

AT HOLDEN BEACH

Policeman Pulls Deer From Ocean

BY DOUG RUTTER

A quiet day at home turned into a not-so-typical day at the beach for an off-duty Holden Beach police officer who waded into chilly ocean waters Sunday to come to the aid of a deer.

Policeman Bill Jordan was sound asleep at his Hillside Drive residence when islanders Armand and Margaret Vasco knocked on his door shortly after noon Sunday to inform him that there was a deer on the strand.

The Vascos had just started an afternoon walk on the beach Sunday when they spotted the white-tailed deer emerging from the ocean near Surfside Pavilion. "I was so startled. I just couldn't believe it," Mrs. Vasco said Monday. "All of a sudden to look up and see a deer staring at you."

The couple's story didn't shock Jordan, who had seen another deer on the beach just a few weeks earlier. During the pre-Christmas snowstorm, Jordan said he saw a deer on the strand near Holden Beach Fishing Pier that ran into the ocean and never returned. "I wasn't going to let that happen again," he said.

After notifying fellow police officer Gary Dancy, who was on duty Sunday afternoon, Jordan and the Vascos went to the beach to do what they could to help the deer.

They decided to guide the animal toward the east end of the island where it would have easier access to the undeveloped wooded area. Jordan said the deer slowly moved east, coming out of the water occasionally but running back in whenever startled.

After four of five runs in and out of the ocean,

Jordan said the deer grew tired and he was able to wade in about knee deep and pick it up. "It was just exhausted," said Jordan. "It stumbled and fell and I grabbed it."

Once the deer was captured, the officer said he carried it across Ocean Boulevard East in the vicinity of Avenue D. Blankets and a sleeping bag were used to raise the deer's body temperature. "It had the shakes really bad," said Jordan, adding that the animal had no apparent injuries.

Mrs. Vasco added, "For a while, the deer didn't move at all. You almost wondered if it was going to make it."

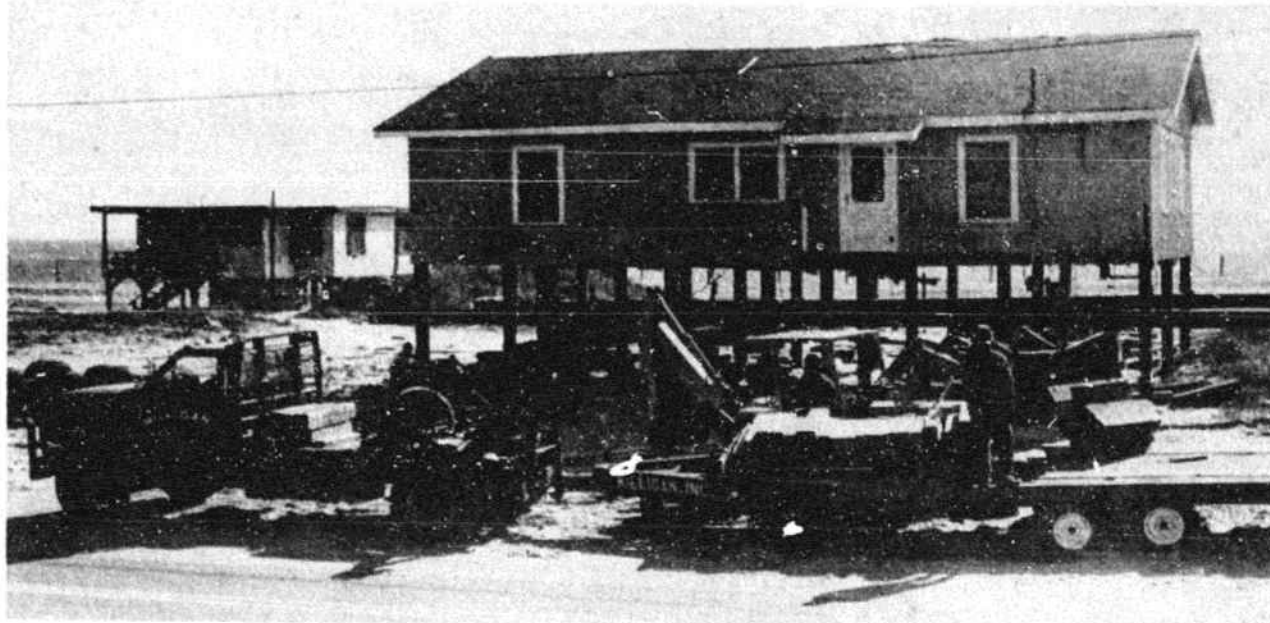
Meanwhile, a crowd of between 25 and 35 people had gathered to witness the rescue, which lasted about two hours. Most were day visitors searching for shells at the east end of Holden Beach.

While it recovered, Jordan said children who had gathered around were permitted to pet the animal, which did not have the strength to resist.

"It was so cute how all of the children thought it was Santa's reindeer," said Mrs. Vasco. "They all went over to pet it."

Thirty minutes in warm blankets and the sunshine apparently rejuvenated the deer, which, after a few shaky moments, darted into the brush near the east end of the island. "It was quite a scene," said Mrs. Vasco.

Jordan estimated that the deer weighed between 60 and 80 pounds. He said he believed it was a female and that it was relatively young based on the way it looked and behaved.



STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

Back On Top At Holden

The David Blalock home at 563 Ocean Blvd. West, Holden Beach, is looking more like its former self these days. Last week, the house was set on new pilings. In October, the house had been lowered from its old pilings, some of which cracked during Hurricane Hugo. In this photo taken Saturday, workers with Milligan House Movers remove temporary supports from underneath the building. Prior to the hurricane, the home was located as far oceanward as the Lonnie Small cottage pictured at left.

Holden Campground Manager Granted Postponement Of Variance Hearing

BY DOUG RUTTER

The Holden Beach Zoning Board of Adjustment Monday postponed a variance hearing two weeks at the request of the appellant, who said he doesn't want to do anything to jeopardize the town's flood insurance program.

Gil Bass, manager of Holden Beach Family Campground, earlier requested a variance from town code so he could rebuild the campground bathhouse destroyed in Hurricane Hugo without meeting flood elevation requirements.

The code would require that the bathhouse be elevated about nine feet off the ground, but Bass wants to build the structure two or three feet above the ground to provide easier access for campers.

On Monday, the campground manager requested that the public hearing be delayed two weeks due to the confusion over whether granting a variance would affect the availability of flood insurance on Holden Beach. Also, Bass said he's studying several alternatives for rebuilding the bathhouse above the flood plain and that a variance may not be necessary.

Board of adjustment members Martin Feldt, Allan Dameron, Graham King, Alfred Bell and Georgia Langley approved the delay after only seven minutes of discussion Monday. The board is scheduled to hold the public hearing Monday, Jan. 29, at 5 p.m.

In the meantime, officials hope to get confirmation one way or the other as to whether granting the variance would affect flood insurance on the island. The Federal Flood Insurance Program allows homeowners to purchase flood insurance if the town enforces flood elevation rules.

The state coordinator of the federal program said in a recent interview that granting the variance could jeopardize the town's participation in the flood insurance program. But the town's building inspector and a regional flood insurance official say one variance will not affect the program.

Berry Williams, who coordinates the national flood insurance program for the N.C. Division of Emergency Management, said the variance could affect flood insurance on the island if the town has other flood elevation code violations.

Williams said repeated violations

"They will not do anything to jeopardize the (flood) insurance program on Holden Beach."

Gil Bass, manager Holden Beach Family Campground



of flood insurance guidelines in a town can lead to probation or suspension of the program. After the program has been suspended, homeowners in that community can no longer obtain federal flood insurance and are not eligible for federal disaster assistance.

However, a federal flood insurance official has supported the contention of Holden Beach Building Inspector Dwight Carroll that granting the variance will not cause flood insurance problems on the island.

Brad Loar, natural hazards specialist with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) regional office in Atlanta, said granting one variance will not affect flood insurance if a community has a good history of following the program's objectives.

"It would go on their record, and it's something we would monitor," said Loar. "Patterns of issuing variances could very well be detrimental."

Loar, who works exclusively in North Carolina, said he's not aware of any existing enforcement problems at Holden Beach. Last year, at least three towns or counties in the state were warned about lax enforcement of the code, but none were in Brunswick County.

Bass said Monday that stockholders of Holden Beach Fishing Pier—which is adjacent to the campground—do not want the variance if there's a chance it will harm the town's standing in the Federal Flood Insurance Program. "They will not do anything to jeopardize the insurance program on Holden Beach."

Mrs. Langley, who was appointed to the board of adjustment earlier this month, proposed that the board approve the variance on the condition that it would not affect flood insurance on the island.

She said the island needs flood insurance but that the elderly and handicapped also need access to the

campground bathhouse. The old restroom that was demolished in last September's hurricane rested on a concrete slab on the ground and was built before flood elevation rules took effect.

Bass has proposed building a 725-square-foot bathhouse with two commodes, three sinks and two showers—including those equipped for the handicapped—on each side. He says it would serve the public better if it wasn't elevated so far off the ground.

However, Williams has questioned whether the variance should be granted. Although it would be more expensive to build an elevated bathhouse, he said ramps can be constructed to provide adequate access.

The town's zoning code spells out the following four conditions that must be met for the board of adjustment to grant a variance:

1) Special conditions and circumstances exist which are peculiar to the land, structure or building involved and which are not applicable to other land, structures or buildings in the same district.

2) The special conditions and circumstances do not result from the actions of the applicant.

3) Literal interpretations of the provisions of the zoning code would deprive the applicant of rights commonly enjoyed by other parties in the same district.

4) Granting a variance will not confer on the applicant any special privilege that is denied to other land, structures or buildings in the same district.

Loar said he wasn't familiar enough with the facts of the case to comment on the specific variance request. He said it's up to each community's board of adjustment to make the decision. Referring to the general conditions for granting variances, Loar said, "As long as those items are met, we would not have a problem with it."

School Board Calls Off Island Retreat

Brunswick County's Board of Education is retreating from its original plan to retreat to Bald Head Island.

After questions were raised by the press regarding public accessibility to the island meeting, the board has changed its plans for Jan. 20. Come 9 a.m. Saturday, instead of boarding the Bald Head Ferry members will hold a half-day work-session at the school system's administrative offices at Southport.

Plans for the original retreat were finalized at the board's Jan. meeting, where board member Donna Baxter said its purpose was to discuss goals and priorities for the school system and for members to get to know one another better.

At that meeting members learned that since they would be discussing school system business, the retreat would be open to the media and to the general public. The proposed agenda included discussion of curriculum, maintenance and transportation, food services and personnel.

"I think because of the sort of negative reaction it got, she (Mrs. Baxter) asked me to change the location to the school board office," said Superintendent John Kaufhold. He added, "I don't know what they had in mind. I could have told them it had to be an open meeting."

One alternative considered was seeking special ferry rates to the island for those planning to observe the meeting. However, discounts for the \$20 round-trip weren't available.

Beach Hardening Issue Tops Next CRC Agenda

The use of hard erosion-control structures such as seawalls, jetties and groins will be the major topic of discussion when the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (CRC) meets next week in Atlantic Beach.

The CRC convenes Thursday and Friday, Jan. 25 and 26, at the Atlantic Beach Sheraton. Meetings will start at 9 a.m. both days and are open to the public.

Consideration of a petition from the Town of Topsail Beach, which is seeking an amendment to the state rule that prohibits hardened erosion-control structures, will be the key item addressed by the CRC, said N.C. Division of Coastal Management spokesman Bill Keese. He said a full agenda would not be available until the middle of this week.

Although it would violate a state ban on hard erosion-control structures, Topsail Beach is considering building a 1,010-foot terminal groin to slow erosion at the south end of the beach near New Topsail Inlet.

The CRC outlawed hard beachfront structures in 1985, reasoning that while seawalls, groins and jetties reduce erosion where they are built, they tend to cause more erosion nearby.

Since Topsail Beach is working with the Army Corps of Engineers on its project, it doesn't need a state permit. However, since no permit is required, the town has no way to appeal the position of the state Division of Coastal Management, which has ruled that the project would be a violation of existing code.

The rule change proposed by Topsail Beach would establish an avenue of appeal for federally-sponsored projects that include hardened erosion-control structures.

The petition and proposed rule change last week gained the support of the Town of Ocean Isle Beach, which has a series of groins in place at its east end where there have been erosion problems for years.

But CRC Chairman Dan Besse has already spoken out against the proposal. At a recent meeting of the Cape Fear Sierra Club, Besse said granting Topsail Beach's request would harm the state's efforts to manage coastal erosion problems. He said this is the first major challenge to the state ban since it was imposed five years ago.

Specifically, Topsail Beach officials have proposed adding a new section to the existing rule that would allow construction of hard structures if:

—The proposed erosion-control project is designed in response to a request from a public body and is necessary to protect or preserve a valuable public resource.

—The project is publicly-funded and will provide a significant economic benefit to either the state or local governments or the region.

—The public body responsible for the project can demonstrate that the proposed erosion-control measures will have minimal or no adverse impact on the environment or adjacent properties.

—All public trust rights and the free and unimpeded rights of public access shall be preserved.

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