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# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON



Images contributed

Artist Helen Radcliffe, left, presents a rifle range painting to Norma Eckard, president of Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range.

## Group to dedicate World War I monument at Fort Caswell Rifle Range

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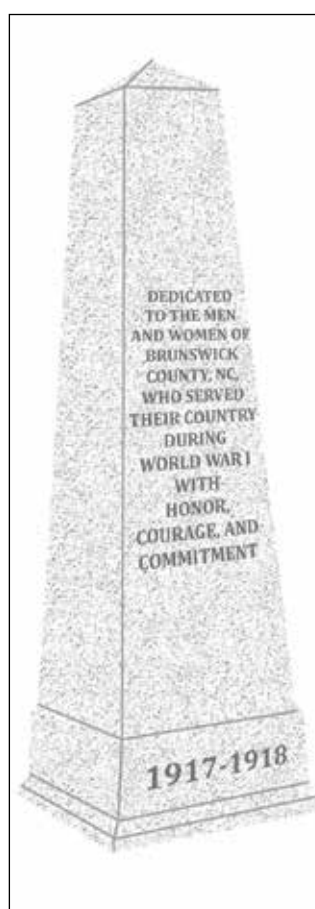
Since 2011, the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range have worked to repair and recognize the World War I site.

The Friends organized as an all volunteer group and incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to preserve the Fort Caswell Rifle Range with Norma Lee Eckard as president, Russ Barlowe as vice president, Tom Luken as secretary-treasurer and Ronald Eckard as administrator.

The nonprofit learned the Rifle Range Target Pit qualified as a discontinuous extension of Fort Caswell and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, along with Fort Caswell.

On Veterans' Day 2017, 100 years after the United States entered the Great War, the Friends began a year of recognizing the 23 veterans from Brunswick County who gave their lives serving the country and honoring all 724 veterans they identified with a

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The Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range will add a monument engraved with the names of World War I veterans from Brunswick County who died in service of their country at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 11, at the site of the National WWI Centennial Memorial at the Fort Caswell Rifle Range at 5 Foxfire Trace in Oak Island during a 2018 Veterans' Day commemoration at 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 11.

## Monument

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connection to Brunswick County.

"If they were born here, lived here, went away and came back, if they enlisted, we claimed them," Norma Lee Eckard said. "It's been very rewarding."

On Veterans' Day 2018, the Friends will commemorate the centennial year and end of World War I by dedicating a World War I monument at the rifle range at 5 Foxfire Trace in Oak Island.

The 11 a.m. Sunday, Nov. 11, dedication will include a roll call of the 23 Brunswick County men who sacrificed their lives during World War I, the firing of Southport Historical Society's cannon Thor, a roll call of 150 Brunswick County World War I veterans, a continuation of the list that began at the April 6 recitation commemorating the start of the war.

"All the names will take time," Norma Lee Eckard said. "But all the names will be called until we get to 724."

Special guests include descendants of Pvt. Harvey T. Chadwick, one of the men from Brunswick County who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War I while breaking the famous Hindenburg Line on Sept. 29, 1918.

Priceless heirlooms from the Chadwick family will be available for viewing, including the American flag that draped his coffin when

his remains were returned in December 1921 and the certificate of appreciation for his sacrifice.

Norma Lee and Ronald Eckard got their daughter, Amy, involved when they needed a website to promote the rifle range preservation effort and to house profiles of the soldiers like Chadwick who died in service of their country and veterans from Brunswick County.

"Since this started people asked if we had a website," said Amy Eckard, a computer engineer from Raleigh who designed and maintains caswellriflerange.com.

Amy and her family create the veterans' profiles seen on the website and shared with The Brunswick Beacon after learning how to research soldiers by finding out about her grandfather, Homer Schade, and his experience serving in World War II.

"When we discussed the centennial and how to get more people interested, I said I'll get all the veterans' names from Brunswick County," Amy Eckard said. "And the response was good. You get more connected when you see the people."

The Friends also invited descendants to share photos, records or heirlooms of family members who served to include in the profiles.

"It's been rewarding. We don't want anyone to forget the soldiers' sacrifice," Amy Eckard said. "WWI affected families and the community, but was so long ago people forget. It's fun to put together their experiences."

The Friends began as members of the landscape/grounds committee of Caswell Dunes neighborhood next to Oak Island Golf Course.

In 2011, the committee was planning to clean up the neighborhood common area. What they discovered in the overgrowth was a nearly 100-year-old structure.

They learned it was a rifle range target pit that was once part of Fort Caswell.

Inside is a 200-foot concrete structure made up of compartments, a store room/passageway, the target pit area and a rifle range. The range was built in 1918 for soldiers in World War I to practice marksmanship before shipping off to Europe. It was used in both World Wars and then was sold to the Baptist Assembly after World War II.

Over the years, trees and brush grew up in and around the rifle range causing conditions to deteriorate, with trees pushing on the sides of the concrete walls, cracking doorways and threatening to collapse the structure in on itself.

That's when the Friends organized to save and restore the site.

The rifle range was also added to the Historic Wilmington Foundation's Most Threatened Historic Places List in 2016 and held over on the list for 2017.

The Friends raised funds for a structural engineering study to identify how to repair the center wall of the 184-foot section before it collapses and removed a row of trees along the wall

to stabilize the site.

"The community has been working for six years planning for the stabilization effort and it is difficult to give up on the historical preservation of something that helped our military train before they left for France," Norma Lee Eckard said. "The site deserves to be here for future generations as a witness to our desire and interest in preserving democracy."

Paul Shivers, engineer and president of the Friends of Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson and project manager of the rifle range work, estimates straightening the center wall will cost about \$15,000 to \$20,000.

After that, the two lintels, or doorways, need repairing as well as patching on the walls.

They have raised about \$6,000 toward the cost to complete repairs to straighten the passageway wall.

Norma Lee Eckard even

brought in a neighbor, Helen Radcliffe, to create a painting of the rifle range to help raise funds.

"I'm a watercolorist, and Norma commissioned me to do a watercolor in 2015," Radcliffe said.

That brought her into the grassroots movement to protect the rifle range.

"Since then we've made note cards of it, all kinds of things to raise money," Radcliffe said. "And I've been to different meetings and places like historical societies, with displays to explain what we're trying to do."

Radcliffe said efforts of the Friends have made people aware the range is worth saving in memory of the soldiers who died in the war.

"I think people are more

aware of how many men from Brunswick County left their families and gave their lives," she said.

Radcliffe also used the artist's eye to help keep the design of the World War I monument in keeping with the soldiers they were honoring. "We designed the monument to keep it simple but appropriate and to be able to engrave their names," she said.

For more information about the Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, go to caswellriflerange.com or email fcaswellriflerange@gmail.com

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