



WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Blazing a New Trail at Wompatuck

By Alma Ramos-McDermott, FOW Secretary

Saturday, June 6th, was National Trails Day and FOW's "Build a Bridge and Get Over It" Day. About 20 of us showed up bright and early at Wompatuck's Visitor Center parking lot to sign in, eat donuts, drink coffee and get our marching orders. The majority of the group went with President Bill Boles and Park Supervisor Steve Gammon to build a nearby bridge in the vicinity of NW13.

Eric Oddleifson, Carl Casale, and I headed out to Prospect Hill to continue work Eric started on a brand new trail for the upcoming Landmine Classic Bike Race in September. There are lots of steps involved in blazing a new trail, which is why Eric took a course in trail creation. He began the trail a week ago by walking the area with Steve Cobble and Lars Ahlzen to determine the best route for the new trail, checking the angle of the land to make sure no erosion would take place, and ensuring that the trail curvatures and placements wouldn't cause flooding. As the trail was walked, small orange flags were placed to mark the territory. Afterwards, he and several helpers returned to cut down small trees and bushes that were in the path of the new trail.

Today, he took his gasoline powered weed whacker out on the trail to cut low lying brush, while Carl and I followed to rake up the debris left in his wake. We drove to the starting point near Prospect Hill and hiked along S10 until we got near S3 and S2. Eric explained that these two trails were eroding and would be closed down so that the new trail could replace these old switchbacks.

We headed onto the trail and began working. Debris flew as Eric motored ahead while Carl and I spaced ourselves evenly so we could rake sections and keep up with his fast moving whacker.



Eric Oddleifson, Carl Casale and Alma Ramos-McDermott pose during trail work.



George Neat on far right shows map. Bare Cove Park ranger Scott McMullan is in green.

Annex History Tour Brought Back Memories for Former Workers

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

Wompatuck State Park conducted its second annual history tour last month. Former Annex employees, park director Steve Gammon, Friends of Wompatuck members, interested hikers and myself toured the old Navy ammunition site for a fun day digesting the facts and stories of different ordnance sites throughout the park.

George Neat, a former Navy lieutenant based at the Annex, gave an overview of his two year duty there.

Neat served at the Naval Ammunition Depot, which included the Annex, from 1960 until 1962 as a guided missile officer, and later as the Ordnance Officer. The Ammunition Depot was closed in 1962.

"I was in charge of about 30 Navy enlisted men and two chiefs during that time," Neat said. "This duty was the best experience I ever had in my whole career."

Neat talked about the process of shutting the Annex down, from selling the surplus copper to burning off ammunition powder. "Sometimes during the burning procedure, powder would get covered over and then explode," Neat said. "All kinds of things would fly in the air, plus

start forest fires. Sometimes we had to call in the fire department to put the flames out."

Neat worked for a tough Mustang lieutenant who was in charge of Guided Missile Service Unit 215 at the Annex. Neat was responsible for assembling, processing, and testing the Navy's first ship-to-air guided missiles, the *Terrier* and *Tartar*.

He was billeted at a house next to Boundary pond near the I.J. Fox House in the park. Now, both houses are just foundations.

Neat explained, "The Annex would transfer the missiles and other ordnance by truck and rail to the Back River dock, now Bare Cove Park. Then, the material was loaded on a barge called an ammunition lighter and sent out to Boston Harbor to a waiting Navy warship."

He also described how the former warhead boxes made wonderful toy boxes for his kids and grandchildren.

Neat wrapped it up with, "I learned more in two years at the Annex than I would ever have learned since then. I'm a retired engineer and I'm always learning."

"Mainly, it was learning how to work with people. I give credit to the

History Tour (continued from page one)



Tour group gets an explanation of the classification railyard from historian Jim Rose. The area was used to inspect incoming ordnance to send to their designated sites for production, overhaul and service.



Former Transportation Leadingman Donald Guilfoyle talks about his past job to Jim Rose. Other Annex workers are George Bartlett and Ron Meade on far left and Bill Handrahan holding his chin.



George Neat explains the testing of missile fuses at Building 83. From the looks of the abstract expressionism surrounding him, Jackson Pollock may have worked here.

Navy chiefs that helped me get through it. They were the ones that helped us win World War II.”

Behind the missile site, former Annex truck driver Ron Meade pointed out strange looking barricaded wooden structures.

“Those odd looking embankments over there were part of the land mine production,” Meade said. “This was an Army operation for the Vietnam War. The land mines looked like bean bags. They were dropped from planes. In theory, they were supposed to look like rocks so the enemy would step on them.”

The name of the manufacturing of the mines was called the “XM-47 Gravel Mine Project.” The operation lasted less than a year and had to be shut down in 1968 because the mines were too volatile. Planes carrying them would have their wings blown off, and a worker in the

Hanover, MA plant was killed by an explosion from one of the mines.

Bill Handrahan, who worked at the Annex as an inspector, was working at the Hanover site when the accident happened. “The worker dropped a flask of the explosive propellant...kaboom!” Handrahan said plaintively. “They found his upper body stuck in the roof. They had poor safety procedures at that plant. Once they had to evacuate part of Hanover because a box of tear gas canisters accidentally exploded.”

Across the street from the land mine bunkers, former ordnanceman George Bartlett pointed to a thicket near a tree. “That’s the place where I saw a mother fox and her family of kits back in the 50s,” he said. “This whole area was brand new then. We used to call it GMSU (he pronounced it like ‘gumshoe’). This translates to Guide Missile Service Unit.

“We had accidents at the Annex too. In the early 50s a fuse exploded on a worker. He got some shrapnel in his chest but was not too bad off. But I heard he is still pulling out parts of the fuse warhead to this day. In fact, it was last summer he pulled out some fragments. What happened was...he screwed down the fuse too tight and it over-heated and exploded.”

The tour ended where the train depot once stood. Former Transportation Leadingman Donald Guilfoyle recalled the good old days. “We had a couple of engines over here at the train shed,” he reminisced. “I had about 20 to 30 people under me. We had to plow snow, drive trucks, haul trains with boxcars, and operate cranes. I gained a wealth of experience at the depot. I enjoyed every second I spent with the federal government. I couldn’t find a better employer.” ■

Blazing a New Trail at Wompatuck (continued from page one)

As we worked for the next 1 ½ hours, the trail began to show clear definition as the ground was evened, and leaves, small branches and long roots were raked to the side. Eric showed us areas where he planned to place berms, and we worked together to raise a massive 200+ pound rock and fill the hole with dirt.

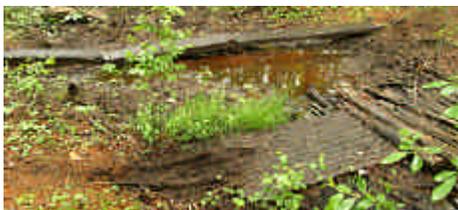
Time flew by and we had to leave without being completely finished; however, we were

pleased at the amount of territory we’d been able to clear. We ended up back at the Visitor Center at 11:30 to swap stories with the Bridge Building crew and enjoy delicious pizza and soda.

FOW President Bill Boles was very pleased with the bridge. “The bridge is perfect!” Boles said with a smile on his face. “I’ve never seen a bridge go in that fast. The job was more fun than work. Thanks to all, and more so to the

Spellman High School Mountain Bike Club for the construction and testing of that fine bridge.”

It was a great day for FOW and for Wompatuck, with a lot of important work accomplished by both crews. Eric plans to continue work on the new trail in the coming weeks, so if you would like to help, please e-mail him at atechguy@comcast.net to coordinate days/times. ■



Bog area selected for new bridge.



Park volunteers begin construction.



Completed bridge as it looks today.