



Memories of the Beach Patrol

In December 1998, Captain Jerry Barker, (U. S. Coast Guard ret.) and his wife, Lois, visited with the docents in the lighthouse at Pt. Pinos. Barker had commanded the Pt. Pinos Beach Patrol detachment of 120 men, 24 horses and 48 dogs from May through November of 1943. "We were nocturnal animals," said Barker. "During the day we rested, did physical training and played games like baseball and touch football." Barker said the men were young and in superb physical shape, but the four-hour shift of walking about a quarter mile of beach through the sand still tired them out.

The mission of the beach patrol was to help secure the coast. They were organized by lighthouse districts because it was a convenient way to divide up the coast. Barker's jurisdiction extended from just north of Ft. Ord to Pt. Sur. While they were to be on the lookout for enemy action at sea or for landings of spies or saboteurs, what this meant in practice was enforcing the total blackout along the shore from dusk until dawn. The penalty for noncompliance was harsh, but Barker remembers never having a problem with enforcement. "People were happy to comply; whatever would help the war effort, they would do." The beach patrol headquarters' phones were tied into the Pacific Grove police department and the FBI, just in case. During the war, beaches were posted off limits to civilians. They were patrolled at night and posted "no trespassing" during the daytime. In addition to the patrols, most districts operated watchtowers during the day.

Not all beaches were patrolled. There weren't enough men to do it. The Pt. Pinos district included about 40 miles of shoreline, patrolled from dusk till dawn. The men worked four-hour shifts, usually two men to a patrol, walking about 400 yards of beach. Barker's detachment could patrol about ten miles of beach. Barker said that the strategic beaches were given priority: those along the waterfront in Monterey, Seaside and Sand City; those around Pt. Pinos down through Spanish Bay and continuing along 17-Mile Drive, Carmel Bay and Monastery Beach. Then the coverage got much thinner as you progressed toward Big Sur. First priority was given to where submarines might land saboteurs and, next, to beaches important to navigation along the coast (Pt. Sur, Pt. Pinos) or those in front of populated areas where it was important to keep the blackout total.

Beach coverage was increased down toward Pt. Sur by using horse patrols. This generated a lot of nighttime traffic as the standard four-hour patrol time was used. Horses and men were transported down the coast highway in horse vans for three shifts a night. Barker said the men learned to drive by the Braille method. Some of them knew the road

so well they could drive it blindfolded. The tiny blackout slits in the headlights did not provide much light and the men drove at high speeds beyond the capacity of the blackout lights to provide light. Horse patrols were better able to negotiate the rugged terrain along the Big Sur coast and their patrols were longer than the foot patrols.

The beach patrollers and the lighthouse personnel kept their distance. Barker said he was invited into the lighthouse once in his six-month stint at Pt. Pinos. He remembers a lighthouse contingent of 5-6 people and no families at Pt. Pinos in 1943. The beach patrollers had four redwood barracks. One was a mess hall, the end of one was the headquarters, and the others were standard barracks where the men were accommodated in bunk beds with about 40 men to a building. Barker inspected the beach patrol exhibit in the south bedroom at Pt. Pinos Lighthouse and gave it a thumbs up. "This is about the way it was," he said, "except for the big radio set we didn't have in 1943."

Barker had been in commando training for night infiltration attacks with the 7th Cavalry around Santa Rosa in early 1943 when he was pulled aside and sent to Pt. Pinos to command the beach patrol.

Both he and his men realized it was a magic time, a moment aside from war. Barker remembers the community taking the young beach patrollers to their hearts. "They got a lot of invitations to dinner."

In the fall of 1943, Jerry Barker proposed by phone to his bride-to-be, Lois, from his apartment in Pacific Grove. Evidently Barker was persuasive, for Lois accepted, journeying west to San Francisco by train, where they were wed as Jerry was in transit to assume command of the Stinson Beach patrol district. On the wall inside the door in the south bedroom at Pt. Pinos there is a wedding picture of the Barkers. ■



1943: Ensign Parker and Rex
Photo credit: Pacific Grove Museum of Natural History