

Our Islands

By Frank Coley

During most of the war years, the camp held a complement of some 500 Marines and 250 Coast Guardsmen. The commander of the Coast Guard detachment was a man whose name is still familiar to a great many people in Beaufort County. J. E. McTeer was the Beaufort County sheriff, but took a leave of absence when the war came along and was given the rank of Lt. Commander in the Coast Guard.

Capt. J. E. McTeer, the late sheriff's son, serves with the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Department out of Beaufort ... and doesn't remember a great deal about those years, but does remember hearing his father talk about the patrols. "They had telephone lines stretched all along the barrier islands where

the Marines and Coast Guardsmen patrolled", he says, "and once in a while you can still find a piece of one. They're rubber covered and about as big around as a pencil. That's the way they'd check in when they were patrolling the beaches with the horses and dogs."

Strangely enough, a person with the most vivid memory of Camp McDougal and everyday life during the time of its operation is a Hilton Head Islander who was only around 10-years old at the time. His name is J. B. Hudson Jr., known to just about everybody as Benny. He lives behind his furniture store on Squire Pope Road and likes to think about the old days as he recuperates from a recent illness.

"They really had a big thing going back there at the Marine base then", he recalls. "If you drive behind the Mariner's Inn, you'll

see a variety of gun emplacements out at about low water. I remember when they use to be 250 feet up on the hill, beyond the high-water mark. That's how much the island has washed away since 1940 and '45."

Those guns were 40 millimeter anti-aircraft guns used mainly for

And there were also the dogs. "I've seen, I guess, a thousand dogs right over here at one time for them to train," says Hudson. "They had a kind of a mummy suit they'd put on a man and leave a spot of his blood. Then, they'd take him down the beach a mile or so or out in the woods a mile ... and those dogs found him."

J. B. Hudson is part of the Hudson family that once owned three of the five oystering operations on Hilton Head Island. His uncle, Mose Hudson, branched out into another area of the food business that was a boon to the 500 Ma-



ABOVE: Three Marines and a Coast Guardsman ham it up in front of an old country store on Jenkins Island.

RIGHT: Horses used for beach patrol duty.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF "BENNY" HUDSON

target practice. A target would be pulled by a plane and the Marines would bang away. And it wasn't just a daytime operation. At night, searchlights would be used to pick up the targets as they were flown over the sea.

"They also had tugboats that pulled targets offshore," Hudson recalls. "They had two six-inch guns down there. One was 'Loud Lucy' and the other was 'Big Betsy.' Those were the big gun mounts. The small gun mounts you can see on the beach were for the anti-aircraft guns.

"I've seen that road all the way from Jenkins Island (near Outdoor Resorts) to the Post Office lined with guns and searchlights pulled by tractors and six-by-six trucks ... also lined with men walking horses on the beach where the Marine camp was."

rines and 250 Coast Guardsmen who were stationed here. He owned a combination tavern and restaurant that was situated roughly in the vicinity of the 7-11 Store on Highway 278 near Shoney's.

"They'd sell beer and steaks and hog dogs and hamburgers and seafood there," he recalls. "Those guys would walk a mile from Camp McDougal to get there.

"I remember, I went out there one morning ... and the general had come over ... and that road from the tavern all the way back to that camp was nothing but glass ... glass everywhere ... beer bottles all broken up.

"That general saw that glass and boy was he mad. He said he wanted it cleaned up immediately

and he didn't want it just taken off to the side of the road either. They sent every street broom they had at Parris Island and put a man on every one of 'em. That general said he wanted it to look like it did before they ever got there and stay that way ... and it did.

"But those Marines loved that tavern. They'd drink all the cold beer there and then when it ran out, they'd start drinking hot ones. There was also a little place about a quarter of a mile away, just a tiny little place called John and Sugar Brown's Joint. They had to run the jukebox and cooler with a generator. But they'd go there, too."

Those were magic times for a 10-year old boy who lived on an isolated island. Benny Hudson remembers the free-flowing spring, that he thinks still exists somewhere in Palmetto Dunes, that gushed forth with sweet water. He remembers going to the tavern and making friends with Sgt. Sadler, who promised to send his Uncle Mose some Japanese ears if he ever got to the war. He remembers Sgt. Boyle and a guy named Fossback, and another named Jones.

He remembers Capt. John Polite and the big triple-decker ferry and passenger vessel, named the Clivedon, that made its way between Savannah and Beaufort; stopping off at Hilton Head and other islands along the way. He remembers his father being in charge of malaria control at Camp McDougal and the tremendous dynamite explosions, as he drained ditches and ponds to kill mosquitoes. Talking with him about those years seems to make the memories as vivid as if it happened yesterday.

Another man whose memory of Camp McDougal is still sharp and clear is Lee Bond. He lives in Greensboro, NC, today, and just retired this month after a long career in the oil terminal business. Bond is from Houston, Texas, but is related to one of the most prominent women in the Lowcountry ... Billy Burn, author and historian on Daufuskie Island. He remembers Hilton Head as a vital part of the war effort.

"During World War II, Hilton Head became an outpost for patrolling the barrier islands," he said during a recent interview. "After training for beach patrol work, I was transferred to Daufuskie Island. Shortly after that, most of the other troops I trained with on Hilton Head were shipped off to North Africa. After the invasion there, they patrolled the beaches using the things they'd learned on Hilton Head."

Bond, was an enlisted man in the Coast Guard and thought himself fortunate to have such good duty on Daufuskie. "Daufuskie only had 12 men stationed there," he recalls. "We were billeted in the old Melrose house. We guarded the beach looking for subs or invaders from the subs.

"My horse's name was Butch. He was an old Army remount and was shipped to Hilton Head from Parris Island on a barge full of other horses, but I don't know where they came from originally. We didn't have to worry about breaking them. They were all broken and some were old, and generally, they were gentle animals.

"I remember we had special uniforms ... riding

boots and khaki riding pants. We'd patrol in pairs ... one down at the water and another about 50 yards away, up the beach. Sometimes, the one up on the beach used a dog."

And once, Bond says, one of his buddies actually spotted what they were all looking for. "It was Lester Hobbs of Stapleton, GA," he recalls. "We had phones on the beach and when he saw that Nazi sub off Daufuskie, he put a call into headquarters and they were right there. They'd dive down and be away up out of their dive when the depth charges went off. Funny kind of explosions. Stuff came up then. We even found some Merita bread wrappers. We felt like somebody in Savannah was supplying them, but never could prove it."

A check with the Parris Island Museum reveals that no record exists of a German U-boat being sunk off Daufuskie. But the debris story is probably accurate. It was a common practice for submarines to jettison oil and garbage in an attempt to fool attackers.

Bond says that another time on Daufuskie, the canine training from Camp McDougal came in handy. "Our dogs picked up a scent on the beach", he said. "We figured it was a German off a sub and followed the scent. Whoever it was, stole a boat from one of the local fishermen and rowed to a highway. We called the information in and the law got 'em. They were headed for Bluffton ... probably on their way to Beaufort. Later, we found their rubber raft buried on the beach in the sand. We felt

like they had a contact around here somewhere, but didn't know who it was ... and never found out."

Lee Bond, eventually, was transferred from Daufuskie to Okinawa, but on the way through the Panama Canal, word came that his mother had died and he was put ashore in Hawaii where he spent the rest of the war.

He's never returned to the part of Daufuskie where he did his patrolling. "Just haven't had the heart", he says a little sadly. "It wasn't a mansion, exactly, but it was a nice house and we liked it there. Now it's all gone ... all washed away. So much is gone. I remember that we held a funeral for a horse in the pasture there one day. The pasture's probably gone, too. I just haven't had the heart to go back."

Camp McDougal has gone the way of the Melrose house ... but in a different fashion. The war ended and it wasn't needed any more. But it had done its job. Men who trained there went on to North Africa, Okinawa, and other legendary killing grounds. And some are still there.

For some of those men the last memories of home could well have been Hilton Head Island. When last they saw it, the island consisted of some 1400 blacks and a few whites ... fishermen and farmers mostly.

There were a few dirt roads, deep woods, a country store or two, and not much else. If they could see it, today, would they think it another world? No. Another universe. 🌟