

The Bumblebee Project

Island Beach, New Jersey



Bumblebee being launched.

In 1944 the U.S. Navy chose Island Beach for a special top secret war research project to be supervised by Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory.

It was given the code name

"BUMBLEBEE."



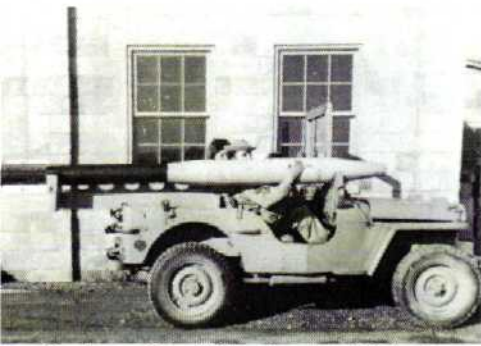
Bumblebee launch site.

The Bumblebee Project Island Beach, NJ

In late 1944 Japanese started using Kamikaze pilots to fly the airplanes into American Navy ships in the Pacific Ocean, inflicting many casualties.

In order to destroy these airplanes a weapon would require great speed and accuracy. Fortunately, a weapon that could remedy this problem was already in the development stage at the Applied Physics Laboratory of Johns Hopkins University of Silver Spring, Maryland. To meet the challenge of perfecting the weapon, the university appointed Dr. Wilbur H. Goss to lead a team of 30 of its staff to work on the super-secret project. The ramjet theory, which was conceived by a French engineer, Rene Lorin, in 1908, had never been developed.

Island Beach was chosen as the most appropriate site because it was secluded, had an unobstructed firing range, electricity, water, a gravel road, armed service men patrolling the beach, and housing for the team, which arrived in mid-February 1945.



Moving a Bumblebee Ramjet Missile to the launch ramp.

The inactive Cedar Creek Coast Guard Station #111 was their headquarters. To the east of this building a concrete platform, launching ramps, and two concrete block buildings had to be built. A mobile radar unit was installed on top of the dunes.

On June 3, 1945, after working around the clock seven days a week with many tests and disappointments the team successfully launched the first supersonic ramjet missile in the world. Propelled by rockets, it took off traveling at an approximate speed of 1300 miles per hour in a southeasterly direction out over the Atlantic Ocean. Its sonic boom was heard by fishermen in the area.

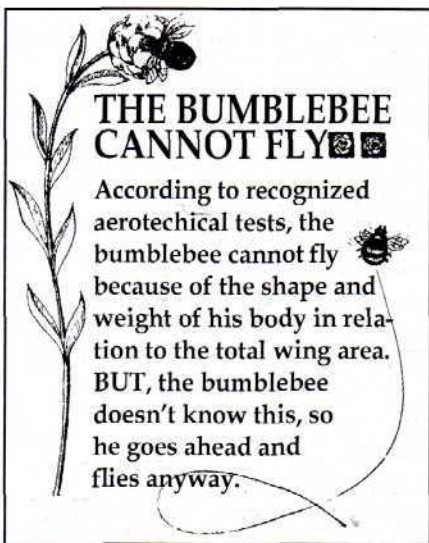
The site of this event was between where the two ocean bathing beaches are today. The 80 foot by 40 foot concrete pad is still under the sand dunes. This was a big advancement in the war effort against Japan. A model of the ramjet can be seen at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.



A missile arriving at the Island Beach launching area.

Shortly after the war was over, the U.S. Navy shut down the operation at Island Beach and moved the missile scientists to the White Sands Proving Grounds in New Mexico. Island Beach, under Superintendent Francis Freeman's keen interest in protecting the flora and fauna and with the help of the Garden Clubs of New Jersey, returned to its natural environment.

Ferdinand F. Klebold, Trustee, Friends of Island Beach State Park 2012



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This information concerning the Bumblebee Project was adapted and condensed from facts researched, compiled and written by Richard W. Updike. A more detailed expanded account will appear in Richard Updike's forthcoming book on the history of Island Beach, which will be published soon.

*Photos courtesy of Johns Hopkins University,
Island Beach State Park Archives*