

Summer on the Beach

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Article submitted by UXO Guest Author [Richard D. Albright](#).

While this story is principally written from information known to Locals familiar with the Cape Henlopen State Park in Delaware, the principles apply at all beaches. Almost monthly, UXOInfo features a story of an ordnance item being found on the beach or in shallow water just offshore. Often these are shells or rockets which have rolled into shore during storms or have been pumped in with sand for beach replenishment projects.

Military shells generally look like shells and many civilians are easily able to recognize them. However, many naval shells are the ones often found on beaches and these may appear harmless since they are base fused and appear to be armor piercing with no explosives.

The author recalls one such shell found along the shore of the Potomac River in DC, on National Parkland. It was shown to a park ranger who mistakenly thought it was solid shot and let the finder take it home. Only when the pictures were reviewed by the undersigned, did the Park Ranger find out that it was a base fused HE round. Unfortunately, the happy finder could not be located as the Ranger did not record his name.

In salt water, shells along the coasts are severely rusted again giving rise to the notion that they must be harmless. Often they are from WWI Coast Artillery batteries which frequently fired out into the ocean for target practice. While larger shells (say 12 inch) are far too heavy to tuck in the picnic basket, smaller 3 to 5 inch shells are not.

One of the common finds, are rifle grenades, fired out into the water by bored gunners. The French Rifle Grenade found in Delaware is very common. This grenade has a hole through it so it could be fired from the WWI rifle using live ammo instead of blanks. The bullet would pass through the hole but leave enough pressure to launch the grenade at a longer distance than hand throwing could achieve. To make matters worse, it had a smooth body, unlike most grenades. The brass fuse was located off to one side of the nose, shaped like a small spool for thread. A striker was driven, by the bullet, into a primer on the side of this brass fuse, which ignited a powder train with a few second delay. To counterbalance this fuse, a lead bolt was placed on the other side. Thus the whole device looked like some electrical capacitor with a positive (the brass side) and negative (lead side) terminals. Although the author had unique ordnance experience (incoming and outgoing) as well as an extensive collection this piece completely fooled him.

Since old explosives get more sensitive with age, scraping the barnacles off it could be catastrophic.

