

The US Army on Washburn Island in WW II



In 1943, a base was established at Washburn Island to train army engineers how to use of amphibious landing craft to land soldiers on a beach. Two "tent cities" were constructed. One (shown in photo #1) was where Seacoast Shores is today. The other, consisting of 1500 tents, was on the island. A bridge (shown in the center of #2) connected the two. A second bridge—a pontoon-type situated where an island road ends at the shore in the center of #3—connected the island to Seapit. Five huge docks (four are visible in #2; five scars in the bottom (#3) show where they were) were built to accommodate the 38 foot landing craft (#5) that were shipped to Cape Cod by rail. Facilities in Falmouth Harbor and elsewhere were built to service them.

The base was built in the early spring of 1943 as part of an expansion of Camp Edwards. Men trained there were being prepared for service in the Pacific, men such as those in Company "D" of the 534th Engineer Boat and Shore Battalion 4th Engineer Specialist Brigade. They, the men of the 544th Regiment and others, practiced Regimental Maneuvers on Washburn Island (#4) and on Martha's Vineyard. At the end of 1943 the training base was moved to Florida where conditions better matched those to be encountered in the Pacific. The engineers that began training at Washburn Island, continued training in Florida before moving on to Australia and New Guinea. They participated in the invasion of Morotal Island and later, the Philippine Islands. After the surrender of Japan in the fall of 1945, they were transported to Japan as part of America's first military occupation. Reunions continue to be held but at Camp Gordon Johnston in Carrabelle, Florida.

