

# Montauk Bombs Away

BY JANIS HEWITT

The Army Corps of Engineers has hired a contractor to investigate the grounds of Camp Hero, a former military base near the Montauk Point Lighthouse, to search for explosives on its approximately 469 acres.

The procedure, which will be undertaken in phases, was outlined at a meeting Tuesday evening at the Montauk Downs State Park by Don Silkebakken, the project manager. He was introduced to the sparse audience by Roland Belew, an ordnance assessor and engineer with the Army Corps who evaluates former military defense sites and is based in Huntsville, Ala.

He and Mr. Silkebakken explained that they did not expect to find leftover explosives or ammunition, but that the investigation was a precautionary measure so that complications did not arise "down the road." Although it was not mentioned at the meeting, the Army Corps expects to spend \$500,000 for the work.

## *Military Career*

The officials noted that the site was used for cannon firing practice during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 and as a Navy observation post during World Wars I

and II. It was also used as a training area for the Army, National Guard, and Citizen Military Training Corps from 1921 to 1923.

The base was a World War II coastal defense installation from 1942 to 1947 and was used by the Air Force for training and radar surveillance from 1951 to 1982.

The base has been off limits to the public since it was closed in the early 1980s. The 27 military houses that border it were transferred by the federal government to East Hampton Town for an affordable housing project and the remaining land was transferred to New York State to be dedicated to "passive recreational use."

## *Search Narrowed*

Last summer, a contracted team demolished 17 buildings and four radar towers on the site as part of an ongoing cleanup by the state, which has been criticized for seeking to put revenue-producing facilities there rather than leaving it for passive recreation. State officials have recently declined to comment on those proposals.

The Army Corps has hired Parsons Inc. of Atlanta to search the Camp Hero grounds for explosives. Using whatever information they could

gather, including Montauk Library archives and a visit to the site, the ordnance team has narrowed down the area of investigation to 51 acres, specifically three locations identified on a map that was handed out at the meeting.

The three areas chosen for sampling are identified as Area H, eight acres south of a large radar tower no longer operating; Area K, 44.88 acres near the shoreline, specifically on the west side of a favorite fishing spot called the Sewer Pipe, and Area A, 0.3 acres southwest of the Montauk Lighthouse near an old fire control station.

## *Left Out?*

All three spots border the military base instead of focusing on the heart of the site, said Lisa Greci, the chairwoman of the Montauk Citizen Advisory Committee and a member of the state-formed Camp Hero Advisory Committee, which, she said did not receive notification of the evening's meeting.

Other audience members echoed her comments, also complaining that the meeting had not been properly announced, noting that only three Camp Hero residents were in attendance, and arguing that the location

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THE MANY BUNKERS and other abandoned structures at Camp Hero in Montauk will be surveyed to uncover any unexploded munitions.

*Mike Reale*

## Bombs

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chosen for study did not necessarily include what could be trouble spots.

Mr. Belew apologized for not inviting the Camp Hero Advisory Committee, saying he had not been made aware that such a committee existed and reminding the group that the state would hear their comments. He said the meeting was part of a preliminary phase of the project in which officials were trying to learn what they could about the site and its surroundings.

### Will Blow Them Up

A man in the audience wanted to know what type of investigation was proposed for the sealed bunkers on the property, which he said he had been told by a state trooper contained ammunition and gunpowder.

Mr. Belew said the trooper was probably misinformed, that he'd bet his own house that there was nothing in them. "I bet my own house that there's a nice house," he said, breaking up the

meeting's serious tone.

Using a "glorified metal detector" and a Gradiometer instrument, a sample from each area will be studied with global positioning equipment, which will produce the data on a laptop computer.

A Parsons "geophysical coordinator" will determine which irregularities should be scrutinized "intrusive-

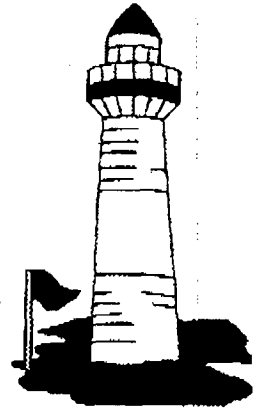
ly." Any potential danger resulting from disturbing the site will be "mediated," it was explained.

If explosives are found they will be detonated on the site, said Mr. Silkebakken, but not before a public meeting with proper notification is scheduled. And, he said, all disturbed areas would be restored when the project is finished.



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Article on Bombs Away

Are you coming to Montauk March 8th

*[Signature]*

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