

John Izett of Crescent Harbor

In the early 1850s, a man by the name of John Izett settled at Crescent Harbor. Izett built his cabin on the west slope below where Torpedo Road bisects Crescent Harbor Road today.

A physically as well as mentally strong man, Izett arrived, as did all the other settlers, with primitive tools and a great determination to carve himself a home from virgin territory.

The eight hour day was unknown to those men, whose day was from dawn to dusk, with small chores left over to be done by lamplight. Life required unceasing dedication. Their industry was matched only by their courage, as the incident about to be related is indicative.

The Indian wars in the Northwest caused but little concern to North Islanders, as the settlers here had always had the most friendly relations with their red brothers. In the Coupeville area, however, fear mounted . . . not through fear of the local Indians but because of the warlike Indians from Vancouver Island.

Blockhouses were erected in defense, a total of 11 in all.



John Izett and his family at their cabin at Crescent Harbor.

Since Admiralty Head (Fort Casey) was a favorite landing spot for the Haidahs as well as the settlers, Alexander and Crockett built their blockhouses there for protection in 1855. The death of Colonel Isaac N. Ebey by the Haidahs climaxed the growing fear. The Alexander, Davis and Ebey blockhouses were built to the north of the spot where Ebey was beheaded.

The Skagits of Puget Sound must have all been affected in some way by the general unrest of their tribes in the territory. There is a legend that in Crescent Harbor a

group of young bucks, probably not more than three or four, took it upon themselves to frighten John Izett.

They surrounded his cabin and with howls and shrieks, prepared to leap upon a terrified and unarmed settler who would emerge from his cabin, take to his canoe and never be seen again.

It would be a triumph.

Izett, bone-tired from a long day's work, and probably preparing his own meal from meat and vegetables wrested from land he had chosen, reacted violently to the interruption of his erstwhile Indian friends. In mounting anger, he strode out of his cabin, and ordered the Indians to leave. They left. We can imagine their astonishment when he came running toward them.

In years afterward, when asked why he didn't build a blockhouse for his family, he is said to have replied that he had not time for blockhouse building because it took too much time to stay alive!

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First white child born at Crescent Harbor

The first family to settle in Crescent Harbor was the William Wallace family. There, in 1851, they became parents of the first white child to be born here, giving her an Indian name, Polowna.

In that same summer, Wallace brought the first horses to the island to help with the work on his farm. The Wallace house is also thought to have been the first frame house built on Whidbey, with that of William Engle and Thomas Coupe, second and third.

Wallace had heard that any settler who would go to Washington Territory might become possessor of 640 acres of land under the Donation Claim Act. Gathering his few possessions, he and his family set out through the wilderness. When they arrived at what is now Olympia, they found it just a small station. The Wallaces were the only white family in the village.

While at Olympia, Wallace met Colonel Isaac N. Ebey, who had just located a claim on Whidbey Island, still known as Ebey's Landing. Wallace's ambition for free land was fired further, and he started out by Indian canoe and scow for his "land of dreams."

Bessie Wallace, his daughter, told how she had heard her parents tell of their visit at the Indian village on Elliott Bay, now Seattle, and how kind and hospitable the Indian chief was. He offered them all the land they wanted in the area of Elliott Bay if they would only stay, but Colonel Ebey's enthusiasm for Whidbey Island remained, and they continued on, landing at what is now

Crescent Harbor.

When the Wallaces took up the claim in Crescent Harbor, Colonel Ebey had not as yet moved his family to the Island. So again they were a "first," the first white family on North Whidbey.

Bessie Wallace always deplored the fact that her father refused the offer of Chief Seattle and persisted in coming to Whidbey where the family was deprived of civilization . . . church, school and social activities.

They had several Indian scares, and were never molested, but Colonel Ebey's murder by northern Indians



terrified them, so Wallace built one of the Island's first block-houses on his property.

In a short time, however, the Wallace family was not without white neighbors. During the 1850s and 1860s, other families moved in and those civilized necessities Bessie thought they were leaving behind in Seattle, gradually became available here.

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NAS Whidbey as it was in 1964

1964 news release . . .

When the United States Naval Air Station Whidbey Island was commissioned on September 21, 1942, few could foresee that the new base was to be more permanent than many of the dozens of wartime fields then being built all across America.

The asphalt runways, the wooden hangars and the temporary barracks marked the new station as one more installation constructed under the pressures of war, very likely to be forgotten when the emergency was ended.

As at those other air stations across the country, wartime training was conducted at a furious tempo. Patrol planes flew long-range navigation training missions over the North Pacific. Fighters and bombers made bomb, rocket and machine gun attacks on targets in the Straits of Juan de Fuca. Recruits, petty officers and officers attended production-line training schools.

A torpedo overhaul facility refurbished six "tin fish" per day when it was first established in 1942, and increased production to 25 per day by 1945.

Then the war ended and the fleet demobilized. In January 1946, NAS Whidbey Island was placed in a reduced operations status. Whidbey had seen the last of the mass formation flyovers, as squadrons of fighters, dive bombers and torpedo planes climbed for the sky and headed west to meet their battle-ready carriers.

For several years it seemed

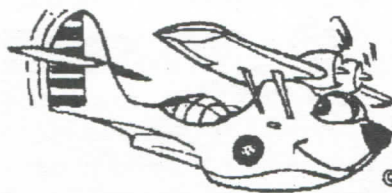
that Whidbey's status depended on the next fluctuation in the lean postwar military budget, and that the next economy wave would surely decommission the base. But during those lean postwar years the Navy was choosing its permanent postwar bases.

Some of the prewar bases were satisfactory, but others could not meet the requirements of the new air Navy.

Six-thousand-foot runways were the minimum standard. A seaplane base facility was desired near each major land base. Approach paths had to be suitable for radar-controlled approaches, under any conditions of weather. Space had to be available for fuel farms, barracks and training buildings, hangars, shops and aircraft dispersal. Ships must be able to load planes and take aboard men and supplies from the air station.

In 1949 the Navy made its decision. NAS Seattle, the prewar major Naval Air Station in the Pacific Northwest, was deemed suitable for the training of reserve forces and as a base for a moderate number of aircraft, but could not be expanded as a major fleet support station.

So Whidbey Island was chosen as the only station north of San Francisco and west of Chicago for the fleet support role. Circumstances had combined to give Whidbey a future as secure as that of Naval Aviation itself. In April 1949, Commander Fleet Air, Seattle, who was the officer responsible for Naval Aviation in the Northwest, moved his headquarters to Whidbey



Island.

During the postwar years and until 1954, the major fleet unit here was Fleet Air Wing Four, made up of squadrons of PB4Y-2 long-range patrol planes. During the war, planes of Fleet Air Wing Four had operated from Alaska against Paramushiro and other islands of the northern Japanese chain, as well as against the enemy-held Alaskan Islands of Kiska and Attu.

Mills of gods (and government) grind slowly.

It took five years, but in February 1954, Commander Fleet Air, Seattle, was redesignated Commander Fleet Air, Whidbey, to reflect the change in headquarters location.

Squadrons stationed at Whidbey during the postwar era were Patrol Squadrons (VP) 1, 2, 4, 17, 29 and 57. Of these, 1, 2 and 17 are still (in 1964) elements of Fleet Air Wing Four, which is still located at Whidbey. VP-4 was transferred to Okinawa in 1957. VP-29 and VP-57 became VAH-2 (Heavy Attack) and VAH-4, both of which are still (in 1964) Whidbey-based.

Other units at Whidbey during this time included Fleet Air Support Squadron 112, a maintenance and support unit which was decommissioned to become part of the Naval Air Station maintenance department in 1959, and Fleet Airborne Electronics Training ➤



*This is the Whidbey Island Main Gate at Ault Field in the 1950s. The photo was in black and white, then colored for publication as a post card.
It's changed a little, but not much!*

Unit Pacific (FAETUPac), Detachment 2, an organization devoted to sharpening the skills of aircrewmembers.

One of the major organizational developments in postwar naval air forces was the creation of the Navy's long-range nuclear bombardment force.

In 1957, Heavy Attack Wing Two, the Pacific Fleet heavy attack organization, moved to Whidbey Island from NAS North Island, San Diego, Calif.

Since that time, Whidbey has figured prominently in the Pacific Fleet's heavy attack force, and in 1964, all Pacific Fleet Heavy Attack Squadrons were based here.



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Prairie Center about 1932. Pat's Place Hotel and Restaurant (now Tyee?) next to Dean Motor Company, with Coupeville school at far right. Photo courtesy of Roger Sherman.

A Great Gift Anytime

A History of Whidbey's Island

as told in story and photo by
Dorothy Neil and Lee Brainard.

"By Canoe and Sailing Ship They Came"

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