

RECOLLECTION OF THE COAST GUARD STATION AT WABASSO BEACH

In the early 1940's, the road leading to the Wabasso Beach was known as the Beach Road. It began at U.S. 1 and continued East for several miles. The road has been renamed and is now 87th Street and becomes a part of SR 510. At the time there were Austrian Pine Trees on either side of the road. The road continued until it reached the river (Indian River) and there were two bridges which span the two sections of the river. Over the second section of the river there was a draw bridge which had to be opened by the turning of a large lever in the middle of the bridge. The turning of the mechanism opened the draw bridge and boats could then continue on their routes north or south.

To reach the Wabasso Beach the bridges had to be crossed and it several miles to the Atlantic Ocean. From what is now A1A to the Atlantic Ocean there was a vacant lot which was later used for shelter for horses. Next to that lot was a large wooden structure with a screened in front porch. The building was near the Atlantic Ocean. In fact, the Ocean could be easily seen from the porch or the windows on the east side of the structure. The building was used as a station for the Coast Guard. There were several Coast Guardsmen stationed in the building and my father, Russel P. Hurst, Sr. was one of them. He had joined the Coast Guard when my brother, Russell P. Hurst, Jr. was joining the Navy. He said, "If my son has to go to war, I go too." So, daddy joined the Coast Guard and was stationed at the structure in Wabasso on the Ocean.

The building was spacious and the furnishing was adequate but not fancy. There was a large kitchen and dining area and a sleeping room where there were cots and off from that area was a large bath room with a shower that could be used by several people at one time.

In the facility there were young men from several states. In fact, it was not uncommon for families of the men to come visit and locate in the area.

Across the road, which is now the end of SR 510, there was a shabby building used as a PX. The building was not notable for its structure but my, the contents of the building were a treasure box for those frequenting the PX. One had to be a relative of the Coast Guardsmen in order to utilize the PX and even then, goods could be purchased by the men stationed at the site. Such items as boxes of Hersey Bars with and without almonds, cigarettes and some small items of jewelry were among the goods sold at the PX. The prices were wonderful, but remember, during the war years, it was difficult to purchase such items as candy. We certainly enjoyed the fact that daddy could easily keep us supplied with candy.

The Coast Guardsmen were stationed there for a reason. They were to patrol the coast line and report any off shore events that were unusual or suspicious. Initially, the men were assigned to patrol the beach on foot. They were given shifts and they walked North and South of the Station. Each man walked alone and had a walkie talkie and a weapon. At night particularly, the men were on duty. There were look out towers along the shore and men were

stationed there also. It must have been terribly lonely for an individual to walk the beach at night along. Frankly, it could be dangerous.

There was evidence that vessels had been demolished in the ocean because debris from the happenings were found on the beach. Such items as pots, pans, containers of alcoholic beverages were often found. Later, it was learned that German Submarines had been sited in the Ocean. In fact, it was said that when one German Sub had been captured, a ticket to the downtown movie theater was in the pocket of one of the captured men.

Walking the beach or being assigned to the watch tower must have been lonely. Walking with your weapon and battling mosquitos and other biting insects must have been a job which was not fun.

It was not long before stables for horses were built between the Coast Guard Station and what is now A1A. Horses were housed there and of course the Coast Guardsmen had the responsibility of grooming the animals. At night the horses were used by the Coast Guardsmen for riding up and down the beach. I am sure that having an animal to ride made the time of the assignment much shorter and more interesting.

For those in the watch tower, a vehicle would come at an appointed time to deliver another Coast Guardsman to the assignment and the one who just ended the duty would be transported back to the station. The men were given time off. For example, they may work three nights and then be off for one or two evenings. Some men also worked in the kitchen and they maintained the grounds and buildings.

The Coast Guardsmen were really involved. They were on patrol of the coast line, groomed and cared for the animals, maintained the buildings and grounds, worked in the kitchen and inside the building, drove the vehicles, worked in the PX and completed the required paperwork. It was not a bad assignment.

To get to the station one had to cross over the draw bridge in Wabasso. They were stopped and they had to show identification. The bridge tender maintained a log of the person going across the bridge, the make, model, and tag number of their vehicle along with personal identification. At that time, Mr. Ben Wood was the bridge tender and he was assigned to work 24/7. Later, it was determined that he had to have relief and his wife became an employee of the state. Prior to that time, she, and Mr. Wood's children had helped him on the bridge, it was wonderful, she got paid and he had relief.

The watch towers were located both North and South of the Coast Guard Station. At that time, there was no bridge over the Sebastian Inlet. The Atlantic Ocean and Indian River were not connected at that time by water. There were sand dunes that could be crossed by foot or by vehicle. Years later the ocean and river were connected.

I had gone up to spend several days with daddy at the station and on the first day he received orders that he was to report for duty in Miami. I was disappointed mainly because asparagus was on the menu that night and I was looking forward to having some.

Men in the Coast Guard were appreciated by the natives and in fact many romances took place because the service men were in the area. It was not uncommon for girls dating the

service men to have them visit their families, churches, etc. There were several marriages that occurred too.

Other local men joined the Coast Guards. Alvin Clinton Walker, Broward McCullers, and Howard Dye, just to name a few.

I remember the coast guard station, stables, PX, watch towers with fondness. It was a pleasure to be closely associated with the facilities and its inhabitants.

Memories of the Wabasso Coast Guard Station by Harry R. Hurst who was approximately 10-11 years of age at the time.

Prepared article: February 20, 2017