



Photos contributed
One wall of the Fort Caswell rifle pit is in serious need of straightening. Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range is raising \$20,000 for the job.

Caswell Beach

Effort aimed at saving rifle pit

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

Volunteers working to save a piece of the region’s Great War history have rolled out a new website and are seeking the public’s help to straighten and repair the walls of the rifle target pit that once was part of Fort Caswell.

The century-old concrete structure is next to Oak Island Golf Course in Caswell Dunes. There, young soldiers learned long-range marksmanship before being shipped off to Europe to fight. A local historian has said it is one of the few high-profile reminders left from that terrible conflict and a stark reminder of America’s shared sacrifices.

Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range, a non-profit, has been working for years to preserve and focus attention on the pit, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. They have cleaned and partially stabilized the pit and removed trees that were buckling part of the walls. One wall is visibly warped.

“The most important thing is to get that wall straightened out,” said Ron Eckard of the Friends group. Volunteers need to raise about \$20,000 to complete the work.

Ron and Norma Eckard have been collecting photographs, letters and family histories about



Dave Kesterson, senior vice-president of First Bank, presents a check for \$500 to Norma Eckard, president of Friends of Fort Caswell Rifle Range.

people who served during the war for a Wall of Honor that is displayed at special events. “I’m

sending letters to the VFWs and American Legions in the area requesting that they consider send-

ing pictures of family members,” said Norma Eckard, president of the Friends group.

Persons who would like to share copies of pictures or other Great War memorabilia may contact the Friends at 5 Foxfire Trace, Caswell Beach, NC 28465 or ftcaswellriflerange@gmail.com.

Website

The Friends website is up and loaded with information about the rifle pit, its supporters, fundraising and history. The site periodically spotlights people who have worked to save the site, including historian Jim McKee, director of the Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site, and Paul Shivers, an engineer with Highfill Infrastructure Engineering, who studied and reported on priorities for stabilization.

The site address is <http://www.caswellriflerange.com/>.

The Eckards noted several milestone dates in the coming year.

On April 6, 1917, the United States declared war on Germany. In May, the Friends group will hold its annual Kentucky Derby fundraiser and luncheon. In June, 1917, the first American forces arrived in France.