



WOMPATUCK NEWS

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Friends of Wompatuck State Park

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Front gate to ammunition depot in the 1950s.



Ceremony in 1954 honoring 50 years of operation .



LTJG George Neat in 1960.

2012 Marked 50th Anniversary of Depot Shutdown

By Jim Rose, FOW News Editor and Historian

This past year marks the 50th anniversary the Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot closed. Former workers and military personnel share their thoughts. The first article was written by George Neat who was stationed at the Annex for two years as a Navy guided missile officer. Former depot employees Bill Handrahan, Henry Lysakowski, Pete Stonis, and Donald Guilfoyle also contribute their memories. Page three contains Hingham Journal stories covering the beginning and end of the depot.

Impact of Closure of U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot in Hingham, Massachusetts

By George Neat, LTJG, USNR

I arrived at the U. S. Naval Ammunition Depot (USNAD) in January, 1960, fresh out of graduate school for my first assignment to discover that the base would be closed in two years. The base continued to function, offloading ammunition on ships going into the Boston Naval Shipyard for repairs and maintenance

and providing ammunition including Terrier and Tartar missiles for ships in the Boston harbor. This was carried out in parallel with disarming old ammunition and cleaning out buildings that had been used for the normal function of an ammunition depot.

As I reflect on my feelings 50 years ago when I completed my tour as an officer, there were two separate issues. First was the impact on the Hingham community and greater Boston and also on our military preparedness. The second issue involved the impact on my family and me personally.

Relative to the big picture, I was keenly aware that closing USNAD, Hingham meant that the days (years) would be numbered for the Naval



LTJG George Neat standing in front of former Quarters A inside the park gate in 2011.

shipyard in Boston. I was not pleased with this drastic change in the New England I had quickly grown to love. Concentrating more activity at a fewer number of facilities makes economic sense. My feeling is that more bases result in more targets, causing difficulty for a potential enemy, and redundancy would improve security should a serious crisis occur. A military shipyard cannot service ships loaded with ammunition. Offloading ammunition in New York, the closest ammunition depot, would require ships to travel unarmed up to the Boston shipyard. This was not acceptable.

For the big picture issue, that was out of my control. For me personally, I had the power to decide my future, although I nearly did not have that choice. My orders for leaving active duty in 1962 were held up until two days before I was scheduled for departure. This was due to the pending war in Vietnam.

From a personal standpoint, I not only was leaving the base just before they locked the gate, but I had made the decision to return to civilian life. While my engineering education was a valuable asset for me as a line offi-

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Ammunition depot workers pose during the 1950s



Bill Handrahan stands in back row, second from right.



Henry Lysakowski poses in center.



Pete Stonis pictured on left.



Donald Guilfoyle receives "Worker of the Month" award.

2012 Was 50th Anniversary of Depot Shutdown (continued from page one)

cer in the Navy, I was anxious to go back to the Boeing Company in Seattle where I would be able to more directly utilize my education before I forgot too much of it.

Looking back, this was a life changing decision. The good news is that I had a satisfying career as an engineer doing research that contributed to national defense and later to safety and security in transportation systems. I could not have asked for more than to have the USNAD Annex become Wompatuck State Park. We have Bare Cove Park to enjoy as well. My family and I returned to the South Shore in 1967 and have benefitted by having my wonderful two-year Navy home a short distance from my current home.



Bill Handrahan

Former ordnance inspector Bill Handrahan, 88, remembers the final days at the depot as working a variety of odd jobs to prep it for closure. "I did all kinds of things out of my usual role as an inspector," said Handrahan. "From cutting grass and plowing to dumping black powder in the Back River. You name it, we did it. After the Navy shut its doors, I went to work for the U.S. Army as an investigator, but I spent most of my working years with the Department of Defense as a Quality Assurance Representative Supervisor. I logged 43 years with the government."



Henry Lysakowski

Quincy native Henry Lysakowski, 88, recalls working with my late father James S. Rose, who was an Ordnance Leadingman. "I drove for the Transportation Department as a trailer truck driver," said Lysakowski. "Your father and I ended up burning five-inch rockets at the burning area in the Annex. He was in charge of the operation. We had to put pallets on top of the rockets as they burned off so they wouldn't fly away and hurt anyone or cause fires.

"At closure, the government ended up selling a lot of material. I had to transport these items around in my truck trailer to the auction. They sold all kinds of stuff: pickup trucks, tractors, five-ton trucks, trailers, etc. Schools took the buses for free.

"I felt bad about the depot closing. I had a good job and enjoyed it there. After shutdown, I went to the Navy Yard in Boston and retired with 32 years of government service."



Pete Stonis

Former crane operator Peter Stonis remembers that time well. "I loaded harbor mines and land mines," said Stonis. "Truck after truck came to pick them up. "They took them down south someplace. I heard the depot closed because of politics. I was kind of upset about this. We had good jobs there.

"But life goes on. I have a lovely home in Rockland, and the town made me grand marshal of the Memorial Day parade right after I just moved there from Quincy. Not bad for an old war vet (Bronze Star and Purple Heart recipient). I just turned 94 in October by the way."



Donald Guilfoyle

Donald Guilfoyle, 84, who ran the Transportation Department as Leadingman, reflected back philosophically on the closing. "What are you going to do? From my understanding the shutdown was a political job. Kennedy needed LBJ's support when he was running for president and this was the trade-off. What a waste. In fact, the Annex just finished building a multi-million dollar guided missile service complex, and then they shut it down. It was sad times then but most of us in my department ended up at the Boston Navy Yard. I resumed my duty there as a Transportation Leadingman.

"I gained a wealth of experience at the depot. For me it worked out for the better. I retired out of the Newport Navy Base as a supervisor who managed 150 people as apposed to the depot where I supervised 20 to 30.

"I'm happy the ammunition depot has been preserved as two parks. I really enjoyed the commemorative events there. Thanks again." ■

2012 Was 50th Anniversary of Depot Shutdown (continued from page one)

HINGHAM JOURNAL MARCH 25 1904

THE NEW NAVAL MAGAZINE.

The U. S. government has at last decided on a location for its new naval magazine. Weymouth and Hingham have been selected, and within a few days all the necessary details will have been completed. The board of naval engineers detailed for this work have made the following report:

"We have inspected the entire coast from Plymouth, Mass., to Yarmouth, Me., and find but one site possessing the requirements considered by the bureau of ordnance essential for a naval magazine."

The site selected is in Weymouth and Hingham, on both sides of the Back river, and comprises 720 acres, 500 in Hingham and 220 in Weymouth.

The territory runs from the Hingham bridge, between Weymouth and Hingham, along Beal and Fort Hill streets to the Weymouth line at Fresh river; thence across the river to Weymouth, and then takes in a portion of the land to the point of beginning at the Hingham bridge. All the land bounded by these lines is included in the territory that the government contemplates taking.

The estimated cost to the government is \$533,000.

On the Weymouth side of the river the land embraced within the proposed taking has no buildings.

The land is mostly level, and surrounded on all sides by rising hills, and the naval experts state that the place is perfectly impregnable from the water and that the high hills by which it is surrounded make it practically the same from a land attack.

The reservation crosses Fort Hill street near the West Hingham station, to the track of the South Shore branch of the N. Y., N. H. & H. R. R. from which point it is proposed to construct a railroad to the magazine.

Hingham Journal March 25 1904

Hingham Journal December 25, 1958

BuOrd Orders Reduction in Operations Depot, Annex Would be Declared Surplus After 30 June, 1962

Ever since the Bureau of Ordnance called Capt. Bernard W. Freund, USN, Commanding Officer of the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot, last Thursday afternoon advising him to immediately start reducing operations and personnel, there has arisen a storm of protest which first started as a ripple, then built itself into a wave of such proportions that it has washed up onto the shore of the Potomac and Washington, D. C.

Capt. Freund requested that he be allowed to tell the Depot's working force after the Christmas holiday, but this was denied by his superiors. His orders stipulated that he implement reduction proceedings immediately, cutting the present civilian working force from the present 516 to 190 by 30 June, 1959. After that there would continue a gradual reduction in personnel until 30 June, 1962 when the Depot and the Annex would be declared surplus.

The Naval Ammunition Depot was regarded as one of the most complete and most modern of its kind in the country. The Navy has pointed an accusing finger at rising prices, higher wages, a new economy program, and the necessity to balance the shore establishment with the reduction in size of the operating force as its reasons for the cutback.

Protests Immediate

No sooner had the word been made public than vehement protests were forthcoming. George Dornigan, president of the Federal Employees Association in Hingham, called for a mass meeting at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Quincy on Tuesday to launch a protest.

Delegations are already lining up preparatory to going to Washington where they hope to meet with the Navy Department in an effort to get them to reverse their recent surprise decision.

Congressman-elect Hastings Keith and James A. Burke, Mayor Amelio Della Chisea of Quincy, William O'Connell, executive secretary of the Quincy Chamber of Commerce, and union leaders have promised the civilian employees affected their full support at a meeting held Tuesday night at George F. Bryan VFW Post in Quincy.

The Naval Ammunition Depot proper covers 726 acres in Hingham and 210 in Weymouth. The annex, on the other hand, sprawls over 2,235 acres in Hingham, 861 in Cohasset, 548 in Norwell, and 104 in Scituate.

Of the 516 civilians employed at the Depot, 76 are from Hingham, 74 from Weymouth, and Quincy, 62. Others are spread from all over the South Shore area and as far away as Framingham.

The Naval Ammunition Depot first launched operations here in January 1911.

DeBard, Planning Board Chairman, Arranges NAD Tour

Mr. Frank H. MacLean,
Hingham Journal
South Street
Hingham, Massachusetts,
Dear Frank:

I read by the papers that the Hingham Ammunition Depot and the Annex will be de-activated by 1962 and will thereafter serve some other use. Many Town officials beside the members of the Planning Board should be interested in a tour.

I have arranged with Capt. B. F. Freund, U.S.N. Commanding Officer, for an inspection of both the Depot and the Annex on Friday, January 2, 1959, from 9:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Among those invited are the press, the Selectmen, the Committee, and the Better Business Development Committee. (It would be premature to invite the Assessors). Some places are being taken to the officers and members of the Chamber of Commerce and the Taxpayer's Association.

The bus holds 40 people. I am sending out 60 post cards with these letters and will reserve places for the first 40 who reply. If there is a sell-out, I will notify those who answer late. However, there may be room for others by calling me on January 1st at RI 9-1324.

Please park across from the entrance to the Depot on Fort Hill Street. The bus will leave promptly at 9:30 a.m. No matches or lighters are allowed on the bus.

If the weather is very bad on January 2, I will notify Committee Chairmen by 8:00 a.m. of a postponement.

With best personal regards,
Sincerely,
Stuart DeBard

Hingham Journal in 1904 announces Hingham and Weymouth chosen as site of new Navy ammunition depot.

Hingham Journal reports depot closing in 1962.