

Camp Hero Cleanup

What's In Store For The Toxic Waste And Munitions At Old Army Base?

By Jerry Cimisi

The planned clean-up of Camp Hero in Montauk is moving along, albeit slowly. Last year, a number of the buildings on the base, designed during WWII to appear like a fishing village from the air, were demolished. Then, early in February, a public meeting at Montauk Downs presented by the Army Corps of Engineers and the Parsons Corporation outlined just what needs to be done at Camp Hero and how it will be done.

Considering the concern of local residents over recent talk about toxic debris, unexploded munitions as well as the legend of the Montauk Project that has grown up around Camp Hero, the meeting was not well attended; there were about twenty people present.

The Army Corps of Engineers is handling the cleanup of Camp Hero, while the Parsons Corporation is putting together a study detailing the contamination of the grounds and the situation with any remaining ordnance.

The administrator from the Army Corps of Engineers overseeing the project was present, Luz Spann-LaBato, along with Roland Belew from the Corps who is the engineering and technical supervisor of the clean up. They were joined by two members of the Parsons Corporation, Don Silkebakken and Michael Short.

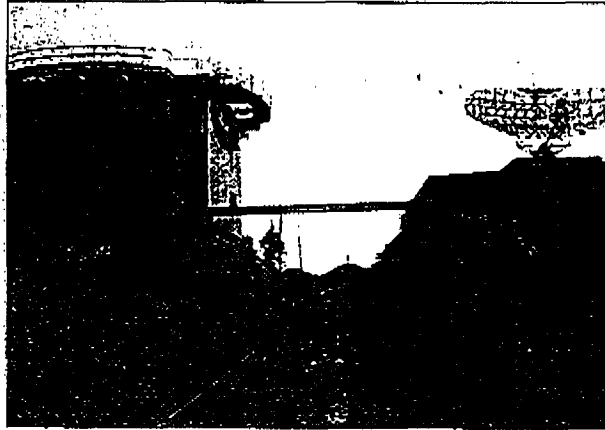
One man who was in attendance told this paper that he had asked the panel about a sign warning of a minefield area at Camp Hero. He had videotaped the sign in 1991; he said the sign is no longer there. The panel expressed no knowledge of this.

Camp Hero, which has long been decommissioned, was established in 1942 as a coastal defense installation for WWII. Located on 469 acres, Camp Hero at one time housed about 600 enlisted men along with 37 officers. There were three gun batteries: Battery 112, Battery 113, Battery 216. The former batteries had two sixteen inch guns; Battery 216 had two six inch shielded guns. During the war the batteries were manned by the 11th Coast Artillery Regiment and the 242nd Connecticut National Guard Coast Artillery Regiment.

Accounts say that the sixteen inch and six inch guns were fired only occasionally and usually for practice. The munitions were stored at a secret location offsite.

It is interesting to note that during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the bluffs of Montauk were used for cannon practice. From World War I to World War II, the area was used as a Navy observation post. For a few years in the early '20s, it was also used as a training ground for the army and the National Guard.

It was not long after the war, 1947, to be exact,



that the Camp was declared inactive by the government. In 1949 removal of ordnance began.

However, in 1951, the newly formed U.S. Air Force commenced using Camp Hero for anti-aircraft artillery training. They operated 120mm guns, .50 caliber machine guns, and 3.5 inch rockets. This went on until 1957. But, beginning in 1951 and continuing until 1982, the Air Force

the matter. "The field work is scheduled to be completed by Memorial Day," LaBato said. "Parsons is contracted is have a report out by the end of the year."

In remarking on how much work Parsons has done for the government, Ms. LaBato added, "They have a lot of former military people on their staff."

At the beginning of their study of just what is lying around Camp Hero, the Parsons Corporation will conduct what it calls a "geophysical investigation." This includes a Global Positioning System (GPS) with other geophysical instruments, such as metal detectors.

Michael Short of the Parsons Infrastructure and Technology Group, Inc, Ordnance and Explosive Sector in Pasadena, California said that the company had made two site visits to Camp Hero, one in

December and the other in early March. "Right in the blizzard, I think it was. The site visits are to determine just what sort of instruments we need to proceed. Weather permitting, we should start at the end of April."

The Parsons Corporation was established in 1944 to provide engineering and construction services for government and the petrochemical industries.

Today Parsons is a multinational company that is involved in projects such as oil drilling in Kuwait to biohazard redemption (such as Camp Hero) and the planning of military bases.

"We are currently cleaning up an old bombing range on Kaho'olawe, an island off Maui," said Short. If the possibility of unexploded munitions poses a definite if unlikely danger, Short added that munitions that have

lain in the soil for a long time do not pose much of a risk to the environment.

This is an assessment with which many environmentalists might disagree. There is also a disagreement as to just how much information about Camp Hero has been made public. Roland Belew of the Army Corps of Engineers at first said that all material on Camp Hero has been declassified, but later also said that the Corps has not yet been able to get the blueprints of the bunkers and underground structures.

A fair portion of the topography of Camp Hero is swampland. The military obviously recognized a need for good drainage, as there are about 5,500 feet of drain ditches throughout the camp.

The Geophysical Survey will take about three weeks. Three areas will be investigated: Area H, which had been an Ordnance Destruction Range of eight acres; Area K, Near Shore Ordnance Area, 44.88 acres; Area A, Fire Control/37mm Training. Field work will be ended early in June, with a draft report due in mid August and a final report due in November.

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used Camp Hero for radar surveillance, intended to identify any and all aircraft coming into the area. These were the years of the Cold War. Radar at Camp Hero was considered a bulwark against possible attack.

The former Camp Hero area is currently sectioned under different owners: the State of New York, the Town of East Hampton and the Coast Guard.

In a phone interview this past month, Luz Spann LaBato of the Army Corps of Engineers explained that the Corps has been assigned by Congress to clean up what are called Formerly Utilized Defense Sites owned by the Department of Defense. Of course, Camp Hero is no longer owned by the DOD, and thus the outcome of the current munitions study will be up to the sites present owners.

Ms. Labato said that it is the experience of the Corps that there could be various outcomes of the study. "Sometimes the current owner or owners just say to leave the property as it is."

At any rate, the first step after a report is put out is to have a public review and meeting on

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