

Coast Press 6/1/16

BRING OUT THE BIG GUN

WWII-era weapon positioned at Cape Henlopen

MOLLY MURRAY
THE NEWS JOURNAL

It took two cranes, 80 tons of counterweights, a team of riggers and dozens of volunteers to lift and slide a 16-inch gun — one of the same guns that witnessed the surrender of Japan at Tokyo Bay in September 1945 — to its permanent location at Cape Henlopen State Park on Friday.

The gun placement marks the next step in a plan to develop a comprehensive WWII museum within a section of the park, that during the start of World War II was responsible for defending shipping in Delaware Bay and River from enemy attacks. The newly installed gun points toward New Jersey.

A similar 16-inch gun provided some of the firepower that made Fort Miles a critical link in the strategic defense of the Middle Atlantic.

The gun was slated for the scrap heap



The 16-inch gun crossing Lewes & Rehoboth Canal in 2012 on the way to Cape Henlopen State Park.

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Gun

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"Here we are four years later," said Gary Wray, head of the Fort Miles Historical Association.

A 90,000-pound concrete base, a 70,000-pound slide, a 38,500-pound yoke support the massive gun barrel. The combined weight of the gun and the supporting framework is 300 tons.

"The barrel is the centerpiece of our Fort Miles Museum," Wray said.

The gun is one of two that showcase the firepower of the coastal defense at Battery 519 within the state park. A 12-inch gun, which also came from Dahlgren, has been completely restored and is installed within the battery. Both guns overlook the ocean, as they would have during WWII.

After the war, the Army removed the guns but kept the land until a part of it was returned to the state and converted to Cape Henlopen State Park in 1964. State park and Fort Miles Association

when it was discovered four years ago at the Navy's Dahlgren, Virginia, facilities. Three of the guns from the Missouri have been salvaged. One is at Cape Charles, Virginia, another at Cape Henlopen State Park and the third at a WWII museum in Arizona. It was floated across the Chesapeake Bay on a barge, moved to a rail car and then carried by train up the Delmarva Peninsula to Georgetown. Then, it moved on to Lewes by rail, crossing the Lewes-Rehoboth Canal railroad bridge in 2012. Volunteers with the Fort Miles Historical Association have scraped paint and refurbished the massive gun and other parts and pieces ever since.

members were unable to track down Army-style guns to create their museum display. The guns the Navy used are slightly different but both the Army and Navy guns had tremendous firepower and range. The similar 16-inch gun at Fort Miles could send a shell toward a target more than 27 miles away.

A crew of 48 could load and fire two of the massive shells every two minutes.

But the heavy arms at the fort were never fired in anger, said John V. H. Roberts, restoration and construction coordinator with the Fort Miles Historical Association. Instead, he said, they fired 445 shots in practice.

The story went that when the guns were being tested, military police drove from Lewes to Bethany Beach and told people to open their windows to reduce the concussion from fired guns, he said. The 12-inch gun, now on display inside battery 519, had a range of 17 miles. The

16-inch gun could fire a shell 27 miles, he said.

So far, an estimated \$1 million in state, private and foundation donations have paid for the movement of the guns and restoration. In addition, thousands of hours of time have been contributed by a group of volunteers with the Fort Miles Historical Association.

The next effort is to raise \$2.1 million to complete the museum, Wray said. Mark Chura, a senior associate with Horizon Philanthropic Services, said the placement of the gun "is an important first step."

The museum will bring an additional dimension to the popular state park, he said. "It's the history. It's the natural component. It's all of these things," Chura said. Reach Molly Murray at (302) 463-3334 or mmurray@delawareonline.com.