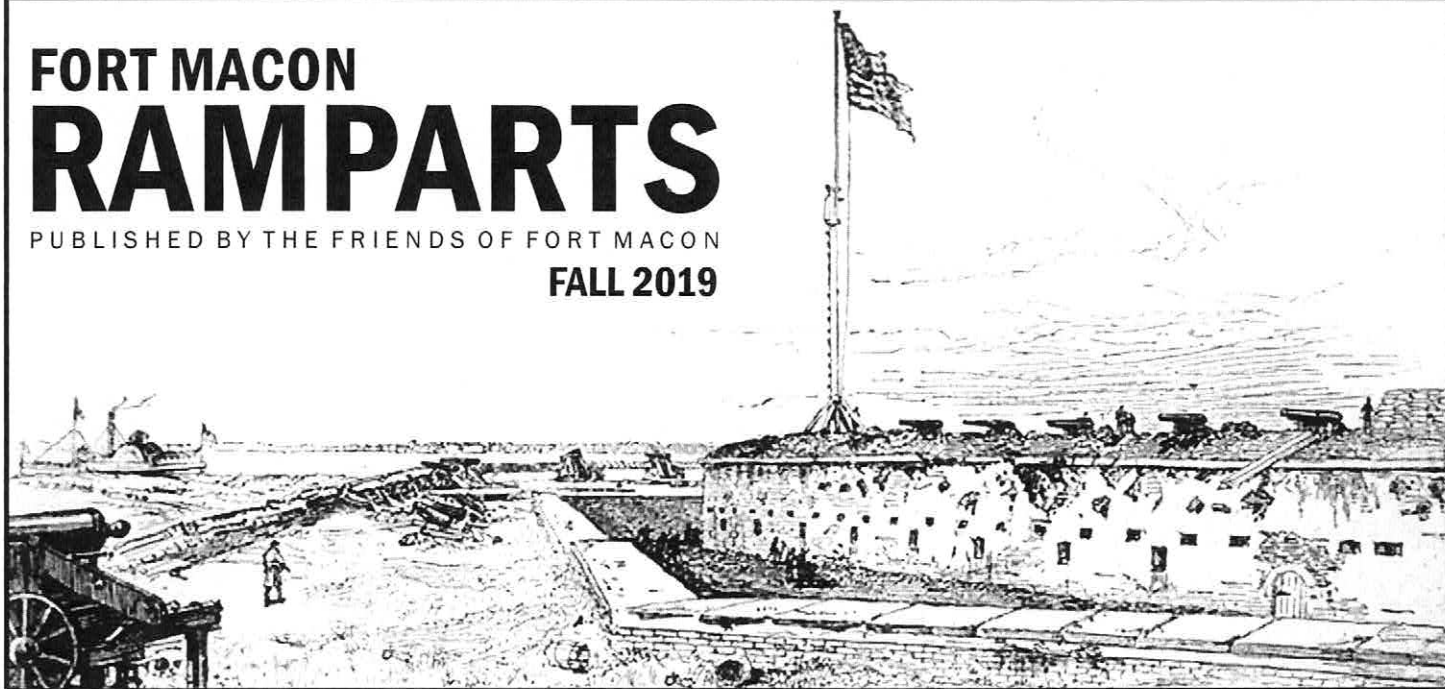


# FORT MACON RAMPARTS

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## World War II Coast Defense Exhibit

*Paul Branch*

For some time now, the Fort Macon State Park staff has been working on a plan to create a World War II Coast Defense exhibit for the park. Hundreds of soldiers in World War II manned the coastal defenses of Fort Macon and the surrounding local area during the period of 1941-1944. While most visitors to Fort Macon State Park are aware of the fort's role in the War Between the States and its use in the 19th century, very few have any realization of the fort's use in World War II. Therefore, it is proposed to create an outdoor exhibit to honor the service of the hundreds of soldiers who served here in World War II.

By way of background, in late 1941 it became increasingly certain that the United States would be drawn into World War II. In November of that year, army officers made a reconnaissance of Fort Macon State Park in expectation of placing coastal defenses in the park. These defenses would have the mission of defending the entrance to Beaufort Inlet, Cape Lookout, the N. C. State Port at Morehead City, a navy section base being established on the west end of Morehead City, and later a merchant ship anchorage in Cape Lookout Bight. As such, Fort Macon was to become the headquarters and primary defense of a larger entity that ultimately become known as the "Harbor Defenses of Beaufort Inlet." When the United States finally entered World War II in December, 1941, troops were sent from the army's Chesapeake Bay Sector to activate the HDBI.

On December 21, 1941, the First Battalion, 244th Coast Artillery Regiment (originally a New York National Guard unit), arrived in Fort Macon State Park. The battalion numbered about 500 men and was armed

with eight tractor-drawn 155 mm guns in two batteries. Of these, Battery A's four 155 mm guns were stationed about three miles west of Atlantic Beach. Two guns from this battery were later moved to defend Cape Lookout. Battery B's four 155 mm guns were placed into position in the sand dunes about 300 yards southwest of Fort Macon guarding the Beaufort harbor entrance. Headquarters Battery occupied Fort Macon itself. Other defenses included the establishment of base end stations for sighting and plotting approaching enemy vessels, search lights, barbed wire entanglements and a Harbor Entrance Control Post (HECP) on Fort Macon to identify and control ship movements.

In addition, to the foregoing, part of a battalion combat team of the 116th U.S. Infantry (originally a Virginia National Guard unit) was stationed in the New Bern, Morehead City, Beaufort area for several weeks as a "sector mobile force." Its duty was to provide defense against local attack, and

perform outpost duty and beach patrols in conjunction with the Coast Guard. In January, 1942, this unit was replaced by a battalion combat team of the 111th U. S. Infantry (originally a Pennsylvania National Guard unit) numbering about 1000 men.

First Battalion, 244th Coast Artillery, remained on duty at Fort Macon throughout the heaviest period of German U-boat operations just offshore. In July, 1942, however, it was ordered overseas and left in August. To take over the defenses on Cape Lookout, Battery H, 2nd Coast Artillery, arrived in July. The unit chosen to take over the defenses at Fort Macon was 2nd Battalion, 54th Coast Artillery Regiment, which arrived July 31 from nearby Camp Davis in Onslow County. This unit consisted of black enlisted men led by white officers. Given the state of society's racial relations in the 1940s, the placement of black soldiers at Fort Macon resulted in protests from North Carolina leaders to the War Department. As a result, the battalion was

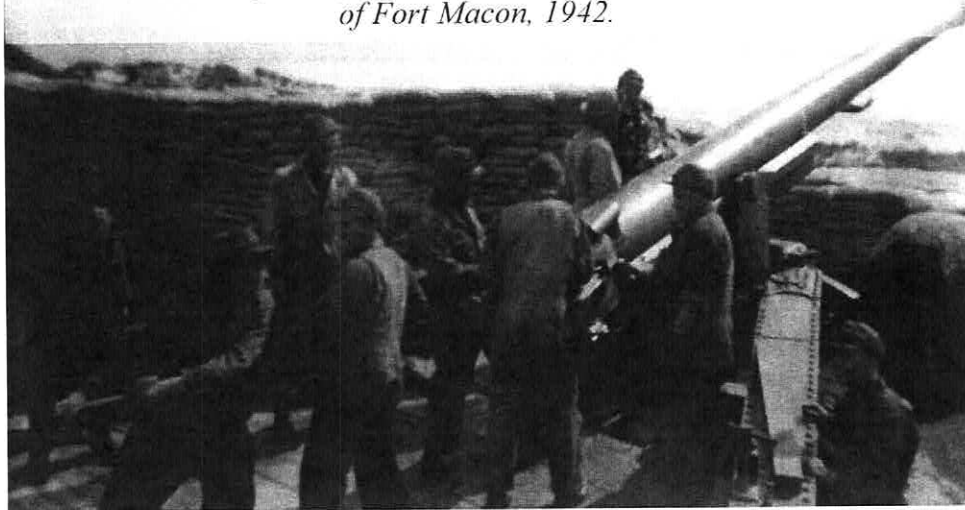
withdrawn on September 6 and replaced with Battery K, 2nd Coast Artillery, and a headquarters battery.

In the meantime, the weaponry of the HDBI was upgraded. The 155 mm guns on Cape Lookout were replaced by a battery of two 5-inch rapid fire naval guns in September, 1942. The 155 mm guns at Fort Macon were replaced in November, 1942, by a battery of two 6-inch rapid fire naval guns.

During 1943 and 1944, there were further changes of units. In October, 1943, the Sector Mobile Force battalion of the 111th Infantry was relieved by 116th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (mechanized) of the 101st Cavalry Group,

and established itself at Morehead City. A final change of the troops in the HDBI took place in April, 1944. At that time, Batteries H and K, 2nd Coast Artillery, were replaced by First Battalion, 246th Coast Artillery (originally a Virginia National Guard unit), with its Battery A taking

*Photograph of a M1918 155 mm GPF gun of the 244th Coast Artillery being loaded in place in the battery southwest of Fort Macon, 1942.*



over the Fort Macon defenses and Battery B going to Cape Lookout. On October 19, 1944, with the threat to the coast all but eliminated, the defenses of Beaufort Inlet were inactivated and the troops subsequently withdrawn. Thus, ended the World War II coastal defense of Fort Macon and Beaufort Inlet. Between 1941 and 1944, about 4000 men served in the HDBI and surrounding area. There is currently no monument, exhibit or interpretation anywhere in North Carolina to highlight and honor their service. For this reason, the park wants to create a new World War II Coast Defense exhibit. This exhibit will be an outdoor exhibit made to imitate one of the cannon emplacements that stood in the sand dunes outside Fort Macon during the first part of the war when the U-boat menace was at its peak. The centerpiece of this exhibit will be an original cannon of the type used at the fort during the first year of the war. Specifically, this cannon would be a Model 1918 Grande Puissance Filloux

*continued...*



*Firing drill with gun Number 3 of the 244th Coast Artillery in the battery southwest of Fort Macon, 1942.*

(GPF) 155 mm gun. It was the U.S. version of the French Model 1917 155 mm GPF developed by French Colonel Louis Filloux in World War I. It served as the U.S. Army's standard mobile long-range heavy artillery piece from World War I until after World War II began. At the beginning of World War II, the M1918 GPF was used to equip mobile Coast Artillery battalions that were sent to defend various small ports and strategic locations along the U.S. coast such as Beaufort Inlet. The proposed exhibit would consist of the cannon sitting behind a sand-bagged emplacement as seen below, with wayside graphic panels interpreting the defenses of HDBI and the troops that manned them.



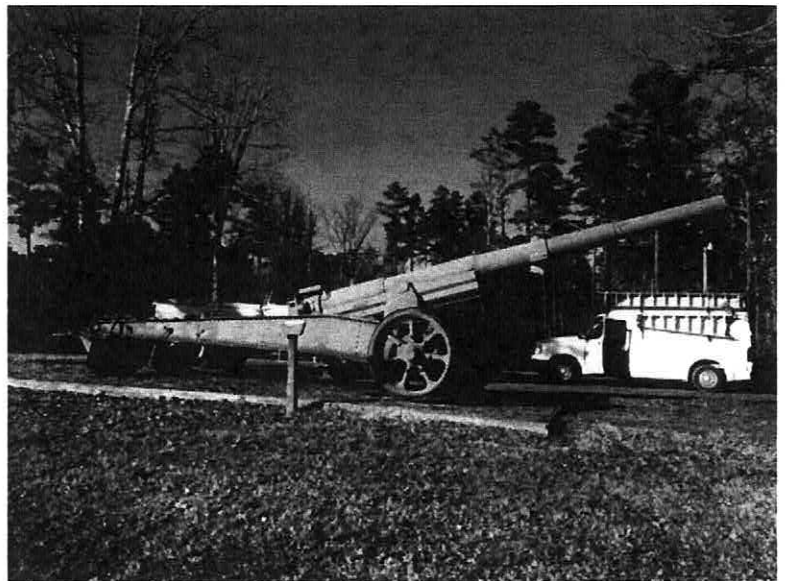
*Gun crews pose with their 155 mm GPF guns of the 244th Coast Artillery in the battery southwest of Fort Macon, 1942.*



The main problem to create such an exhibit is where to acquire an original 155 mm GPF cannon. No replicas are being made today and very few of the originals still exist. However, Park Ranger Ben Fleming discovered that an original 155 mm GPF is located at the N.C. National Guard facility at Camp Butner, N.C. This piece was originally used as an outdoor display at a National Guard facility at Charlotte, N.C. but was subsequently moved to Camp Butner. There is no particular historic significance that it shares with Butner and few people other than a handful of National Guard personnel ever even get to see it. Beyond a small plaque in front, there is no interpretation associated with the piece.

The cannon is owned by the state through the N.C. Department of Public Safety, which oversees the N.C. National Guard, and is the type that is needed for the exhibit. The very rarity of this type of original cannon and the fact it is located within the state, along with the historic use of this type of cannon at Fort Macon, all speak to the fact it deserves to be in a place of honor where it can be viewed by the public and interpreted as an important historic artifact. And there is no better place than in the proposed coast defense exhibit at Fort Macon, where cannons of this type were actually used during World War II. The park staff has been in contact with the N.C. National Guard and efforts are underway to develop a loan agreement whereby the cannon can be transferred to Fort Macon State Park for use as part of the World War II coast defense exhibit. The park staff would be able to provide the maintenance needed to preserve the cannon as a historic artifact, as they currently do for the other artillery pieces that are on display at Fort Macon. The 1.2 million citizens of North Carolina and their guests who annually visit Fort Macon State Park would thereby obtain a new exhibit to interpret yet another part of the state's rich history.

It is hoped the planned arrangements can be worked out with the N.C. National Guard to transfer the cannon to Fort Macon during the fall. There will be a cost involved to get the cannon here, as well as site work and equipment rental to prepare the exhibit site. The park has set up a donations fund to help defray this cost and the support of the Friends of Fort Macon will be an important factor in making this exhibit a reality.



*M1918 155 mm GPF at Camp Butner, N.C.*

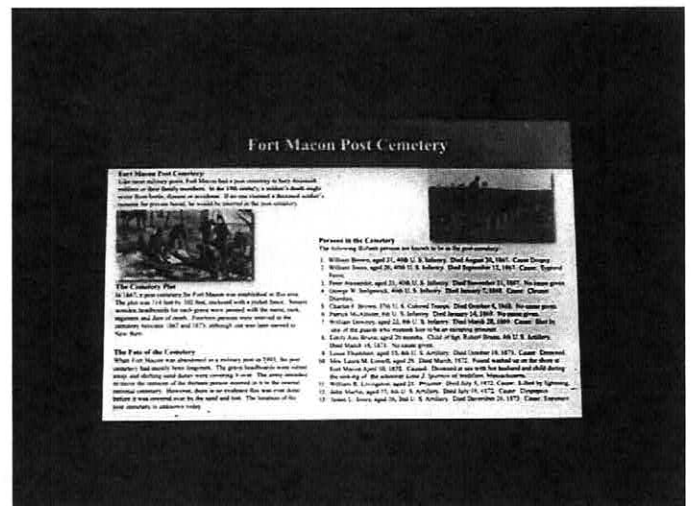
# Friends Make Possible Two New Wayside Trail Exhibits on the Fort Macon Nature Trail

*Paul Branch*

The Friends of Fort Macon have made it possible for the park staff to install two new outdoor wayside trail exhibits on the Fort Macon Nature Trail. The Friends provided the funds for the exhibit graphic panels and their metal stands.

One exhibit is located between mile markers 2.7 and 2.8 overlooking the remains of the old World War II bunker in the sand dunes overlooking the ocean. The bunker was actually a Battery Commander Fire Control Station for a battery of 6-inch guns mounted near the beach below. The new exhibit explains the purpose of the bunker and how it was used during World War II. Because the bunker collapsed into ruins years ago, most people today have little understanding of what it was supposed to be. The exhibit now answers this question.

The second exhibit is located at mile marker 2.5 and describes the old 19th century Fort Macon post cemetery that was located somewhere in that area. The cemetery has been lost to history, but the exhibit contains the names of the thirteen persons associated with the fort that were buried in it between 1867 and 1873.



## What's Happening?

Stay tuned to the Friends of Fort Macon website: [friendsoffortmacon.org](http://friendsoffortmacon.org) and our Facebook page for updates and what's new.

# Fort Macon State Park

# HOWLING HAYRIDE

## and NIGHT HIKE

Howling Hayride #4 was a ton of FUN! We added some soldier history to our scavenger hunt, and some things for the senses too.

We had s'mores and candy everywhere... theres something extra special about gathering together around a wood fire to roast marshmallows.

Thank you! to the Park Staff and Volunteers for their dedication and hard work. We especially, appreciate all our visitors that help make this fall gathering another fabulous tradition at Fort Macon State Park.

See ya at the Fort!

Cindi Davia, President, Friends of Fort Macon





# Membership Renewal Dues 2018/2019

**Follow these instructions to renew your membership!**

**The address label on the newsletter references your Membership Type:**

I = Individual (\$15) F = Family (\$15) C = Contributor (\$30) D = Donor (\$50) S = Sponsor (\$75)  
Individual Lifetime (\$200) or Business Lifetime (\$500)

**Then the amount of your last membership dues is listed.**

**The last item is the date of your most recent dues payment.** If this date is prior to 2018, this will be your last Rampart until you update your membership. Unless you are a Lifetime Member, this is an annual membership.

**To renew your membership, you can tear off the portion of the RAMPART with your address label on it.** Circle the Membership Type that you are choosing. Add your email address to the right of the Membership Type section. Then mail this along with your check to the address on the RAMPART. You may also renew memberships and make donations on our updated website.

We would like to add your email address to our information as this will help reduce mailing costs and enable us to notify you of events in a more efficient and timely manner. We promise that we will NOT share this information with anyone and will only use it to notify you of Fort Macon/Friends of Fort Macon events.

*Thank you, Sheila Leppert*

## ✂ Thank You... *Cindi Davia*

Thank You to the NC State Park community and the Friends of Fort Macon for allowing me a very rewarding volunteer opportunity over the past few years. I'll be retiring from the FOFM Board on New Years Eve and go out with a "Cannon Blast"! I've worked with some amazing people and know the new Board members have a great deal to share in the future.

We NEED the Friends of Fort Macon membership to grow. Please, renew, also, consider starting a membership gift for your family and friends.

Many generations have memories at Fort Macon and lets keep that tradition going. We have sponsorship opportunities for our events if you'd like to do that as well. Stay tuned and sign up via our website [www.friendsoffortmacon.org](http://www.friendsoffortmacon.org). Also, like our Facebook page for updates.

Take care, and I'll continue being a volunteer with cheer... hope it's contagious.

Cindi Davia, *President, Friends of Fort Macon*

## *Join us...* New Year's Eve Cannon Blast

Celebrate the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 with a blast. Fort Macon will be firing off its big guns in celebration of the new year. The band "The Werewolves" play starting at 6 pm, and the cannons will go off at 7:00 sharp. Feel free to bring a folding chair and picnic meal similar to the summer concerts. Come early, parking is limited.



## First Day Hike



**JANUARY 1 —** Start the new year off with a hike in your favorite state park. Fort Macon will be offering two ranger led hikes this year, both starting from the Visitor Center at 9:00 am. One will be a short nature hike on the Yarrow's Loop trail and inlet beach covering about ¼ of a mile. The second hike will be along the 3.2 mile Elliott Causes Trail.