

Surfing on the **Cape Fear Coast**

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1946 to 1966 - Contemporary Period



1955
J.M. Binkley (middle) gifts a fiberglass balsa surfboard to Bill Creasy of Wrightsville Beach, NC.

1959
The movie, Gidget, shows at the Colony Theatre, in Wilmington, NC.

1959
The author's college roommate, Stanley Winbourne, surfs on Wrightsville Beach, with a fiberglass and balsa board he purchased in Virginia Beach, VA.

1960
Surfer Magazine founded.

1962
Wipeout, by the Surfaris, is released.

1962
Wrightsville Beach Surf Club founded.

1964
East Coast Surfboards founded, Carolina Beach, NC.

1965
Surfing wax becomes an available accoutrement.

1946

1966

Fiberglass over balsa with fin



Fiberglass over foam longboard



1967 to 1991 - Commercialization Period



1967
The movie, Endless Summer, shows at the Crest Theatre, at Wrightsville Beach.

1967
Eastern Surfing Association founded.

1970
Introduction of the surfboard leash.

1976
Sweetwater Surf Shop founded on Wrightsville Beach, NC.

1977
Allison Surfboards founded in Wilmington, NC.

1978
Surf City Surf Shop opens on Wrightsville Beach, NC.

1982
UNCW Surf Club officially chartered.



1982
The Cove Surf Shop opens in Carolina Beach, NC.

1983
Record Bar Pro-Am surfing competition began at Wrightsville Beach, NC.

1985
Eastern Skateboard Supply founded in Wilmington, NC.

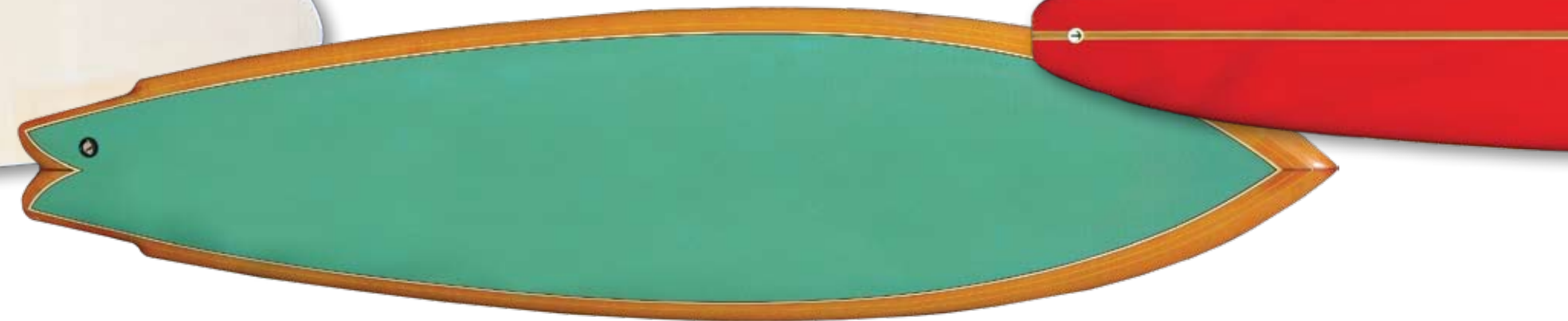
1990
Aussie Island Surf Shop opens in Wilmington, NC.

1991
Jet propelled, FlowRider wave machine, popularized.

1967

1991

Fiberglass over foam shortboard





all the sensations and excited people. It was in that atmosphere, I was bitten by the surfing bug.

We learned from the waves - feeling the motion and energy of the surf. In 1954, at 6 years old, I started my wave riding apprenticeship, utilizing inflatable surf mats. Inflatable mat surfing was popular and we learned to ride prone, crouch, ride straight in and angle across the waves. The mats were typically made by Converse, the shoe manufacturer. The rented mats were made in matching colors and were numbered for identification. Our surf mats were inflated to a higher air pressure than for tourists. Ours were inflated as hard as rocks, so they did not bend on a breaking wave. My family provided us with many privately owned surf mats. As well, we did not wear rubber swim fins on

our feet. I started mat surfing at several locations on the Cape Fear Coast, typically Johnnie Mercers Fishing Pier, Lumina Pavilion, and Crystal Fishing Pier on Wrightsville Beach or the Boardwalk Area and Fisherman's Steel Pier at Carolina Beach. From 1954 until 1960, I was in swimming and canoe training at the YMCA. My family taught me gentle body surfing and I was swimming like a fish by 4 or 5 years old.

This was at a time when contemporary surfboards were not readily available on the Cape Fear Coast. However, in the early to middle 1950's, low density styrofoam surfboards were available and we rode them in the prone position. There were at least two contemporary surfboards (Bill Creasy and Stanley Winborne, owners) around Wrightsville Beach between 1954 and 1959, but focus of their use was as a family and not as an individual. That was the kind of relationships that turned us into the contemporary pioneer surfers.

The Cape Fear Coast wave is perfect for body surfing, which some locals consider the purest form of surfing. By 1956, your author was developing the skills to handle the waves of the ocean breaking near the shore. We often learned to body surf by piggy backing or doubling with an older relative or friend. The

buddy system was a requirement to advance into breaking waves. We learned to body surf as the waves broke near the shore creating a turbulent surf front of bubbles, foam, spray and splashes of water. As the waves propelled our bodies through the breakers, we fell into a deeper love for the sea. We honed our skills, racing man to man, as we traveled shoreward on broken waves. We also learned to roll over on our backs while body surfing.

Our formal swim and dive training paid off. A significant part of body surfing was also developing a strong kick stroke with your legs and feet. We developed as strong bodysurfers, as

we kicked off the bottom. The position of wave breaking is important to the body surfer. We would swim out with a buddy to an observable position where the waves were constantly breaking. The crests generally overturn down the face of the wave, the wave is of the spilling or rolling variety and is ideal for body surfing. We termed the method of catching a wave, porpoising, because it is clearly used by bottlenose dolphins and porpoises to play in the waves near the shoreline just before the waves break. By watching porpoises we learned to exit out of the back of waves. If the waves are too large, they are not suitable for body surfing and at that time we utilized a wave riding

Wrightsville Beach - 1954

Skipper and his brother, "Buddy", enjoy a day playing on their surf mat at Johnnie Mercer's Fishing Pier.



Surf Mat Competition

In 1954 at the Makaha International Surfing Championships in Oahu, Hawaii mat surfing was included in the surfing competitions. According to World Surfing Champion Fred Hemmings, "Events included women's open, senior open and junior men championships, bodysurfing, paddleboard races, tandem surfing and mat surfing." California's George Greenough, was riding surf mats in the mid fifties and is credited for starting the short board revolution in the late sixties. Mat surfing earned its rightful place in surfing history, before the boogie boards were invented in 1973.





vehicle. It was important to practice body surfing skills, particularly if it was a dumping or plunging wave. We learned to avoid turbulence, by diving under breaking waves as they moved towards the beach. The turbulence passes overhead when the body surfer dives to the bottom and clings the sand. Body surfers must be in good physical condition to catch and ride a wave - they must be able to accelerate quickly to the wave speed. This is easily done by standing and propelling the body forward just as the wave touches the back of the legs or back.

The next step is to swim onto the wave and catch it just before it breaks. Once skilled, we could catch the wave with no swimming strokes or one stroke. We developed maneuvers that helped us escape the possibility of serious neck, head or spinal injury caused by going straight down head first towards the beach to the shallow sand bank below the dumping wave. Rough water body surfing, strong swimming skills, rescue drills and buddy system skills were a requirement in the early days, driven by our training as lifeguards. We were taught to negotiate strong ocean currents, both simulated and in water training. At a very young age, we swam in actual strong rip currents. I always remember the verbal drill, "stay calm - don't panic"; "relax or you won't make it"; "the pull of the

ocean is strong, you must go with it, don't fight it." In the early days surfboard riding, wipe outs generally required swimming to retrieve your surfboard, as surfboard leashes had not been invented. The interrelatedness of lifeguard training, swimming, body surfing, mat surfing and water skiing set the stage for contemporary surfing in the late 1950's and early 1960's.

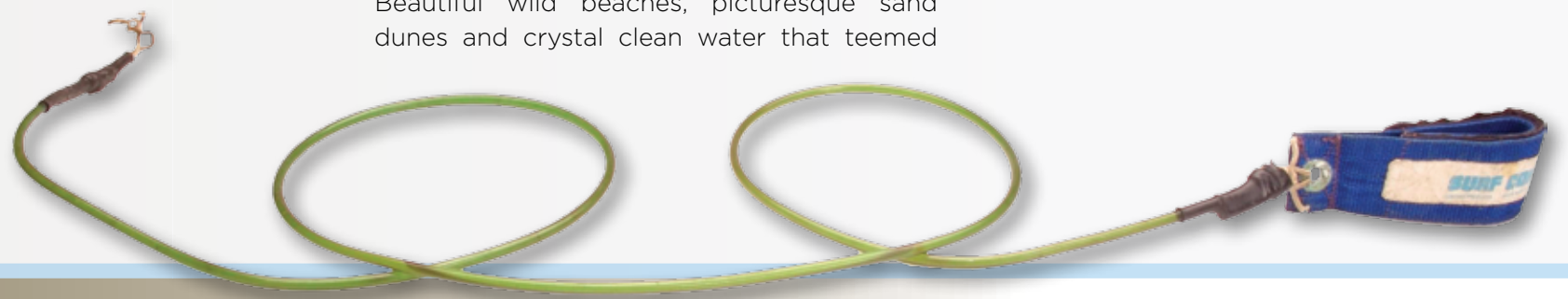
Secret Spot

Why were the pioneer surfing days during the 1950's and 1960's so glorious? In our day on Onslow Bay, there were more porpoises surfing than there were surfers surfing. Your author has seen the day on Long Bay, when alligators outnumbered surfers in the surf zone! It is not unusual that alligators are washed into the ocean at the mouth of the Cape Fear River and its estuaries. Gorgeously rugged, un-crowded and absolutely loaded with wave riding potential, the Cape Fear Surfing Coast was an adventure waiting to be discovered. It was a daily treasure hunt to uncover the magic behind the appeal of the Cape Fear Coast's maritime environment.



On Onslow Bay, there was only a fishing shack or two and no houses on Lea Hutaff Island, Figure Eight Island, Masonboro Island or Bald Head Island. Your author recalls boating to the locations dozens of times and there were not any people on the entire island, save a fisherman or two. Going to Baldhead Island was as much a hunting and fishing trip, as it was a surfing safari. Topsail Island was little more than a tiny fishing village, while Wrightsville Beach, Kure Beach, Carolina Beach and Fort Fisher were slowly developing. Successfully hidden away on Long Bay - Holden Beach, Long Beach and Sunset Beach were slowly developing, but the remaining beaches were no more than tiny fishing villages. The tranquility of that beloved time is unique. Fortunately, the State of North Carolina and beach communities have been wise, creating some of the islands as natural reserves, protected into perpetuity.

We were the first contemporary surfers on the 90 mile, Cape Fear Coast. Whether one's vehicle was a plank wooden board, a hollow paddleboard, an inflatable surf mat or a contemporary surfboard, the options for thrills - be they mellow or extreme - were limitless. Beautiful wild beaches, picturesque sand dunes and crystal clean water that teemed



with wildlife - what not to like for a budding waterman or waterwoman! It was the twilight of Cape Fear Coast contemporary surfing and a sport of a relative few. We grew up and lived during Cape Fear Coast's sleeping giant era. We were the fortunate ones who embraced isolated stoke and undisturbed privacy. We had to look around for someone to go surfing with, so you did not have to be alone in the water. If, you ended up surfing alone, you were constantly eyeballing the beach, hoping another surfer would appear. If you were day tripping north or south, there were so few surfers, it was difficult to find someone to go. We all knew each other and if we didn't, we made fast friends.

This was at the time when the entire Cape Fear Coast surfing population numbered less than 50 guys and a few girls. Actually, there were probably less than 25 hard core surfers during the period before 1965. Your author grew up with them and knows all of them. The real glory days of pioneer spirit for the Cape Fear Coast was during the early 1960's to 1965. Each one of those pioneers represents a thread in the fabric of Cape Fear Coast surfing history. The original longboard era in the mid 60's was one of the most significant developments in surfing history.

11'0" East Coast Board (1966)
Rodney Everhart did grunt work for Lank Lancaster and Harold Petty but later moved on to help Sonny Danner. This particular board is likely only one of two boards of that size that Rodney remembers being made by East Coast and may have originally belonged to Bill Reid. He likes to refer to it as a Lank's plank Bill Reid nose-rider model with a Joe Marley speed skeg.
(© Aug 2006 photos by Steve Everhart)





The Fort Fisher Cove, NC.

The unusually long lines of left breaking waves are the ultimate surf spot on the Cape Fear coast. The Cove at Fort Fisher is a rare combination point-reef break, unique on the southern East coast. The 60s and 70s Cove was regarded as the premier and most dangerous surf break on the Cape Fear Coast. There is still a good wave there when the September rollers come in, but not like it used to be.



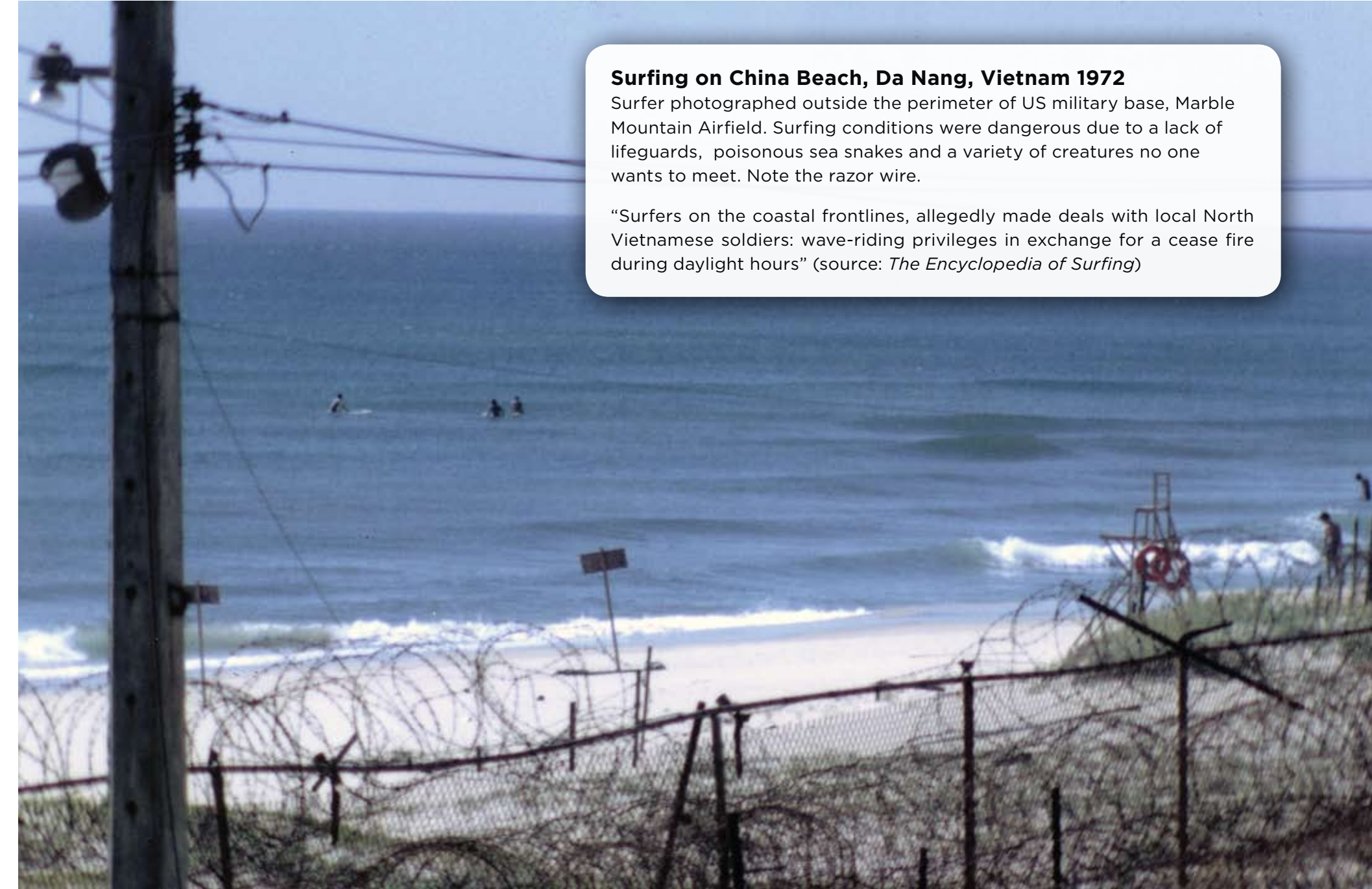
Amelia Valley
Carolina Beach Beach, Mid 70s

Hang 10 never looked so good.

J. Braswell



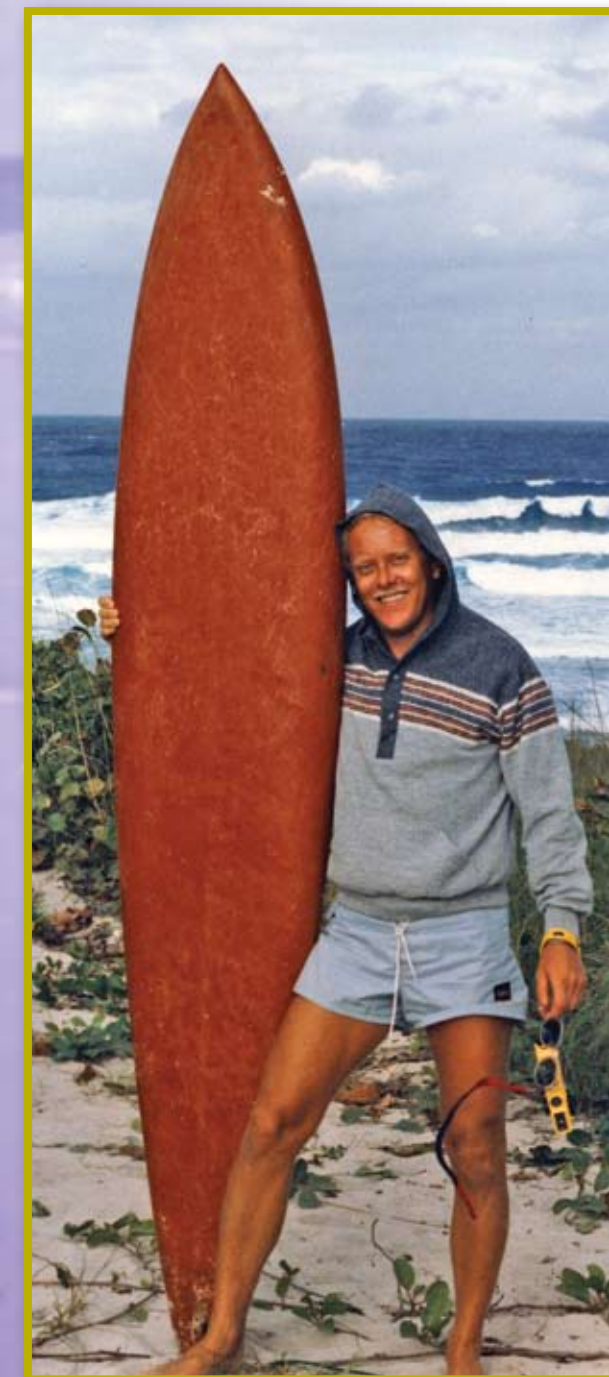
J. Braswell



Surfing on China Beach, Da Nang, Vietnam 1972

Surfer photographed outside the perimeter of US military base, Marble Mountain Airfield. Surfing conditions were dangerous due to a lack of lifeguards, poisonous sea snakes and a variety of creatures no one wants to meet. Note the razor wire.

“Surfers on the coastal frontlines, allegedly made deals with local North Vietnamese soldiers: wave-riding privileges in exchange for a cease fire during daylight hours” (source: *The Encyclopedia of Surfing*)



About the Author

Joseph "Skipper" Funderburg

Your author is a renown Cape Fear Coast pioneer surfer and waterman. He is known for his humor, perseverance and unsinkable nature. He grew up on the Cape Fear Coast, started his apprenticeship in surfing in the mid 1950s, played around with balsa surfboards in the late 1950s and then helped popularize stand up surfing by the early 1960s. He has worked as a horse stable owner and construction manager, but beginning in 1968 and for more than a third of a century, his work life was spent as a professional ship or yacht captain. He has lived a waterman's life and ridden waves all over the Atlantic Ocean, Pacific Ocean and elsewhere. As a well-seasoned traveler and a master mariner, the treasures he liberated always included good surf. He has been writing about surfing for over forty years and serves as the native Cape Fear Coast's preeminent surfing historian. He currently resides on the Cape Fear Coast with his wife and two children.

Skipper

10'4" Hobie Surfboards Dick Brewer model (2002)

Ultimate shape for big wave
boarding. One of the most in-
demand big wave boards.

