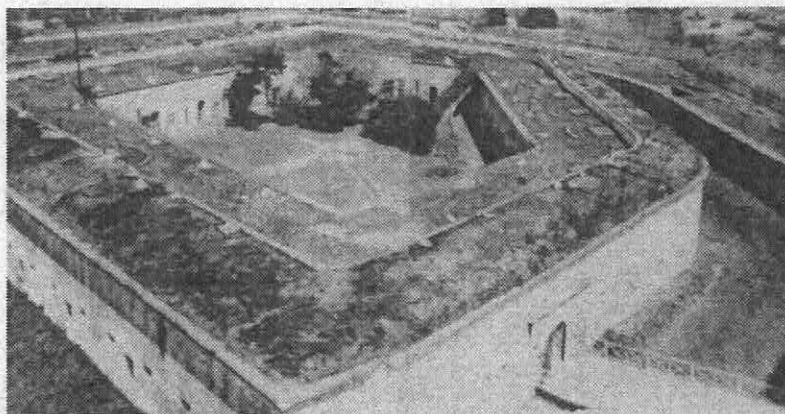
Small, Medium and Large
Gold Cannon Emblem

\$25.00 plus \$3.00 s/h

PO Box 651, Beaufort, NC 28516

BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP DRIVE PAYS OFF

New members are the life blood of any organization, and we are especially grateful for the recent "TRANSFUSION" resulting from our business membership drive. We had 42 business members in mid-May before the drive began, and we have over 90 at this writing! Several members of the Membership Committee should be recognized for their outstanding performance in recruiting new business members for the Friends -- especially Adele and Bruce De Luca, Ed Olson, and Cynthia Stevens. We also extend a cordial welcome to our new business members. You will find their names included in the honor roll of all of our business members on the back page of this newsletter. Please give them your patronage as a way of showing our appreciation for their support.



The Fort in 1942



A fierce bunch of warriors



Fort Macon Post Exchange

Membership Form

Check
One:

☐

New
Member(s)

☐

Renewal

☐

Gift
Membership

Fee Enclosed \$ _____

Date _____

Members Name(s) _____

Street Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Name of Donor, if gift _____

Membership Categories and Fees

Individual - \$5.00 Family - \$10.00 Lifetime (ea.) - \$100.00

Business or Organization - \$25.00 Business Lifetime - \$500.00

Friends of Fort Macon, P.O. Box 651, Beaufort, NC 28516