

Bob Heinly gives talk on World War II lookout tower

By ED WISMER
Star and Wave Critic

OCEAN CITY – On Tuesday, May 17, Dr. Robert Heinly took his audience on a tour of World War II in South Jersey, particularly in the lower part of Cape May County.

Heinly spoke at the Ocean City Free Public Library. He is a retired history professor who is a foremost authority on the history of this area, and is a historical columnist for the Cape May Star and Wave. Heinly is a thorough researcher who captures his audience's attention with quick wit and attention to detail.

Heinly's talk was wide ranging, with special references to the World War II Lookout Tower at Sunset Beach in Cape May Point that was recently refurbished. The tower is more properly called Fire Control Tower No. 23 Museum and Memorial. It is the state's last freestanding World War II tower, and was part of the immense Harbor Defense System known as Fort Miles, built in 1942. It was one of 15 towers, most in Delaware, used as observation posts to

detect enemy vessels and direct artillery fire from nearby coastal batteries that protected Delaware Bay.

Heinly used many projected photographs to illustrate how the artillery battery adjacent to the tower looked when it was intact. One of the photos was of Captain Edwin Hill, a navy hero associated with Cape May Naval Station, who died early in the war. A monument to his memory stands near the Washington Street Mall in Cape May.

Another photograph was of the remnants of another tower that still rises and protrudes from atop the Grand Hotel, on Beach Avenue in Cape May. Other towers are located in Cape Henlopen, across the Delaware Bay.

Cape May consisted of a naval base, which became

today's Coast Guard facility that was open to the public prior to Sept. 11, 2001 but is now open to the public only on special occasions. The naval base accommodated submarines, seaplanes and blimps, which were used to track enemy subs and ships that often came close to shore. As a matter of fact, a German sub commander grew rather fond of a spot on the beach at Strathmere, and after the war he returned and built a motel there that still stands as a condo complex.

Ships entering and leaving Delaware Bay followed a zigzag course to avoid mines that had been sown to keep the enemy out. The area was strategically vital and there were many other observation posts further up the coast.

There was a plane and ship-spotting tower atop the Ocean City Music Pier that was removed when the pier was updated in the 1980s. Coastal artillery was capable of hurling shells as large as Volkswagen Beetles as far as 25 miles out to sea.

Heinly told of the many sites of World War II activities all over South Jersey, including the Millville Air Station that houses a museum now, and the Naval Air



Above, Capt Bill Kelly of the U.S. Coast Guard talks to veterans and others at an Armed Forces Day ceremony in front of the World War II lookout tower, Saturday. Inset at left, Joe Moke, a Marine veteran of Iwo Jima, Tom Glynn, a Navy veteran of Operation Tiger, and below interpreters from Fort Miles, Del., Delaware State Parks employee Mike Rogers and volunteers Scott Wallen and Art Ellison.

Station, which now is the site of the Wildwood Aviation Museum at the Cape May County Airport. A photo of the airfield included a restored Mitsubishi Zero fighter plane that was the scourge of the Pacific during the war.

Heinly's itinerary covered sites all over this area, which are very interesting to World War II buffs.



Parking

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nance set forth for the Convention Hall and was already figured into the budget.

Murray said he was also concerned about the possibility of a lawsuit occurring between the three parties involved in the agreement.

"Keep in mind, if you are a

party to an agreement in our country, anybody can get sued," he said.

Mahaney said both the church and Ogren have increased their insurance coverage in the event of a lawsuit. He said the city and the contractor will also be taking out a "builders risk" policy.

Aside from the Convention Hall, residents will be seeing some minor construction as well near the beachfront after Cape May received a \$500,000 grant from the Department of Community Affairs. According to MacLeod, this grant is to help the city meet standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

He said the funding from this grant would be used for a three-phase project that

involved improving accessibility to the beach for disabled individuals, as well as installing a handicap ramp and an automated door at the Franklin School Civic Center. Finally, there would also be improvements made to the sidewalks and ramps at intersections on Carpenters Lane and near the Washington Street Mall. MacLeod said some of the sidewalks did not meet ADA standards because they were not wide enough.

He said this is the third time Cape May has received a grant like this and has applied for many similar grants in the past. He said there would be a public hearing and vote for adoption at the June 8 meeting.

BTF

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council itself, that included scores of experts, witnesses, and citizens and mounds of documentary evidence show the Theatre merited the recommendation of the two noted boards," Jackson said.

Since Frank Investment's withdrew their appeal, Monzo said this litigation has nothing to do with the Zoning Board. He said it is simply the BTF trying to become party to it and delay the demolition of the Beach Theatre by proving the extended permit is not valid.

Jackson said in a BTF press release, Frank Investments initial demolition permit was not extended. The HPC issued a certificate of appropriateness in July 2007, which would allow demolition of the Beach Theatre. However, the permit was considered to be expired one year later, and when the Franks went back to the HPC for re-approval they were turned down.

Monzo said the BTF will also argue in the case that the Permit Extension Act does not apply because Cape May lies in Planning Area 5 (PAS), an area declared "environmentally sensitive" by the State Department of Environmental Protection.

According to Monzo, there have been no meetings between council and the BTF pertaining to this case. He said Frank Investments had no plan to demolish the Beach Theatre before Memorial Day, so the court will have time to decide whether the BTF can intervene or not. If it can become party to the case, Monzo said there will have to be a winner in the case or a "consent to settle agreement" between all parties involved.

"We understand that, as owners, the Franks have the right to do what they'd like with their property. Our purpose has never been to stop that, but the law requires them to try to market it at a fair price first – hopefully to someone interested in preserving it," Jackson said.

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