

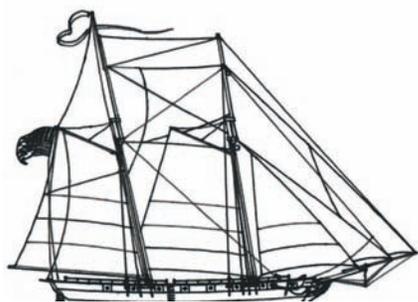
Florida Keys

Sea Heritage Journal

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USS SHARK



OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

History of Meacham Field

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

A. Background

(I) Function in the aeronautical organization

Meacham Field is a satellite field of Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, with four runways (longest takeoff area 4,000 feet; one of the runways is very short) and with LTA facilities to support 4 ZNPs, 42 officers and 114 enlisted personnel. It is used as a landplane airport, LTA facilities, and "bounce" field for carrier planes. It has refueling facilities but no repair or night landing facilities, and no maintenance facilities for heavier-than-aircraft.

(II) General Data

a. geographical

Meacham Field is located on the S.E. edge of Key West island, two miles E.A.E. of NAS, Key West, at 24°-33'N, 81°-45' at center of field. Shape of the field is



Meacham Satellite Naval Air Field Key West on April 6, 1943 taken from 5,000 feet from the south. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

irregular, 4000 x 4000 ft.

b. topographical

Altitude is about four feet at mean high water. The runways are constructed of coral rocks, which has been crushed and rolled to provide a hard surface. The major portion of the land surrounding the runways is mangrove swamp and salt-water ponds.

(III) The land: acquisition and background

Right of the Navy to use Meacham Field property was

obtained by several different deals.

a. Meacham Field proper:

On 1 July 1943 lease to the major portion (346.83 acres, including most of the four runways) was transferred to the Navy from the U.S. Army. This lease (with Key West Realty Co. at a rental of \$1.00 a year plus taxes amounting to approximately \$5,000) had been in effect for the Army since on or about 19 December 1941. The property

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by John Viele

Key West Maritime Historical Exhibit

“Ships and Their Stories,” an exhibit of Key West maritime history, opened at the Custom House on May 15. The exhibit is a collaborative effort of the Key West Maritime Historical Society and the Key West Art and Historical Society featuring the marine paintings by David Harrison Wright and purchased by KWMHS with an anonymous grant. Also contributing were KWMHS members Dr. Dan Gallagher and John Viele. Wright’s paintings include the Spanish treasure galleon **Senora de Atocha**, the U. S. Navy schooner **Shark**, the Key West-built clipper ship **Stephen R. Mallory**, the sidewheeler **City of Key West**, and the Mallory line steamer **Concha**.

In addition to the paintings, there are ship models, photographs, and drawings of historic Keys vessels, captains, and builders. The exhibit will be open through November. KWMHS members should not miss it.

Lectures and Other Events

In January, Don Kincaid, former underwater photographer on Mel Fisher’s Treasure Salvors team, showed slides and talked about his experiences including discovering the first

gold chain which indicated that the treasure galleon **Atocha** had been found.

In February, Susan Nugent, author of *Women Conserving the Florida Keys*, talked about the inspired and dedicated efforts of eleven women to save the Keys from over-development and ecological destruction.

In April, City Commissioner Bill Verge told about his experiences as a junior Coast Guard officer aboard an 82-foot Coast Guard patrol boat along the coast and in the rivers of Viet Nam. His presentation included a film he had taken during this period.

In May, Dr. Dan Gallagher, author of *Florida’s Great Ocean Railway*, showed photographs and told about the many unique watercraft that were used to build the Overseas Railroad.

Sign Up For E-Mail Notification Of Changes To Lectures/field Trip Schedules.

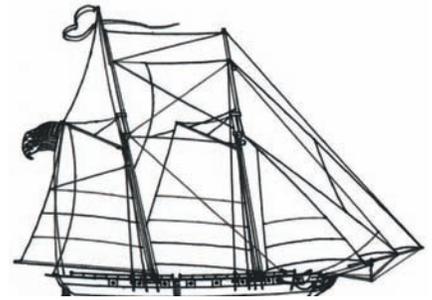
It sometimes happens that we have to make last minute changes to scheduled lectures or field trips and it is too late to send out a notice by mail. We can let you know if you will provide us with your E-mail address.

If you log on to our Web site, www.keywestmaritime.org you will find a block where you can enter your E-mail address.

New Members

Craig C. Cates, Key West; Sheila & Fred Devendorf, Key West; Frank

Kelley, Key West; Rob Stevens, 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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William 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 October and November 1856.

Monday, October 13. Rose at 4:20 and went to Mead's Pond and sat till light without seeing a bird then went around by Linn's Pond and saw nothing till near the Quarters where I got two Tringas, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.45, thermometer 81.5, wind northeast 1, clouds 4. Down on Bowne and Curry's wharf where there was a sale of wrecked goods there were but few articles sold as agents reserves tobacco, axes and many other things from sale. Took out a roll of three-ply carpet at Bowne and Curry's for 2.50 and had it sent home. Drew up a petition for the appraisalment of the reserve good from the ship **Isaac Allerton**. Charles Howe and Felix Senac appointed appraisers. Mrs. Dr. Jones came in after tea and sat till 9 when Matilda and I walked home with her. There was an eclipse of the moon soon after rising nearly the whole face covered.

Tuesday, October 14. Rose at 4:20 and walked up to Moffats lot where the tide having been over the road returned home and bathed. At 8:20 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 83, wind east northeast 1, clouds 8. Bought an apple parer for \$.50 and it work nicely. Down at Bowne and Curry's wharf for a short time when there were a few goods for sale. After tea Matilda went to William Wall's and afterwards riding on a cart. The ride I took the other night was enough for me.

Wednesday, October 15. Rose at 4:20 and walked on the beach,

returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.46, thermometer 83.5, wind east northeast 1, clouds 6 with squall clouds. Read papers. Bought a Gutta Percha cane of L.M. Shaffer for \$2.75.

Thursday, October 16. Rose at 5:30 it having rained during the night. Got several light showers after daylight and I would not go out, bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.48, thermometer 83, wind east southeast 1, clouds 6. Yesterday drew up a petition for the sale of a box which fell overboard from the bark **Joseph Hale** as they were discharging her and it was sold. There was a sale of wrecked goods in the evening which I attended and bought one pair of garden shears for \$.75 and one pair of sheep shears \$.25. Took them home and had them oiled. It rained for some time in the afternoon. Matilda and Charlotte got caught out and to have supper at Cornelius Curtis' where they were when the rain commenced.

Friday, October 17. Woke at 4 but the weather was so threatening that I lay down again and rose at 5:30 and bathed. At 8:40 A.M. barometer 29.54, thermometer 79, wind north by east 4, clouds 9. Down at Bowne and Curry's wharf where some good were sold and a quantity put in stowage. Went over the Newcomb's with Matilda and Harriet to an examination, the room being so full that I could not get a seat I remained but a short time. Matilda and Harriet stayed till after 11.

Saturday, October 18. Rose at 4:40 and walked out to the ponds and home by the Barracks, saw nothing. Returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.52, thermometer

80, wind northeast 3, clouds 8. Read Knickerbocker magazine. There were sales morning and evening at Bowne and Curry's wharf but few things were sold. A quantity of oil was brought down.

Sunday, October 19. Rose at 5:40 and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.52, thermometer 83, wind east 2, clouds 6. Wrote the answer in the bark **Emigrant**.

Monday, October 20. Rose at 4:10 and went out to Mead's Pond and sat till light when seeing nothing I returned. I had lost my duck call. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.60, thermometer 84, wind east southeast 2, clouds 6. Drew up the libel in the case of the bark **Joseph Hale**. Read Knickerbocker magazine.

Tuesday, October 21. Rose at 4:40 and went out to Mead's Pond and sat till near sunrise, saw no ducks. At A.M. 8:15 barometer 29.62, thermometer 83.5, wind northeast 2, clouds 1. Read Harper's magazine. Wrote out the crew list of wreckers in the case of **Don Juan**.

Wednesday, October 22. Lucia was sent to sleep with Lizzy last night to wean her. Matilda nursed her once during the night to empty her breast. The steamer **Isabel** got in about 8 P.M. bringing a company of soldiers to relieve the company stationed here. Went down early in the morning and got papers, a letter from the Commissioner of Customs approving my fee bill and one from P. Williams enclosing Shaw's and Williams' land warrants. At 9 A.M. barometer 29.53, thermometer 80, wind north northeast 2, clouds 3. Last night the wind was northwest a good breeze but the barometer

(Continued on page 4)

(Hackley from page 3)

would not rise and the northerner soon died out. Read papers.

Thursday, October 23. Rose at 5:30 and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.44, thermometer 79, wind north northeast 3. Clouds 4. Read papers. Went to Alexander Patterson's and got caught in a rain.

Friday, October 24. Rose at 5 and walked by the Fort and South Beach home by Porter's Well. Took dog with me. Returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.42, thermometer 79, wind east southeast 2, clouds 4. Borrowed \$40.00 of W.H. Wall and Company. Wrote to P. Williams enclosing a ten dollar bill being his fees in procuring land warrants for William Shaw and J.P. Smith, sent it out of my own packet as I have not delivered either warrant. Rain in the afternoon.

Saturday, October 25. Rose at 5 and walked by the ponds but saw no ducks, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.53, thermometer 81, wind was northeast 3, clouds 3. On Wednesday got from Walberg a Gerand chain made of Matilda's hair which I sent by home. It is well done and is a pretty thing, cost \$15.00. Captain Israel Vogdes' company which has been stationed here near four years left in the steamer **Isabel** for Fort Moultrie. The company commanded by Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John H. Winder having come in to relieve it.

Sunday, October 26. Rose at 5 and walked up to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:40 A.M. barometer 29.57, thermometer 81, wind east northeast 2, clouds 2. Got Hatty's cow driven up as she will a calf soon. Read papers.

Monday, October 27. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond and home by the ponds where I saw

a number of snipe but no ducks. Returned home and bathed. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.57, thermometer 82, wind east southeast 1, clouds 3.

Tuesday, October 28. Rose at 3:50 and went down to the schooner **Dart** where the following person Charles Tift, Felix Senac, Fernando Moreno, William Pinckney, Alexander Patterson, Oliver O'Hara, Davis, Captain Brown, Captain French of the Ship **Don Juan**, Watkins, Phillip Fontane, Winer Bethel and self are going to Women's Key. Got down about 8 and the majority of the party landed with cooking utensils on Woman's Key and Patterson, Williams and I went to Mullet Key where we caught a few fine mullet and Patterson killed a large crane. The net was too light to fish in deep water and Williams is not a good caster. Went to Snipe Key where we saw a flock of Tringae and killed 29, but two escaping. We then ran down to the point of Woman's Key. We found that some of the party had killed a few birds but birds are very scarce but we brought enough to make a good dinner which was eaten and got home about 8 P.M. Found the day had been drizzled and disagreeable but we had a nice day with but one slight sprinkle of rain on the way up. I ate but bread and cheese and apples all day the cooking being too greasy for me.

Wednesday, October 29. Rose about 5:30 and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.58, thermometer 82, wind northeast 1, clouds 2. I feel pretty well after my jaunt but I never want to be in so large a party again, it disconcerts me to see men drink so much and eat like hogs when I go to hunt and am more than usually abstemious in my eating. I ate yesterday nothing but bread and cheese and apples.

The other volume would not hold out to the end of the month so that I had to finish the month in a new one and I fear that the lines of this have faded too much for my eyes though the paper is still good I have used the book for three years. Exchanged my old alarm clock for a new 8 day pendulum clock (alarm) paying \$3.00 difference in the selling price, set it to running and it runs well. Read the answer to Captain Brown.

Thursday, October 30. Rose at 5 and walked up by the Barracks and crossed the island by the Long Road and found when opposite Linn's Pond four ducks flew close to me and soon after heard a gun in Linn's Pond. Two ducks rose out of one of the small holes near the South Beach and lit in one of the ponds which runs along inside the beach. After heard a gun at Mead's Pond and nine ducks flew close over me and lit with the others and someone flush a single duck in the west end of the lighthouse pond. Crossed to the beach and before I got to the road six more ducks (large one) flew towards the ponds and soon after I heard a gun fired in that direction on my way home saw more doves than I have seen together on this Key. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.53, thermometer 82, wind east 1, clouds 6. Bought three pairs of boots from Charles Howe. Yesterday got some cabbage, beets, turnips and onions but they having been purchased with several others and divided do not know what they cost. While I was hunting Matilda sent down town and bought two dozen plates for \$2.00. After dinner went with my gun and killed one duck and one yellow leg. Saw several single ducks flying. Raining nearly all evening but I had a piece of oil cloth which I threw over my shoulders and kept me dry.

Friday, October 31. Rose at 5 and went to the duck ponds and saw but one and that one a dead one killed by the Marshall at my stand. Went to the Long Road Pond and to the slew along the beach. Everywhere I went saw a man, the woods were full of guns and heard several reports. Returned home and bathed. At 9 A.M. barometer 29.51, thermometer 82, wind north northeast 2, clouds 4. Read papers. By a schooner that went out about 9 saw that the wind was northwest in the bay, here it is about north moderate, day pleasant. Carried my clock from the office to Walberg and exchanged for a pendulum clock; the last three days it had lost fifteen minutes per day. Those Jerome marine clocks will not keep time. I have tried them now more than two years.

Saturday, November 1. Overslept and did not hear the alarm and did not rise until about 5 rose and bathed. At 8:20 A.M. barometer 29.50, thermometer 79.5, wind northeast 2. Dr. S.F. Jones died at 4 A.M. of dysentery, he had been confined to the house only since Sunday. He was Virginian and first cousin of James Fitzgerald of Virginia. Read Harpers magazine. Bought at auction barrel of potatoes, barrel of apples and a key of cranberries. They brought down some things from the ship **Isaac Allerton**. Cloudy all day.

Sunday, November 2. Rose at 5 and walked up to the fork of the Salt Pond road and crossed over the island to South Beach and by the beach home. Saw two duck flying west over the sea. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.53, thermometer 82, wind southeast 2, clouds 6. Went up to Dr. S.F. Jones funeral but did not go to the grave as the sun was very hot. Read Harper's.

Monday, November 3. Rose at 5:30. There having been a rain about day light bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.60, thermometer 83, wind southeast 3, clouds 4. Drew up

a claim for duties in the case of the ship **Don Juan** and also in the case of the brig **Bingham**, finished the answer in the case of the brig **Emigrant**. Borrowed \$450.00 of William Pinckney. Paid \$2.06 being my share of the cost of the hunting trip on the 28 of October. Paid servants wages \$19.00. P.M. Read Putnam's magazine. Weather warm.

Tuesday, November 4. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Ponds, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.60, thermometer 84, wind east southeast 3, clouds 4. Today brings the election for Electors of President. I voted the Democratic Ticket, in other words voted against Fremont. There was 164 Democrat majority.

Wednesday, November 5. Rose and walked to the Salt Ponds, returned home and bathed. At 8:15 A.M. barometer 29.60, thermometer 83, wind north northeast 3, clouds 8. The wind sprung up about 8 A.M. The past day or two has been very hot. Read Putnam's magazine. The steamer **Sawanee** (formerly **Pampero**) came in about noon with the troops from Miami bound to the Rio Grand and got coal etc. Wind hauled to the northeast by night, good breeze.

Thursday, November 6. Rose at 5:40 and did not walk as the wind is blowing fresh and hurts my eyes. At 8 A.M. barometer 29.58 thermometer 80, wind east southeast 5, clouds 8. Dan had quite a high fever yesterday. Aconite has reduced it so that he without the fever this morning. Drew up an answer in the case of the ship **Isaac Allerton** this morning. The steamer **Isabel** got in about 8 P.M. and I went down and got my letters one from

Mother, one from the Treasurer enclosing warrant for \$100.00 for fees in the first half of 1856, one sewing machine and one from Electric Machine magazine. Robert Campbell, William Randolph and wife, Mary Fontane, Winer Bethel and Family, the Minister & family and General Harney came in the **Isabel**. The Judge did not come. Hiram Benner also came.

Friday, November 7. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Ponds, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.58, thermometer 80, wind east southeast 4, clouds 3. William Randolph's child died in the night. It is well it is dead for I do not think it was of sound mind. Wrote to the Treasurer. The things for the sewing machine did not come. Went to the funeral in the evening, very few persons were there. I did not go to the grave as it was late and commenced raining slightly. Reverend E.O. Herrick officiated.

Saturday, November 8. Rose at 5 and walked above Moffats when finding the tide so high that I could not cross dry footed, returned home and fixed a pump. Dan is much better this morning he has been quite sick and yesterday he was very weak. The fever did not leave him entirely till in the night. This gives me more confidence in the little pills. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.56.5, thermometer 86.5, wind east southeast 2, clouds 5. Welch showed me letters from the underwriters in Boston and in New York in which they expressed the wish that Samuel Douglas be employed to defend all cases brought in court, but the letters at the same time stated that the Captain has the right to chose his own legal advisor. This will migrate against me and I see nothing left for me but to go west in the spring.

WRECKING COURT CASES

Transcribed from microfilm and edited with explanatory notes by John Viele

This is the first in a planned series of summaries of wrecking court cases transcribed from the hand-written records of the Superior Court, Southern Judicial District, Key West. These records are available on microfilm at the Key West Library

Prior to the establishment of the Superior Court at Key West in 1828, salvage claims were settled by one of the following methods: Prior to 1823:

1. Direct negotiation between the master of the wrecked vessel and the captain of the salvage vessel or, if more than one salvage vessel involved, the wreck master.

2. Mutual agreement between the master of the wrecked ship and the captain of the wrecking vessel to submit the claim to local arbitration.

3. Wrecking captain or wreck master would submit a claim for salvage against the owners and underwriters in the Superior Court at St. Augustine.

In 1823, the Territorial Legislative Council passed an act that required salvage vessels to bring wrecked property to port where the local justice of the peace or notary public would appoint a five-man jury to decide the claim. The master of the wrecked vessel or its owner would select two of the jurors, the salvors would select two, and the justice of the peace or notary public would select one. As it was almost impossible to find anyone in Key West who did not have a financial interest in the outcome of the claim, the juries made outrageously high awards.

This law was declared

unconstitutional by the superior court in St. Augustine and annulled by congress in 1826. Settlement of claims returned to arbitration until the superior court, often referred to as the "wrecking court," was established at Key West in 1828.

The importance of the wrecking business to the economy of Key West is demonstrated by the following statement made by a Key West lawyer in 1838, "You will naturally enquire how we live, and the reply is simple, in, by, and through wrecks. If we are not directly interested in the business, our support comes wholly from it. Stop that and we cease to live."

September 14, 1837

Samuel Sanderson, captain of the wrecking schooner **Sylph** versus the Spanish brig **Pizarro**.

The wrecking vessels, their captains, tonnage, and number of crewmen were:

Schooner **Sylph**, Samuel Sanderson, 81 tons, 11 men in crew
Sloop **Vivelia**, David Cold, 75 tons, 10 men

Sloop **Brilliant**, Latham Fitch, 54 tons, 9 men

Sloop **Actor**, John Walter, 77 tons, 11 men

Wreckers' testimony as given by their proctor (lawyer):

On September 7, while **Sylph** was underway off Caesar's Creek, Sanderson sighted two boats full of men near the reef off the Ragged Keys. They were the captain and crew of the Spanish brig **Pizarro** of Barcelona, bound for Barcelona from Havana with a cargo of cotton and seegars (cigars) and had gone aground on the reef. They said they thought the ship would go to pieces and abandoned it.

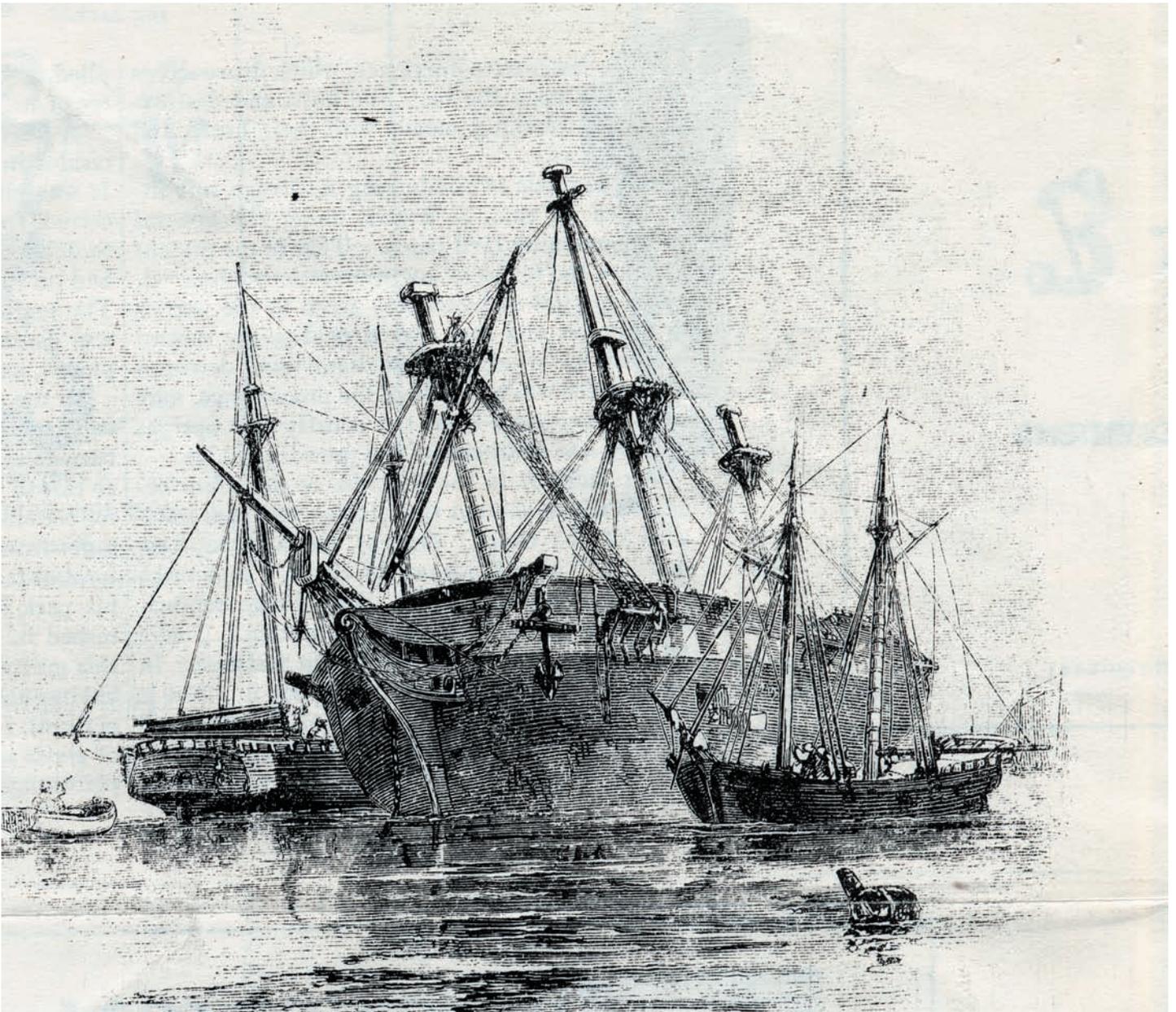
As first on the scene,

Sanderson became the wreck master and would therefore direct the salvage operations, and would allow or deny permission to other wreckers, in the order they arrived, to join in the operation.

Sanderson sent his gig with two men to get other wreckers to help get the brig off. Shortly thereafter, the sloop **Vivelia** appeared on the scene and Sanderson sent her to Key Rodriguez where she found the sloop **Brilliant**. In the meantime, Sanderson sailed **Sylph** to the vicinity of the wreck and anchored in the lee of the reef. As the seas were breaking over the brig he could not go alongside. Crewmen lowered a boat to row to the brig. The brig's captain refused to go back to his ship. On arriving at the brig, Sanderson found that her rudder had unshipped and was missing. He also observed that there were two and one-half feet of water in the hold. He directed his crewmen to cover the companionways to prevent further entry of water from the breaking seas.

Sanderson's crewmen rowed a line from the brig to **Sylph** to be used to haul boats through the breakers as cargo was offloaded. In a little while, the wreckers **Vivelia**, **Brilliant**, and **Actor** arrived on the scene, were taken into a partnership called a consortship, and began helping with the offloading. During the offloading, one of the boats swamped and two bales of cotton floated off. Another wrecker, **Citizen**, found and recovered them, but was not taken into the consortship. (As of the time of the court proceedings, the bales were still missing.) When night fell, the wreckers hauled off to rest their crewmen.

In the morning, the brig's



Key West wreckers at work in this drawing from Harper's New Monthly Magazine of April 1859. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

captain came aboard **Sylph** and suggested that Sanderson strip her of her rigging, which was new, because he did not think she could be saved. Sanderson said he believed she could be saved and with 42 men working, resumed offloading. The salvors ran 200 fathoms of line from the brig to an anchor and at two o'clock in the afternoon, using the brig's windlass, heaved the brig off the reef. Divers from the wreckers found the lost rudder in four fathoms of water, attached a line to it and recovered it. They also found

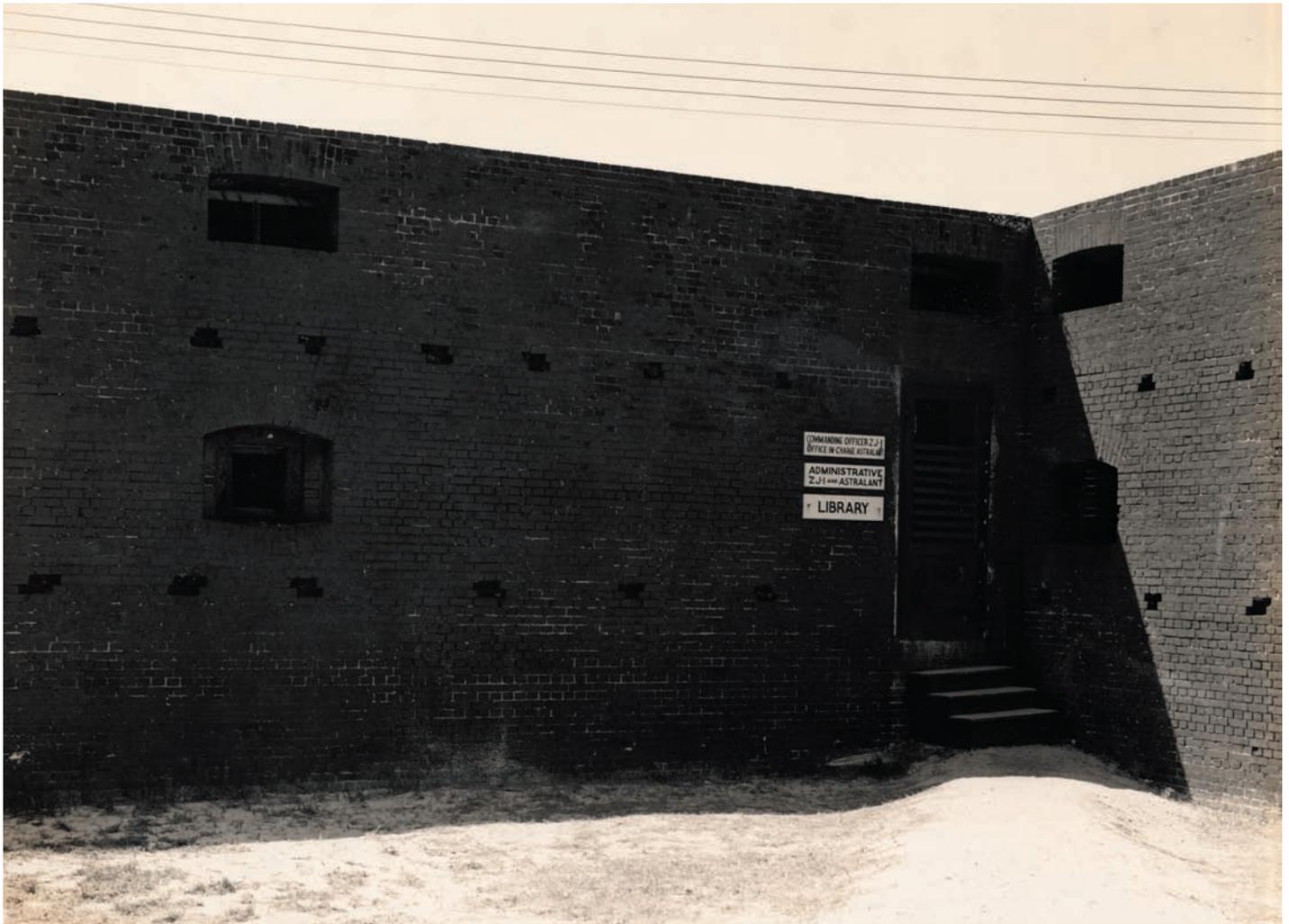
one of the brig's anchors that had been lost. Wrecking crewmen sailed the brig to Key West with stops at Indian Key and Loggerhead Key.

In his testimony, the master of the brig denied that he had abandoned his ship, rather, he claimed, he was on his way to get help. He said his crew helped the salvors willingly and cheerfully. Further, he stated, there was no great danger, and denied proposing to strip the brig of her rigging.

The judge awarded the salvors \$3,444. In another case, I will explain

how the salvage money was divided.

John Viele has been a member of the Board of Directors of the Key West Maritime Historical Society of the Florida Keys for the past 20 years. He is the author of three books on the history of the Keys published by Pineapple Press of Sarasota: "The Florida Keys – A History of the Pioneers," "The Florida Keys, Vol. 2 – True Stories of the Perilous Straits," and "The Florida Keys, Vol. 3 – The Wreckers."



Meacham Field administrative offices and library in the Martello Fort photo taken on March 13, 1945. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

((Meacham from page 1)

was subsequently turned over to the Navy as no longer needed by the Army. Actually the Navy was using the field concurrently with the Army at a much earlier date, and was even undertaking construction since there was already correspondence between the Bureau of Yards and Docks and the Officer-in-Charge of Meacham Field on 30 July 1942 regarding construction of LTA facilities under contract NOy 4849. NAS Public Works Department uses 10 December 1942 as the date on which the Chief of Naval Air Operational Training assigned Macham to NAS for use as a satellite field.

The field was originally built by Pan American in 1927 as a two-runway airport in connection with its air mail service between Key West and Havana, Cuba, (this being the second foreign air mail contract).

During the 1930's civilian use of the field increased, Key West being practically isolated from the mainland so far as overland travel was concerned. This was especially true after the 1935 hurricane washed out Flagler's overseas railroad, and before the new highway to Miami was completed. In 1938, however, Pan American suspended operations due to insufficient business, and dismantled their facilities. In 1939, during the national emergency, the

field was used to some extent by planes on neutrality patrol. By 1941 only occasional commercial, private and Air Corps planes were stopping there. A letter written by the Asst. Commandant, Naval Station, Key West, in March 1941, in answer to a request made by CNO of all District Commandants as to civil airports which needed to be improved for the benefit of the Navy stated:

1. The area indicated on Enclosure (A) for development of a civil airport, is now owned by the Key West Realty Company. Mr. William R. Porter, President of the Key West Realty Company, stated that this property could be leased for use as an airport at one dollar per year, but with the stipulation



Blimp landing at Meacham Field during WW II. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

that should the property be sold to a new owner, the latter would have the right to take possession of the property in thirty or sixty days notice. This area was formerly used by Pan American Airways, but is now used only occasionally by commercial, private and Air Corps planes.

2. The present field has 2 marked off runways – one 1430 ft. long, the other 1000 ft. long. The surrounding area is covered with mangrove bushes, which could easily be cleared away, providing ample space for lengthening of the runways. The land is very little above sea level, hence a certain

amount of filling in and grading would be necessary to insure dry runways during exceptionally high tides or heavy rains. Obviously paved runways should be provided if flight operations were not to be interfered with at certain periods.

3. It is believed that this field should be improved sufficiently to:

(a) Facilitate the operation of naval aircraft in this area of strategic importance. A suitable field at Key West would facilitate the ferrying of high ranking officers and other distinguished passengers, by eliminating the transfer of passengers by boat at Miami, a transfer that involves service from

either the Coast Guard or Pan American Airways.

(b) Facilitate the training of naval aviators by assigning suitable utility and fighter planes to conduct practice gunnery exercises with the patrol squadrons based at the Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

(c) Facilitate the necessary movements of naval aircraft by providing a landing field between the mainland of Florida and Cuba, a field that at times might be exceptionally useful for an over-water flight of navy or marine corps

(Continued on page 10)



Mess Hall at Meacham Field taken on March 13, 1945. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

(Meacham from page 9)
landplanes.”

A further letter from the C.O., NAS, in July of 1941 stated that: “Pending the completion of Boca Chica Airport, the Commandant is advised that the old Pan American Airport at Key West could be reconditioned in approximately two weeks time and thus afford take off and landing facilities for defending aircraft, which it is believed should be naval aircraft”¹ In October 1941 the Navy Department, jointly with the War Department, recommended Key West as one of the civil airport projects to be developed.

On or about 19 December 1941, then, the Army leased the field from Key West Realty Company. And the Navy became interested a few months later in

taking it over as a satellite field for NAS, Key West, for the Naval Air Operational Training Program and for lighter-than-air operations.

B. East Martello Tower Reservation

Adjoining the field at the south end was a piece of Army property, approximately 17 acres in size, containing a historic fort, built in 1861, and several theater-of-operations type structures erected by the Army in 1942. When the Navy decided to start advanced lighter-than-air training at Meacham, January 1944, it ran into difficulties so far as housing, messing, transportation, and office and classroom space were concerned, there being practically no such facilities on the field proper. For the first few months no other arrangement could be made than to billet staff and students at seaplane

base and to house administration, shops and ground school in buildings located in the center of the field adjacent to the landing area.

On 17 March 1944, as of noon, the U.S. Army discontinued use of East Martello Tower Reservation and, through local agreement, NAS, Key West, took over its operation and administration. The blimp men, training program and officers were then moved into the vacated barracks and hutments. A portion of this property, 7.46 acres which encroached upon the runways, had already been in use by the Navy under a five-year permit granted by the Secretary of War 5 August 1943.

On 27 July 1944, the Army transferred ownership to the U.S.

Navy of 13 acres of this Reservation, along with buildings, equipment and improvements. The Army retained title to the remaining 3.7 acres, including the Fort itself and an AT&T cable hut in which was located the controller station for the seacoast searchlights also within the excluded part of the Reservation. Local Army authorities, however, since April 1944, have allowed Blimp AstraLant to use rooms in the Fort for classrooms and offices, pending issuance of formal permission from the Secretary of War.

The Fort itself is one of two historical forts first built by the Army in Key West in 1861. Roughly pentagonal in shape, these each consisted of central citadel, about 40 feet high, surrounded by a courtyard, around the edge of which was placed a series of casemates of arched earth covered brickwork. Stone gun mounts were constructed but cannon were probably never installed, since, with invention of rifled cannon, these became obsolete shortly after their completion.

East Martello and West Martello Towers housed the only Union troops to be permanently garrisoned south of the Mason-Dixon line during the Civil War, and the Army has retained the properties since then mainly for their historical value. Virtually their only use has been as observation and fire-control points during practice firing of the coastal artillery guns located at nearby Fort Taylor. For several years, being in disuse, the towers were opened to the public, whose souvenir hunting proclivities resulted in their present partially-ruined appearance. In the 1930's the Army, with only 30 or 40 men stationed in Key West, employed West Martello Tower as a storehouse



The water tanks at Meacham Field on March 3, 1945. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

and in connection with coastal defense facilities. East Martello was more or less abandoned, becoming a favorite subject for artists and a picturesque Mecca for tourists.

In 1942 the Army re-manned East Martello and installed larger mobile guns (equipment of the 50th Coast Artillery) along Roosevelt Boulevard. Light machine guns were placed atop the walls but no armament was provided inside. One battery of men was mentioned here then—of the 50th Coast Artillery at first, then of the 31st Coast Artillery. It was these latter who moved out March 1944 when the Navy took over.

IV Construction of The Base

Two runways (1430 ft. and 1000 ft. in length) had been built at Meacham in 1927 when Pan American Airways established an airfield there. Major portion of the construction work, however, was accomplished by the U.S. Army in 1942-43 prior to transfer of the field to the Navy, approximately \$300,000 being expended by the Army Engineer Corps for this purpose. More than \$115,000 of this went

toward enlarging and improving the by then run-down field, \$60,000 going for two additional runways, and other money spent on resurfacing the two old ones. Two blimp mooring circles and taxiways were also put in. On the East Martello Reservation were erected 10 hutments, four barracks, two latrines, a messhall, a pump house, four water storage tanks and a septic tank, together with water, power, telephone and sewer lines. All buildings were of temporary nature.

Naval construction amounting to approximately \$260,000 expanded the above facilities—some of this being started before the Navy actually acquired the property. On the leased property, a concrete garage and barracks building were completed in April 1943, together with an additional septic tank and wooden storehouse. Three prefabricated buildings were erected the summer of 1943, on the Reservation area, to house Operations, Administration, and Duty Office. Further small buildings have since been set up, to house

(Continued on page 12)

(Meacham from page 11)

synthetic training devices, gunnery training, and radio radar. Extension of public utilities was continued, a power sub-station being added in early 1943. Improvements to the field facilities included two more LTA mooring circles and masts, constructed May 1944, and additions to the runways and taxiways.

B. Functions and Uses

(I) Original Function

Original purpose of the Navy in acquiring Meacham Field in 1942-43 was to provide a satellite field for NAS, Key West, in connection with the Naval Air Operational Training Program and for Lighter-than-Air operations, as well as to have a ferrying point for the Caribbean area. Both LTA and HTA were based here at the start (two blimp mooring circles built 1942-43).

(II) Change in Function

Commissioning here of Blimp AstraLant (Airship Anti-Submarine Training Detachment, Atlantic Fleet) on 1 January 1944 changed Meacham Field from an operational base to an LTA training base. Mooring facilities and helium storage (limited capacity) were added and made it possible to use Meacham for combat training of blimp crews, with special emphasis on anti-submarine tactics. There has also been tactical experimentation and development of new weapons and techniques by Blimp AstraLant.

In addition to LTA, this field has been used by planes attached to NAAS, Boca Chica, for practice carrier landings, and also by planes visiting NAS Key West Seaplane base.

A commercial aspect was

added when National Airlines, Inc., was granted permission to use the landing area for the purpose of taking and discharging passengers. It began these operations on 8 February 1944 with three flights a day, changing a few months later to two flights, and just recently reverting to the three. Its office and room is located in an abandoned Navy hutment.

(III) Operational Use

Upon declaration of war and until January 1943, U.S. Coast Guard units operated from the field as an advanced base (home ports St. Petersburg, Florida, and Dinner Key, Miami, Florida). During this time Army engineers had begun enlarging the base and the Army Air Forces (17th Anti-Submarine Squadron) moved in until late 1942 or early 1943, when they transferred to Boca Chica Field. For awhile during this period Army and Navy used the field concurrently. Navy Squadron VS3D-7 has based there with OS2U land planes from November 1942 until January 1943 when the planes were fitted with floats and moved to the Seaplane base. Since then, planes of Fleet Air Wing Twelve have based sporadically during changes over from wheels to floats or vice versa.

In early 1943, the first blimp patrol squadron (1ZNP-21) began using Meacham as an advanced base out of Richmond, Florida, and Blimp Hedron 21-1 was established here for minor maintenance purposes. LTA activity, however, was slight until 1944, so that through most of 1943 the field was used but infrequently by the Navy.

On 10 February 1944 Airship Utility Squadron One was commissioned at Meacham, relieving fleet blimp squadrons of utility duties, and Blimp AstraLant was placed under its administration.

Blimp AstraLant maintained two airships for its training program, making with other airships flying down from Richmond on advanced hops, a total of from two to four blimps based at the Field at any one time.

(IV) Training Use

Meacham was used at intervals during 1943, 1944 and 1945 for bounce drill and carrier qualification of heavier-than-air pilots in training at Boca Chica Field.

LTA training began with establishment of Blimp Astralant under Commander, Fleet Airship Wing Two, on 1 January 1944, with a staff of nine officers and one yeoman. Establishment of this A/S program of training, experimentation and development, had been directed by the Commander, Air Forces Atlantic Fleet, on 30 October 1943. Actually the first class convened at Meacham 22 December 1943 for flight training over weekends, but on 6 January 1944 all training, including ground, was transferred here from Richmond, Florida. By 14 January, personnel had increased to 5 officers and 100 men. Advanced ground and flight training, with emphasis on A/S tactics, was given experienced combat blimp crews. Blimp Hedron Two furnished logistic and maintenance facilities. Liaison was maintained with the Commander, FAW 5 A/S Training Detachment for coordination the Airship Training Schedules with other fleet training activities in the Key West area. During its first week, Blimp AstraLant operated with a single airship, K-112. It was assigned a second airship 31 January 1944 and since operated with two.

Five crews per week trained until May 1944, when the number was reduced to four. A subsequent



Barracks at Meacham Field taken on March 13, 1945. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.

reduction to three crews per week took place in November 1944. The course lasted two weeks at the beginning, but was lengthened to 17 days later. On 1 January 1945, when the 50th class reported for training a new schedule was adopted in accordance with which a class of two combat air crews reported each Sunday to be detached three weeks later. New lectures were added in ordnance, navigation, and electronics, and new A/S experimental exercises used in flight.

Various training devices were employed, including a \$100,000 MAD trainer, a Link, 3-A-2 gunnery trainer and other gunnery devices.

C. Development of Facilities and Services

(I) For Personnel

a. Housing

Until April 1944, although a few men lived in a garage-quarters building (erected by the Navy near

the landing field in April 1943, one room, capacity 16 men), most of the crews had to be housed and fed at NAS, Key West. Between January 1944 and April, this resulted in overcrowding of the barracks at NAS. Transportation also was a problem.

Already in December 1943, the C.O. of NAS had asked the Commandant of Key West Barracks if there was any space available in Army Buildings on East Martello Tower Reservation. In April 1944, after the troops had vacated that area, the Navy under a temporary arrangement with the Army moved into facilities there. Among buildings thus acquired were four barracks (34 men capacity each), a mess hall, two latrines, and 10 hutments (5 men capacity each). Three of the barracks furnished LTA enlisted men housing. (The officers were not provided for but have continued to date to be quartered

at NAS.) The fourth barracks was converted into a combined Ship's Service, Recreation Hall, and Post-office. Some of the rated men lived in the hutments.

By January 1944 there were five officers and 100 enlisted men stationed at Meacham. By June, the capacity was 130. By December, Blimp Hedron-2 Det. 21-3 had two communications officers, one warrant officer and 70 to 75 enlisted men, while Blimp AstraLant ZJ-1, Airship Utility Squadron and Airship A/S Training Det. had 20 officers and two enlisted men. On the average, 150 personnel, including 40 officers and 110 enlisted men were stationed at Meacham Field. As of January 1945, capacity of the barracks there was 162 and all bunks were occupied.

b. Messing

All Meacham personnel messed

(Continued on page 14)



Meacham Field barracks alongside South Roosevelt During WW II. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

(Meacham from page 13)

at NAS KWF until 10 April 1944 when a separate mess for Meacham was established under jurisdiction of the NAS Commissary Officer in the former Army messhall. Supplies were drawn from NAS but prepared at Meacham. The messhall by Army counting could accommodate 48 officers or 96 enlisted men. The Navy divided in into galley, messhall for enlisted, and a partitioned section for officers, who lunched there although taking other meals at NAS. By June 1944 the capacity of the galley was changed to feed 30 officers and 100 enlisted. While NAS furnished most of the galley help, one cook was supplied by Blimp Hedron-2.

c. Medical

NAS Medical Department oversees all medical work at Meacham, but Blimp Hedron-2 furnishes the pharmacist's mate. Sickbay is maintained in one of the hutments.

d. Recreation

Recreational facilities have consisted mainly of the recreation hall, which was outfitted with a Ship's Service (branch of NAS's), radios, ping-pong tables etc. Volley ball and basket ball courts were also provided on the station, as well as a sailboat for use outside working hours. A rearming scow could be used for recreation purpose when it was not in service as a target-tow. Swimming could be done from a diving board on a pier which jutted out to dredged channel waters where the water was cooler and clean.

Money for recreation comes out of NAS Ship's Service profits.

e. Post Office

This was established about April 1944 in one corner of the Recreation Hall as a branch of NAS post office.

(II) Aviation Facilities

a. Landplane Facilities

Meacham Field now has four hard-surfaced runways (of rolled marl) as follows:

Dimensions	Bearing
------------	---------

150 x 4000 feet	E-W
150 x 4000 feet	NW-SE
199 x 2300 feet	N-S
150 x 3500 feet	SW-NE

Two of these were originally built by Pan American in 1927 (one 1430 ft., the other 1000 ft. long), and were enlarged in 1942-43 by the U.S. Army, which at the same time constructed the additional two for \$60,000. The Navy was responsible for further improvements later.

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|---|

There are refueling facilities, but no maintenance facilities for landplanes, and no provisions for night operations. Parking area is 17,000 sq. yds. (February 1944). The field can accommodate 18 planes.

b. LTA Facilities

These include four mooring circles, 250 ft. diameter, with masts (two of the masts portable, two fixed). Two of the circles were built early 1943 by Mackle Leach Construction Co. under NOy 4849, the other two in May 1944 by Charley Toppino & Sons (being needed incident to establishment of the combined HTA and LTA Anti-Submarine Training program in the Key West area).

Blimp Hedron 2 has maintenance shops, but the blimps must return to Richmond, Florida, for all major overhaul.

There is no large helium storage area, only a small supply being kept on hand.

3. Local Obstruction

Four mooring masts – 50 ft. high

SW – Five radio towers

SW – Three radio towers – 321 ft. high

NW – Three radio towers – over 200 ft. high

NE – One radio tower – 150 ft. high

4. Crash Facilities

(Marine Transportation)

One crash boat (No C9181 rearming boat) was assigned to Meacham prior to March 1944 for purposes of air-sea rescue, tow target services to airships of the detachment, and recreational trips for crews assigned for instruction.

5. Communication Facilities

These are provided by telephone lines and radio communication with NAS. Telephone is by Southern Bell Co. Telegraph by

Western Union (through NAS KWF or city). One VHF Transmitter and Receiver SCR-522A was acquired for Meacham in 1944.

6. Ordnance

Provided and hauled from Naval Magazine on Fleming Key.

(III) Station Facilities

a. Supply

Furnished by NAS KWF, assisted by NOB KWF and NAS Richmond, Florida. A storehouse was built by the Navy in early 1943 in the center of the field by the landing area. (Bldg#2) It is 40' x 42', has two doors 10' wide x 12' high, ceiling height 12.66', and allows for 1680 sq. ft. general storage space. Gasoline distribution is by tank truck. Helium storage space 14' x 14' is provided in Bldg. #1.

b. Public Works

Grounds and buildings are maintained by NAS KWF Public Works Department.

c. Transportation (Land)

Transportation has been a problem at Meacham Field since no passenger vehicles were assigned that activity. An air station bus stopped at Meacham three times daily on its run to Boca Chica and the Naval Hospital. Since City bus lines have been uninterested in providing bus service there, it was recommended in February 1945 that a passenger bus for liberty parties be provided the field. A space 28 x 28 feet is allotted in Building #1 for garage space.

d. Utilities

Electric – City Electric Company plus one 25 KVA Diesel Generator.

Water – One 5400 gallon cistern, plus Florida Aqueduct system. Chlorinating equipment was installed March 1945 to improve aqueduct water.

Sewage – One sanitary sewer to a septic tank and two storm sewers to tidal flats.

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Pan American Airways field about 1928. Photo credit: Monroe County Public Library.

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