

# WWII at Port Althorp and George Island

By Matthew Hunter

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In 1930, the only significant military presence in Alaska consisted of a garrison of 400 Army troops at Fort Seward near Haines. (Woodman 45-47) As Japan gained ambition to become an imperial power, American military planners recognized the urgency to activate the plans for potential war in the Pacific. War Plan Orange created a perimeter that stretched from the Panama Canal Zone to the Territory of Hawaii, to the Territory of Alaska. Naval aircraft and surface vessels would deploy from bases at the vertices of this triangle in hopes of intercepting enemy forces well before they could threaten the States. (Miller 39-44)

In the latter half of the decade, squadrons of Navy flying boats deployed with their seaplane tenders, (converted WW1 destroyers), to bays and harbors around Southeast Alaska for a few months at a time. The P2Y-3 planes would fly round trip patrols to Attu at the end of the Aleutians once a week. In addition to becoming familiar with the weather and terrain, the pilots were actively searching for potential bases for future operations.

In 1937, Sitka's coaling station became home to a seaplane base. The P2Y-3 flying boats and their replacements, the PBY-5's, would be stationed in Sitka for 6-months at a time with their seaplane tenders. (Freeman 13-18) In December 1938, the Naval planning board under Admiral Hepburn endorsed the construction of three full Naval Air Stations in Alaska. (Building) Funding (\$13 million) for the Sitka and Kodiak bases came through in early 1939. (Building) Seims, Drake, & Puget Sound, a construction consortium from Washington, began work in late August 1939. (Building) In 1940, the contract was increased ten-fold, which expanded the scope of work to include a third Naval Air Station at Dutch Harbor, and six smaller dispersed bases for each naval air station. (Building) Total cost for the Alaska project was estimated at 160 million dollars.<sup>1</sup> (Building)

Dispersed bases under Naval Air Station, Sitka initially included: Naval Section Base (NSB), Annette Island, NSB, Port Armstrong (southern Baranof Island), NSB, Port Althorp (northern Chichagof Island), Naval Auxiliary Air Facility (NAAF), Yakutat, NSB, Cordova, and NSB, Ketchikan. The Navy turned the Cordova and Ketchikan bases

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<sup>1</sup> This sum is approximately two billion in 2011 dollars.

over to the US Coast Guard in October 1942. The dispersed bases had as few as 50 men, as at Port Armstrong, and as many as 110 men, as at Port Althorp. Most of the bases appropriated pre-existing civilian structures as part of the emergency establishment of defenses in Alaska.

Naval Section Bases acted under the jurisdiction of the commanding officer of the base that they were a section of. This meant that the commanding officers could do very little without direct two-way communication with NAS, Sitka. In 1943, the Naval Section Bases under NAS, Sitka were re-designated Naval Auxiliary Air Facilities, giving the commanding officers additional privileges in discretionary spending and daily operations at their bases. This designation removed a layer of bureaucracy and allowed the commanding officers to communicate directly with the Sitka Subsector instead of having to go through the NAS, Sitka first.

The Thirteenth Naval District headquarters in Seattle Washington oversaw all activity in the North Pacific. The Alaska Sector of the 13th Naval District was initially headquartered in Seattle, then moved to Kodiak and finally to Adak Island as the war progressed into the Aleutians. The Sitka Subsector (of the Alaska Sector) remained headquartered at Naval Air Station, Sitka, until it moved to Ketchikan near the end of the war. Until the move to Ketchikan in late 1944, the Commanding Officer of NAS, Sitka also commanded the Sitka Subsector. Under the Sitka Subsector, the Naval Section Base, Sitka oversaw all activity at the Naval Air Station, Sitka and smaller section bases. The chain of command is evident in communication between bases:

NAVAL SECTION BASE  
Port Althorp, Alaska

C O N F I D E N T I A L

January, 15 1943

From: The Commanding Officer.  
To: The Commandant THIRTEENTH Naval District.  
Via: (1) The Commander, Sitka Sub-Sector.  
(2) The Commander, Alaskan Sector.

Subject: Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Progress Report of.

The bases at Port Althorp and Ketchikan were the first Naval Section Bases selected in the Sitka Subsector. Captain J. R. Tate, commander of NAS, Sitka and the

Sitka Subsector, and his deputy Lt. R. Ellis toured the Ellis Airways hangars in Ketchikan. Lt. Ellis traveled further to tour the P.E. Harris & Company cannery at Port Althorp. The officers decided to requisition the assets of both companies to support naval operations in Southeast Alaska.<sup>2</sup> (Navy 9 May 1941)

Lt. Ellis reported finding the cannery buildings at Port Althorp in fair to good condition. The usable buildings consisted of a dock with dock warehouse, a bunkhouse for White employees, a bunkhouse for Oriental employees, a mess hall and galley, cold storage, watchman's house, a building adjoining the scow ways, and fuel tanks for diesel oil and fuel oil. In addition to assessing the facilities at Port Althorp, Lt. Ellis also scouted positions for 6-inch guns to be used for base defense: (Navy 9 May 1941)

An aerial survey revealed that the best site for 6-inch guns would be on top of a ridge to the north and west of the cannery proper. This ridge is also an ideal spot for a signal tower as it overlooks the entire Cross Sound area from Inian Island to the entrance, as well as Port Althorp. Transporting 6-inch guns up the side of the ridge would entail considerable effort, and the Forest Service would have to cut a trail to the gun and signal tower sites from the cannery. It would also be necessary to construct a small building at the gun site to house and feed the ready gun crew. Locations closer to the cannery were considered, but it is believed that the site discussed above is the closest that will give clear control over the greatest possible area. It is recommended that the guns be shipped to N.A.S., Sitka, as soon as possible, to be held there pending preparation of trails and emplacements at Port Althorp.

The Navy acted quickly on Capt. Tate and Lt. Ellis's recommendations. On September 12th, 1941, the Navy and the P. E. Harris & Company (of Seattle), signed a lease allowing the Navy to use the cannery buildings<sup>3</sup> "exclusively for the following

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ellis was the owner of Ellis Airways and a Lt. In the Naval Reserve. As one of the pioneering pilots in Southeast Alaska, he was called up for service at NAS, Sitka. One of his first duties was to requisition his own hangars and planes for Naval use.

<sup>3</sup> The cannery equipment was to remain in place and undamaged. The Navy was worried enough about the cost of replacing lost equipment that the Commandant of the 13th Naval District issued a letter to the commanders of NAS, Sitka and NAS, Dutch Harbor, threatening General Court-Martial if equipment was lost. (NAVY 18 November 1941)

purposes - Naval Section Base," for \$15,000 per annum, renewable each June 30th until 1951. (Navy 12 September 1941)

The Navy commissioned Naval Section Base, Port Althorp on November 1st, 1941. The first two sailors arrived to take possession of the Port Althorp cannery that morning. (Navy 5 November 1941) They were joined later that day by Ensign W. F. Reinking, in temporary command with eight men to take inventory and "to clean up quarters, get power plant in operation and make repairs to roofs and walks." (Navy 21 November 1941) The skeleton crew could do little more than general maintenance, as they were busy shoveling snow and thawing and repairing pipes through December. (Navy 03 December 1941a)

In order to expedite the Port Althorp project, Captain Tate asked for assistance from the Forest Service to construct roads and trails to the proposed gun emplacements and to build some floating hangars for seaplanes at the end of August, 1941. The Forest Service agreed to do everything, but bureaucracy held up the project. Finally, in the days immediately before the Japanese attacked the bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the commander of the Alaskan Sector<sup>4</sup> made the establishment of operations at Port Althorp the first priority for the Sitka Subsector: (Navy 03 December 1941b)

It is desired to place the Section Base at Port Althorp in operation at the earliest possible date. Proposed plans have been prepared by the District... In order to expedite this completion, all materials required for the subject base have been ordered by Staff Headquarters. Materials will be shipped at the earliest date.

Arrangements have been made with the US Forest Service for construction of the Hangars. However, as section bases are being considered as possible temporary operating bases for PBY's, the Navy Department is withholding approval on construction of the floating hangars.

The Regional Forester has further indicated his willingness to construct roads leading to the magazines and to the gun emplacements. The Sub-Sector Commander is authorized to deal directly with all government agencies concerned, forwarding recommendations to this office.

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<sup>4</sup> The Alaska Sector was housed in Seattle within the Thirteenth Naval District headquarters at this time.

Arrangements have been made with the Bureau of Ordnance for the shipment of two (2) six inch guns to Naval Air Station, Sitka, for installation at Port Althorp.

Unfortunately, the Forest Service became very busy after Congress officially declared war. By spring, the Forest Service was unable to do more than recommend a local contractor as they were preparing to supply spruce logs to the aircraft industry: (Heintzleman)

Am sorry to advise that great reduction of our local personnel since advent of war and necessity our starting soon on huge project of getting out spruce logs in Alaska for aircraft construction preclude Forest Service from directing the construction of these bases STOP Will be recalled that when you requested us on August 25 last year to do this job you expected that plans and funds would be furnished to us immediately so that work could be completed before the end of the year. STOP...

...I Confidentially discussed construction these bases today with R J Sommers of Sommers Construction Company address Juneau a highly experienced builder of Alaska airfields, buildings, and roads.

The Public Works Department at NAS, Sitka initially took responsibility for the construction at Port Althorp. (Building) Soon the project was added to the Seims, Drake, & Puget Sound contract and civilian workers arrived to augment the base personnel. With the increased urgency of construction and the addition of so many projects to the civilian construction contracts the Navy quickly ran out of money for construction in Southeast Alaska. Each project had to be justified. Captain Tate wrote to the Chief of the Naval Bureau of Aeronautics to lobby for support for the Ketchikan and Port Althorp operations: (Navy 11 April 1942a)

Port Althorp is situated at the entrance to Cross Sound from which all traffic is being routed at the present time passing to the westward. It is necessary to provide not only antisubmarine patrols but also coverage for convoys heading to the westward, carrying supplies and troops. In order to provide this service, it is thought that Port Althorp is more of a section base for the operation of aircraft than for the operation of surface craft. Within the week it has been necessary to refuel VPB airplanes at this

base. It is recommended that a float ... be provided at this base at the earliest possible moment and that a minimum of four VSO type planes be assigned for use as anti-submarine patrols...

...Planes from both section bases will be provided upkeep and overhaul from the Naval Air Station, Sitka. It is considered that the operation of these two section bases as miniature air stations is of the utmost importance in the coverage of this very vital area.

Capt. Tate set the priorities for the fledgling NSB, Port Althorp as follows: (Navy 15 April 1942)

- a. The patrol and safeguarding of Cross Sound, Lisianski Strait, and adjacent areas.
- b. The immediate establishment of mine sweeping facilities and the laying out of a swept channel into Cross Sound and Icy Strait.
- c. The establishment of an underwater listening station in Cross Sound.
- d. The establishment of air patrols for Cross Sound area and air coverage for convoys entering and leaving Cross Sound area.

Without the Forest Service's expertise in road building and trail work, the Navy turned to George Island, situated at the entrance to Port Althorp, as an easier alternative to house its defense guns. In April 1942, Captain Tate wrote to the Forest Service to withdraw George Island from the Tongass for Naval use: (Navy 30 April 1942)

In the course of development of the Naval Section Base at Port Althorp, George Island, which lies approximately four miles north and west of the Section Base, has been found suitable and necessary for certain installations and housing of personnel. It is the desire of this activity to be granted permission for the use of this island for the duration of wartime emergency.

As construction began on George Island, transportation between the section base and George Island became an increasingly frustrating problem. Capt. Tate assigned Lt. P. S. Sater, USNR to be commanding officer of NSB, Port Althorp on May 12, 1942. Lt. Sater immediately recognized the transportation issue as his number one concern and

nearly had to deal with a mutiny by the civilian construction workers who threatened to quit if they did not get their mail. Lt. Sater wrote nearly a dozen letters to Public Works Officer Lt. Slattery, some on behalf of Mr. Jim Pride (the foreman of the civilian construction crew), complaining about lack of transportation and resultant miscommunication during his four weeks as commander of the base. (Navy 23 May 1942a)

Jim Pride's men according to what they have told me, were promised by you to have groceries sent to their wives homes at Sitka. According to letters received by the men from their wives they have received no groceries. These men are pretty well peeved about it. Kindly iron this out to the satisfaction of these men as I do not want them to leave their jobs.

Eventually Mr. Pride wrote his own letter to Lt. Slattery (Navy 25 May 1942)

"Dear Sir, We have been here three weeks Saturday and we are coming in next Saturday. So far there has been one letter arrived here for the entire crew and from what we could make out from it no promise that was made by you has been kept. So far no one is blaming you..."

In addition to the transportation issues, breakdown of equipment from heavy use necessitated creative solutions. When the jackhammer on George Island ran out of starter steels, Lt. Sater sent a patrol boat to the Chichagoff Mine to obtain more. When the base did not have adequate diesel oil for a patrol boat, oil was purchased from Elfin Cove. When the Jackhammer itself broke, a patrol boat took it to the newly founded city of Pelican for repairs: (Navy 23 May 1942b)

On May the 21st all the starter steels that we had gotten from Sitka broke one after the other. This caused the work on George Island to come to practically a standstill until more starter steels could be obtained. I dispatched the P-13 to the Chichagoff Mining Company with orders to obtain starter steels by either buying or borrowing them. They sent me thirty starter steels. I probably won't need that many but we can return or buy any amount of the thirty that we wish to have. I will enclose a copy of the letter written by J.D. Littlepage, manager

of the mine. After you have read the letter please let me know what you want us to do regarding the starter steels obtained from them.

On May the 21st, the P13 needed fuel oil. We have Diesel oil here at the base but the oil we have is 32 gravity. The P-13 uses 29 gravity and J.O. Gregoire, CBM, didn't wish to use our oil on account of getting too much carbon in the motors. I therefore dispatched the P-13 to Elfin Cove to be fueled there. Their oil is 27 plus and seems to be a better grade of oil than what we have here at the base. Please let me know if you wish me to continue getting oil at Elfin Cove. Enclosed you will find a copy of the bill for 625 gallons of oil priced at seven cents a gallon totaling \$43.75.

Yesterday evening the jack hammer at George Island broke down. I dispatched the P-13 to Pelican City to endeavor to have the jack hammer repaired. The mechanic there has sent word that he will be glad to help us make any repairs we might need of that kind. This, I believe, was the quickest way and would cause less delay of our work on George Island.

Even in wartime, the Navy projects were competing with civilian projects. The only pile driving crew left their project at Port Althorp in mid May to finish a project at the new cannery in Pelican. Lt. Sater wrote to Capt. Tate to report the delay in construction. (Navy 10 May 1942) Captain Tate wrote to the cannery company in Seattle to explain why the company needed to delay their project. (Navy 26 May 1942.)

Dear Sir,

It is understood that you are intending to start construction on a salmon cannery at Pelican, Alaska and desire to employ the services of the local pile driver and crew. This crew is now in the employ of the Navy on construction of a Section Base in that area.

Your position is appreciated and it is not the intention to interfere with the fishing industry. Nevertheless, it is considered that the development of the Section Base is of utmost importance toward the security of this area and must be completed with the most possible speed.

Transportation, labor, and material problems are best handled by the use of local sources as other defense projects have absorbed practically all available labor and materials. It is the desire to

retain the present means until completion of the project.

Very truly yours,  
J. R. Tate  
Commander, U.S. Navy, Commanding

The stress of Captain Tate's position is evident as he continues to write to his superiors for additional resources to properly complete Port Althorp and to adequately defend the Sitka Subsector: (Navy 27 May 1942)

We are proceeding with the development of Port Althorp at variance with the original concept, at with the idea to operate mainly aircraft rather than patrol boats. The patrol boat situation in this area is deplorable to say the least. For adequate and proper coverage, we need about 20 more Yippy boats. The struggle to accomplish the mission with the small boats taken over at the beginning of the war seems almost hopeless. I sincerely hope that something can be done in the near future to alleviate this need for patrols in Alaska. The \$20,000 allocated for Port Althorp is not sufficient to do more than a superficial repair of existing facilities. I wish they would turn over to me about \$50,000 to spend as we see fit without further reference to contractor of Commandant, in order to get the place built. As it is now, we are doing everything in a makeshift manner. I have stolen three tanks from the Air Station and we have installed 15,000 gallons of aviation gasoline there, other improvements being completed in a like manner. We are also badly in need of an aviation fueling float and aircraft facilities. This float will cost approximately \$12,000 or \$13,000 to properly service contemplated aircraft operations.

The Japanese attacked the Naval Air Station at Dutch Harbor on June 3rd, 1942. All military bases in Alaska went on full alert, as the ultimate Japanese objective remained uncertain. A few days later it was determined that the Japanese had occupied the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska, near the end of the island chain. On June 6, 1942, Captain Tate assigned G.S. Schwamm, Lieutenant, A-V(T), USNR to take over the Naval Section Base at Port Althorp. Lt. Schwamm and navy doctor Lt. (jg) L. Stamatis, MC-V(G), USNR were the ranking officers at the base. Lt. Schwamm reported on the status of the base to Capt. Tate two days after his arrival: (Navy 8 June 1942)

2. Temporarily attached to this base is a plane and a ground crew of ten men with G.T. Joynt, Ensign, A-(V)N, USNR. in charge.
3. Other personnel now assigned to this base consist of thirty one enlisted men, six of which make up the crew of the patrol boat now assigned to this base. These men are engaged in construction work and general maintenance.
4. Installation of new walks, fender piling and piling to the dock approach by the Civil Service Workers has been practically completed. Three five thousand gallon tanks have been installed, one on the dock and two on the beach. The two tanks on the beach contain gasoline and are connected with line and hose for immediate gas delivery.
5. A lot, seventy eight feet by one hundred thirty five feet, has been cleared and leveled off and is being used as a combination ramp and apron for the beaching and servicing of the plane. A tractor is available at all times for launching and beaching the plane. A plane servicing float, being worked on by enlisted men, will be completed within a week. However, gassing facilities for any type of plane which may come to the float are now ready and available at all times. A camouflaged ready magazine with a four hundred foot trestle and walk for the transportation of bombs and ammunition to and from the magazine has been erected. This magazine has storage space for approximately one hundred and twenty five one hundred pound bombs, twenty four three hundred twenty five pound depth bombs and fifty cases of small arms ammunition with ample overhead space for the storage of bomb tails.
6. Due to lack of materials, progress on George Island has been only fair. Repairs on the living quarters of the Civil Service Workers and two storehouses have been made. One half mile of rock and corduroy road leading to the proposed gun placement site has been laid.

On June 11th, 1942, Capt. Tate again wrote to the Commandant, Thirteenth Naval District requesting additional funds for his subsector. He outlined \$22,000 in costs for the project to fortify George Island: (Navy 11 June 1942)

George Island, Port Althorp Section Base  
Estimate

<u>BLDG</u>	<u>TYPE PROJECT</u>	<u>LABOR</u>	<u>MATERIAL</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
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WWII at Port Althorp and George Island

Hunter

<u>NO</u>		<u>COST</u>	<u>COST</u>	<u>COST</u>
-	GI - Gun Emplacement	1400.00	630.00	2030.00
-	GI - Remodel Shack	675.00	450.00	1125.00
13	GI - Magazines, Igloo (2)	3200.00	300.00	3500.00
-	GI - Barracks, 30 Man	2000.00	4525.00	6525.00
-	GI - Signal Tower	750.00	-----	750.00
-	GI - Water Supply	200.00	300.00	500.00
-	GI - Power Shack	300.00	375.00	675.00
-	GI - Sewage Disposal	75.00	75.00	150.00
-	GI - Dock & Trails	5000.00	2000.00	7000.00
				22255.00

By the end of June, the Navy had allocated an additional 50,000 dollars for construction work at Port Althorp and George Island. The commander of the Alaskan Sector ordered that the "Prosecution of this project will be expedited as much as possible compatible with other military requirements." (Navy 25 June 1942) Additional funds earmarked for Port Althorp began trickling in on a quarterly basis for general maintenance of the base and facilities on George Island. (Navy 1 July 1942)

Jim Pride and his civilian construction crew worked a small miracle in building a road to the gun emplacement. In addition to bogging down in deep muskeg, the men had to build a bridge across a deep ravine and get supplies up the gun site. The bridge was completed at the end of June, 1942, but the construction crew had not yet received plans for the gun mount. (Navy 20 June 1942) By the end of July, the road to the magazine was still not done, but the crew had completed the ready magazine behind the emplacement and wanted a break. Jim Pride wrote: "I would advise you to have a crew here to take over as we are all coming to town when this mag is complete." (Navy 27 July 1942) J. A. Rives, who took over at the NAS, Sitka Public Works Office for Lt. Slattery, replied immediately that the work must continue: (Navy 28 July 1942)

I have been planning to get up to see you and talk with you, but have been so rushed here with Lt. Slattery leaving, that I haven't been able to get away long enough to get to George Island.

It is desired that the road work should be rushed as soon as possible. I am in the process of obtaining either a more powerful truck or tractor-trailer for use in hauling gravel, in the mean time it is

suggested that you haul the gravel on sleds or in the truck pulled and pushed with the cat.

If the Gunner Mate has not arrived to complete installation of the gun and man it, you can expect him to arrive any day. Please give him any assistance that he needs. It is suggested that you camouflage the gun and the bridge as soon as possible. A boat left this morning with materials for Port Althorp and unfortunately then left you additional camouflage materials on the dock. This will be sent to you on the next boat.

When you complete the road on George Island you will proceed to Port Althorp and install the magazines there.

In his first progress report of July 1942, Lt. Schwamm reported the base had a second seaplane and work on George Island was progressing: (Navy 08 July 1942)

Now attached to this base are 43 men now engaged in general maintenance and construction work. The majority are Seamen, 2c, and for the past two weeks have been clearing and burning refuse at the former burned cannery.

In addition to the above number of men we now have two planes piloted by Ensigns: G.T. Joynt, T.H. Voelker, and Wm. McCoy with a ground crew of ten men. Although these men are stationed at this base they are not considered Port Althorp Section Base personnel.

All of the buildings have been painted a dark green on the outside. A camouflage material has been laid over the two five thousand gallon gasoline tanks that are on the edge of the sand beaching ramp.

An International 50 KW, diesel driven, A.C. generator has been installed..

A nose hangar has been built adjacent to the sand ramp for checking the engines of the airplanes. This is connected with electric lights and has canvas sides to keep the mechanics out of the weather. A small oil house has been built very close by. The sand ramp has been oiled several times with fuel oil and worked in with a tractor and a drag to about four inches. This is packing the sand very well. The wheels of the beaching gear of the planes make only slight marks in this oiled sand when being pulled up on the beach. The beach is dragged daily to create a smooth, hard finish.

The project at George Island has been completed to a point where the forms for the gun base are complete

with the reinforcing steel all in place. The concrete for the base should be poured within the next two days. Several men from the station will be sent over to help with the mixing and pouring of the concrete. Two of our mechanics have been at George Island for several days making repairs to the tractors and equipment. We are taking the gas welding outfit over in the motor launch.

This construction has been done with only one carpenter. The other men are strikers and seamen. What is needed mostly is a few real carpenters and plumbers to finish the job before winter sets in.

G.S. Schwamm

The eighteen tons of gun parts finally made it to the emplacement in August, 1942, thanks to a Herculean effort by Jim Pride's Civil Service crew. Lt. Schwamm writes: (Navy 08 August 1942)

The work at George Island progressed quite well, but was hindered by heavy rains and some labor difficulties. The concrete base for the gun mount was poured and the ten ton gun and eight ton mount was hauled up the very steep and muddy road. The workmen are to be commended for their almost heart breaking efforts under such obstacles as were encountered...  
...Men in general are in good healthy spirits although working ten hours a day.

With the gun in place at last, focus turned to facilities for the gun crew. Capt. A. J. Isbell, who took over NAS, Sitka and the Sitka Subsector from Capt. Tate, ordered additional civilian carpenters to NSB, Port Althorp specifically to speed work on George Island. "Please see that at least ten of the contractor's artisans are dispatched to Port Althorp at the earliest practicable date to complete work of George Island. The men will be quartered and subsisted by the Naval Section Base, Port Althorp, and will be fully assisted by Port Althorp naval personnel as necessary." (Navy 25 August 1942)

The construction men arrived with orders to protect all buildings by rebuilding them with the floors: "four feet below the lowest natural grade, excavating material left heaped up around the building... for splinter protection." (Navy 28 August 1942) This obviously would pose a problem in the boggy soils of George Island. Such dictates by officers dozens of miles away proved frustrating. Lt. Schwamm quickly replied

requesting change of orders and bemoaning the lost time waiting for permission: (Navy 1 September 1942)

If we dig four feet of muskeg and set the huts at the bottom it will be impossible to drain the pit as the locations that are nearly level are muskeg. The experience encountered already with George Island muskeg has resulted in bogging down the tractors and causing a stench that is nauseating. Please let me know by dispatch at your earliest convenience as how to go ahead with this construction as there is nothing we can do without permission and are losing much valuable time.

By September, there were 72 men stationed at Port Althorp and all were helping with construction work. The cannery buildings still required upgrades, and the defensive positions on George Island continued to require great effort. Lt. Schwamm writes in his 08 September 1942 progress report that the 6-inch gun on George Island was finally installed and fired its first shots during the first week of September 1942. Additionally, two 20MM anti-aircraft guns were emplaced on the island: (Navy 8 September 1942)

Considerable time and labor has been spent transporting material to George Island and assisting in construction work. The work at George Island has progressed quite well, although retarded by heavy rains. The six inch gun installation was completed and the gun test fired the early part of the month. The range finder is in process of installation. A lookout hut has been on the west side adjacent to the gun with large observation windows and living quarters in the rear behind a partition of the observation room. The windows are constructed at such an angle to give minimum reflection. A 20-MM gun was installed in front of the lookout position. The ready magazine for the large gun is completed. All guns and buildings have been well camouflaged even during their construction.

The galley at George Island has been made larger and generally cleaned up. One Quonset hut is completed at the second nearly finished. A second 20-MM gun has been installed, sandbagged and camouflaged at the beach landing on the island. A watch shack on the south side (facing Port Althorp) has been constructed with a signal light installed. Contact has been made with Port Althorp when visibility permits. A complete

telephone system has been installed between the two lookouts here and is very satisfactory.

Emplacing the gun required precise survey work to ensure the projectile would not get off course during its flight to a target. The M.V. Westdahl of the US Coast and Geodetic Survey spent three consecutive weeks surveying at Port Althorp and George Island. (Pierce) The captain of the vessel, Lt. Commander Charles Pierce, USC&GS, reports that his crew precisely located the gun on George Island by placing a beacon at 12000 yards across the sound and two "triangulation points" at 6000 yards, and 8000 yards from the gun. The Westdahl also recorded magnetic declination and performed a complete hydrographic survey of the Port Althorp area. (Pierce)

October saw continuing work at the gun site and at the camp near Granite Cove. Three Quonset huts expanded the living space on George Island, though much time was required to dry the floor panels, which didn't fit into place when wet. (Navy 4 October 1942) A pair of ten-inch "shutter type" signal lights allowed for visual communication between the section base and George Island. (Navy 4 October 1942) G. S. Schwamm outlined the progress on George Island in his letter below: (Navy 4 October 1942)

Three Quonset huts have been erected and personnel have moved into same. Wooden walks have been built connecting them to each other and to the main mess hall location. The huts have been camouflaged to blend with surrounding foliage with green paint.

Abutments of logs, sand and gravel, and sand bags are being made to cover the sides of the huts up to about four feet. Oils stoves were erected in the huts and considerable time has been involved to dry the wet wooden floor panels to make them fit in place. All these huts are widely dispersed among trees and practically not visible from the air.

A large water tank is ready to install except for bolts to put it together. A large tank for diesel fuel is also ready to install.

In the past two weeks, much time and labor has been spent transporting lumber and building materials from this station to George Island, sometimes four barge or scow loads per day that have to be unloaded on a rocky beach in heavy surf.

Considerable work has been done up at the gun position, back of the gun formerly was knee deep in

mud and muskeg. Many sand bags were filled and taken up here and laid to form a deck, these have been filled in between with sand and gravel and make a clean, satisfactory deck behind the gun and to the ready magazine. This deck has helped speed up the time of practice loadings.

A good camouflage of fishnet and small pieces of burlap tied to this net completely covers the gun and magazine area. This can be quickly dropped to one side in case of firing. All gun installations have been well sand-bagged and camouflaged. New trails have been made to different parts of the island and this work will be kept going until all are complete.

The installation of the range finder has been completed on a concrete foundation, also sand-bagging and camouflaging has been completed.

Two 8' x 8' wooden buildings have been constructed about two-hundred feet from the gun over the crest of the hill, one for powder and one for projectile storage.

The general spirit of the personnel at Port Althorp and George Island has improved due to their looking forward to and moving into new quarters, together with the introduction of new recreation facilities which include an occasional motion picture and new library. Men from George Island are given two nights per week to see movies at Port Althorp.

G.S. Schwamm

With winter quickly approaching, Lt. Schwamm pleaded for twenty additional men to split between Port Althorp and George Island. The men would help the contractors rebuild the water systems at Port Althorp and George Island so that they wouldn't freeze. Ten of the men would also augment the gun crew on George Island. (Navy 30 October 1942) Since four men left George Island each day to do laundry and shower at Port Althorp, the island was regularly short of men to man the gun. (Navy 30 October 1942)

The Navy cancelled Siems Drake & Puget Sound's Alaska construction contract in November. The work was not progressing quickly enough and the cost was high. The Navy sent its first Naval Construction Battalions (SeaBees) to Alaska to replace the civilian contractors. The Naval Air Station, Sitka Public Works Department notified to Lt. Schwamm to send his contractors back to Sitka as soon as the SeaBees arrived in

November 1942. (Navy 24 May 1943) The contractors left George Island on November 20th and returned to Sitka December 2, 1942. (Navy 24 May 1943)

By mid December, 80 enlisted sailors were stationed at the Naval Section Base, Port Althorp, 18 of them on George Island. (Navy 15 December 1942) Additionally, crews from the 22nd Naval Construction Battalion were at the section base working on construction and renovation projects. These men arrived on December first and began working at 1700 that afternoon. (Navy 15 December 1942) The SeaBees could not have arrived at a more opportune time. Beginning the night of their arrival, all exposed pipes of 6-inch diameter or smaller froze and broke. The wooden pipeline from a nearby stream had to be rebuilt multiple times and strengthened, and the crews constantly bled water and drained the pipes to avoid repeated freezing. (Navy 15 December 1942) As Lt. Stamatis reported: (Navy 3 May 1943)

During the winter months a considerable amount of maintenance was required by the water system.. This maintenance included keeping a path clear of snow and ice from the base to the dam three fifths (3/5) of a mile upstream; dismantling, thawing, and reassembling 700 feet of 6-inch wooden pipeline on two occasions (and parts of it more often); keeping the dam and grizzly free of ice; on unusually cold weather having crews work on pipeline joints all day and all night to keep from freezing; building an auxiliary water system and maintaining a night crew to drain it.

With this continuous wet work in the freezing weather, it is no wonder that Lt. Schwamm noted that the SeaBees "...were rather hard hit by colds when they first arrived..." (Navy 15 January 1943)

Disaster also was narrowly averted on George Island. The civilian contractors completed a new mess hall and three Quonset huts on the island just before being relieved and sent back the Sitka. (Navy 24 May 1943) On December 9th, 1942, a fire completely destroyed the old mess hall and barracks building. (Navy 15 December 1942) Luckily, the new mess hall had just entered service so no meals were missed. (Navy 15 December 1942)

The end of December saw the ranks increase to 87 enlisted men with 14 of them in boat crews stationed at Port Althorp, and 20 on George Island. (Navy 1 January 1943)

Despite the increase in men, construction had stagnated as the winter weather proved too much. Lt. Schwamm writes: "Our working detail is not large enough at the present time to keep us dug out of the snow." (Navy 1 January 1943) The weather kept the section base men and the SeaBees from completing any outdoor construction during the month of December. They did manage to build a small wooden scow for dumping garbage in the bay and bleacher seating in the movie theater. (Navy 1 January 1943)

By mid January, the SeaBees were again hard at work on the construction projects. They assembled five log rafts to be placed strategically around the area as dispersal points<sup>5</sup> for aircraft, installed additional 20mm anti aircraft guns at Port Althorp, and completed the third Quonset hut on George Island so that they would have a place to live as they began their work on the island. (Navy 01 January 1943) Commander A. J. Isbell maintained the priority status for construction at Port Althorp. In a letter drafted to the officer in charge of the construction in Sitka, he outlined the following projects for George Island: (Navy 4 January 1943)

1. It is requested the work be done at George Island as follows:

(a) Build cribbed rock-filled pier from shore to deep water.

(1) This project was originally a pile dock but it was found there is no penetration.

(2) Logs for cribs were cut and partially delivered by Civil Service employees.

(3) A stiff leg for handling logs was partially completed by Civil Service employees.

(4) No plans for this project are completed as information regarding soundings, depth of gravel wash, etc. is lacking.

(b) Build sidewalk and stairway to new officers' quarters.

(1) This work has been completed.

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<sup>5</sup> Dispersal points were key to operating naval aircraft in Alaska. In addition to providing emergency shelter and supplies for crews stranded by weather or mechanical problems, the points could be used to keep aircraft fighting in the event the Japanese attacked the main bases. In spring 1942, Capt. Tate reported: " There are in the Sitka Subsector innumerable bays and inlets that would provide dispersal bases for the operation of aircraft up to and including the largest type of VPB planes. At present, Commander, Sitka Subsector has dispersed bombs and gasoline to several of these outlying points in preparation for operations." (Navy 11 April 1942b)

- (c) Construct wooden water storage tank and cover pipeline to main camp.
- (d) Install two-20 M.M. gun mounts.
- (e) Construct room and install 15 K.W., A.C. generator
  - (1) Plans for this room to be furnished by Public Works Office.
- (f) Construct splinter proof walls around Quonset huts.
  - (1) Cross section of these walls to be furnished by Public Works Office.

High priority or not, weather is the real boss in Alaska. A stormy first half of January made transportation of men and materials between the base and George Island impossible. Lt. Schwamm reported: "Dangerous landing conditions due to high seas and also the lack of lumber has curtailed construction work on George Island considerably during the past two weeks." (Navy 15 January 1943) Even in the nasty sea conditions, patrol boats still deployed from Port Althorp. The crew of Patrol Boat YP-85 earned Lt. Schwamm's recommendation for the Meritorious Work in the Line of Duty award for a daring rescue of a lumber barge northwest of Cross Sound. Lt. Schwamm writes: (Navy 17 January 1943)

On the night of January 13, 1943 YP-85 was ordered from this station immediately upon receipt of a dispatch containing information that a barge loaded with lumber had been lost by the tug Commodore in the vicinity of Lituya Bay. Lieut. J. J. Lind, Captain of this patrol boat, proceeded to Dixon Harbor for shelter during a severe Northeast storm. The following morning, this boat proceeded up the coast in search of the barge. The barge was sighted by Mr. Lind without the aid of aircraft, he proceeded to and picked up the barge fully intact and returned it to this station under severe high winds and seas while temperature was well below freezing.

The last weeks of January proved more fruitful. The SeaBees managed to complete two additional 20mm anti-aircraft gun emplacements on George Island, even though the water supply pipeline had to be shut down because of freezing temperatures. (Navy 1 February 1943) These new guns were located next to the bathhouse, probably

on the beach across the narrow island from Granite Cove, and "upon the cliff above the six-inch gun." (Navy 1 February 1943) This brought the total number of anti-aircraft guns on George Island to four, with one previously located at the beach at Granite Cove, and one near the 6-inch gun. When they weren't working, the men were hauling their water from the tanks to their huts. (Navy 1 February 1943) By mid February, the water supply on George Island had completely frozen. (Navy 13 February 1943) Lt. Schwamm recommended a separate water system be built strictly for fire fighting; a saltwater one that would remain drained except during emergencies to prevent freezing. (Navy 13 February 1943) The only fire defense equipment on George Island at this time consisted of ten 15-pound CO<sub>2</sub> extinguishers, and no water. (Navy 13 February 1943)

The winter weather struck again in force in early February. Lt. Schwamm reported that "During the first week of February, the extreme cold and severe high winds, most construction projects had to be abandoned and the entire station and SeaBee crews had to be turned-to to secure all floating equipment." (Navy 15 February 1943) He goes on to say that "...the station personnel has been quite busy digging out from under the heavy winter snow. The airplane ramp has been cleared of about four feet of snow and ice by using a bulldozer and tractor drag and at present is in the best condition since last November and operations are again on a normal basis." (Navy 15 February 1943) Work on George Island also slowed due to the heavy snowfall and 20mm AA gun classes that were obligatory for all men. (Navy 15 February 1943)

By the end of February, the men on George Island completed a new powerhouse to shelter their 15KW diesel generator, which now powered their camp. (Navy 28 February 1943) The SeaBees continued to work on a crib dock in Granite Cove, and all men had completed 20mm gun training classes. (Navy 28 February 1943) The Naval Section Base, Port Althorp, and its defensive outpost on George Island had reached their pinnacle for wartime build-up. The George Island camp at Granite Cove was mostly completed, consisting of: a Radio Shack, Officer's Quarters, Carpentry Shack, Mess Hall & Galley, Laundry & Washroom, 3 Enlisted Men's Barracks, Power House, Fuel Oil Storage Tank, Gasoline Storage Platform (drums), 2 Reserve Water Storage Tanks, and an Auxiliary Power House. (Navy 19 March 1943a) While the SeaBees and station

personnel continued to improve the living quarters, water supply, and safety of the base, the following months would see gradual decrease in armament as the focus of the war moved westward into the Aleutian Islands.

On March 18th, 1943, Commander A. J. Isbell recommended that the Navy cancel the second 6-inch 50 caliber gun at Port Althorp, as well as some other planned or barely started projects. (Navy 18 March 1943) The next day, two 20mm guns were ordered transferred from Port Althorp. (Navy 19 March 1943b) Life at Port Althorp and George Island did not relax, however. With convoys continuing to steam up the Inside Passage and through Cross Sound on their way westward, the section base was busy scouting for enemy submarines and identifying each vessel that moved past the station.

The George Island lookout station was located near the 6-inch gun site, about a half mile from the main camp. This station was manned 24 hours a day, which was a monotonous duty broken only by false alarms. The US Coast Guard Light Station at Cape Spencer challenged any vessels entering Cross Sound with light signals. It often appeared to the George Island lookout that the ship ignored the challenge, so the lookout would raise the alarm unnecessarily. Finally, Lt. Schwamm requested a copy of the "four letter cipher" used by the light station so that rapid communication would be possible to avoid the frequent alarms. This was especially important as there were no patrol boats operating out of Port Althorp at this time. Planes were launched to identify the ships. (Navy 20 March 1943)

The Navy reorganized the base at Port Althorp at the end of March 1943. (Building) The Naval Section Base became a Naval Auxiliary Air Facility (NAAF), essentially becoming a miniature air station. (Building) Lt. Schwamm now reported directly to the Commander of the Sitka Subsector as a "separate and detached command," meaning he no longer had to request permission from Naval Air Station, Sitka to approve his plans or operations. (Navy 18 April 1943) The Commander of the Alaska Sector wrote: "This directive is based upon the fact that the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility, Port Althorp, is physically and geographically detached and, therefore, that its administration from another place is impractical." (Navy 18 April 1943) As commanding officer of his

own command, Lt. Schwamm also gained the ability to convene Summary Courts Martial. (Navy 18 April 1943)

With the new designation as a Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Lt. Schwamm faced the challenge of reorganizing his men to . Lt. (jg) Q. Mitchell, in charge of the supply for the station, had to find a place to store boxes of parts and documents that began arriving to supply the "new" NAAF. He ordered a large quantity of lumber for making shelving and dividing his existing warehouses into separate storerooms. When the supply officers at NAS, Sitka questioned his requisition, he wrote this note to "Exec" Lt. Bob Riggs: (Navy 26 May 1943)

Dear Exec,

From various persons whom I shall leave unmentioned, I understand that there has been some controversy as to the 4000' feet of shiplap which I recently requisitioned. Honest, my friend, the purpose is legitimate, and in proof thereof, I shall enumerate the various maintenance projects for which is it intended.

With the advent of warm (?) weather we have found it impossible to keep what few fresh vegetables Sitka sends us in the former spud locker on account of the new butcher shop, which furnishes just enough insulation to make the old spud locker too hot for green vegetables. The idea to solve this problem is to make a half-wall half-screen in the refrigeration unit, which, we believe, will be adequate to keep our vegetables.

Secondly, our boats division has recently talked me out of the far end of my warehouse so that they would have a place to stow all their gear, such as line, oars, marine hardware, mooring cable, canvas, life jackets, etc. etc. ---all of which should be down on the dock and readily accessible to the boats. To do this, we are trying to rig up a bulkhead between my storeroom and the proposed boat locker, which will occupy a space approximately 15' x 20'.

Thirdly, and lastly, as you know, we are now an Auxiliary Air Facility. As such we are to carry a fairly complete stock of aviation material such as spare parts, clothing, etc. To date over 500 different items have arrived and we have left them all in their original boxes pending a time when we have a place to store them systematically and neatly. As a spot for this, we have chosen a room in the same

building with the machine shop where Doc formerly kept his beer. We will need a great many shelves and innumerable bins, as you can see, so the shiplap is definitely required there.

As a great favor, you could do us a tremendous service by seeing that this lumber is sent up pronto. Another order for lumber for boat repair work is on the way, and I will appreciate your efforts on that delivery, too.

What progress have you been able to make on the diesel storage tank we discussed when I was in Sitka?

Come up and see your station some time. Fishin's good--I snagged a 23 lb. Salmon day before yesterday.

Sincerely,  
Q. Mitchell (Mitch)

Lt. Mitchell finally got his lumber about a week later.

Boatswain E. P. Hoskinson remained the gunnery officer for the station through the reorganization. With a few men freed from boat duty, Bos'n Hoskinson decided it would be a good time to do some training on the 6-inch gun on George Island. He requested ordnance pamphlets for both the gun and the types of aircraft depth charges that he had on hand. (Navy 16 April, 1943) Naval Air Station, Sitka immediately sent pamphlets for the depth charges, but no 6-inch gun information booklets were available. (Navy 11 May 1943) The men had to make due with an instruction pamphlet for a 5-inch gun. (Navy 24 April 1943)

On the morning of April 21, 1943, Bos'n Hoskinson led a target practice session with the 6-inch gun on George Island. The gun crew took two full days to carefully clean and examine the gun to make sure it was in perfect working order. (Navy 26 April 1943) A full crew of 20 men participated, firing a shell every 15-20 seconds at a target about 7800 yards away. (Navy 26 April 1943) The gun worked perfectly for the first four rounds, but on the fifth round the pedestal mount broke and the gun was out of action. (Navy 26 April 1943) The only injury was a crushed great toe that required Lt. J. A. Jenkins to seek treatment at the hospital at Naval Air Station, Sitka. (Navy 24 April 1943) Bos'n E. P. Hoskinson and Lt. Jenkins both wrote detailed reports of the event. (*See Attachments A and B*)

The SeaBees at NAAF, Port Althorp spent their last days rebuilding the water system before being transferred to the Aleutian Islands in early June. (Navy 29 May 1943) Construction on George Island was entirely complete. (Navy 26 June 1943) The men enjoyed a respite with the return of the warm weather. Station personnel had access to volleyball, basketball, and horseshoes. (Navy 26 June 1943)

After the bloody battle to take Attu from the Japanese during the month of May 1943, the military commanders planned an enormous invasion force of over 34000 combat troops to take Kiska. (Garfield 376) Cross Sound remained a busy place during the summer months as convoy after convoy passed through on its way to the Aleutians for an August 15th D-Day on Kiska. The captain of a vessel in one such convoy of ten LCI ships, Lt. (jg) H. Kermon, C.O. of the LCI(L)#78, thought he saw a submarine. (Navy 29 July 1943) A brief excitement ensued, as sailors manned their guns and patrol planes took to the air in search of the enemy. It turned out to be a floating fish trap with "a very decided likeness to the outline of a submarine." (Navy 29 July 1943)

The convoys continued to pass by George Island and Port Althorp on their way to expected action in the Aleutians and westward. While the men at Port Althorp were busy with almost daily supply runs to George Island and patrol flights over the convoys, naval planners discussed the necessity of their base. (Navy 6 August 1943) R. S. Taylor, now the commanding officer of NAS, Sitka, outlined the pros and cons of operating NAAF, Port Althorp in his report to his superiors: (Navy 13 October 1943)

Advantages:

(1) Permits operation of aircraft patrols and coverages in the Cross Sound area where weather does not permit planes from Sitka or Yakutat to make this coverage. There are a considerable number of instances where this incident has presented itself over the past six months.

(2) This provides an intermediate radio contact for planes operating in the area between Yakutat and Sitka, where communications cannot otherwise be maintained.

Disadvantages:

(1) During the major portion of the winter months, the williwaws and other weather conditions render regular operation of aircraft dangerous...

(2) It requires a considerable force of men to maintain this base.

Mr. Taylor recommending retaining the NAAF at Port Althorp, but he also recommended abandoning the George Island installations or turning them over to the US Army Coast Artillery Corps: (Navy 13 October 1943)

In view of the general curtailment program and reduction of possibilities of attack in this area, it is recommended that the George Island battery either be placed out of commission or be turned over to the Coast Artillery as part of their network. The matter of maintaining a trained gunnery crew and the supporting personnel becomes increasingly difficult with the general reduction in personnel.

George Island and NAAF, Port Althorp remained in operation through the winter of 1943 and until the end of spring 1944. The last winter saw an organized campaign against cockroaches, led by Pharmacist Mate 1st Class Homer W. Harvey. (Navy 07 November 1943) Lt. Schwamm's last request was for a seaworthy vessel to aid him in making supply runs between the station and the military logistics center at Excursion Inlet during the harsh winter weather: (Navy 31 December 1943)

It is requested that a seaworthy vessel be assigned this station for the next three months as during this period the weather becomes so violent and the water so rough in Cross Sound, South Inian Pass, and Icy Straights that the present vessels are not capable of withstanding the trip from this station to the Swiftsure, Excursion Inlet, or Cape Spencer Light Station.

A minimum of three trips are made weekly between Port Althorp and Excursion Inlet for the delivery of personnel, motion picture films, and mail. (all official mail from the States comes via Excursion Inlet)

On many occasions this station has been requested to identify inbound or outbound vessels in Cross Sound and the writer has refrained from sending station vessel to accomplish this mission due to unseaworthiness of station craft at this time of year.

It is also requested that the vessel have a speed of at least ten knots to enable the Excursion Inlet and Swiftsure trips to be made in daylight due to the

existence of numerous large Icebergs in this area that make travel after dark a serious hazard...

After surviving an uneventful winter 1944, Lt. Schwamm received a letter from the executive officer at NAS, Sitka: "...it is directed that all enlisted personnel on duty at Naval Auxiliary Air Facility, Port Althorp, Alaska be transferred by first available transportation to this station for duty." (Navy 26 May 1944) Two men, Paul F. Broedling CCM, and Joseph D. Riley MM1c, were to stay behind as caretakers and watchmen of the station buildings until they could be transferred to a cannery representative. (Navy 26 May 1944.)

The WWII story of George Island and Port Althorp ends in June 1944. The Navy decommissioned the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility, Port Althorp on 01 June 1944. (Navy 28 July 1944) Mr. Hans Floe, the authorized representative of the P.E. Harris and Company, took receipt of the cannery property and improvements on 16 June 1944. (Navy 28 July 1944) Lt. Joseph A. Jenkins, Lt. Schwamm's former executive officer and the last Officer in Charge of NAAF, Port Althorp, reported total improvements of \$38,900 to the cannery buildings. (Navy 23 June 1944) All equipment and supplies had been shipped back to Naval Air Station, Sitka. (Navy 28 July 1944) The Navy terminated its lease of the property on 30 June 1944. (Navy 28 July 1944)

*Attachment A - Bos'n E. P. Hoskinson's report of Gun Casualty, CD files: (4532-4534)*

# CONFIDENTIAL

NAVAL AUXILIARY AIR FACILITY  
Port Althorp, Alaska

April 24, 1943.

From: The Gunnery Officer.  
To : The Gunnery Officer,  
Naval Air Station, Sitka, Alaska  
Subject: Gun Casualty, 6" 50 cal., Report of

1. At about 0958 on April 21, 1943, while engaged in target firing practice by the crew of 6" 50-cal. gun mounted at George Island, Alaska, subject casualty occurred. Four salvos had been fired just prior to the casualty, each salvo being spaced 15-20 seconds apart. On each of the first four salvos, no abnormal functioning was observed. An observer was stationed specifically for the purpose of observing motion of the gun through recoil and counter-recoil, and has stated that no erratic action was noticed. On firing the fifth salvo, the muzzle of the gun was observed to slue upward and slightly to the right, then settling with the gun elevated about 50 above the original position. The gun returned to battery normally after this salvo. As the crew was momentarily blinded by the muzzle flash and smoke, the first indication of a casualty was given by the pointer and trainer, who were thrown to the concrete. Upon observing this, the gun captain gave the command "Silence." A cursory examination showed the battery to be out of action, so the order to cease fire was given, and the gun secured. After this, the checksight observing officer was noticed limping away, having sustained an injury to his left foot caused by the trainer's stand being forced down upon the left foot.

2. Further examination revealed a circular break around the stand (MK VI, MOD V, No. 481, O.D. 239798) on the vertical portion about six inches from the base of the stand and cracks radiating from the center outward through the flange, or horizontal section of the stand. The elevating gear bracket (O.D. 34009) was cracked and bent open from the bottom. This fracture is located about 2 feet aft of the forward end of the bracket and extends from the bottom vertically for a distance of about 14 inches, being about 1-1/2 inches inside at the bottom. This break shows a flaw in the casting and was apparently caused by the trainers and pointers stands striking the concrete foundation, causing an upward pressure to be exerted on the bracket, giving away at the narrow part of the piece. The bracket tie rod was bent by striking the nut on the mount securing the bolt. The forward lower edge of the left recoil cylinder was forced down and struck the carriage, afterward returning to the normal position.

*Attachment A - Bos'n E. P. Hoskinson's report of Gun Casualty, CD files: (4532-4534)*

3. Prior to firing, all prescribed preparations were made. Two full days were taken in making preparations as follows:

(a) On the first day all electrical leads were checked, oil holes and Alemite plugs cleaned and filled, and mount bolts checked.

(b) On the second day, friction disks were removed and soaked in lye water and replaced, trunnion clearance adjusted, bore gauge passed, training indicator installed, gun base sighted, firing circuits tested, primers tested by circuit and percussion, cleaned and lubricated slide, removed mushroom and inspected, adjusted training and elevating gear, overhauled firing lock and brush mechanism, brought target charges to ready locker and cleaned and lubricated target projectiles.

(c) On the third day battery marks and safety circles were painted, primers tested by fitting into lock, recoil cylinders drained and refilled, withdrawing approximately 3/4 pint after filling. Just prior to firing, crews and observers were given instructions on safety regulations, and duties of each were explained. Since no other check-off list was available, 5" 51 cal. check-off list in BuOrd Manual was used where applicable.

4. Five rounds of target ammunition were expended. The powder charges were SPD 1794 and projectiles were MK XXV, MOD 2, LOT 1-35. After opening fire on initial range spotting method was used to direct fire. By this method, good results were obtained. Spotting data recorded is as follows:

Initial setting	range scale	8625 yards	deflection scale	48
Second salvo	down 200		left 02	
Third salvo	down 100		left 04	
Forth salvo	no change		left 02	
Fifth salvo	no change			

5. Target was of pyramid type. Approximately 7 feet square and 9 feet high and was cast adrift at slack motor at actual range of 7800 yards 285 degrees true from gun emplacement. Weather was mild, overcast with 10 miles visibility, sea calm, wind at target SSE 8.

6. Gun crews and observers are listed below:

Battery Officer and spotter	HOSKINSON, E.P., Bos'n USN.
Gun Captain	COOLEY, C.N., BM1c, M-2, USNR.
Pointer	DURRAH, G.R., EM1c, M-2, USNR.
Trainer	WILLIAMS, D., S.1c, V-6, USNR.
Sightsetter	COOPER, B.F., GM3c, USN.

Talker	RICHARDS, I.W., GM3c, V-6, USNR.
Trayman	BAUGHMAN, R.K., Cox., USN.
Rammerman	OTT, H.E., S.1c, V-6, USNR.

*Attachment A - Bos'n E. P. Hoskinson's report of Gun Casualty, CD files: (4532-4534)*

1st Shellman	KNUTSON, P.E., BM2c, M-2, USNR.
2nd Shellman	RILEY, J.D., MM1c, V-6, USNR.
3rd Shellman	ERICKSON, A.O., S.2c, USN.
4th Shellman	HUMPHREY, J.R., Cox. V-6, USNR.
1st Powderman	HOCKMAN, H.E., S.2c, USN.
2nd Powderman	WISECUP, C.C., S.2c, V-6, USNR.
3rd Powderman	LARSEN, L.T., Cox, M-2, USNR.
Powderman (Standby)	WIEGAND, R.W., S.2c, USN.
Checksight Observer	JENKINS, J.A., Lt(jg) DV-(S), USNR.
Recoil Observer	DEDMORE, W.L., GM3c, USN.
Spot Recorder	UMBAUGH, W.A., S.2c, V-6, USNR.
First Aid Man	PETERSEN, R.J., PhM2c, USN.

Due to the fact that ten of these men had not previously taken part in the firing of any heavy guns, the action of the entire party, both prior and after casualty, is considered commendatory.

E. P. Hoskinson

*Attachment B - Statement of Joseph Arthur Jenkins, Lieutenant (jg), D-V(S), USNR  
report of Gun Casualty, CD files: (4527-4528)*

**NAVAL AIR STATION**

**SITKA, ALASKA**

April 26, 1943

Statement of Joseph Arthur Jenkins, Lieutenant (jg), D-V(S), USNR, attached to and serving at Naval Auxiliary Air Facility, Port Althorp, Alaska:

On the morning of April 21, 1943, and George Island, which is located in Cross Sound within the command of the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility at Port Althorp, (which is approximately twenty miles east of Cape Spencer light-house) in the Sitka Subsector, Alaska, a gun crew assembled for the purpose of practice fire of a six inch fifty caliber gun. The gun is situated on the north side of George Island, and commands the area surrounding to the entrance of Cross Sound. To the best of my knowledge, the gun has not been fired for approximately three months. Consent for practice fire had been given by the commanding officer of the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility, Port Althorp. That morning the weather was overcast, the temperature was approximately 40 degrees Fahrenheit, and the wind was calm.

On the above date, Boatswain E. P. Hoskinson, attached to Port Althorp, and serving as First Lieutenant and Gunnery Officer, requested my assistance for practice fire. A floating target was towed out in Cross Sound to a position approximately 8000 yards from the position where the gun was mounted. At approximately 0930 that morning, the firing commenced. I acted in the capacity of check sighter. Four rounds were fired, all of which struck in close proximity to the target. The gun was apparently in perfect condition and operation. A fifth round was loaded into the breach, the gun was properly sighted, and the command to fire was given; the projectile left the muzzle of the gun.

I was standing at my station. Upon recoil the stand fractured at the flange base, and the pointer's platform attached to the mount was driven down and backward approximately three inches to the cement base. The platform struck the distal portion of my left foot, throwing me off balance. The pointer was thrown backward off the platform when this occurred. He landed on the cement base, holding his head, which had been struck by the telescope at which he was stationed. I examined this man and found no visible evidence of injury.

The injury to the distal portion of my left foot caused me to suffer great pain. Pharmacist's Mate Petersen, who was present at the time, rendered first aid assistance to the lacerated and fractured great toe of my left foot. I was assisted into a rearming barge and taken to Port Althorp where I was given medical attention by Dr. Leon Stamatis, Lieutenant, (MC) V-(G), USNR, and admitted to the Dispensary at that base.

***Attachment B - Statement of Joseph Arthur Jenkins, Lieutenant (jg), D-V(S), USNR  
report of Gun Casualty, CD files: (4527-4528)***

After I was injured and before leaving George Island, I noticed that the gun was back to battery, and that the stand casting was completely fractured, but because of my injured condition and my position of observation, I was unable to state definitely more detailed facts concerning the condition of the gun after it had been fired.

I was confined to the sick bay until the following day when the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station, Sitka, ordered me to be transferred to Naval Air Station, Sitka. At approximately 1300 on April 22, 1943, I arrived at the Naval Air Station, Sitka by plane and was admitted to the dispensary there where I am now confined as a person receiving medical aid and attention.

I have read the above statement, consisting of one and one-half pages, the contents thereof, and hereby state that the facts contained therein are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

/S/ Joseph Arthur Jenkins,  
Lt (jg) USNR

*Attachment C - Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Watch, Quarter and Station Bill 194, CD files: (4598-4602)*Officer's Watch, Quarter and Station Bill

Name	Rank	Battle Station	Fire Station
SCHWAMM, G. S.	Lieut.	Commanding	Commanding
HEATH, V. T.	Lieut.	Salvage & Repair	Coordinate crews and see that proper equipment reaches the fire.
STAMATIS, L.	Lieut.	Surgeon	Surgeon
MITCHELL, Q.	Lieut. (jg)	Stand-By to remove confidential records	Stand-by Supply
JENKINS, J. A.	Ens.	North Battery	Assist
HOSKINSON, E. P.	Bos'n	Dock Battery	In-Charge Fire-Fighting Party
SCHMIDT, T. L.	Mach.	Salvage & Repair	In-Charge Power Equipment

*Attachment C - Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Watch, Quarter and Station Bill 194,  
CD files: (4598-4602)*

Starboard Section No. 1 Watch, Quarter and Station Bill

Billet No.	Name	Rate	Battle Stations	Fire Stations
101	EHLE, E. E.	E.M.2c	Stand By Switchboard and Repair	Illuminate Fire Area and Board Walk
102	POLICK, G.	F-1c	No. 1 - 20 MM Gun	Nozzleman - Bring - Hose Party No. 1
103	SIKOLA, F. E.	M.1c	No. 4 - 20 MM Gun	Bring Tools - Fire Fighting Crew
104	LESSAR, E. J.	S.2c	P-5	P-5
105	HERMAN, L. F.	C.M.2c	Repair Party	Bring Tools - Fire Fighting Crew
106	SOPP, C. J.	S.2c	Ammun. Supply	Hose Party No. 1
107	THOMPSON, R. C.	SK3c	No. 3 - 20 MM Gun	Warehouse - unlock
108	RICHARDS, I. W.	G.M.3c	Gun Repair	Stand By Armory
109	JACOBS, H. P.	F.2c	P-5	P-5
110	ROBSON, E. F.	Rkr.2c	No. 2 MG - Gunner	Bring 4 Buckets - Stand By
111	MILLER, L. E.	S.C.3c	No. 2 - 20 MM Gun	Tel. Talker - Mess Hall
112	JOHNSON, R. E.	F.3c	No. 1 - 20 MM Gun	Tel. Talker - Capt. Office
113	SMITHERMAN, H. R.	AKM3c	Ammun. Supply	Nozzleman - Bring Hose Party No. 2
114	JACOBS, M.	F.1c	P-5	P-5
115	ANDERSON, A. L.	F.1c	P-13	P-13
116	KNUTSON, P. E.	Cox.	P-2	P-2
117	LeMEKSE, R. J.	S.1c	P-13	P-13

*Attachment C - Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Watch, Quarter and Station Bill 194,  
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Port Section No. 2                      Watch, Quarter and Station Bill

Billet No.	Name	Rate	Battle Stations	Fire Stations
201			Ammun. Supply- In Charge	Fire Fighting Crew- Bring Tools
202	PAYNE, R. H.	F.1c	No. 4 - 20 MM Gun	Chemical Cart
203	WRIGHT, J. J.	F.3c	No. 2 M.G. Loader	Chemical Cart
204			No. 3 M.G. Gunner	Hose Party
205	ALLEN, W. L.	SK3c	No. 2 - 20 MM Gun	Tel. Talker Warehouse
206	BALL, G. N.	PhM3c	Main Battle Dressing Station	Scene - First Aid Kit
207	PERKEL, Z.	S.C.2c	Stretcher Bearer	Bring Four Buckets
208	SANTOS, V. P.	MA2c	Stretcher Bearer	Stand By B.O.Q.
209	JOHNSON, O. D.	Cox.	No. 3 - 20 MM Gun	Bring Shovel & Pick Fire Fighting Crew
210	NEWMAN, S. L.	S.1c	No. 4 M.G. - Gunner	Bring Ladder & Line Hose Party No. 2
211	SCHROEDER, L. R.	RM2c	Radio	Radio
212	CHURCHILL, V. F.	MM2c	Repair Party	Bring CO <sub>2</sub> Extinguisher Fire Fighting Crew
213	HUMPHREY, J. R.	Cox.	No. 1 M.G. - Gunner	Bring Ladder & Line Fire Fighting Crew
214	WILCUT, E. B.	S.1c	P-2	P-2
215	WESTRE, C.	B.M.2c	P-13	P-13
216	READ, R. W.	M.M.2c	P-13	P-13
217	WAKEFIELD, E. D.	W.T.2c	3" AA Sight Setter	Stand By Fuel Lines

*Attachment C - Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Watch, Quarter and Station Bill 194,  
CD files: (4598-4602)*

Starboard Section No. 3 Watch, Quarter and Station Bill

Billet No.	Name	Rate	Battle Stations	Fire Stations
301	HOLCOMB, R. A.	S.1c	3" AA Gun Loader	Bring CO <sub>2</sub> Extinguisher Hose Party No. 2
302	KIRK, J. M.	S.F.3c	No. 1 - 20 MM Gun	Rescue Breathing Apparatus
303	RYAN, G. J.	S.2c	No. 4 - 20 MM Gun	Fire Fighting Crew Bring Two Pike Poles
304	SALTIS, C. V.	CM3c	3" AA Gun Captain & Plugman	Fire Fighting Crew Bring Tools
305	BOOGAERTS, J. A.	S.2c	No. 3 - 20 MM Gun	Bring 2 Spanners Hose Party No. 1
306	NEEL, K. J.	SC2c	Galley Watch	Galley Watch
307	COCHRAN, J. G.	S.1c	No. 1 M.G. Loader	Fire Fighting Crew Bring Fire Axe
308	WRIGHT, J. R.	F.2c	No. 3 M.G. Loader	Bring Two Spanners Hose Party No. 2
309	HARVEY, H. W.	PhM1c	Aux. Battle Dressing Station	Aux. Battle Dressing Station
310	WILLIS, W. C.	MM2c	3" Gun Foresetter	Fire Engine
311	THORGERSON, R. R.	CSp(A)	Captain's Assistant	Captain's Assistant
312	MEYER, L. W.	RM3c	Radio	Tel. Talker - Radio
313			Boat Dispersal	Direct Hose Laying
314	JORDAN, W. H.	S.2c	Plane Dispersal	Planes
315	WISSMAHN, L. T.	S.1c	P-2	P-2
316	WESTRE, A.	Cox.	P-13	P-13
317	SKEWES, P. F.	C.R.M.	Radio	Radio

*Attachment C - Naval Section Base, Port Althorp - Watch, Quarter and Station Bill 194,  
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Port Section No. 4                      Watch, Quarter and Station Bill

Billet No.	Name	Rate	Battle Stations	Fire Stations
401	RILEY, J. D.	M.M.1c	Repair Party	Fire Engine
402	SMITH, P. S.	F.3c	Repair Party	M.H.B. Engineer
403			No. 2 - 20 MM Gun	Bring CO2 Extinguisher Fire Fighting Crew
404	BURNETT, H. O.	CM3c	No. 2 - 20 MM Gun	Bring CO2 Extinguisher Fire Fighting Crew
405	GILMORE, H. J.	Y.2c	Messenger	Messenger
406			3" AA Shellman	Stand By Sick Bay Remove Patients
407	BRULOTTE, J. H.	S.2c	Ammun. Supply	Relieve Dock Watch
408	LARSEN, L. T.	Cox.	3" AA Gun Pointer	Boat Crew
409	BROEDLING, P. F.	CCM	Repair Party - in Charge	In Charge - Fire Fighting Crew
410	PIERCE, R. H.	RM3c	Ammun. Supply	Radio
411	SLOAN, W. E.	PhM3c	Aux. Battle Dressing Station	Sick Bay
412	DEADMORE, W. L.	GM3c	Gun Repair	Stand By Magazines
413	MILLER, L. M.	SC2c	Stretcher Bearer	Stand By Sick Bay Remove Patients
414	WIEMAN, C. C.	Cox.	P-5	P-5
415	RENSINK, H. W.	AMM3c	Plane Dispersal	Planes
416	BUCK, H. C.	AOM3c	Plane Dispersal	Planes
417	JUCIKAS, J.	F.2c	P-13	P-13

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