

Spindrift Two

50¢

Volume 9 Number 4

Spring 1986

"Wanted: Ten journeymen coopers immediately."

This advertisement appeared in the *Columbian*, an Olympic newspaper under the dateline March 12, 1853. The workers were wanted at Scatchet Head Fisheries on South Whidbey, where salmon were caught, cleaned and "put down" in barrels of salt brine for commercial shipment. Casks for salting salmon were in demand on Puget Sound as early as 1852 and experienced coopers drew premium wages.

Isaac Wood and sons of Olympia advertised they were prepared to deliver on call 500 barrels, newly made for the salmon trade. Their slogan was "All species of cooperage done in the best style and at the shortest notice." Scatchet Head Fisheries was in tune with the times and comprised the first successful industrial operation located on Whidbey Island.

Originally the name Scatchet Head took in all territory between Maxwelton and Possession Point. According to the log of the schooner *Emily Parker*, a trade boat calling at Puget Sound ports in 1853, there were three separate fisheries.

Scatchet Head First Island Precinct

They were engaged in supplying prized salt salmon to San Francisco markets and coastal sailing vessels and enjoyed a brisk trade in the precious cargo. Ships' captains took great pride in the speed with which barrels of salmon could be set down in southern ports.

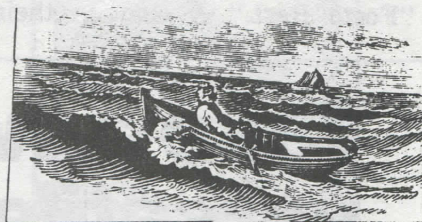
When Island County was organized in 1853 all of Whidbey south of Holmes Harbor was designated Scatchet Head Precinct and the polling place was the Robert Bailey home. Bailey served as an assistant Indian Agent under Captain R. C. Fay from 1856 through 1859 and some of his correspondence relating to Indian affairs is still preserved. He died at his South Whidbey home in 1889.

Joseph Jewett, grandson of Robert Bailey, wrote that he first saw Whidbey Island in 1896 when he came with his parents on a

sternwheeler. The family disembarked at Possession Point and walked the beach at low tide all the way to Cultus Bay, leading cattle and horses. There were neither docks nor roads on that part of the Island. Jewett started his schooling on the Island in 1901, walking through dense forests to the nearest school, located at what was later to become Maxwelton.

Cultus Bay was a favorite meeting place for Indians and here on the long sandspit they gathered to dig clams and dry them, and to smoke salmon. They maintained a longhouse and a small shack on the spit, and two more longhouses were located farther along the bay.

As late as 1900 there were no stores or markets in that whole area. A Mr. Ellis, who farmed at Cultus Bay wrote of having to sail his boat to Everett for supplies and then having to wait outside in the strait for a high tide to carry him back into the bay. A sudden storm could make this a dangerous journey.



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Smuggling is Part of Whidbey Island History

13

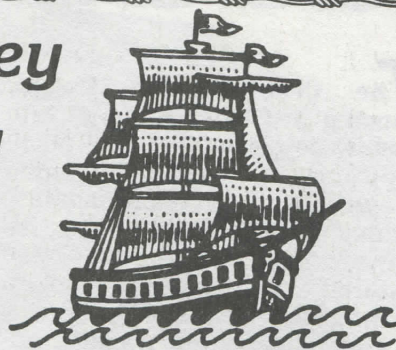
During prohibition, liquor smugglers unloaded their boats on West Beach, with the trucks then taken to a farm building for hiding until night, when they were unloaded on the east side of the Island back into boats. This operation became popular because Deception Pass was regularly patrolled by government vessels.

One Oak Harbor farmer with a large barn was offered \$100 to shelter a truck, no questions asked. He refused, suspecting the cargo, although the \$100 at that time was twice what most men's salaries were for a month. The smugglers, however, didn't have any trouble finding another farmer who would hide the truck,

the revenue adding materially to the well-being of the cooperative farmer in a time when farmers were having a hard time keeping afloat.

Through the years, Whidbey Island has lent itself ideally to smuggling, as the following stories recall.

In 1894, a fruit rancher near West Beach found several cans of smuggled opium, and mistaking it for mineral paint, used it to paint his house. The Coupeville Sun reported: "It took about \$3,000 worth to do the job, giving a fine maroon color."



The wreck of a schooner on Camano Island in 1896 was found to be carrying opium. One hundred pounds of the drug were retrieved by Inspector DeLancey.

Smuggling of Chinese into the United States was common from the mid-1880s to 1900, with many harrowing stories of cargoes of Chinese dumped overboard when the smuggling vessel was approached by the Coast Guard.

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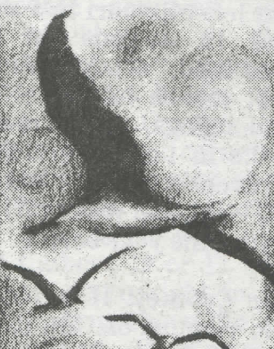


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The Crockett Blockhouse, standing just outside the gate to Fort Casey, was erected in 10 days in November 1855 by 3 men to provide protection against raiding parties of Northern Indians. The blockhouse was restored in 1938 by Whidbey Island Chapter No. 6 of Daughters of the Pioneers of Washington, with the help of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC).

Samuel Crockett, in 1844, was the first of his family to lead the way to the Oregon Territory. He wrote long letters about the dangers of the route west, the terrain, vegetation, wildlife, minerals, Hudson Bay Co., Indian conditions, and "a little bit of everything" he observed. This paved the way for family and friends to follow.

In 1851 Ann Crockett and John Crockett left Missouri in a wagon train of 17 wagons for "the promised land." They arrived in Olympia, took a barge to carry their belongings, and arrived in Coupeville in 1852 to join father Walter Crockett II and his sons Samuel, Hugh and Walter III, who had arrived the year before.

Walter Crockett II wrote to a friend in Virginia on Oct. 15, 1853, from Island County. Following is a shortened version of his letter:

"My sons, Samuel, Hugh and Charles are all 'baching' on their claims. They are frequently with us, but are compelled by law to make their houses their homes. Walter has not taken a claim and makes his home with the old folks and I think when they are gone he

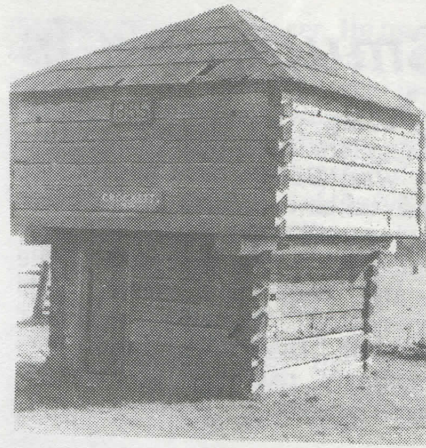
will get a good tract of land from them.

"We have harvested our first crop of wheat ... and should yield twenty bushels per acre. Samuel is of the opinion the same land will yield forty next season. We have a hundred bushels of onions, worth about \$6 per bushel. It takes time to get the land subdued and the wilde nature out of it.

"There is a good deal of excitement about the coal trade in this country. There has been a vain (sic) of coal opened just lately at Bellingham Bay that has 15 feet of solid coal of a superior quality. This is about 35 miles north of where I am living. This settlement (Bellingham) is attached to Island County and will remain so until their population increases so as to give them a new county. Hugh is Sheriff of Island County, and he is of the opinion that Bellingham Bay is a great place for business.

"The military post at Steilacoom is about to be moved to the head of Penn's Cove on Whidbey Island. That will cause the Indians to be a little more quiet.

"To be safe with Indians you must act with firmness and if you



have any fears you must act so as never to let them know it. The small pox has been among them along the Sound and destroyed a great many of them. There are other diseases that are carrying off great numbers of them. I think in a few years some of the tribes will be extinct. This appears to be the fate of the Indian whenever they undertake to live among white people.

"I want you to answer this letter without delay and enclose a quantity of apple seeds in it. My son Samuel has commenced an orchard and will have a good bearing in a few years. One of my neighbors brought about 50 grafted trees from the Willamette Valley, with several kinds of fine apples among them.

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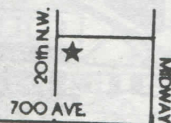
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Crocketts Found Whidbey a Good Place to Live

"I have no doubt that all kinds of fruit raised in your portion of the country will do well here. I have found more good wild fruit here than in any other place I have lived. The land is quite hard to get into cultivation.

"There is one plant that is very much in the way. That is fennen (bracken fern). The whole country is covered with it. It will take three or four years to subdue it. Another plant abundant here and more valuable is camas. It grows something like an onion in shape and about the size of a hickory nut. It affords very fine hog range and the earth is full of it. The Indians dig it to live on. It has a top resembling garlic and about June it sends up a stalk of 12 inches and has a pale blue bloom. Then the Indians dig it.

"We have a fine stock of hogs coming on and the camas is their principal subsistence. When the earth is too dry to root for camas, they graze on fine clover.

"I am not writing these things to warm you to the notion of moving to this country. I could not do that to any person who is

making a fair living there. I find men here who left the states with fine outfits and here they are with very little on their hands. All was wasted and lost on the plains. It takes all of a man's hard earnings to feed and clothe his family. When I look back to Montgomery County, Virginia, and think of the route I traveled to get to this point, I am surprised to think I am alive and almost as surprised that I have as much as I have. I never was more contented and happy than I am at this time." (signed) Walter Crockett

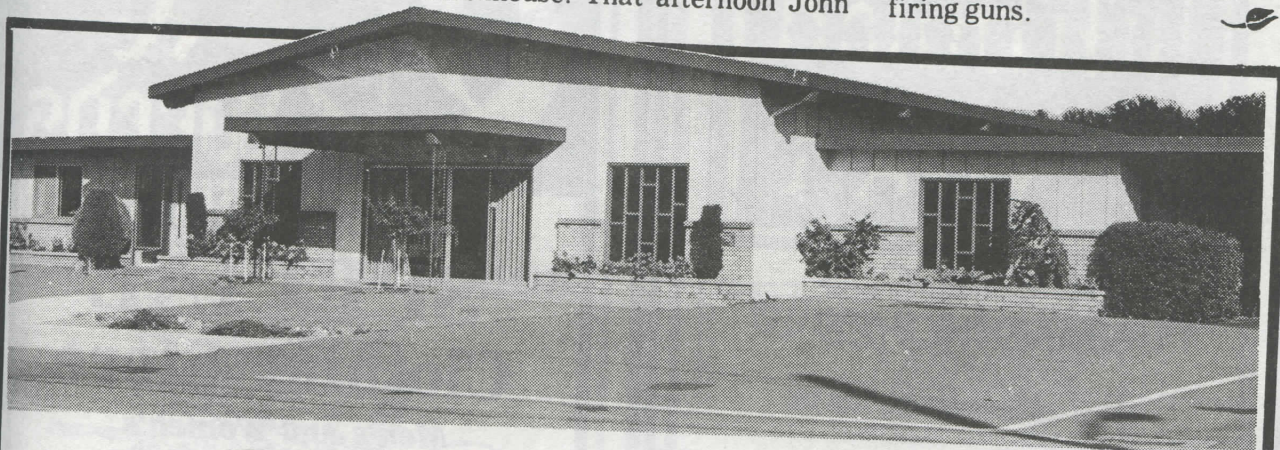
The Indians became more and more troublesome and in 1855 it was considered necessary to build an enclosure for protection. On Nov. 6, 1855, the settlers called a meeting at the home of John Crockett and agreed to erect a blockhouse. That afternoon John

Kineth, Joseph Smith and Samuel Hancock Sr., (John Crockett's brother-in-law), went to work on it and within 10 days finished a large two-story structure surrounded by a palisade 12 to 15 feet high.

Walter Crockett Sr., built a second fortification to accommodate refugees, erecting small blockhouses at diagonal corners of a high fence surrounding his home, made of squared hewn timbers blocked together at the corners. The second story projected about two feet over the wall of the first story. The fence was made of round timbers 10 or 12 inches in diameter, set upright in a ditch and extending above the surface 12 or 15 feet. Four men could command a view of all four sides. Portholes served for a view for firing guns.



1930 photo of the Alexander Blockhouse in Coupeville before its restoration

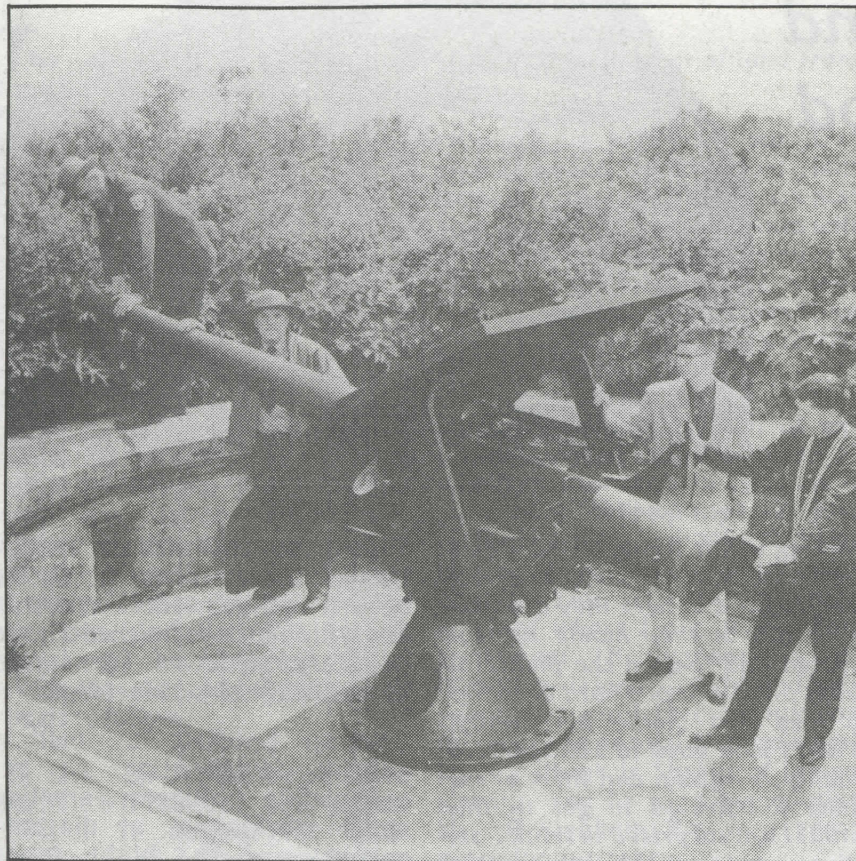


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Visitors at the dedication of the guns of Fort Casey were two veterans of World War I, Henry Juvet and Jess VanDenmark, of Ferndale, pictured to the left. They were among 5,000 men stationed there during the war.

Guns Return to Fort Casey

A number of years ago the "big guns" of Fort Casey became the center of interest on Whidbey Island and as far away as Fort Wint in the Philippines. The guns, or "disappearing rifles," were first fired at Fort Casey on Sept. 11, 1901. Six-inch rifles were installed in 1906. During World War II the guns were scrapped to aid in the fight with Japan, and Casey's gun mounts were bare and deserted.

In November 1965, Governor Dan Evans proclaimed Guns for Casey Month, as interest centered on two of the old-style harbor defense weapons located at Fort Wint, Grande Island, Subic Bay, off Luzon in the Philippines. Lt. Dave Kirschner, stationed at Whidbey Island Naval Air Station, learned of the existence of the guns at Fort Wint and found they were listed as government surplus. After he personally inspected the guns, he urged that they be obtained for Fort Casey.

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State Parks and Recreation had been on the lookout for the old coastal defense guns, and there were two 10-inch guns and four 3-inch guns at Fort Wint. It had been estimated that it would cost about \$35,000 to move the guns to Whidbey Island, but during the subsequent negotiations, the amount greatly increased.

Whidbey residents, under a "Guns For Casey Campaign" sparked by the Coupeville Lions Club and assisted by the George Morris Post of American Legion, began a brisk campaign to raise the money. Contributions poured in, and finally the 200 tons of steel were moved, through the efforts of the U.S. Navy, to Whidbey Island.

Aug. 11, 1968, saw the Guns for Casey dedication at the Fort, with Senator Henry M. Jackson as the featured speaker. Many influential in obtaining the guns were present, and Wilbur Sherman of the Coupeville Lions Club was also a speaker.

Today, as one walks the gun emplacements at Fort Casey

State Park, it is interesting to note that these two big guns are the only two of their kind in the world, and are here as a result of the Navy, who, with volunteer labor, dismantled, crated and transported them through the jungle to Subic Bay, where they were shipped across the Pacific to Seattle via Sea-Land Service, Inc. The Navy took over again at Bremerton where the guns were cleaned, painted and reassembled.

HOW IT BEGAN

On Jan. 28, 1898, bids for construction of mortar batteries at Admiralty Head found low bidders in the firm of Maney, Goerig and Rydstrom of Port Townsend, with a bid of \$78,052.

A month later, newspaper headlines shouted "Big Guns Coming." The Salt Lake Tribune heralded: "Two immense guns arrived here by rail, each weighing 70,000 pounds and with 10-inch muzzles." On March 25, a dispatch from Watertown, Mass., announced that 10 carloads of material for mounting the guns on disappearing carriages were being shipped for Puget Sound

defenses. By April 15, the carriages for the four 12-inch rifles for Fort Casey arrived in Seattle, at Sandy Hook.

Work was being rushed at Admiralty Head, and it was believed on June 10, 1898, that within a few weeks the fortress would be "bristling with guns."

The Times reported five complete carriages for mortar batteries of 12-inch guns, "To make the fortifications a terror to the navies of any foreign power with which this country may go to war." The guns shot 1,000 pound projectiles.

By July 15, the big guns were still coming. Two 12-inch rifles arrived in Seattle aboard the Coast Defense vessel *Monterey*, each gun 36 feet long and weighing 52 tons!

DYNAMITE GUNS

"Little Chicago," the little boomtown on the Keystone spit, in a column of local interest in the Island County Times reported that "Dynamite guns were to be set at Fort Casey with a range of three miles." They were also called "Earthquake Guns."

(Continued on next page)

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Fort Guns Fired First in 1901

(Continued from previous page)

On Sept. 13, 1901, the big guns were fired for the first time, and the concussion was felt for miles around. It was said when Fort Flagler (one of the triad of Puget Sound forts) guns were fired, many cisterns in Port Townsend went dry, cracked by the concussion.

On Sept. 17, 1901, while President McKinley lay in state in his coffin, Fort Casey guns fired every half hour.

Pioneer Hastie was spraying trees on the Coates place when the first gun was fired from Fort Flagler. He said it shook the Island so badly that John LeSourd's horses ran away and over the bank, according to Carl Engle.


LIVING IT UP... WORLD WAR I STYLE

Present at the dedication of the guns at Fort Casey were two veterans of World War I, Henry Juvet and Jess VanDemark, both

of Ferndale. They were among the approximately 5,000 men stationed at Fort Casey during the war.

In an interview for the Whidbey News Times, VanDemark said, "The men would all go to Coupeville when they really wanted to live it up. In Coupeville on Saturday nights there was usually a dance with 15 or 20 girls, and around 400 men from the fort. It was lively, as you can imagine."

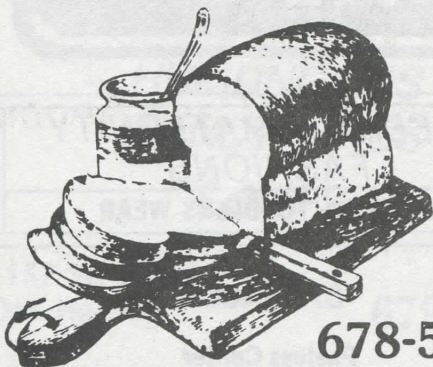
Juvet recalled that they lived in tents on the parade ground for three to four months, then moved into two story barracks built where today's picnic area is located. Land for the cantonment was cleared by the men themselves.

"We'd tie a rope around the stumps in the field," Juvet said, "get about 200 men on the rope and pull the stumps out of the ground." 



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Cafe



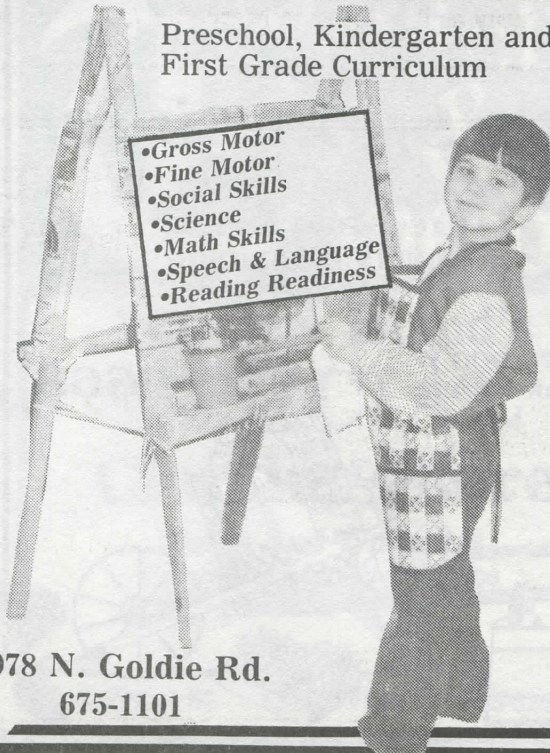
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in Coupeville

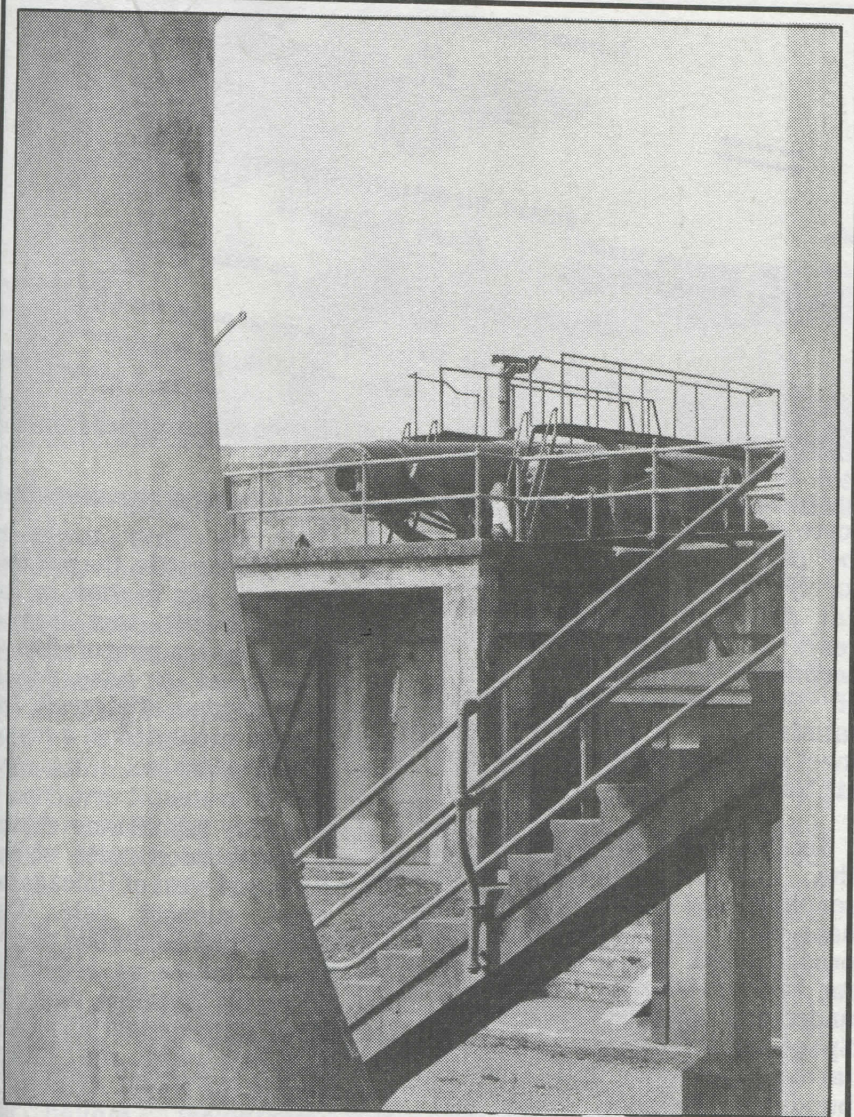
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Fort Casey as it is today, a mecca for kids and tourists to explore.

The men would rise at 5 o'clock in the morning for a half hour of calisthenics, eat breakfast, and proceed to the guns where they would participate in four hours of drilling on the guns, then move to the field for another four hours of drilling on the parade ground.

Following the drills every day the men would scrub, clean, polish and grease the guns, as well as the decks around the guns. Lye was used on the decks and a couple of days after the lye was used, everyone would need a new pair of shoes because of the reaction of the lye on the leather.

NEVER FIRED IN ANGER

During World War I there were seven 10-inch rifles; six 6-inch rifles; four 5-inch guns and sixteen 12-inch mortars. The guns were never fired to fend off enemy attack.

Every Saturday morning the companies would hike with full packs to Coupeville as a drill. The population of Coupeville was just under 300 at the time, so the nearly 500 army men who made the march were a conspicuous attraction.

A number of the soldiers at Fort Casey remained to marry local girls and raise their families, contributing to the community and becoming "Islanders."



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1964 Navy News Release

While scrounging through the archives recently, we ran across this news release from the Navy's public affairs office, dated April 29, 1964, which traces the history of NAS Whidbey Island from its beginning in 1942 until the date of writing. We found it interesting, we hope you do too.

NAS Whidbey Island... 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.

Whidbey edges Seattle

In 1949 the Navy made its decision. NAS Seattle, the pre-war 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.

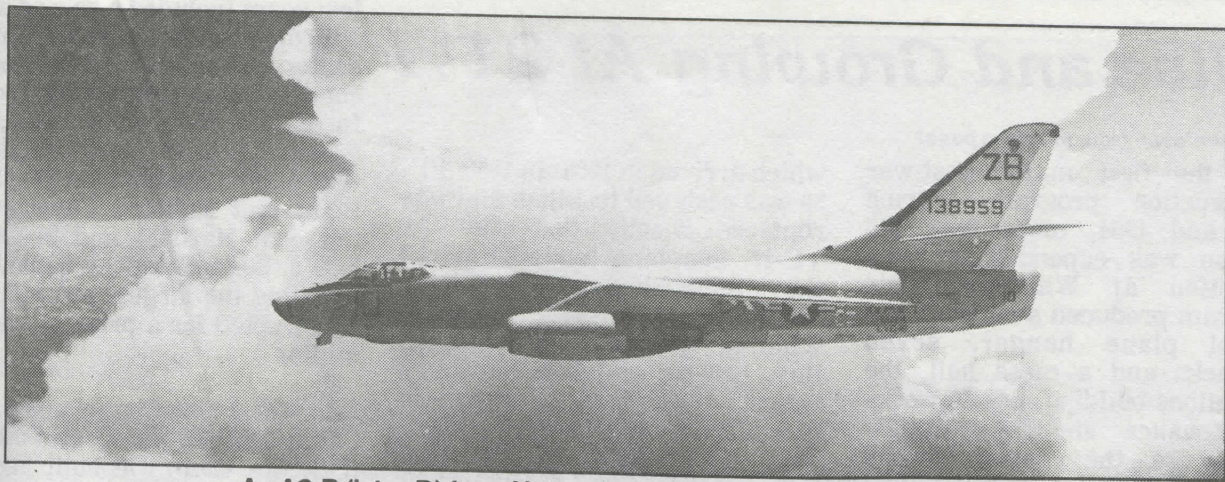
So Whidbey Island was chosen as the only station north of San Francisco and west of Chicago for the fleet support role. Circumstances had combined to give Whidbey a future as secure as that of Naval Aviation itself. In April 1949, Commander Fleet Air, Seattle, who was the officer responsible for Naval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



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An A3-B (later D) from Heavy Four, high in the skies above Whidbey.

During the postwar years and until 1954, the major fleet unit here was Fleet Air Wing Four, made up of squadrons of PB4Y-5A and 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, where it remains. VP-29 and VP-57 became VAH-2 (Heavy Attack) and VAH-4, both of which are still 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 Unit Pacific (FAETUPac), Detachment 2, an organization devoted to sharpening the skills of aircrewmembers.

One of the major organizational developments in the 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 at present (1964), all Pacific Fleet Heavy Attack Squadrons are based here.

Base builds up

Among the visitors who come to Whidbey are many who served here during World War II and immediately after. Almost invariably, these ex-Navy men comment: "This place has really been built up." (Editor's note: They ought to see it now!)

And they're right. A large number of new facilities have replaced most of the wartime installations, although a number of temporary structures are still in use and will be for the foreseeable future.

(Continued on next page)



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Alive and Growing At 21½

(Continued from previous page)

In the first major post-war construction program, during 1953 and 1954, more than \$15 million was expended on construction at Whidbey. This program produced a runway, the patrol plane hangar, seven barracks and a mess hall, the operations building, public works maintenance shops, a supply warehouse, the central heating plant and associated utilities and roads.

Jets and ships arrive

VP-57 became Whidbey's first jet squadron in 1956, when it was designated Heavy Attack Squadron (VAH) Four. The mission of VAH-4 is to provide detachments of planes (A3-Ds) for Pacific Fleet's smaller attack carriers.

Although Whidbey had an active career as a seaplane support station during the war, the first seaplane unit to serve at Whidbey after World War II was VP-50,

which arrived in 1956. In 1960, VP-50 was assigned to Japan and was replaced shortly thereafter by VP-47. Seaplane tenders (ships) that have been assigned to Whidbey are USS F. Kenneth Whiting, 1957-58; USS Floyd's Bay, 1959-60; and USS Salisbury Sound (The Sally), which is currently stationed here.

A number of distinguished naval officers have served as Commander Fleet Air, Whidbey. These include Vice Admiral John Perry, one of the Navy's ranking experts in Alaskan Operations. Adm. Perry retired in 1959 after serving longer as Commander Fleet Air Whidbey than any other officer before or since. Others were Rear Admiral Bernard M. Streat, presently Commander Carrier Division Two; and Rear Admiral W. S. Guest, now Commander Carrier Division Nine.

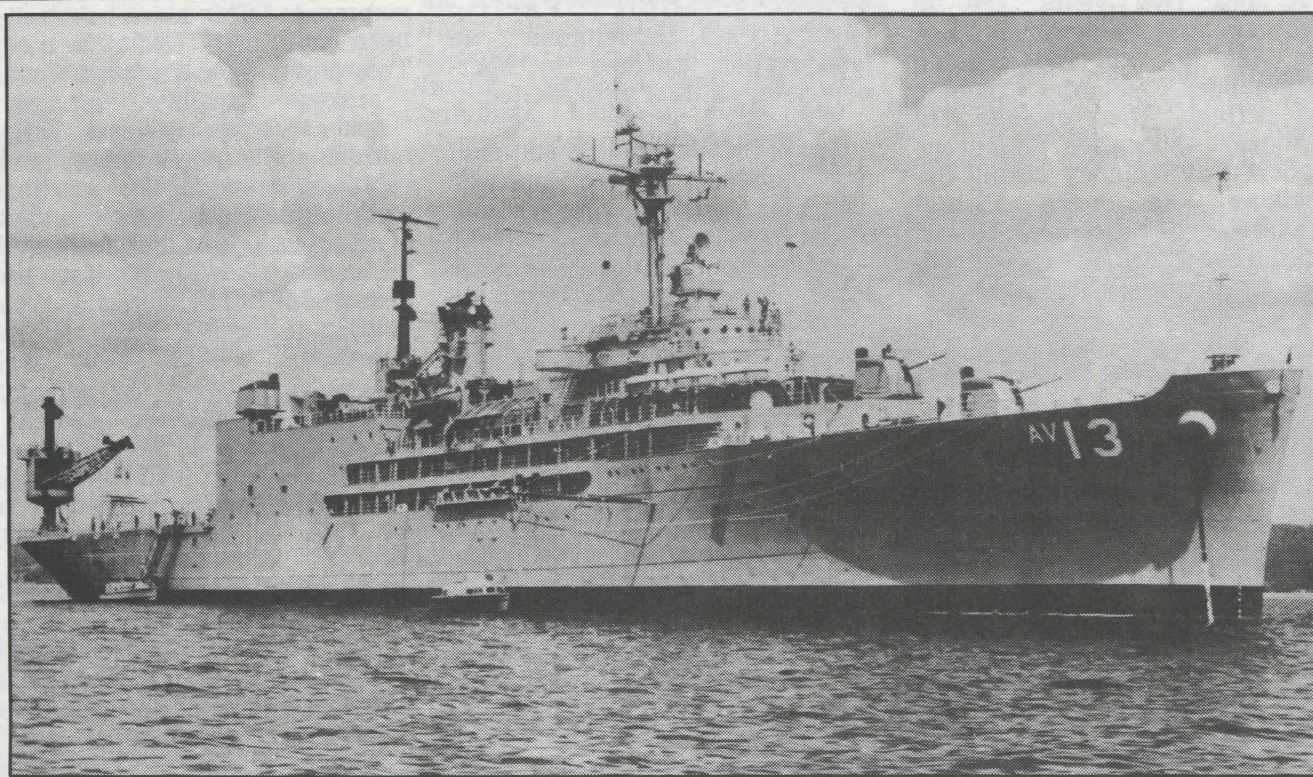
Construction during the next

few years included a second large hangar, a radar approach control center, navigation aids and a combat conditioning tank (pool). In 1960 a \$10 million Capehart housing project was completed (Officers' Capehart on Maylor's Point and Enlisted Capehart at Crescent Harbor) and in 1962 a new 8,000-foot runway capable of handling the largest aircraft was constructed for a price of over \$5 million.

In 1964 a new Chapel and a new Commissioned Officers' Mess (Officers' Club) was built, each at a cost of about \$350,000. A new Bachelor Officers' Quarters (BOQ) costing \$849,000 is under construction. Future plans call for a new liquid oxygen facility, a new telephone exchange and a new barracks.

This 1964 review of NAS Whidbey Island's 21½ year history reveals that Whidbey has grown as Naval Aviation has grown. It is now a vigorous element of the nation's defense organization.

(And in April 1986 it still is!) 



"The Sally Sound" (USS Salisbury Sound) a seaplane tender, anchored in Crescent Harbor about 1964.



PB5Y's on the Ault Field flight line.



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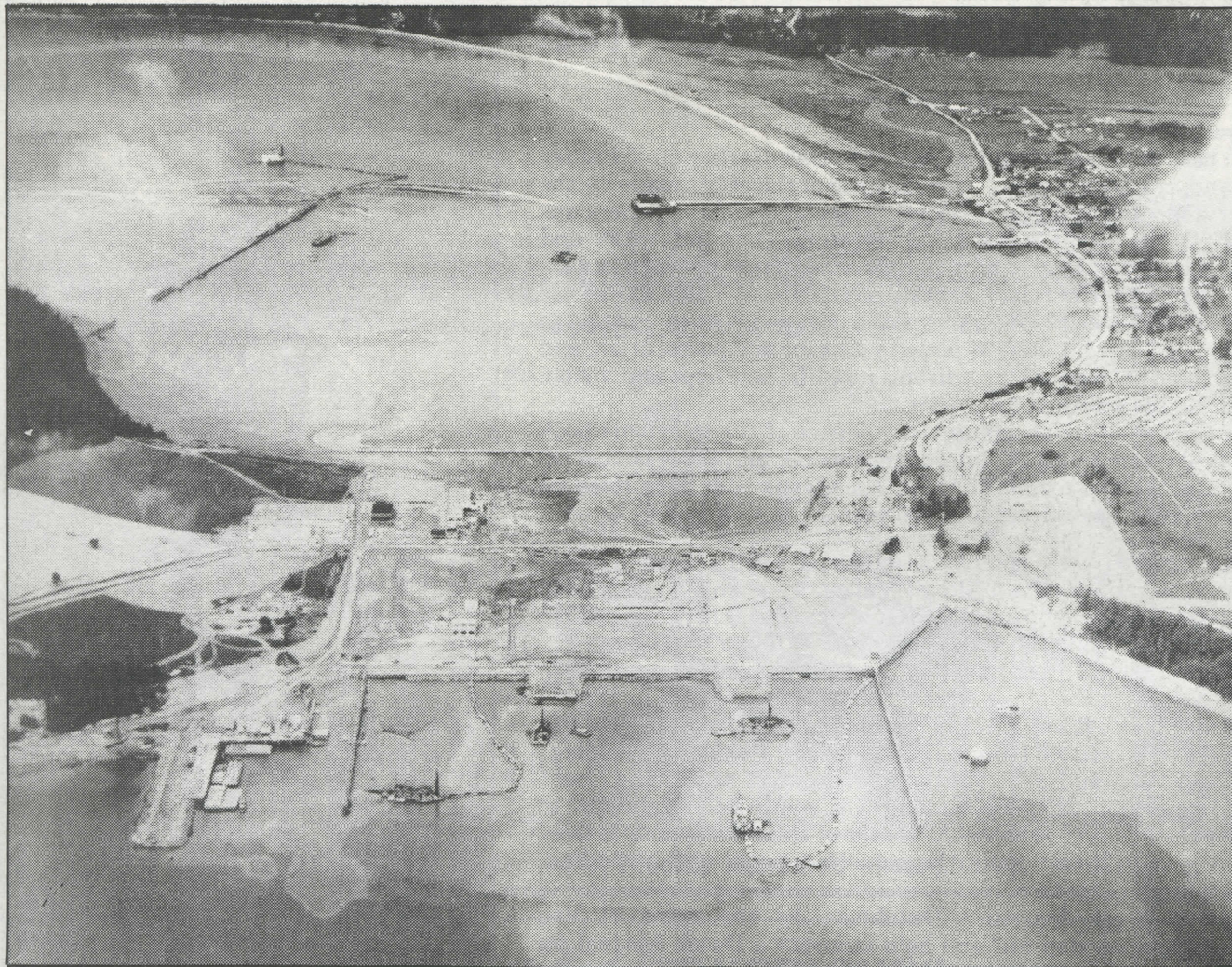
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In 1942, World War II, the Seaplane Base was a flurry of activity as the neck of land connecting Maylor's Point and Oak Harbor was widened, and made into the Whidbey Naval Air Station. In the background, the "Crooked Spit" of Indian history jugged out into the channel across from the dock (right). Buildings were being constructed and streets built. The Flintstone Freeway was not in existence as yet and Oak Harbor was a sleepy small village surrounded by farms and forests.

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