



WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Bunker Ceremony Slated 11/8

By Andy Mills, FOW Member

Eagle Scouts to dedicate restored World War II bunker at Wompatuck State Park.

On Saturday, November 8th at 1:00 pm, Friends of Wompatuck State Park (FOW) Hingham and BSA Troop 4480 Kingston will hold an open house and tour at the renovated military bunker "N9" at the park. The dedication will take place rain or shine.

The renovation project was completed by three Eagle Scouts to earn BSA's highest rank.

Tim Benza cleared the overgrowth and installed a pathway with access ramp.

Colby Alves researched the history of the storage bunker, installed a sign with his history results and planted a memorial garden with benches. Dan Benza cleaned the bunker loading dock of debris and trash.



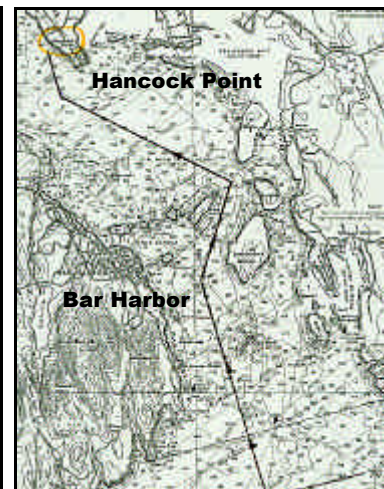
Restored Bunker

He also scraped and painted the loading dock area that contained some graffiti. All three boys are members of BSA Troop 4480, Kingston.

The bunker was refurbished to honor past civilian and military personnel who worked at the former Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot. The ammunition depot operated from 1904 to 1962.

The idea to restore the bunker came from early FOW meeting discussions about four years ago. The Scouts began work two years ago and completed the work in the spring of 2008.

FOW has scheduled several guest speakers including former employees, U.S. Navy and Marine Corps officials, as well as the Eagle Scouts. ■



Crewmember Horst Haslau sent me this photo of the U-1230 and a map showing the sub's route to Hancock Point past Bar Harbor. Haslau is standing in the first row, in back, looking right and is wearing dark gloves.

On a Dark and Stormy November Night

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

Because the former Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot was one of the primary sources of ordnance for the Allies during World War II's Battle of the Atlantic, I'm reprinting a story I wrote 15 years ago about Nazi spies transported to U.S. shores by German U-boats. Following the story, I'll include new information I recently gleaned about a possible spy landing less than ten miles from the ammunition depot.

It was about 10 o'clock that November night when Mrs. Mary Forni left her friend Margaret's house after an evening of playing cards. As she drove her Chevrolet slowly through the snow toward home, she noticed two dark figures walking the opposite direction along the road. Coming closer, she got a better peek through the light flakes coming down.

They appeared to be two dapper gentlemen carrying expensive looking luggage. They hurriedly walked down West Side Road toward Route 1 and vanished into the frigid dark. Wondering where they came from, she noticed footprints in the snow coming from the old logging trail that led down to the ocean.

How odd, she thought. Why would strangers walk up from the ocean late at night, dressed to the hilt and not in tourist season? Little did Mary realize the two men she spotted were Nazi spies dropped off by the German submarine U-1230.

That landing was recorded on November 29, 1944 next to Bar Harbor at Hancock Point,

Maine. The two saboteurs were Erich Gimpel, now living in South America, and a U.S. Navy deserter born in East Lyme, Connecticut, William Colepaugh who resides in Pennsylvania. Their mission was to disrupt the U.S. atomic bomb effort - the Manhattan Project - and gather information.

Hancock Point resident Mary Forni recalls seeing the two spies that snowy winter night walking along West Side Road. "They stood out like sore thumbs because they were so overdressed," she said. "We knew everybody in town, and these strange fellows you couldn't help but notice with their expensive looking top-coats, fedoras, and attache' case. They didn't have that Down East look. It was much like Wall Street. When I arrived home, I described the sighting to my husband, Dante. He told me not to be so nosy."



Mary Forni

Nonetheless, Mary alerted the deputy sheriff, Dana Hodgkins, the next day. The FBI was called in and interviewed her for more information. From there, the FBI went looking for the spies.

The agents eventually made their way to New York City. After a month of more partying than espionage, Colepaugh lost his nerve for spying and turned himself and Gimpel over to the FBI on December 26.

Meantime, the U-1230 sank the freighter Cornwallis off Mount Desert Rock near Bar Harbor on December 3, 1944. Of the freighter's 49 crewmen, only five survived.

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On a Dark and Stormy November Night (cont. from page 1)

The radio operator on the U-1230, Horst Haslau, remembers the Bar Harbor landing as one of his more exciting moments of World War II. "We entered Frenchman Bay late that afternoon after spending a week or so off the entrance into the bay near Schoodic Point listening to boat traffic overhead, calibrating instruments, watching tides, and observing the phases of the moon," said Haslau.

"Everything had to be timed perfectly, otherwise we were dead. Except for letting off Gimpel and Colepaugh, our entire trip from Europe was below the surface. I remember the American acting exceptionally nervous and frightened. On the other hand, Gimpel was very cool and confident. He also had a good head on his shoulders because he helped repair our broken depth meter in time for the landing. This instrument was absolutely vital for the landing that night."

Colepaugh and Gimpel were tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death. But when the war with Germany ended, President Truman commuted the sentences. Gimpel was deported and Colepaugh was sent to Leavenworth Penitentiary.

Other spy landings "on record" in the United States took place on June 13, 1942 when the U-202 dropped off four saboteurs at Amagansett, Long Island and on June 17, 1942, when the U-584 put four agents ashore at Pointe Vedra beach near Jacksonville, Florida. Of the ten Nazi agents apprehended in the United States during the war, six were executed.

Horst Haslau frequently visits Bar Harbor and the Forni family - now as a U.S. citizen. Horst reflects, "I'm very lucky Mary Forni waited until the next day to sound the alarm. Otherwise, I might not be here relating the story."

Story Update

Since I wrote the story in 1993, Horst Haslau died in 1999 and had his ashes spread over Frenchman's Bay. William Colepaugh was paroled in 1960. He died in 2005. He was a Boy Scout volunteer and a Rotary Club member and was happily married. Mary Forni died in 2006 after becoming a very wonderful friend and hiking guide to my wife and me. Erich Gimpel is still living in South America at the ripe age of 98. Known as quite the "Lover" during his spy days, the German military warned

Gimpel not to compromise his missions with romantic escapades. I remember Mary Forni telling me with a twinkle in her eye two months before her death at 91, "That man is so-o-o handsome!" Apparently, he still has the magic.

Local Landing?

About 25 years ago I heard from a fellow veteran that a U-boat dropped off saboteurs in Scituate. He told me a German was killed rigging explosives to a tower next to a beach. He said the incident was suppressed by the authorities to prevent mass hysteria.

I since discovered two possible saboteur objectives plus startling new revelations.

One target for sabotage could have been the former radio station WRUL off Hatherly Beach Road. The station once broadcast "Voice of America" from a tower during the war. The station is no longer but the foundation of the tower can still be found. For the Axis, the radio tower was a source of enemy propaganda.

Another possible sabotage objective was a coastal observation tower located in the Glades area of North Scituate. The structure was used to triangulate an offshore target with another tower and radio a "fix" to a gun battery to fire at the approaching ship or submarine. The Glades station was command and control for Boston Harbor defense.



Virginia Heffernan

Adding to the story, this past September the town's historical society helped me contact Virginia Heffernan who claims she found a German uniform during World War II buried in the sand at North Scituate Beach, about one mile from that observation tower.

"I was amazed," said Heffernan. "The uniform had all the German insignia. It was definitely buried and did not float in. I found it at part of the beach we called 'Collier Ave. Steps' in those days."

She gave the uniform to the police at the time but hasn't heard anything since. The current Police Chief Brian Stewart didn't find anything in the department archives. It was his late grandfather, Chief Mike Stewart, that Heffernan gave the uniform to.

She also said that after the war, during a party held in the Glades area, a German guest

said that during wartime he was a U-boat captain and knew all about that area including the observation tower still located there.

Former Scituate Selectman and Glades resident Bob Thorndike heard the same story and further elaborates, "The U-boat skipper was Otto von Bulow. He said his U-boat wolfpacks would lie submerged and wait for ships to sail out of shipyards in Quincy, Hingham and Charlestown and torpedo them well offshore."



Bob Thorndike

Upon research, I found out that the Germans sank 10 ships out of Quincy Fore River shipyard alone and von Bulow received the Iron Cross.

Heffernan also said during the war a German named "Hans" rented her carriage house in North Scituate for about two months. She said he would periodically disappear for a few days and then return. Finally, he just vanished. No one ever saw him again. Heffernan still has the binoculars that Hans left behind.

Enemy agents were definitely prowling the U.S. East Coast. Six months before World War II began, the FBI arrested 33 German spies in New York City. Called the "Duquesne Spy Ring" after commander Fritz Duquesne, German spies were placed in key occupations to get information that could be used in the event of war and to be ready for acts of sabotage. One person started up a restaurant to filter out information from the customers; another spy worked at an airline to report Allied ships crossing the ocean; others worked as delivery people so they could communicate secret messages.

Did Hans belong to that buried German uniform? Was his fellow Kamerad the German shot at the tower?

Bob Thorndike adds, "The only time I heard of anyone shot there during the war was when a grazing horse didn't answer to a sentry's call, 'Halt! Who goes there?'"

Time may tell. However, World War II veterans, American and German, are in their twilight years. Over one thousand American veterans die per day. We may never find out what happened on the Scituate beach 66 years ago.

"Die Antwort liegt versteckt...immer." ■



Approximate area on North Scituate Beach where Heffernan found buried German uniform.



Glades observation tower up close.



Examples of German uniform that was found by Heffernan.



German binoculars left behind by Hans.