

Topsail Towers

Introduction

At the end of World War II, the United States Navy established a missile testing facility on Topsail Island, N.C. The site was one of three along the Atlantic coast, part of a top-secret project for assembling, firing, monitoring, and perfecting experimental ramjet missiles. Navy and Marine personnel, numbering 500 men, arrived in mid-1946 to begin installing the necessary facilities. The buildings included a number of masonry observation towers that are still standing, both beach- and sound-side.


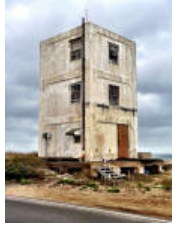

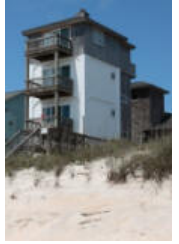
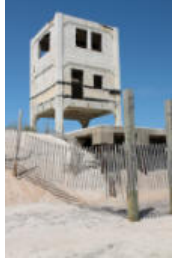







The site was placed in operation in March 1947. They launched an estimated 200 rockets over the next 18 months. The site was closed, as the location didn't meet the needs of a permanent base due to weather conditions and increased sea traffic. But the towers are still standing, as is the assembly building, which most recently was converted to the [museum about the program](#). Read a bit more on [this Wikipedia page](#). Or read a [detailed history via Google books](#) in Ray McAllister's *Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea*. Very good history there. Some of the structures are also listed on the [National Register of Historic Places](#). Read the [documentation from 1993](#), which contains quite a bit of details.

[See photos by Mike Legeros](#)

List of Towers

Structure	Location	Geography	Notes	Photo
Tower #1	930 South Anderson Boulevard.	Sound side	<p>From NPS in 1993: At 930 South Anderson Boulevard (NC 50), at its intersection with Hines Avenue, Topsail Beach, and 6.6 miles south of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City. A two-story residential addition was attached to the southwest corner of the tower in 1949 and modern windows were installed in the tower walls.</p> <p>Tower #1 was purchased in 1991 and converted over the next several years into the current structure. The concrete addition was demolished in 1995, during the renovations. It was completed one week before Hurricane Fran in 1996. Mike Legeros photo, March 2012.</p>	

Tower #2	1000 block North Anderson Boulevard	Sound side	<p>From NPS in 1993: In the 1000 block of South Anderson Boulevard (NC 50), Topsail Beach, in the Queen's Grant residential development, on the west side of the street overlooking Topsail Sound, 4.9 miles south of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City, and 0.1 west of South Anderson Boulevard. The tower, in unaltered condition, stands as a lone sentinel overlooking Topsail Sound on the west side of the island and is isolated from the residential development by a narrow channel.</p> <p>Tower #2 is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Mike Legeros photo, March 2012.</p>	
Tower #3	3008 South Shore Drive.	Ocean side	<p>From NPS in 1993: At 3008 South Shore Drive (NC 50) and Hispanola Avenue, Surf City, and 3.6 miles south of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City. The structure was altered in the 1950s by the addition of a one-story residential wing on the south side of the tower and a wraparound porch on the ocean side of the building.</p> <p>Tower #3 was stripped of its one-story addition by Hurricane Fran in 1996. Mike Legeros photo, March 2012.</p>	
Tower #4	1408 South Shore Drive	Ocean side	<p>From NPS in 1993: At 1408 North Anderson Boulevard (NC 50), Surf City, and 1.6 miles south of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City. The tower is now sandwiched between two multi-story residences and retains only its reinforced concrete frame and floors.</p> <p>Tower #4 was used as a home and a business in the mid-1950s. The first floor was used for selling hot dogs in 1953 and 1954. It was renovated to a home in 1999, after looking like a concrete skeleton for years. Features include a spiral staircase from the ground floor to the top floor. Mike Legeros photo, April 2012.</p>	
Tower #5	332 N. Shore Drive	Sound side	<p>From NPS in 1993: Just southeast of the intersection of North Shore Road (NC 210) and New Bern Avenue, North Topsail Beach, 0.4 miles north of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City, and 0.05 miles east to the Atlantic Ocean. Like Tower #2, the structure stands in its original condition on a bluff overlooking the sea.</p> <p>Tower #5 had a number of renovations added started in 1994 and over a period of six years. The building is one of the tallest on Topsail Island due to the penthouse on top of the tower. Mike Legeros photo, April 2012.</p>	
Tower #6	408 Island Drive	Ocean side	<p>From NPS in 1993: Ocean City Pier, North Topsail Beach, at 3.5 miles north of the intersection of NC 50 and NC 210 in Surf City, and 0.05 miles east to the Atlantic Ocean. The property was developed in the 1950s as a public fishing pier and restaurant, with the tower forming the central mass in the arrangement of newer buildings.</p> <p>The buildings surrounding Tower #6 were severely damaged by Hurricane Fran in 1996. They have been removed along</p>	

			with the pier. The tower is still standing and a home has been built beside the tower. Mike Legeros photo, April 2012.	
Tower #7	3900 Island Drive	Ocean side	Tower #7 was renovated into a 4,000 square-foot home about 1992. The added structure hides the tower from the street, but the tower is visible from the beach. Mike Legeros photo, April 2012.	
Tower #8	North Topsail Beach.	Ocean side	Tower #8 was the northernmost tower on Topsail Island, located in an undeveloped oceanfront area off Secondary Road 1568 in West Onslow Beach. Also known as the Jeffreys Tower. According to Star-News article in 1986, George Jeffreys had renovated the tower to be a house. He abandoned his efforts after numerous storms and the results of vandalism. He then sold same to another owner. It became an eyesore as well as an attraction for problems. Three people died from falling from the third story during incidents of parties or vandalism. Two deaths occurred in August 1986. It was demolished by the owner in 1989, who was unable to keep trespassers off the property. Star-News photo.	
Control Tower	802 S. Anderson Boulevard		<p>From NPS in 1993: To the east of the Assembly Building, at the southwest corner of South Anderson Boulevard and Flake Avenue, stands a three-story, sixteen-foot by sixteen-foot reinforced concrete building, which was originally erected as the control tower for the missile testing facility. Documentary photographs of the structure show it much as it remains today, except for the removal of a roof-top observation platform and the substitution of wide eaves and a flat roof over the observation deck.</p> <p>The Control Tower was purchased in 1958 and converted to a family beach house, to replace one destroyed by Hurricane Hazel. Mike Legeros photo, March 2012.</p>	
Assembly Building	720 Channel Boulevard	Sound side	From NPS in 1993: The Assembly Building, where ramjet rockets were fabricated and stored, is a seventy seven by eighty-two-foot structure with reinforced concrete walls and floors, concrete block upper walls, and timber trusses supporting the gable roof. It is located at the intersection of Channel Boulevard and Flake Avenue, two blocks west of South Anderson Boulevard, the main north-south road that connects the seacoast towns of North Topsail Beach, Surf City and Topsail Beach. Directly behind the building is Topsail Sound, which separates the island from the mainland across tidal flats and the Intracoastal Waterway. Mike Legeros photo, March 2012.	
Launching Platform	800 Ocean Boulevard	Ocean side	From NPS in 1993: One block east of the control tower, across South Anderson Boulevard and skirting the ocean side of the island, stands the Jolly Roger Inn, a complex of two- and three-story structures that face the sea and flank a sixty-foot by seventy-two-foot concrete patio that formerly served as a part of the launching platform for the missiles wheeled on dollies from the assembly building to the firing site. A reinforced concrete bunker beneath the platform served as an observation post during launching of the missiles and is now used as a storage room for the motel. Mike Legeros photo, April 2012.	

Photos by Mike Legeros

Sources

- *Echoes of Topsail: Stories of the Island's Past* by David A. Stallman
 - Missiles and More Museum
 - National Park Service records
 - [National Register of Historic Places](#)
 - [Roadside America.com](#)
 - *Star-News*, August 15, 1986.
 - *Topsail Island: Mayberry by the Sea* by Ray McAllister
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