

## In shadow of Missouri gun, Fort Miles artillery park opens

Dedication takes place on 71st anniversary of Japanese surrender



Bob Saupee of Reading, Pa., was stationed on the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrendered on Sept. 2, 1945. The Missouri gun barrel is the showpiece for the new Fort Miles World War II Artillery Park. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO

By Ron MacArthur - September 2, 2016

In what at one time seemed like a “Mission Impossible,” Fort Miles Historical Association volunteers celebrated the culmination of their dream – an artillery park showcased with a gun barrel from one of the most noted ships in U.S. history.

Under the shadow of the 66-foot-long USS Missouri barrel, volunteers joined with dignitaries and state officials Sept. 2 to officially dedicate the Fort Miles World War II Artillery Park of 10 guns, connected by a trail among the dunes and pines of Cape Henlopen State Park.

It was 71 years ago to the day that the Japanese army surrendered under that same barrel onboard the Missouri in Tokyo Bay, ending World War II.

Among the dignitaries attending the ceremony was Bob Saupee of Reading, Pa., who was an 18-year-old sailor on the upper deck of the USS Missouri witnessing the surrender ceremony.

The 16-inch gun barrel – similar to two large guns that were housed in Fort Miles bunkers – is designed as the showcase to the entrance of a planned World War II museum.

Gov. Jack Markell said most people would look at the task of transporting the Missouri barrel from Norfolk to Fort Miles and give up. “But that’s not your attitude,” he told the volunteers.

The barrel was just days away from being cut up for scrap. Through a plan



A 16-inch gun barrel from the USS Missouri is located near the entrance to the museum. Two of the same size guns were housed in underground bunkers when Fort Miles served as a military base during World War II. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO

written by the association and Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the barrel was donated by the U.S. Naval Systems Command to the state's Division of Parks and Recreation.

The barrel arrived amid fanfare in April 2012 via barge, railcar and eventually truck.

DNREC Secretary David Small called the park a place where memories are made, as well as a place where natural beauty mixes with the history of Fort Miles.

"You have put new life into a place that played such a vital role in World War II," Small said.

Fort Miles Historical Association President Gary Wray, a member of a team of four who in 2003 put the restoration wheels in motion, said dedicated Bunker Buster volunteers put in 14,000 volunteer hours in 2015 and will top that number this year. "We are a pushy bunch, but we get stuff done," Wray said. "This project has been a total team effort."

The association raised \$430,000 to fund the artillery park, including more than \$113,000 to transport the Missouri gun barrel.

Next on the agenda is the completion of a state-of-the-art World War II museum in Battery 519 adjacent to the artillery park and the Missouri gun barrel. A fall kickoff event is planned to launch a \$2.1 million capital campaign.

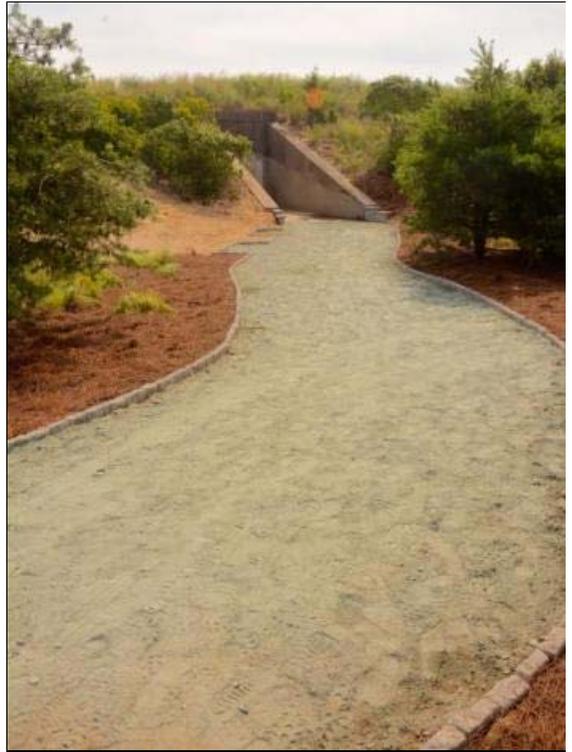
Fort Miles was the largest East Coast combat-ready post during World War II, with 2,500 personnel trained to protect the coast and the entrance to the Delaware Bay and Delaware River. Fort Miles had 32 of the Army's largest-caliber artillery pieces plus anti-aircraft weapons. It continued to serve in military capacities for another three decades until more than 540 acres of the area were returned to the state of Delaware, forming the heart of Cape Henlopen State Park.



Gary Wray, president of the Fort Miles Historical Association, says the dream for a museum and gun park dates back 20 years. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



Veterans, elected officials, volunteers and state parks staff join Sept. 2 - the 71st anniversary of Japanese surrender - to cut a ribbon to open the Fort Miles World War II Artillery Park. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



This entrance to Battery 519 will eventually be the new entrance to the World War II Museum at Fort Miles. The fundraising campaign for the project will get underway soon.  
RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



World War II veterans Tom Creekmore, left, and Horace Knowles meet during the ceremony. Creekmore was part of a flight crew based in England, and Knowles served at Fort Miles.  
RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



Delaware State Parks Director Ray Bivens, left, and DNREC Secretary David Small capture a photo opportunity as U.S. Sen. Tom Carper talks with Bob Saupee, a World War II veteran who served on the USS Missouri. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



Gov. Jack Markell talks with Horace Knowles of Lewes, who was a member of the 261st Coast Artillery stationed at Fort Miles during World War II. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



U.S. Sen. Tom Carper tips his hat after announcing that a Virginia-class nuclear submarine is being named after Delaware, the first ship with that designation in 100 years. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



Under the gun barrel of the USS Missouri, Fort Miles Historical Association President Gary Wray thanks the hundreds of volunteers who have donated thousands of hours in the fort's restoration efforts. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO



Nick Carter, right, presents Fort Miles Historical Association President Gary Wray with a commemorative plank from the USS Missouri. The battleship served in World War II, Korea and the Persian Gulf before being decommissioned in 1992. It's now a museum ship at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Carter chaired a fundraising committee to raise funds to bring the Missouri gun barrel to Fort Miles. RON MACARTHUR PHOTO

**Story Location:**

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Lewes Delaware 19958

