

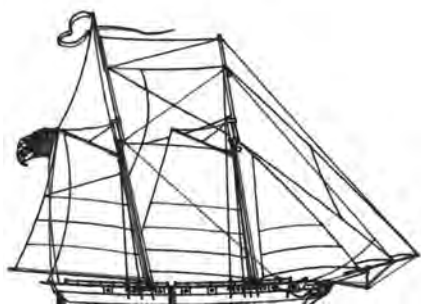
Florida Keys

Sea Heritage Journal

VOL. 19 NO. 2

WINTER 2008/2009

USS SHARK



OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Transporting African refugees from Key West to Liberia

*A letter written aboard the Ship **South Shore**, transporting African refugees from Key West to Liberia in 1860.*

By Corey Malcom

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Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society

In the Spring of 1860, three slave ships – the barks **Wildfire**, **William** and **Bogota** – were intercepted by the US Navy in stepped-up efforts to stop the illegal trade in humans. These American-owned slavers were bound for Cuba, where their human cargoes were to be sold to labor-hungry sugar plantations. Because it was the nearest US port, the 1,432 Africans rescued from these ships were brought to Key West. The 3,000 citizens of the remote island community, led by United States Marshal Fernando Moreno, came together and built housing, donated clothing, and provided food and medical attention for these people during their stay.

For eighty-five days the newly liberated refugees found shelter at Key West. But because of the horrific conditions they had suffered aboard the slave ships, many of the Africans were quite ill, and 295 of



The African Barracks at Key West. Photo credit: The Author.

them died during their stay. These people were buried in shallow sand graves on the southern shore of the island.

As soon as word of the Africans at Key West reached Washington, the question arose as to what to do with them. President Buchanan felt the law clearly stated they should be sent to Liberia – a country on the West African coast established as a home for liberated American slaves – but under what terms? After a short debate, this idea was formalized through a resolution passed by Congress and

expenditures were appropriated. Contracts were negotiated with the American Colonization Society for transporting the Africans to Liberia and then supporting them after their arrival. In June, three ships set sail from New York to carry the Africans from Key West to Liberia.

Their second voyage across the Atlantic was intended to be nothing like their first. The American Colonization Society agreed to provide large, seaworthy ships “classed A No.1,” and to provide a

(Continued on page 3)

SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES

By Tom Hambright



WOODEN SIDE PADDLE STEAMER
CITY of KEY WEST
 BUILT 1845 • 207' PL GA • 200-250 Gross Tons • 100' Length • 1800 - 1900 Gross Tons
 1900 and "Vaporizing Engine" original
 Provided Steampower for Key West, Fla. and of Eastern Railroad
 and the Miami River to KEY WEST from 1845 and 1902

The Key West Maritime Historical Society received a donation for renowned marine artist David Harrison Wright to paint watercolors of five ships that played a significant role in Key West’s development. The plan is for the painting to be placed where the public can view them. An unveiling for Society members is planned for the spring with the Artist discussing his work and the history of the ships.

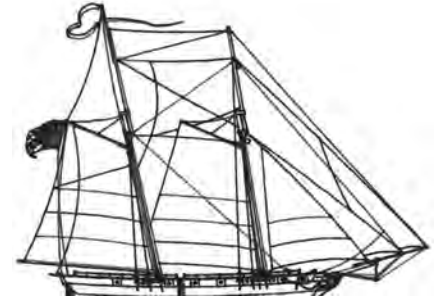
The five ships are from the beginning of American’s ownership of Key West to the present. The first ship is U.S. Schooner Shark that Lieutenant Mathew Perry commanded when he landed in Key West in 1822 and planted the first American Flag. The clipper ship Stephen Mallory was the ship that

marked the pinnacle of Key West shipbuilding. The Mallory built by John Bartlum for Curry and Sons was the only clipper ship every built in Florida. The Concho is the representative of the Mallory Steam Ship line whose ships provided the connection to the outside world from the Civil War to the coming of the railroad in 1912. The Mallory line’s New York-Key West-Galveston line was the way for people and supplies to arrive and leave. The City of Key West was Henry Flagler’s P & O Steamship company’s ship that connected Miami and Havana until the completion of the railroad. The last was the Atocha that sunk off the Marquesas in 1622 but became part of Key West history when Mel Fisher found the mother load of the wreck in 1985.

New Members

Don & Gail Cruz II, Rockport, Texas; Dane & Helen Cruz, Candor,

New York; David Cruz, Key West; Leonard Salazar, Key West.



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Letters and articles are welcome. Please write to: Editor, Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal, KWMHS, P.O. Box 695, Key West, FL 33041.

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new set of clothes for each person, “wholesome, well-cooked food,” medicines and medical attendance, sleeping berths, bathing facilities, and protection against sun and rain. But such amenities offered little comfort to the ship-weary Africans. By all accounts, they were dismayed about having to leave Key West, and considering their earlier experience, reluctance to board another ship was understandable.

The ship **Castilian** carried 400 people from the **Wildfire**, the **South Shore** 355 from the **William**, and the **Star of the Union** 383 from the **Bogota**. Unfortunately, and much like the first voyage, many people died. Of the 1,138 people who left Key West, only 823 survived delivery to the agents of the Colonization Society in Liberia. Some of the deaths were accidental – a man fell down a hatch; ten people drowned when their canoe overturned going ashore at Liberia – but most of the others were from sickness, and most of them were people who had never fully recovered from the misery of the slave ships; many simply could not make it. Despite the good intentions of the US government, the legacy of the Africans’ first Atlantic crossing was too much to prevent their second from being any better.

Once the surviving Africans landed in Liberia they were as lost as when they reached Key West. Despite being on the African continent, they were not home. The Liberians also had to struggle to accommodate such a large influx of new immigrants. The US Government had contracted with the American Colonization Society to provide shelter, food and clothing for the new colonists at the rate of one hundred dollars per person over eight years old, and fifty dollars

per person under that age for the term of one year. But after that, the Africans were expected to have become acclimated to their new situation and to be able to manage for themselves. The three chartered ships each went to different ports to transfer their passengers – the **Castilian** to Cape Mount, **South Shore** to Bassa, and **Star of the Union** to Sinoe. From there the “Recaptives,” as they were generally called, were apprenticed to American-Liberians to work and learn the ways of the colony.

The ship **South Shore**¹ left Key West during the pre-dawn hours of July 15th, 1860, with 385 people rescued from the slave bark **William**. The **William** had sailed from the Congo River on March 10th carrying 744 Africans. The bark was intercepted by the US Navy steamer **Wyandotte** off the Island of Pines on the south side of Cuba on May 9th with 570 captives onboard. Most of these people were children and many were quite ill. As the **South Shore** neared the Liberian coast, Webster Lindsly, a young doctor onboard, hired by the American Colonization Society to tend to the Africans during the voyage, started a letter to his father. The father, Harvey Lindsly, was a distinguished Washington, DC physician and chairman of the American Colonization Society’s executive committee.²

Because it was being written to a trusted family member, the letter has a frank, informal tone. Lindsly offers his father vivid descriptions of the Africans and their customs, the joys and sorrows experienced during the passage, and a less than glowing picture of Key West. He is especially critical of the poor planning made for the transatlantic crossing, which lead to much unnecessary distress. Lindsly’s frustration is palpable as he recounts

being able to only watch as his patients suffered for want of proper provisions. But, despite the strong sympathy for his charges, and an obvious disdain for slavery, Lindsly also expresses an unreformed racism, which, sadly, was a typical sentiment for the time. Ultimately – like the broader story of the Key West Africans of 1860 – Lindsly’s letter offers a bittersweet tale. It is a story of tremendous suffering by innocent victims caught in one of history’s cruelest chapters, but also one of liberation with the chance for a new beginning for a group of young people meant to die cutting cane in the plantations of Cuba.

A transcript of Lindsly’s letter follows.³ The original spelling and punctuation has been retained.

Ship South Shore
Lat. 7° N. Long 17° W.

August 28th 1860

My Dear Father,

My stay at Key West was so short and my time so much occupied that I was unable to write you more than a line by the mail which left there on the 13th June. We arrived on the 13th – had all the negroes on board by noon the next day and before daylight on the 15th we were on our way to Monrovia. Key West is a stupid little town built on a sand reef and hot plain, but I had no pocket thermometer along and I consequently cannot give the exact elevation of the mercury. As soon as the anchor was down Capt. L and myself went ashore and called upon Marshal Moreno – whom we found to be a very pleasant gentleman. He gave us our letters, late papers +c and then acted as our guide to

(Continued on page 4)

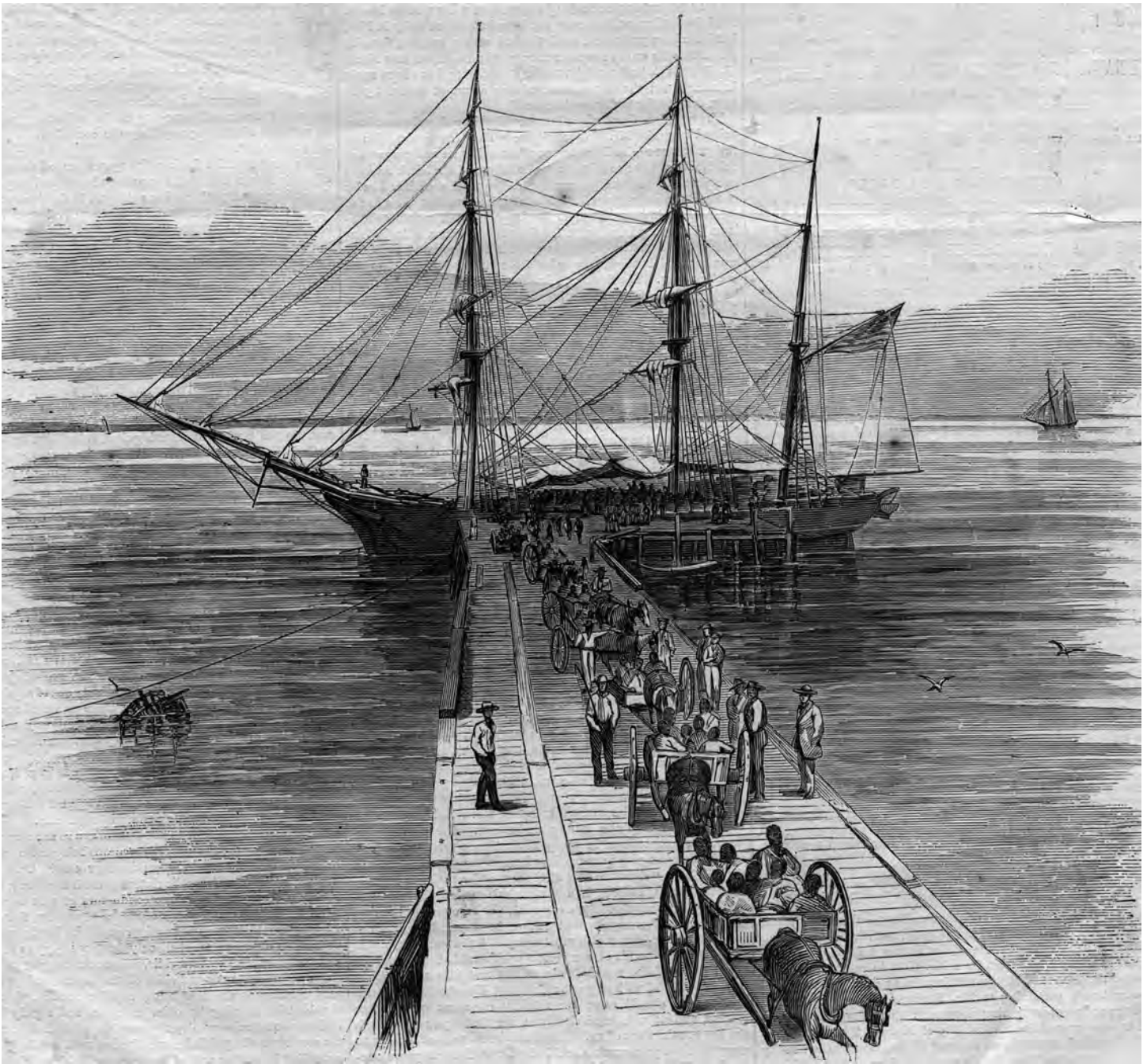
(Africans from page 3)

the Barracoon where the Africans were quartered. This was a large enclosure a short distance from the town and containing a number of shanties for the negroes, quarters for the attendants, a hospital, +c. Here the Africans were kept guarded day and night by a company of U.S. troops. This was necessary, for had it not been for the guard half of the negroes would have been stolen by the good citizens of Key West, who, in the absence of any wrecks to plunder – would have been only too glad to have seen off a hundred or two of such “likely niggers.” As we entered the gate of the barracoon a number of the negroes crowded around us, the women all insisting upon shaking hands with us while the men were talking and jumping about in a very lively style. It was an odd sight; here were eight hundred of these human beings singing, dancing and rolling about in the white sand the very picture of contentment (having just breakfasted.) The Marshal remarked that he had made a mistake in giving them blankets, and so I thought as I saw them walking about in the hot sun wrapped in them with nothing but their eyes and noses visible – the promenade producing as copious a diaphoresis as a vapor bath would have done. The Marshal told us the **South Shore** was to have the “**William’s**” cargo, and on going to the hospital I found a large number of her people sick. When this bark was captured the poor creatures on board of her were in a miserable condition, and after their arrival at Key West the number of deaths among them was greater than in both of the other cargoes combined. The “**William**” left Africa with over 700 negroes on board and on our arrival at Key West but 372 of them were alive. The cargo of the

French bark⁴ were all fine healthy looking fellows, most of them over six feet high, and of the company shipped in the “**Castilian**” the Marshal told me there were but twenty three sick. There were 355 negroes delivered to Capt. L and of this number over 300 were children – many under ten years of age. They were marched down to the wharf and then carried in boats to the ship. A more miserable woe begone looking set you never saw. Two thirds of the company were sick, about twenty of them so weak and emaciated that they had to be brought down to the wharf in carts, and several were totally blind. The prevailing diseases were dysentery, ophthalmia,⁵ and dropsy. In getting them on board one of the boats was upset and two of the negroes drowned. As soon as we got to sea I had a part of the between decks fitted up as a hospital and in it placed eighty of the sickest of the poor creatures. Here I was in a pretty fix with eighty sick men, women and children under my charge, not one of whom could speak a word of English. Had it not been for a nurse, a colored man by the name of Paul Hall, I don’t know what would have become of them, they must have died off like sheep with the rot. He washed and fed them, gave the medicine and mused them most faithfully day and night. Many were almost moribund when they came on board and these soon died off. In a few days I found that most of the cases of dysentery and ophthalmia were quite amenable to treatment, and as the weather became cooler they improved rapidly. I was much gratified at this, and thought the prospect fair for making the passage with the loss of not more than forty or fifty – but the appearance of things soon changed – for in less than two weeks from the time of leaving port nearly the

whole number were suffering from scurvy. These Africans were fed upon rice during the voyage from the coast, they had nothing but rice and salt meat at Key West and now they were to eat salt beef and pork, rice and bread for the next month and a half to come.⁶ Wonderful that they had scurvy is it not? Imagine me at sea with 300 sick persons under my charge and no means at hand to relieve them. And here let me remark that no vessel should ever be sent without a supply of potatoes and onions – and it is greatly to be expected that we were destitute of both. I gave them all the atecic acid⁷ (four pounds which should have been forty) and all the vegetable and mineral tonics I had on board and Captain Lathrop placed at my disposal all the ships potatoes, but among so many the share which fell to each one was small and all that I could hope to do was to keep the disease somewhat in check. Thus it continued the whole voyage producing a state of anasarca⁸ which caused the poor creatures to die of other diseases which under more favorable circumstances they would have recovered from. Thus today one hundred of the three hundred and fifty five are dead.

There is nothing very peculiar in the appearance of these Africans when dressed in a checked shirt and pants and with a straw hat on you could hardly tell them from a Virginia darkey, except that the African is if anything better looking. They have very intelligent faces and are well formed, several of the women having feet and limbs that might well excite the envy of many a lady, to say nothing of the admiration of the other sex. All men women and children are profusely tattooed on their arms, chests and backs and many have their upper front teeth filed away to a point, which is considered a



Africans being undloaded from the bark William at the Fort Taylor pier. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

mark of great beauty. The Africans are a fright looking set and easily taught and judging from these specimens I should say the process of Christianizing the race (i.e. hoeing cotton) adopted at the South has not much improved their intellect. Death seemed to make but little impression and they were as happy as clams at high water during the whole voyage. They appear to have but little idea of where they are going and to care less.

They are very fond of singing and every evening after supper come on deck and sing their favorite “bambo bambo hey,” not a very finished production but one they appear to enjoy equally. I bought a tambourine at Key West for their benefit and so we have had dancing as well as singing. Their movements are very graceful and the dances though not as difficult and intricate as some I have seen

performed by the ballet at the Grand Opera yet are quite as graceful. These negroes are all smart enough but so lazy that I feel confident they will never come to anything unless a system of apprenticeship is adopted with them. If they are apprenticed to proper persons and taught to work they will be quite a valuable acquisition to Liberia, otherwise

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(Africans from page 6)

they will become the newest vagabonds in the colony. Apart from the negroes and their sufferings, the voyage to me has been a delightful one not a thing having occurred during the whole time that I regret or would wish changed. I have not a word of fault to find with either the S.S. or her captain. It has not been my good fortune to meet with many better men than Capt Lathrop. He is an intelligent and gentlemanly man such a clever fellow withal that it is a pleasure to be with him. The weather has been cool and pleasant during the whole voyage with the exception of a couple of weeks when we had nothing but calms and rains and suffered somewhat from the heat. We have now been out forty four days and will probably reach Monrovia tomorrow or the next day. At Key West Capt L. laid in a good supply of green turtle and some fine cigars and the result is that I am about ten pounds heavier than when I left home.

Monrovia August 31st

We arrived here last night and this morning were pulled ashore by a party of Kroomen⁹ in a deluge of rain. We called upon President Benson, Rev John Seys and Mr. Dennis¹⁰ – they have received no letters from U.S. and are in doubt whether to land the negroes here or send them all to Bassa. On shore I met a couple of Officers of the sloop of war **Marion** which is anchored here, and they told me she would sail tomorrow direct for Portsmouth N.H. It is now 7 P.M. and I have just returned on board and the Krooman is waiting to carry this on board the **Marion**. I send nothing to the Sec. or to Mr. McLain as I have no time to write and as the negroes are not yet landed the voyage is not yet complete and I cannot make my report. They have heard nothing at

Monrovia of the **Castilian**. A ship passed here the day before yesterday supposed to be the **Star of the Union**. If the ship goes to Bassa we may be detained three or four weeks on the coast, as there is no harbor there – and it is very difficult to land goods through the surf. I shall write by every opportunity but the mails are very uncertain and you may not hear from me again. The number of deaths among the negroes has reached one hundred and eight and if they go to Bassa probably ten or fifteen more will die before they get ashore.¹¹ I told Mr. Dennis this morning that if he sent the ship to Bassa he must give us some fresh provisions before we sailed. What he will do in the matter I cannot say. The S.S. will return direct to New Orleans.

With much love to all

Your Affectionate son

Webster Lindsly

(Endnotes)

¹ The **South Shore** was a 975 ton wooden ship with two decks, built in 1852 according to American Lloyd's Registry of American and Foreign Shipping, E.W. Blunt, New York, 1861.

² History of the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, 1817-1909. Medical Society of the District of Columbia, Washington, 1909.

³ The Letter is found in Records of the American Colonization Society, Incoming Correspondence, Letters from Liberia, 1 March 1859-22 October 1860. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

⁴A reference to the bark **Bogota**.

⁵Conjunctivitis, or the inflammation of the conjunctiva, the

clear covering over the white of the eyeball which also lines the inside of the eyelid.

⁶ This contradicts a list of provisions provided by Marshal Moreno to the Africans while they were at Key West. Many of the items found on it are high in Vitamin C, chiefly 21 barrels of potatoes, 8800 limes, 200 lemons, and one bushel of tamarinds. The document is entitled "The United States for the use of the Recaptured Africans to the W.H. Wall Co.," with the original copy in the Benjamin Bruce Family Archives, Key West Florida.

⁷This is most likely a misspelling of acetic acid.

⁸ Severe generalized edema.

⁹ Members of the Kroo tribe native to coastal Liberia. Because they were experienced watermen, Kroomen often offered their services to ships doing business there.

¹⁰ Stephen Benson was President of Liberia from 1856 to 1864; John Seys was stationed in Liberia as a special agent for the American Colonization Society; and Henry W. Dennis also served as an agent for the ACS.

¹¹ The **South Shore** would ultimately deliver 233 of the Africans to the Colonization Society at Bassa, indicating 152 died during the crossing. Of the 744 originally onboard the **William** when it left the Congo River, less than one-third of the group survived to the shores of Liberia.

Corey Malcom is Director of Archeologists for the Mel Fisher Maritime Heritage Society and secretary for the Key West Maritime Historical Society. Corey has studied the Africans for years and had an article on the African Cemetery at Higgs Beach in the Florida Keys Sea Heritage Journal of Fall 2002

History of NAAS Boca Chica

In 1945 Lt. (jg) Winifred R. Hoey compiled a report of over 600 pages on the Naval Air Station Trumbo Point, the Naval Auxiliary Air Station Boca Chica, Naval Air Station Meacham Field and support facilities. Following is the history section of her report on NAAS Boca Chica.

Early History of NAAS Boca Chica

Picture if you will a small island set in the blue waters where the Atlantic and Gulf of meet and blend—an island covering only seven square miles, and one of the last links in the chain of keys that drops away from the southeastern tip of Florida mainland and curves south and west for almost a hundred miles.

Picture a concentration of hundreds of construction workers on this island moving busily about among the rough unfinished buildings of a new Army Air Base, and vision the lush green mangrove swamps that surround and infiltrate the building area. On the outskirts of this an ant hill of activity, picture three broad new runways, stretching cleanly for 7,000 feet surrounding obstruction.

Though it is December, a bright hot sun blazes down, and the only shade in the sky comes from garbage dump fires between Boca Chica Key and Key West, eight miles distant and pendant on the chain of Florida Keys.

There you have a picture of Boca Chica Airfield on the day the Navy assumed jurisdiction from the Army, 9 December 1942, putting into effect an agreement reached



Hanger at NAAF Boca Chica. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

some three months earlier (on 19 September) and making available a new unit for the Navy Operational Training Command.

Navy Considers Field

The Navy had visioned Boca Chica Field as a part of its Operational Training establishment as early as April 1942, when Nazi submarine were slashing impudently close to Florida and the Keys to sink allied ships within in slight of land.

At that time Boca Chica Field was a small civilian airport with three skimpy runways. Eight miles west-southwest of the field was Key West, with its Naval Air Station and Naval Operating Base. Almost a hundred miles northwest by overseas highway (only land transportation route to the Keys) lay the Florida mainland.

Despite the inadequacies of the field's 4200-foot runways, its location and the year around near-perfect flying weather made it desirable as a base. This was

indicated in SecNav letter of 30 April 1942, which established the Naval Air Operational Training Command and listed NAS Key West as an existing base and Boca Chica as a prospective base for gunnery and carrier qualification training.

Desirability of the site was again emphasized when in July 1942 the Commanding Officer of Naval Air Station, Key West recommended acquisition of the field by the Navy and construction of necessary quarters and shops if landplane training or fleet operations were contemplated in this area (N.A.S. was a Seaplane Base). Only existing buildings at Boca Chica were a CAA Radio Shack and a control vault for the electric power.

Army Leases Boca Chica

But the Army also had had an eye on Boca Chica, and in July 1942 Army Engineers began construction and development at the field

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calculated to make it capable of supporting two bomber squadrons. Holding some of the Boca Chica under lease from Monroe County, and with suit pending in Federal Court to take other acreage, the Army was in possession of a field comprising some 1800 acres and deemed by the Navy to be needed for successful development of the NAOTC program. Negotiations were begun to secure its transfer to the Navy, and the September conference agreement was the result.

Under this agreement the Boca Chica Airfield was assigned to Navy jurisdiction, and it was agreed that the Navy would reimburse the Army for expenditures made by the latter on facilities constructed at the field.

When the Navy assumed jurisdiction over the field on 9 December, it was also agreed that Army units engaged in Anti-submarine Operations from the field would be permitted continued use of the field and its facilities as long as such use was requested by Commander Gulf Sea Frontier. It was anticipated that the construction of the field would be completed and field ready for operation by 1 February 1943.

The Army already had spent nearly \$4,000,000 on the project, exclusive of land and collateral equipment. Before construction was completed, Army costs had reached \$5 ½ million, to which the Navy added another \$2 ½ million by April 1945.

While the field had been placed under administration of the Naval Air Station Key West when the Navy took jurisdiction, there was no immediate change in its operation. Even on 11 February 1943—two



The administration building of NAAS Boca Chica in 1944. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

months later—at which time the field was assigned to NAOTC to be administered by the Commanding Officer NAS Key West, the Army was still administering the field, using it as a base for a squadron of B-34 Aircraft on Anti-submarine operation under ComGulfSeaFron.

The entire maintenance, upkeep and operation of the station had remained thus far under Army administration because up to this time the Naval Air Station had not been provided with personnel for this purpose.

Boca Chica Designated NAAF

The next step in Navy development of the field came on 23 February 1943 when Boca Chica was established as a Naval Auxiliary Air Facility under command of the Commanding Officer, NAS Key West.

Two weeks later arrived the first Navy complement for the station, consisting of seven officers and eighty enlisted men under the command of Lt. Comdr. (now Comdr.) Roy Biggs Stratton,

USN, who had retired in 1936 after a career including service in the fleet and as CO of VJS-D11 at NAS San Diego. Mustered in blues beneath a blazing hot sun, the enlisted personnel heard a brief talk by the Executive Officer, who warned them against too close acquaintance with the native scrubs, some of which would leave red irritated welts on the skin.

Navy Begins Administration

The station's life as a Navy unit finally began on 1 April 1943, when the Navy actually took over physical custody and administration of the field and relieved the Army unit. That Army authorities were to some extent responsible for the delay between the time the Navy took jurisdiction and the date on which the Navy took custody is indicated by some of the correspondence on the subject.

An Army squadron continued to use the field until 8 June 1943, and an Army Supply Detachment remained until 4 July. In addition, the Navy agreed to subsist up to 100



The mess hall at NAAS Boca Chica. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

Army enlisted men and two or three officers after departure of the Army squadron so the Army could have personnel available.

Growth of Boca Chica

Meanwhile, development of Boca Chica Field was moving steadily, but somewhat slowly, forward. The field when the Navy took over presented all the comforts of an advanced base on some far Pacific atoll. The existing Army buildings were all constructed of wood and tar paper, theatre of operations modified and mobilization modified types and had to be adapted for Navy use. Mangrove swamps crowded close about the buildings, providing a breeding place and giving cover for vast clouds of mosquitoes which swarmed out each night to torment and harass personnel and eventually

reduce the efficiency of night maintenance crews by as much as fifty percent.

Other difficulties were also presented.

On 20 August 1943 acting CNAOPTRA wrote "Lack of spare parts and maintenance difficulties have in the past precluded the full contemplated use of Boca Chica by the Naval Air Operational Training Command. On 15 October 1943 Boca Chica was relinquished by CHAOTC and was allocated to Fleet use under ComSeven service planes that might come in to Boca Chica during operations in connection with Gulf Sea Frontier.

The first NAOTC Program began less than three weeks after the Navy assumed physical custody of Boca Chica, when VB-127, consisting of 12 PV-1 Aircraft,

arrived on 19 April for three weeks of shakedown and Anti-submarine Training other PV-1 Squadrons followed at three week intervals, and during this same period, Boca Chica was the base for several PV-1 squadrons combining operations with training.

Soon afterwards, on 23 October, Boca Chica was designated as a NAAS, and the ground work was laid for a vastly expanded area training program in which the station would play a vital role.

New facilities and buildings would be necessary to carry out the station's contemplated new mission as a fleet air base for both operational and training squadrons. The Commanding Officer NAAS Boca Chica on 24 November 1943 listed ten new buildings, relocation

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(NAAS from page 9)

of some of existing buildings, additional construction work and collateral equipment – all of which he estimated would cost \$473,983 as necessary. ComAirLant's endorsement to the CO's letter added rocket projection training and aircraft torpedo training as reasons for the new construction.

BuAer's favorable endorsement requested BuDocks to construct the facilities at the estimated cost of \$1,037,900 to be financed under provisions of Nav 1 appropriation Act of 1944, plus \$95,700 for collateral equipment to provide necessary facilities for a contemplated complement of 2500 men and 500 officers and additional hanger space for the maintenance of fleet aircraft.

New Training Program Under FAW5

The new program reached a concrete stage on 27 December 1943, when ComAirLant directed FAW5 to coordinate and supervise Aircraft Training Schedules and facilities in the Key West-Boca Chica area, and outlined the types of training and capacities. Under this plan, NAAS Boca Chica, NAS Key West and Meacham Field were coordinated in the expanded program to provide four type of training: advanced Anti-submarine warfare training, rocket training, torpedo training of Marine and Navy squadrons and Lighter-than Air anti-submarine warfare Training (the latter based at Meacham Field).

By 1 January 1944 personnel in strength on Naval activities at NAAS Boca Chica had reached a new high of 143 officers and 1295 enlisted men, but his figure was more than doubled in the next twelve months. On 1 January 1945 there were 410



Mosquito control ditches at NAAF Boca Chica. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

officers and 2979 men on the station.

With this greatly expanded complement and the enlargement of the training program it was felt that NAAS Boca Chica should be re-designated an Air Station (in fact this recommendation had been made early in 1944, but disapproved). On 8 February 1945 the re-designation was approved, and NAAS Boca Chica became U.S. Naval Air Station, Boca Chica.

It remained as such until 31 March 1945 when it was disestablished as a Naval Air Station and Naval Aviation Facilities at Key West and Boca Chica combined to form one aviation activity under designation of U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

Shortly prior to the dis-establishment of Boca Chica as a Naval Air Station, activities there had reached a new peak. Early in March there were 469 officers and 3039 men at Boca Chica, planes at the station included 9 PB4Ys, 6 PB5As, 16 PVs, 6 SNJs, 6 FMs, 9 TBMs, and 11 OS2Us, in addition to 125 planes belonging

to ComFairQuonset engaged in carrier qualification training. A photograph of the parking area made on 10 March 1945 well illustrates the wide variety of planes.

At this time Boca Chica was being contemplated for use in the night fighter training program, and it was suggested that the anti-submarine warfare training be reduced substantially and PB4Y training cut drastically. Fleet and ASW training were to be transferred from the field prior to 1 July to make way for the night fighter program.

Extract From Annual Sanitary Report Boca Chica, 1943

1. Number of Personnel, Day of Report

On 1 January 1944 there were 143 officers and 1,295 enlisted men attached to the Naval activities at this station.

2. Average Strength

During the calendar year 1943 the average strength of officers was 149 and the average strength of enlisted personnel 1,019.

3. Epidemiological Facts

The report from this station is for the most part included in the Annual Sanitary Report of the Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

The health of the men has been, in general good. The climate for the greater part of the year had been uncomfortably hot. Few individuals on board have escaped without some periods of prickly heat, fungus infection of the skin and upper respiratory infection. The inadequate laundry facilities have served to aggravate the incidence of these annoying conditions.

The number of civilian employees on board has been negligible and no serious accidents have occurred.

4. Topography of the Station

The U.S. Navy Auxiliary Air Station is located on one of the Florida Keys known as "Boca Chica Key." This Key is a low-lying island of 7.1 square miles of which 2.4 square miles are salt inlets of lagoons, and only 4.7 square miles are land. It is located 8.5 miles (at a true bearing of 76 degrees) from the City of Key West. There is no map showing contours over the entire island, since no survey have been made on the Northern end, or the western peninsula, but elevations are known for the greater part of the island. The minimum elevation within the building area is 3.5 feet above mean low water level. The maximum elevation is 6.0 feet above mean low water level. Considerable fill from dredging operations and borrow pits was required to establish this elevation. Vegetation on uncleared land is dense hammock, and there is relatively little open area or sparse brush. There are ponds, portholes and swamps of varying size over the entire island. A considerable number of these exist within the building area and will have to be



Fresh water tank at NAAF Boca Chica. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

corrected by additional filling and finished grading. The buildings occupy the higher ground to the north of the airfield and the runways are located on the eastern half of the island.

Originally the C.A.A. airport was located at this site. During the latter part of the year 1942, the U.S. Army began extensive development of the existing airport by increasing the size of the airfield and providing a building area. This development was completed by the Army Engineer and, in the early part of the year 1943, this airport was transferred by the Army to the Navy Dept.

The mosquito problem and its relationship to topography is discussed in paragraph seventeen.

17. General Hygienic Consideration and Suggestions

There are many factors present on this station which result in lowered morale. These include:

1. The uncomfortable physical characteristics of this site.
2. Inadequate recreational facilities.

3. The mosquitoes and sand fleas.

4. Lack of adequate laundry facilities.

5. Absence of adequate Ship's Service.

Many of the men stationed here have come from foreign and combat areas and express marked disappointment at the fact that this station is called shore duty in the United States.

The mission of this station is to provide facilities for the fleet units which are training personnel in the operation of the PV-1. The aircraft itself has an underserved reputation of being very dangerous in operation, difficult to fly and maintain. The nature of the aircraft and the duties of the personnel warrant careful attention to these factors which are now resulting in lowered morale. One of the prime factors of discomfort and lowered morale is the pestiferous mosquito. Mosquito vectors of disease are not found on Boca Chica. The salt

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marsh mosquito, *Aedes Seilictans* and *Aedes Taenierynchas*, breed in great abundance. Light trap counts of 12,000 were common during the summer, with 18,000 mosquitoes in night being the record catch. It was estimated at that time that the plane night check, who worked in the open, were only fifty percent efficient. This was due to clouds of mosquitoes, attracted by the artificial light, pestering them at night. Small amounts of insect repellent were of some occasions obtainable by this activity and it was carefully rationed to furnish some relief to the men. Netting and protective clothing proved inefficient and cumbersome.

January, February and March are relatively mosquito free since these months are dry and rainfall rather than temperature is the limiting factor. There is no respite from mosquitoes during the remainder of the year.

The mosquito control program is under the direction of an Entomologist attached to the U.S. Naval Hospital, Key West, and he is the mosquito control officer for the Key West area. Approximately 70% of the total problem exists at Boca Chica. The mosquito detail at this station consists of four seamen and one Hospital Apprentice 1/c who acts as foreman. They are equipped with an International truck (1 ½ ton) with tank and pump rigged for spraying diesel oil. They are likewise equipped with knapsack, hand-powered sprays for diesel oil and buckets for ladling waste crank-case oil.

Since March 1943 the entomologist has located a total of 553 breeding places in Boca Chica. They have been made accessible either by truck paths, made by tractor, or foot paths cut out laboriously by machine. Until July



Commander Roy Biggs Stratton, U.S. Navy. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

1943, Paris Green dust was tried as a control method and proved to be unsatisfactory. Since then the detail has put out 17,500 gallons of waste oil and 2,500 gallons of diesel oil. In spite of all work done no practical reduction of mosquitoes was evident until October, when high tides flooded those extensive tracts of black mangrove which had never been accessible to the oiling crew.

During October and November, the limited breeding areas were controlled both by preventative oiling and spraying of oil into breeding waters. The degree of control attained is illustrated by the fact that mosquitoes in the brush attracted to a man in ten second interval rarely exceeded three,

whereas the usual count on the untreated Keys to the east was in excess of 25. Nevertheless the oiling program leaves much to be desired. The night-check crews, guards and station personnel are still pestered at night, although the work does no fall behind as it did during the summer.

Less than half of all known breeding spots can be reached with the power spray, and several swamps are too extensive to be oiled by knapsack sprays. Control could be obtained by either ditching or filling the worst breeding spots, leaving the crew free to oil small temporary puddles. 444 ponds, swamps and potholes have been spotted on a map and recommended for ditching. Another one hundred



Officer Wine Mess at NAAS Boca Chica. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

and nine places are located and spotted for filling. One contractor holds a contract to cut 15,000 feet of mosquito control ditches near the runways and this will control a limited area. Another project to ditch and fill elsewhere on Boca Chica and with in a five mile radius of the island has been awarded. Although conditions have been somewhat improved by the industry of the small mosquito control group, they are by no means satisfactory and it is hoped that an adequate control program will be approved.

In addition to the mosquitoes, further annoyance results from the intermittent presence of large number of sand fleas whose activity has casued a great deal of discomfort during many nights of the year.

As indicated in previous paragraphs, the facilities for laundry have been and continue to be totally inadequate. Steps are being taken to correct this situation at this time.

The officers' quarters, although relatively inadequate, will undoubtedly function satisfactorily under pressure of war-time conditions.

The recreational facilities are miserably inadequate for large portion of the period covered by this report there were not even movies shown on this station. A large storage room has recently been converted into a movie hall. This room is crudely furnished; one of the two projectors has a faulty lens and the size of the movie hall is inadequate to satisfactorily serve the complement aboard. It is to be hoped that the requested appropriation for the new auditorium will be approved.

Other recreation facilities are negligible. The swimming hole and one soft ball field comprise the major athletic facilities. It is urgently recommended that attempts be made to gain approval

of requests for recreational facilities outline in paragraph 6.

Liberty in the Key West area is poor. This is in part indicated by the relatively small number of cases of venereal disease in which there is a history of exposure in the Key West Area. The attitude of a large portion of the men is such that they prefer to remain aboard; rarely change from dungarees; have little pride in their appearance as men in the Naval Service; and impatiently seek or patiently await transfer.

The general situation is improved only slightly by the fact that the men are permitted a 40 hour liberty in Miami once per month.

Because of the nature of the mission of this station and because men are arriving here who have returned from the dangers and discomforts of combat, the above inadequacies have been described at length. It is urgently necessary that they may be corrected.

Hackley's Diary

William Hackley practiced law in Key West from 1829 to 1857. He kept a diary for part of the time he was in Key West. Here is the diary for part of September 1856.

Thursday, September 18. Rose at 4:45. The mail from Charleston having arrived during the night went down before breakfast and got my letters and papers. Received a letter from the Attorney General and one from P. Williams informing me that the warrant in Shaw's case is in his hands and that the one for J.P. Smith will soon be issued the decision having been reversed. Felix Senas has his commission as purser in the Navy. Yesterday bought an opera glass of L.M. Shafer for \$14.00 returning a spy glass bought a few weeks since he asked \$20.00 for the glass which cost \$13.00 but sales are dull and he let me have it. My sewing machine came in the smack and I got it home about 11 o'clock and worked the rest of the day in getting it up and in running order, did not succeed entirely, though learnt a good deal about it. Got a quarter Doubloon and sent over to Havana for a Lottery ticket..

Friday, September 19. Rose at 4 and went to the market and then walked up to the Barracks, returned home and bathed. Worked on the sewing machine till breakfast, learning by degrees it will run well but we cannot sew yet. At 8:40 A.M. barometer 29.49.5, thermometer 86.5, wind east southeast 1, clouds 9. There was a sale this morning as there was yesterday morning but I remained but a short time. Caste and Billy Pearce came in and gave me the facts about the wrecking of the ship **Don Juan** on which to found the libel. Put in the Post Office a letter in answer to the one

received from the Attorney General yesterday. Squally all evening. Matilda and I went to Alexander Patterson's after tea.

Saturday, September 20. Rose at 4 and went to the duck ponds. Shot one teal in the Lighthouse Pond on my return. Four ducks flew up out of a small hole of water after I had passed and though I fired did not get one. Returned home and bathed. During the night it blew fresh from the southeast for several hours with a rain. At 8:15 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 85, wind southeast 1, clouds 6. Wrote to O.R. Potter and Company, Editor of Rainbow and Mother and put them in the Post Office. Bought at the auction nine pieces different kinds of cotton for \$45.25. Put down a piece of oilcloth bought of Alexander Patterson in the dinning room. The sewing machine too much for us cannot get it to work. Matilda and I went to Alexander Patterson's after tea.

Sunday, September 21. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Barracks and then by the Fort. and back by Porter's Spring and home. Saw a teal in the Lighthouse Pond that allowed me to pass within 20 yards without flying. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 84, wind east southeast 2, clouds 4. Wrote to Editor of Musical World for missing papers. Wrote on the Libel vs. The ship **Don Juan** and drew up a claim for bounty lands for William B. Randolph.

Monday, September 22. Rose at 4:30 and went to Mead's Pond saw several ducks but they soon flew out. Shot at some godwits thought there were two ducks in the upper part of the pond and killed one. Went to Linn's Pond where two ducks flew out while I was creeping up. A flock of 15 Godwits flew over my

head and around the pond. I killed three Godwits. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 84, clam, clouds 8 with haze. I was at the auction for some time. Drew up a claim for bounty land for Richard Roberts. Did not write on the libel. At 4 P.M. barometer 29.38, thermometer 85.5, calm, clouds 6 with haze. George Allen came by and tried to start the Sewing Machine and got it to work little but it will not work as it should.

Tuesday, September 23. Rose at 4:20 and went to the ponds and killed six teals, three yellow legs and two doves. At 8:20 A.M. barometer 29.37, thermometer 84.5 wind southwest 2, clouds 6. Felix Senac who went up to the upper end of Island got eight ducks. Wrote P. Williams enclosing Richard Roberts claim and William B. Randolph's claim. At 4 P.M. barometer 29.33, thermometer 88, wind south southwest 3, clouds 8. A light rain about dark.

Wednesday, September 24. Rose at 4:40 and went out to the ponds and sat till it was light. At Mead's Pond and then went to Linn's but saw no ducks and but one godwit. The birds must have left for Cuba

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with the first of the northern which is now blowing which commenced about 3 A.M. I hear that there were a number of geese over the town last night. Walked out with Matilda and Mrs. Chales Tift. The Patterson girls spent the day yesterday. The sewing machine is doing better.

Thursday, September 25. Rose at 4:15 and went to the ponds and saw one duck which would answer my call but would not come and when I tried to get round to him flew. Killed a Marsh Hen at the Flag Pond and three Tringae in the road home by the Barracks. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 80.5, wind east 4, clouds 9. Finished the libel in the ship **Don Juan** except the formal conclusion. Colonel Oliver O'Hara brought Captain James Brown of the bark **Emigrant** up and I drew up a petition for the sale of wet cotton and some materials and gave it to Winer Bethel proctor for libel, to sign and file which he did first filing his libel. After dinner went to the sale. Bought a lot of DeLains. After tea went to Alexander Patterson's with Matilda. Alexander Patterson returned my gold pen borrowed some months ago.

Friday, September 26. Rose at 4:40 and went to the duck ponds and sat till near sunrise when having seen but a single duck at which I fired but it was so dark that I could not see my gun barrel and missed, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 82, wind east 3, clouds 4. Went to Bowne and Curry's wharf where there a few good for sale but did not remain till the sale. Bought a pair of black pants from Saunders for \$2.50 and got Captain Brown's barometer from Oliver O'Hara and took it to the house and hung it up. Rolled up all the good that were dry.

Saturday, September 27. Rose at 4:15 and went down to the

wharf to the cutter having made an arrangement last night to go to Woman's Key this morning but the sky was clouded and winds fresh from the northeast and all concluded not to go. Got a few fish and took Spring down to the Fort wharf and gave him a swim. The smack with the mail got in last night, got papers and a letter from Harriet who is in Washington with Martha who has lost a son on the day of his birth. Harriet will be in Cincinnati this winter all her family will be with her. Returned home and bathed. At 9 A.M. barometer 29.45, thermometer 84, wind northeast 4, clouds 8. The steamer **Tennessee** from Greytown came in about 9 AM. With five passengers. R.R. Fletcher came back in her. Took my libel in the case of the ship **Don Juan** to have it translated for the Captain, borrowed of him \$60.00. About 2 P.M. there was a light rain which continued at intervals the whole evening and night. Bought a lot of Calico and Ginhams at auction for \$5.00.

Sunday, September 28. Rose at 5:30 and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.45, thermometer 83, wind east northeast 3, clouds 10 with frequent slight showers. The brig **Huntress** came in during the night. Mary Fontane went to New York in the steamer **Tennessee**, Phil had a flare up with his employers and left them. Mary will do more harm than good, his father should have gone. The Patterson girls came home with Matilda and spent the day. Walked across the Key in the evening and to the Fort.

Monday, September 29. Rose at 4:15 and went out to the ponds where I killed with one shot one teal and two Godwits. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 83, wind southeast 3, clouds 4 with haze. Bought a barrel of potatoes at auction for \$5.25 and divided it with Alexander Patterson.

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Foundation for hanger number 3 at NAAF Boca Chica taken on March 21, 1944. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

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