

Fort Story's Storied Past

Native American History and Colonialism

The landform now known as Fort Story was occupied for thousands of years before the establishment of the first European colony at Jamestown. Archaeological evidence, historical documentation, and culturally-affiliated Native American nations make clear the abiding presence of Native peoples within what is now Virginia Beach. Within three miles of Fort Story, archaeological sites suggest consistent Native occupation of specific places over many generations and thousands of years. At Fort Story, archaeologists have uncovered evidence that Native peoples used the area to sustain themselves, their families, and their communities. Lithic scatters, or distributions of stone artifacts worked and / or used by human hands have been identified in various locations on Fort Story.

On April 26, 1607, English colonists made first landfall on the American continent, on what is now Fort Story. Upon arrival, the colonists named the landform 'Cape Henry' in honor of King James' son, erected a wooden cross to mark the location of their arrival, and skirmished with members of the Chesapeake tribe. After the Chesapeake tribe was reportedly vanquished by the Powhatan chiefdom, the neighboring Nansemond resettled Cape Henry. The Nansemond were a powerful presence in the region, and prevented the English from settling south of the James River until the 1620s. Thereafter, sailors and fisherman used Cape Henry for its natural resources.

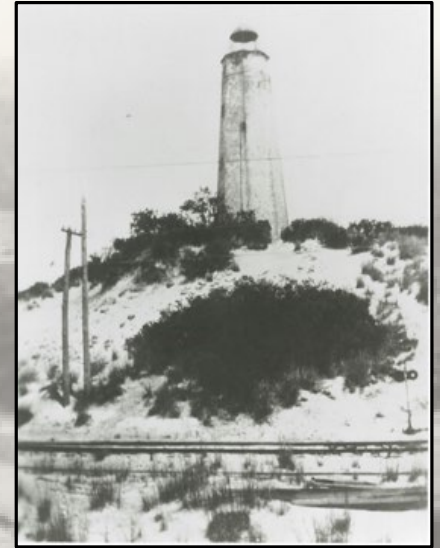
Battle of the Capes

A crucial naval known as the Battle of the Capes took place just offshore in 1791. The decisive French victory in this engagement prevented ships from relieving Lord Cornwallis' besieged troops at Yorktown, leading to the British surrender and ending the American Revolutionary War.

Lighthouses and Government Outposts

In 1792, a lighthouse was constructed at Cape Henry. The first lighthouse erected by the newly-formed United States government, the lighthouse still stands today and is owned and managed by Preservation Virginia. A second lighthouse was constructed in 1881, and is currently managed by the U.S. Coast Guard.

In 1874, a lifesaving station was established at Cape Henry. Around the same time, the U.S. Weather Bureau constructed a weather station near the base of the 1792 lighthouse.



1792 Lighthouse, n.d.

Resort Development

During the early-20th century, a small resort community developed at Cape Henry, alongside plans for an eventual construction of the Army garrison. Resort development at the Cape was spurred by the Cape Henry Park and Land Company (reorganized as the Cape Henry Syndicate in 1899), which purchased over 5,500 acres at the cape beginning in 1890.

Initially an isolated location, Cape Henry was eventually made accessible by rail. In 1902, the Chesapeake Transit Company constructed an electric trolley line from Norfolk to Cape Henry, and a train station was opened the same year. Development followed and by 1909, at least three hotels were operational. Guest cottages included Capps Cottage, White Cottage, and the Ferebee Cottage. The Chesapeake Transit Company erected a large, dancing pavilion in 1903. O'Keefe's Casino opened soon after and served as a venue for dances and other social events.



Railroad Car at Cape Henry, n.d.

Fort Development

For several decades prior to construction of the fort at Cape Henry, the War Department had considered acquiring the land for such purpose. These considerations took the form of land surveys, inspections, and reports dating from as early as the 1880s.

Funding for the purposes of establishing an Army garrison at Cape Henry was appropriated in 1913, and Fort Story became a military installation in 1914. The early fort consisted of approximately 343 acres with two six-inch rapid-fire Model 1900 guns and a pair of five-inch rapid-fire Model 1897 guns, designed to operate in conjunction with four, five-inch rapid-fire guns on Fisherman Island at Cape Charles to defend the entrance to the Chesapeake Bay. By 1921, these early defenses were supplemented by the addition of two batteries consisting of two, M1920 16-inch howitzers each. These batteries were named Battery Pennington and Battery Walke.



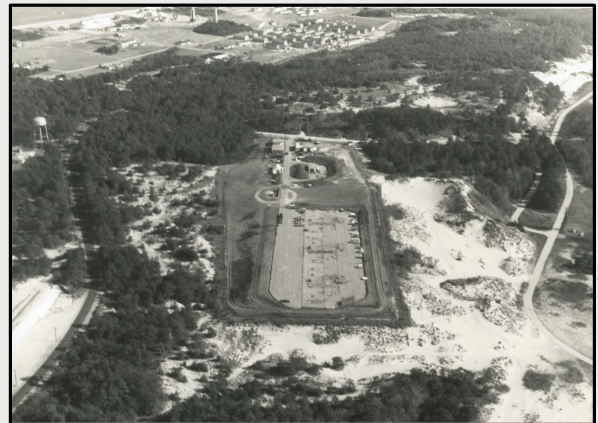
Battery Pennington or Walke, n.d.

Coast Artillery Post

Batteries Pennington and Walke remained the primary coastal defenses at Fort Story throughout WWII, along with three permanent 6-inch batteries constructed into the primary dune line between 1941 and 1943. In 1944, the Army constructed two additional batteries known as Batteries #1 (Ketcham) and #4, and consisting of two, 16-inch Navy rifles (MKII and M1). As an additional defensive measure against German U-boats, the Army constructed two mine casemates on the post to support offshore minefields.

Post-WWII Changing Mission

After WWII, the coast defenses were taken out of use, and Fort Story was increasingly used for amphibious warfare training. In another post-WWII shift, Fort Story became one of 145 coastal sites selected for the installation of the Nike-Ajax missiles and support facilities. These included the Integrated Fire Control site (which controlled radar and associated equipment), the missile launch site, and the administration area. Three large, underground missile silos were constructed at the launch site, and by 1958, were upgraded to the Nike-Hercules missile. Capable of carrying atomic weapons, the Nike-Hercules missile also provided defensive security against a wider range of aircraft. By the 1970s, the United States defensive strategy again shifted, this time away from the Nike missile program, and Fort Story's Nike facilities were decommissioned in April, 1974.



Nike Launch Facility, 1979

Into the Present

Following the end of the Nike missile program, Fort Story continued to be used for amphibious warfare and transportation training purposes. Training dropped off significantly in the late 1970s, but was revitalized with the stationing of the Army's Lighter Air Cushion Vehicle hovercraft at the post in the 1980s. Amphibious vehicle and Logistics Over the Shore training continued at Fort Story through the early twenty-first century; however in 2009 as a result of, the Base Realignment and Closure process, management was turned over to the Navy. JEB Fort Story continues to be home to the Navy, as well as tenant commands of the Army, and provides specialized training for frontline initiatives.