

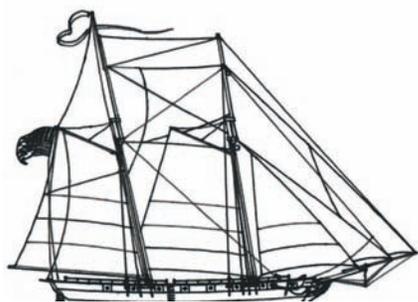
Florida Keys

Sea Heritage Journal

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USS SHARK



 OFFICIAL QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE KEY WEST MARITIME HISTORICAL SOCIETY

William Beverly Randolph Hackley

I first read William Beverly Randolph Hackley's diary about 25 years ago. Since then I have transcribed all of the Key West part of the diary, the only account of family life in Key West in the 1850s. During the research I have found information about him and his family and met a number of his descendants and found a photograph of one of his daughters Charlotte Hackley Spencer (Sea Heritage Journal, Spring 2009). Now thanks to Jane Jones we have this photograph of William Hackley.

The diary was saved by Dr. R. L. "Lee" Goulding son of Harriet Hackley and Frank Ross Goulding, III. Harriet, one of William's three daughters, was the 2nd wife of Frank. His first wife was her sister Sarah Hackley.

To help understand the diary I have been gathering information about Hackley, his family and the people in his diary.

William Beverly Randolph Hackley was born to Richard and Harriet Randolph Hackley on October 7, 1806 in Virginia. Richard was a successful and well-traveled merchant, who resided at various times in Fredericksburg, Norfolk, Richmond, New York, Florida and Spain. In 1789 he was an established merchant in New



William Beverly Randolph Hackley. Photo credit: Jane Jones.

York. In 1806 he was appointed US Consul at St. Lucia, Spain, and in 1807 he was appointed US Consul at Cadiz, Spain, the latter being a more prestigious position

at that time. Richard had claims to 12 million acres of uncultivated land near present day Tampa, Florida. He was deeded this Florida land by the

(Continued on page 3)

(Hackley from page 1)
Duke of Alagon on May 29, 1819, who previously had been granted this tract by the King of Spain by order dated December 17, 1817. The land claim was eventually denied by the United States Supreme Court. William's mother Harriet Randolph Hackley was born November 24, 1783 in Goochland County, Virginia at "Tuckahoe", and died in 1859. She was buried in Hollywood Cemetery, Richmond, Virginia. She was the daughter of Thomas Mann Randolph Sr., of Tuckahoe and Anne Cary. Her brother Thomas Mann Randolph Jr. was married to Thomas Jefferson's daughter. The family was well connected politically and her daughter, William's sister, Harriet Randolph Hackley, was born June 26, 1810 in Albemarle county, Virginia at "Monticello," Jefferson's home.

William moved to Florida (probably to Tallahassee) in 1826. The details of his education are not known, but he was admitted to the Florida bar on March 31, 1827 and began practicing law in Key West in late 1828. A diary for the last half of 1830 to September 1831 survived. Fragments of 1843, 1845 and 1848 survived but are difficult to understand. The most important part of the diary is from July 1853 to May 1957 when the family left Key West for Joliet, Illinois. He kept the diary for part of the time in Illinois. The Monroe County Library has the entire diary on microfilm

William married Matilda Rhoda Agnes Clark Folker in 1841. She was the daughter of Joseph Folker MD and Charlotte Caroline Hememann of Charleston, South Carolina. Her sister Sara was married to Alexander Patterson. She is commonly referred in the diary as Sister Sara. Her husband Alexander was a merchant who also served as Mayor of Key West 1841, 1848-1851, 1856, 1861-

1864, 1865-1866 and 1867-68. Matilda and William had three daughters Harriet, Sarah Annie and Charlotte. One son, William, died shortly after birth 1853.

He practiced law in the wrecking court and was U.S. District Attorney for the Southern District of Florida from 1849 until 1857, when he left.

During his time in Key West the population was less than three thousand so during his daily life he had dealings with most of the town who appear in the pages of the diary.

Below are diary entries by William Hackley for December 1856 and January 1857.

Monday, December 15. Rose at 4:30 and walked to the Salt Pond. Heard a duck in the small pond opposite the lower garden. At 8:20 a.m. barometer 29.50, thermometer 78, wind northeast 2, clouds 3. Judge William Marvin went up to the ship Issac Allerton in the schooner Florida.

Tuesday, December 16. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.64, clouds 7, cool. Spent the evening yesterday at Mrs. Stephen Mallory's. In the afternoon walked with Matilda and the children to the Fort. Mrs. Douglas and Mary Ann Porter and families came in from St. Marks.

Wednesday, December 17. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.71, wind north northwest 4, clouds 3. Read papers. After tea went with Matilda to see Mary Ann Porter. Several vessels came in during the day.

Thursday, December 18. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:15 a.m. barometer 29.68, thermometer 71, wind northeast 3. Bought a coat for Beverly but it is rather large for him, cloud not get a smaller one.

Read papers. I am sore all over and took two dozes of Nux, one of Brionia and put a wet bandage on body at bed time.

Friday, December 19. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 A.M. barometer 29.65, thermometer 72, wind east southeast 4, clouds 4. Read Putnam and Knickerbocker magazines. Paid John Conde his bill \$20.72. Sister Sarah Patterson dined with us.

Saturday, December 20. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.57, thermometer 75, wind east southeast 4, clouds 6. Read Knickerbocker magazine. A man at the Barracks and Ben Bowman, a Mystic carpenter, died with yellow fever. King gave me his petition in behalf of the Insurance Company of New Orleans for proceeds of sale to be sent on to them and prays that Captain Baldwin answer it. The steam pump sent out from New York was tried on William Wall's Wharf and throws fifty barrels per minute.

Sunday, December 21. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.52, thermometer 77, wind south southwest 2, clouds 9. There was considerable rain yesterday at the Salt Pond though in town there was only mist. Clouds all day and about 4 p.m. the wind shifted to the northwest with slight rain. The U.S. Steamer Fashion came in.

Monday, December 22. Woke at 5 but did not rise at once because of the cold. Rose and hunted up my net cotton undershirt as it was rather cold, did not bathe. Went down town and found the steamer Isabel had not got in. At 8:40 a.m. thermometer 67.5, wind north

(Continued on page 4)

(Hackley from page 3)
northwest 5, clouds 3. Bought a thick coat of John Curry for \$2.00 and a dozen pair of yarn gloves for \$1.00. The Isabel got in about 7 p.m. having been detained by heavy weather. Captain William Rollins had to go north in consequence of sickness in his family. Captain N. Coste, USRM brought the ship out. Mrs. Welch came in her.

Tuesday, December 23. Rose about 6 and went down to the market and got papers from the Post Office having got letters last night. I got a letter from P. Williams enclosing Richardson's land warrant. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.64, thermometer 65, wind north northwest 5, clouds 6. The wind having backed to the northward and freshened since yesterday evening when it was north northeast. The beach is strewn with millions of fish of all kinds which have been dead for several days as some of them are much decayed, they must have died of disease as the cold has not been severe enough to kill them. I fear that the quantity of them on the beach will create or rather increase disease. Judge William Marvin read his decree in the ship Isacc Allerton giving \$.50 on the net which is not justice to the men that dived into the lower hold, they should have had \$.50 more than the men that got goods from between decks. Captain Benjamin Sawyer died about 1 p.m. After tea Matilda and I went to Mary Ann Porter's and sat till 9 with cousin Susan, Matilda having gone to the church to choir practice. The thermometer in the open air at 9:30 p.m. was 55 degrees.

Wednesday, December 24. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 9:30 a.m. barometer 29.57, thermometer 59, wind north by east 2, clouds 3. The sun shines with but little warmth when I first came down I was so

cold that I could not write with comfort so I walked about. Wrote to P. Williams enclosing \$5.00 for Richardson's warrant, and to the sewing machine men enclosing one gold dollar which with the one I sent them for silk. I want them to send small machine needles with them, Messes Luther Tucker and Sons, Albany, N.Y. for Cultivator, 1857 and Illustrated Annual Register of Rural Affairs enclosing \$1.00, Messes Harper and Brothers, Franklin Square, N.Y. enclosing \$5.00 for their new weekly, called Journal of Civilization, and to C.L. Derby, Actuary of C.A.A., No. 348 Broadway, N.Y., enclosing \$15.00 for subscribed to Harper's, Putnam's, Knickerbocker magazines and to Saturday Night and Godey Lady's book. The New Orleans and New York underwriters have made claim on the residue of the proceed of ship Issac Allerton's cargo and the Judge says that he will retain the funds in court until they can make the adjustment and that the services of the Captain are not wanted longer and allowed him \$150.00 per month and \$10.00 per week board for the time he has been here and Captain Baldwin goes in the steamer Isabel.

Thursday, December 25. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 9:30 a.m. barometer 29.52, thermometer 60, wind east northeast 1.5, clouds 2. Last night it was calm but the wind rose with the sun. Wrote to the editors of Musical World and Times, New York City, enclosing \$2.00 for subscription price for 1857. Wrote to the Solicitor of the Treasury (see letter book). Paid for getting can home \$1.50. Dined as I have for the past 15 years on Christmas Day at Alexander Patterson's. A Negro man named Adam Fatio was killed by a Spaniard with a single blow of a sheath knife the blow perforated the

heart and the man fell dead. Inquest was held and criminal committed. The steamer Isabel got in as usual and Captain Baldwin went in her. Mailed all my letters by noon.

Friday, December 26. Over slept myself and did not walk. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.57, thermometer 63, wind east northeast 2, clouds 6. Weather cold and raw. The children cheeks are getting red. Yesterday had a return of rheumatic pains in my right shoulder for which I took Rhus at night, this morning about the same but not very painful. Made out my accounts against the United States amounting to \$125.00. In the afternoon walked down to the Fort and all over it, they are getting on finely.

Saturday, December 27. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, return home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.57, thermometer 77, wind east by south 2, clouds 8. Red papers. The schooner Dart brought in 124 kingfish, bought one for \$.50. Cloudy all day but pleasant.

Sunday, December 28. Rose at 6 and did not walk or bathe. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.56.5, thermometer 70, wind east by south 1, clouds 9. Read papers.

Monday, December 29. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.58, thermometer 71, wind east southeast 5, clouds 0. Read papers and made a copy of my accounts against the Government. Mr. and Mrs. Felix Senac and Mrs. Stephen Mallory spent the evening. Weather warm but pleasant.

Tuesday, December 30. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.62, thermometer 73, calm, clouds 2 with haze. Hatty has had fever for some days but was free all day yesterday but returned last night. I felt rather bad this

morning since breakfast, by noon I had some fever and ached all over. Went home and took camphor and afterwards Aconite and Brionia. I was quite sick all night, wet bandage at bedtime.

Wednesday, December 31. Rose at 6 and felt better fever is gone but I am sore all over and pains in the stomach, neither walk or bath. I heard that Lucia Talcott's death is in the papers but have not seen it. Down to the office after breakfast, sore all day. Sister Sara Patterson was taken sick pretty much as the children were and I sent her Aconite and Bell to be alternated at intervals of one hour.

1857

Thursday, January 1. Rose at 6 and bathed which seemed to relieve in some measure the muscular pains which I have all over, I feel much better than I did last evening. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.58, clouds 2, heavy dew last night. Wrote report of state of docket to Solicitor of Treasury. At 4 p.m. went to Captain Cornelius Curtis' with Matilda and Hatty by invitation and took dinner and tea in one. After night Wesley Benner came in and he and Mrs. Curtis sang several songs. Hattie's cow had a bull calf in the forenoon her udder is very large and hard but there is but little milk in it.

Friday, January 2. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.56.5, thermometer 75, wind calm, clouds 1 with haze. Paid George Alderslade bill for beef (to Toby) \$11.89. Read papers and Putnam's magazine. Reverend Osgood Herrick paid me for table \$16.00 and Mrs. Ximinez \$2.00 for an iron furnace.

Saturday, January 3. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.60, thermometer 77, wind south southeast 0.5, clouds 9. The calm

weather has lasted so long that the fresh water from the Everglades has drifted down to the Keys. The fisherman say that yesterday in the Northwest Channel the water was fresh enough to drink and that they did drink full drafts of it. The water at the wharfs and in the harbor this morning has the green tinge peculiar to the water near the coasts of the mainland. The fish continue to die in great numbers and of all kinds: kingfish, mullet, morays, trunk fish, grunts etc. lined the beaches making a horrible stench and the water is covered with the dead and drifting out with the tide. Bee's udder is as big as a half barrel and hard and we cannot get the milk to run. Yesterday rubber it with bengling but it does not seem any better, in fact it is larger than it was yesterday we must get it drawn off by some means or other. Got Judge William Marvin to examine and certify my accounts which finished them and they are ready to send on.

Sunday, January 4. Rose at 6 and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 39.61, thermometer 77. Read papers and Putnam's magazine. After tea walked one and half hours on the piazza.

Monday, January 5. Rose at 5 and bathed. At 8:45 a.m. barometer 29.63, thermometer 73.5, wind north 3. Walked to the Salt Pond. Overtook Mr. Williams who told me that his sweet potato vines were killed by the last cold spell and that they had the appearance of having been killed by the frost. The water shows the admixture with fresh and the men say that in streaks it is fresh enough to drink. The blue water was very perceptible in a streak in the channel yesterday. Read papers. Got order of publication in Smith vs. Smith.

Tuesday, January 6. Rose at 5:30 and walked on the beach, returned home and bathed. At 9 a.m. barometer 29.67, thermometer 73.5, wind northeast 2 clouds 1. Read papers. Charles M. Johnson arrived last night and brought my rifle with mini sights and mold and a shot belt all costing \$5.50. The steamer Isabel got in at 10 p.m.

Wednesday, January 7. Rose at 5 and went to market and the Post Office and got papers and a letter from Mother and a parcel from Fowlers & Wells in which they did not sent anything I wrote for. The cotton was in 200 yard spools and they send three almanacs which together are worth \$.37 making in all \$1.32 and I sent them in all \$2.50 and they gave me no credit, the expenses are \$1.58 making the cotton rather costly, \$2.36. They are scoundrels and I shall let them know my opinion of them. Captain and Mrs. Cornelius Curtis took dinner with us and the Captain was so much pleased with the sewing machine that he remained all evening, he and Mrs. Curtis tried to sew but could not succeed though the machine was in perfect order. Byrd sent me six turkeys by the schooner Charles which came safe.

Thursday, January 8. Rose at 5 and walked to the Salt Pond, returned home and bathed. At 8:30 a.m. barometer 29.72, thermometer 72, wind north northeast 3, clouds 2 with haze. The sun shine is dim and the air is raw and cool. Asa Tift and Phillip J. Fontane arrived in the steamer Isabel. Stephen Mallory has been elected to the U.S. Senate for which I am glad as much as David Yulee is disappointed as he was the principal opponent of Mallory as that Mallory makes a good senator he being a hard working man and understands Naval matters pretty well and is chairman of the Naval Committee.

CONTRADICTIONS IN TESTIMONY BEFORE THE WRECKING COURT OR WHO DID THE JUDGE BELIEVE?

On microfilm at the Key West library are the Superior Court ("wrecking court") records of salvage claims by Keys wreckers. As I read and recorded the testimony of the wreckers followed by the testimony of masters of wrecked ships, I often found it difficult to believe they were talking about the same event. I wondered how the judge was able to determine what really happened and how he was able to reach a just decision in setting a salvage award. Here are some examples:

Salvage of Brig Ashore in the Tortugas - April 1830

In April of 1830, John Burroughs, master of the smack (fishing sloop) Mary Ann, sighted a brig aground near North Key in the Dry Tortugas. She was the Union on a voyage from New Orleans to Havana with a cargo of flour, hogs, and hoop poles. Burroughs boarded the brig, showed his wrecker's license, and offered assistance. The master, saying he could get off without help, rejected his offer. Soon thereafter, the wind freshened to near gale force and drove the brig further aground. Her master changed his mind and signaled Burroughs that he would now accept assistance. In the meantime, three other smacks arrived on the scene and offered to help. The crews of the four smacks went aboard the brig, offloaded a large portion of her cargo, and kedged her off the shallows. During this process, the brig's rudder was knocked off. The smacks towed the brig into Tortugas harbor, constructed and hung a new rudder, then piloted her to Key West.

In Superior Court, the wreckers, through their proctor (lawyer), told their version of the salvage operation, maintaining that the winds were near gale force throughout the operation. The master of the brig in his testimony, strongly disagreed saying that despite the "boisterous state of the weather, the libellants [wreckers] were not deterred from procuring a valuable fare of fish, as he is informed and believes and therefore avers, that fishing can only be carried out during calm and mild weather."

Despite the contradictions as to the state of the weather, the facts remained that the wreckers had gotten the brig afloat, constructed and installed a replacement rudder, and brought her safely to Key West. Judge Webb awarded the salvors one-fourth of the proceeds from the sale of the brig's cargo.

Salvage of Brig on the Reef Near Key Rodriguez - April 1830

At the same time the brig Union was driven ashore in the Tortugas, another brig was cast up on the reef off Key Rodriguez in the upper Keys. She was the Spanish brig Nuestra Senora de la Gracia with a cargo of sugar and logwood. Thomas Rook, master of the schooner Florida, sighted the brig, went aboard, and offered assistance which the master accepted. In the meantime, two more wrecking vessels arrived on the scene. Rook took them into a consortship - an agreement to share the salvage award with the owners of the wrecking vessels and their crews according to an agreed upon formula.

The crews of the three wreckers

went aboard the brig and offloaded 131 boxes of sugar, one pipe (large, 145 gallon cask) of wine, and three puncheons (80 gallon casks) of water. They attempted to haul the brig off the reef, but squalls held her fast and caused the wrecking vessels to pound on the bottom. Some of the wreckers went back aboard their own vessels and hauled them off into deeper water. Those remaining on the brig made sail and the brig came off the reef. When the brig was in deeper water inside the reef, the wreckers dropped anchor and then discovered that her rudder had been knocked off. The next morning, there were more squalls which drove the brig aground again. The wreckers were able to kedge her off and tow her to Key West.

In the subsequent court hearing, Rook emphasized that there was real danger of losing the brig because of the recurrent squalls. The master of the brig denied there was any great danger, nor were there any squalls. Despite the master's assertion, Judge Webb awarded the salvors \$2,500.

Salvage of Ship Mary Maria Wrecked on Pickles Reef - April 1837

In April, 1837, George Eldridge, master of the wrecking sloop America, discovered the ship Mary Maria stranded broadside to the reef on Pickles Reef in the upper Keys. The ship was on a voyage from New York to New Orleans with a cargo of assorted goods. Eldridge boarded the ship and offered his assistance which was accepted. He was soon joined by four other wrecking vessels which he accepted

into a consortship.

According to Eldridge's testimony in court, the seas were heavy, the ship was pounding on the reef, and her crew had refused to do anything to get her off.

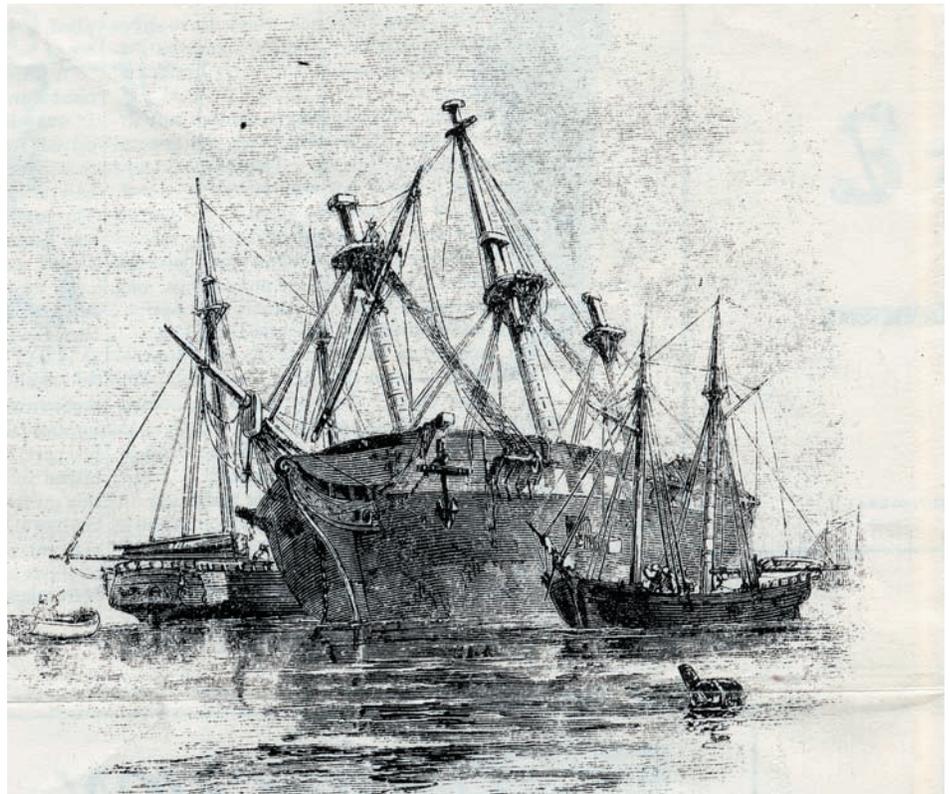
The five wreckers, with a total of forty-one crewmen, hauled alongside the ship, offloaded cargo, and kedged the ship off the reef. In the process, the ship's rudder was unhung and the pintles broken. Eldridge took her in tow and brought her safely to Key West. There, surveyors determined that the ship was beyond repair.

In his testimony in court, the master of the *Mary Maria* denied that his crew refused to work, and said that the ship came off the reef because of a change in wind direction not because of the wreckers' efforts. Judge Webb was not swayed by his statement and awarded the salvors forty percent of the salvage value of the ship.

Salvage of Barque *Cyrus Butler* Ashore Near Hillsboro Inlet - July 1837

The barque *Cyrus Butler*, on a voyage from New Orleans to Liverpool with a cargo of cotton, was driven ashore and bilged (flooded) on the beach near Hillsboro Inlet (at Pompano today) in July 1837. At that time, the Second Seminole War had been in progress for over a year. The Seminole Indians maintained undisputed control of mainland South Florida and had conducted raids into the upper Keys. A year earlier, they had attacked and burned the lighthouse at Cape Florida. Just two months before the *Cyrus Butler* had been driven ashore, a band of Seminoles had ambushed a shore party from the *Carysfort* lightship on Key Largo and killed the captain and one of the crewmen.

After eleven days, the crew of the stranded barque had been unable to



A drawing of Key West wreckers at work. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

kedged their ship off the beach. The master, one of the mates, and three crewmen manned the ship's boat and went in search of aid. Five days later and out of water, the boat was sighted by two wrecking schooners, the *Sylph* and the *United States*, off Caesar's Creek. When the two schooners, with the boat's crew on board, reached the barque, they saw that there were several Indians in the vicinity. The Indians were lighting fires apparently to signal other Indians to come to the wreck.

The wreckers began offloading cotton to their vessels. To speed up the process, they hired the barque's crewmen to help at three dollars per day. The seas were rough, and the schooners were being damaged as they rode alongside the barque. Crewmen stuffed cotton in the leaks. One of the schooners came close to sinking. When they had offloaded all the cotton they could carry, the wreckers took the passengers and crew of the barque on board and sailed back to Caesar's Creek. On

arrival, they ran both schooners partly aground to prevent their sinking and made further repairs to the leaks.

In court, the wreckers pointed out the real danger of an attack had more Indians arrived on the scene while they were offloading the cotton. By way of rebuttal, the master of the barque stated that there was no big danger from the Indians. He said that the passengers had talked to them, had purchased vegetables from them, and a few had even slept, unarmed, in their tents.

It is possible that the Indians were trying to maintain friendly relations until reinforcements arrived. There does not seem to be any other explanation for their behavior. Judge Webb apparently considered that it was a dangerous situation for the wreckers as well as the passengers and crew of the barque. He awarded the salvors one-half of the value of the cotton saved which amounted to \$6,846.

Naval Air Station Seaplane Base

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

Introductory statement

U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, embraces the following activities:

Naval Air Station, Key West (Seaplane Base), Meacham Field, Key West (Blimp Facility and Satellite Field for land planes) [Journal Summer 2009], Boca Chica Field, Boca Chica Key (land planes) [Journal Winter 2008/2009] and U.S. Naval Magazine, Fleming Key, Key West

Since Boca Chica has functioned variously as a Naval Air Facility, a Naval Auxiliary Air Station, and an independent Naval Air Station before being merged with the Seaplane Base into one Air Station April 1945, its history will be covered in a separate report.

The other activities will be described in this report. Although much general data pertaining to all of them is included under this story of the Seaplane Base, each activity has devoted to it in addition its own separate section.

I. Chronology

A. Date of Origin

15 December 1940 - established as U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, and by the Secretary of the Navy

18 February 1941 -

Commissioned

B. Commanding Officers

20 Jan 41 to 17 Feb 41: Lt Francis R. Scholly, A-O, USNR Capt of the Yard until 17 Feb 41, when he became Executive Officer, Hometown Pennsylvania.

18 Feb 41 to 29 Nov 42: Lt. Comdr. (Comdr., Capt.) James McKay, USN.

29 Nov 42 to 4 Sept. 43: Comdr. Dolbert L. Conley, USN, Hometown: Wichita, Kansas.

4 Sept 43 to 9 Dec 43: Capt. Albert Handly, USN Hometown: Lake City, Fla.

9 Dec 43 to ____: Capt. Allan P. Flagg, USN (Ret), Hometown: Long Island, New York.

C. Transfer of Command (Higher Echelons)

10 Feb 40 Placed under command of the Commanding Officer, Naval Station, Key West, Florida.

15 Dec 40 Established as U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

25 Sept 41 Placed under command of the Commandant, Naval Operating Base, Key West, Florida, which is reestablished as of this date to comprise Naval Station, Naval Air Station and Naval Hospital, all in Key West

Jan 42 Under Seventh Naval District, which is made a separate entity with headquarters in Key West as of this date (NAS reports to 7ND via NOB).

4 May 42 Assigned to the Chief of Naval Air Operational Training Command (along with NAS, Jacksonville, NAS, Miami, and NAS, Banana River, Florida).

15 Oct 43 Reassigned to Com 7 for Fleet use as an activity of NOB, KWF, CNAOTC relinquishes control of NAS.

15 Sept 44 Assigned to Naval Air Bases, Seventh Naval District. NOB, KWF, to relinquish control as NAS as soon as new organization is set up as determined by CNO.

D. Subsidiary Commands

13 Oct 41 U.S. Naval Magazine, Key West, Florida established on Fleming Key and placed under command of Commanding Officer, Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

10 Dec 42 Meacham Field assigned to Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, as a satellite field by the Chief of Naval Air Operational Training.

1 Apr 43 Boca Chica Field occupied as a Naval Auxiliary Air Facility under administration of NAS, KWF.

23 Oct 43 Naval Auxiliary Air Facility Air Station, Boca Chica, redesignated U.S. Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Boca Chica, Florida, as an activity under NAS, KWF.

25 Nov 43 Orange State Pier, Key West, is assigned by NOB, KWK to NAS, KWF for use of utility craft in connection with Fleet Air Wing Five training.

8 Feb 45 Naval Auxiliary Air Station, Boca Chica, Florida, is redesignated U.S. Naval Air Station, Boca Chica, Florida, as an activity under the Commander Naval Air Bases, Seventh Naval District.

31 Mar 45 Naval Air Station, Boca Chica, Florida, is disestablished; and Naval aviation Facilities at NAS, KWF and at Boca Chica are combined to form one activity under designation of U.S. Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida.

II Narrative

A. Background

(I) Function in the Aeronautical



A PBM with squadron personnel on the ramp at the Seaplane Base. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

Organization

Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, is a seaplane base with dredged landing and takeoff areas comprising four runways (the largest 11,440 feet) night landing facilities, a large hangar and Class "C" A&R facilities. It is capable of supporting three VPB squadrons (36 PBMs) plus one VSO squadron (18OS2Us) with operational and training facilities and "Tender" services; and it has 11 barracks, five BOQs, two swimming pools and other recreational facilities for accommodation of personnel.

It was first used by the Navy in World War I when part of the present site was leased for training planes, observation balloons and

dirigibles based in Key West along with surface craft to block in any attempts to obtain oil from Mexican ports and two patrol adjacent waters for enemy submarines. At that time there were three small ramps, 22,000 yards of concrete parking area and paving, a blimp hangar, and an administration building. The base seems to have continued in use throughout the early 1920's, after which it was visited by naval aircraft only sporadically until 1939, when planes of Patrol Wing Five arrived for an emergency patrol.

Since the establishment as a full Naval Air Station 15 December 1940, it has functioned as both an operational and a training seaplane base for fleet aircraft

squadrons and has afforded them facilities for minor upkeep and, later, limited repair. The number of squadrons based here at any one time ranged from one to three or four, the majority being PBM units under Fleet Air Wing Twelve (PBY's at the beginning), plus one OS2U squadron, VS 62, attached here since November 1942. Coast Guard planes have used this stationed as an advanced base. The nature of operations long has been largely Anti-Submarine Patrol and Escorting Convoy. Training has been primarily along the lines of Anti-Submarine Warfare.

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(II) General Data

a. Geographical

Naval Air Station, Key West, is located at 24 34' 00" N, 81 47' 20"W, on the northern edge of Key West, in the United States' southernmost city occupying a coral island approximately 4 miles long and 2 miles wide, 100 miles off Florida mainland and near the southern tip of the Florida Keys. To its west stretches blue-green Gulf of Mexico, to the east the Atlantic Ocean, to the south the narrow Straits of Florida and the Gulf Stream separating the island from Cuba 90 miles away.

b. Aerological

Temperature: Just north of the Tropic of Cancer, the city as a semi-tropical climate, frost-free, with a normal year round the temperature of 76.8 F. Summer temperatures average 82, with a usual range of from 69 to 94 winter, 70, with range of 54 to 84. 60 years of weather records show the warmest temperature as 100 and the coldest as 41(both occurred in 1886).

Humidity: Relative humidity throughout the year averages as follows: at 0230-81%, at 0830-30%, at 1430-70%, at 2030-77%. The range extends from a maximum of 100% to a minimum on rare occasions in the 40's. The atmosphere is about 3% dryer in the warm months, April through August, than in winter.

Rainfall: Rainfall averages 38.11 inches annually, the driest month, April, producing 1.29 inches on the average, and October the wettest, 299 days a year being clear or partly cloudy. Predominant clouds are of cumulus type. Ceiling averages 2,000 ft. Showers prevail, most frequent in September and October. Thunderstorms occur in summer, averaging twelve in August, eleven

in July, ten in September; they close the landing area for 15 to 30 minutes.

Fog: Fog is extremely rare, dense and even light fog averaging less than one day per year. In 1944, three days of fog occurred, which is above average for this area. Visibility is far above average except when smoke haze from the Florida Everglades is blown in by northerly winds which may bring the smoke as far south as the Cuban coast.

Wind: Surface winds blow predominately from the east all year, with slight changes to ESE during summer and to NE during winter. Average yearly velocity is 8.6 knots. Windiest month is November, average 9.6 knots; calmest month is August, with 7.3 knots. Winds are gusty when thunderstorms pass the station, up to 35 knots for short duration. Hurricane winds exceed 90 knots.

Waterspouts are frequent August and September, forming on bases of cumuli-nimbus clouds. At time four or five waterspouts have been observed in the area at one time during the day, generally mid to late afternoon.

Hurricane season runs from August through November. The most recent hurricanes to affect Key West occurred Labor Day, 1935, and 18 October 1944. The former left the city untouched but isolated due to destruction of an overseas railroad which was its chief artery to the mainland. The latter, striking between Key West and Havana, Cuba, caused some slight damage which the Navy easily repaired. This 1944 hurricane closed the area for 29 hours and 19 minutes, ceiling and visibility were zero, a heavy rain, 5.6 inches, accompanied it; winds reached an average of 62 knots for one hour, gust attaining 90 knots during the peak; lowest atmospheric pressure recorded was 29.07 inches.

Total hours instrument flying for the year 1944 was 48 hours, 17 minutes. Total hours closed (including the hurricane) for 1944 was 46 hours, 24 minutes. Thus unrestricted flying conditions prevailed 99% of the time. The weather is practically ideal for operational flying and training and is indirectly responsible for low plane less.

c. Topographical

Most of the land comprising the seaplane base is part of reclaimed land made by constructing a retaining wall or dike around the outer boundaries and filling the contained area with sand and rock pumped from the harbor bottom by hydraulic dredges. The land was built up 1904 to 1912 during construction of Flagler's Florida East Coast Railroad overseas extension from the mainland to the Florida Keys. (Only exceptions to this are the portion of Army property in use for housing Waves, which is permanent and not reclaimed land, and an extension to Trumbo Point which was built up by spoil from Navy dredging processes during 1942.) Elevation of the land is 5 to 6 feet above mean low tide. Mean tidal range is 1 to 2 feet.

The seaplane operating area is mostly dredged (through Navy contract work July 1941 to January 1943), although it also includes water of sufficient natural depth for plans purposes.

(III) Acquisition of the Land

a. Explanatory Note

The land in use at present by Naval Air Station, Key West Florida, was purchased or leased at various times in several lots. For convenience of this report, the lots have been given numbers.

Parcels 1 through 4 inclusive, comprise land belonging to the Air Station proper (Seaplane Base), #1



The BOQ and officer's pool on Trumbo Seaplane Base. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

and #3 including property which was the site of a naval air base in 1917-18.

Parcels 5 and 6 are grounds employed by the Lighter-than-Air Satellite field, Meacham Field.

Parcel 7 is an Army hospital area, Key West Army Barracks, where Waves attached to the seaplane base are quartered.

Parcels 8, 9 and 10 belong to Boca Chica Airfield.

Parcel 11 is Orange State Pier.

Parcels 12 and 13 are property of the U.S. Naval Magazine, Key West.

The seadrome area was acquired in two large portions which have not

been given any special designation in this report since they are readily discernable on the map. Maps delineating each of these parcels are enclosed in the Appendices, as are also their legal descriptions.

(IV) Construction of the Base

a. Periods of Construction

Construction of NAS, Key West, Florida, (Seaplane Base) took place in three distinctive periods: Period 1 (December 1939 to September 1940): During the first, temporary type buildings were erected to provide Emergency Aviation Neutrality Patrol facilities for 12 VPB planes. These include hanger, barracks, BOQ, dispensary, storehouse, fire

house-garage, and water storage and evaporator facilities. The work was accomplished by lump sum contract, primarily by Ivy H. Smith Co., Jacksonville, Fla., (NOy3895), although the firehouse-garage and fire pump house were put up by Southeastern Construction Co., Miami, Fla. (NOy 4260), and the hangar by a combination of firms. All structures were completed and ready for occupancy by September 1940 except for the hangar, which was partially occupied in October and finished in December. Appropriation seems to have been granted for the physical year 1940.

(Continued page 12)



The Main Gate at the Seaplane Base. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

(Seaplane from page 11)

Another structure - Radio Building and Masts - requested after fleet personnel moved into the Air Base, was erected in November 1940 by W.P. Thurston Co. Richmond, Va. and evidently financed out of appropriations for 1941. WPA services were employed in the spring of 1940 a 60-day project of clearing, landscaping and grading. Cost of this whole initial construction appropriation \$575,000.

Period 2 (June 1941 to July 1943): major construction of the base took place during this second stage, after establishment as a full Naval Air Station. Actually two phases are discernible with in this period: (1) June 1941 to May 1942, when it was necessary to provide wartime facilities for the operation and maintenance of two to four patrol squadrons; and

(2) May 1942 to July 1943, when it was desired to expand and add facilities for operational training under the Naval Air Operational Training Command. Construction went along continuously, however, under one contractor, Mackle Leach Construction Co., Miami, Florida (cost plus fixed fee contract NOy 48 49), so that the two phases merger into one so far as growth of the station was concerned. Approximately \$3,277,000 was spent in building NAS at this time. Also during this period and under the same contract, over \$200,000 was spent on improving Meacham Field for use by LTA; and about \$670,000 on the U. S. Naval Magazine Area, Fleming Key, for magazines at other necessary public works such as bridge and docks. In addition, between July 1941 and January 1943 dredging of the seaplane landing and takeoff area was accomplished at a cost

of approximately \$3,500,000 by Standard Dredging Corp., New York City (contract NOy4966). Funds for all these projects were of appropriated for the fiscal year of 1942 and 1943.

Period 3 (January 1944 to date): beginning with January 1944 and continuing on to the present, there has been sporadic expansion of this station to provide additional supply, repair and personnel facilities as needed. The contractors have been variable, each being hired for an individual project on a lump sum contract basis. Among them are:

- | | |
|----------|---------------------|
| | Patrick McCarl |
| NOy 8325 | Jan 44 to Apr 44 |
| | Mackle Co. |
| NOy 6492 | Jan 44 to Mar 44 |
| NOy 7944 | |
| NOy 8402 | Sprague Constr. Co. |
| | Feb 44 to Nov 44 |
| | Charley Toppino |

NOy 9429 May 44 to date
 Paul Smith Constr.
 NOy 9429 May 44 to date
 NOy 9616
 NOy 9639
 NOy 10855
 Gabel Constr. Co.
 NOy 10996 Dec 44 to Feb 45
 John H. Mann & Son
 NOy 11724 Mar 45 to Mar 45

Approximately \$385,000 was spent on the seaplane base during this period, including expense of alterations to the section of the Army's Key West Barracks taken over July 1944 for use as WAVE quarters. Approximately \$56,000 was also spent for further LTA facilities and improvements at Meacham Field, while the cost of erection of additional magazines and services on Fleming Key ran between \$80,000 and \$95,000.

A. Total Cost of Construction

The station was built for about \$5,500,000 plus \$3,500,000 for dredging.

III. Functions and Use

(I) At the Station's Inception: Emergency Neutrality Patrol (September 1939 to June 1941). Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, was originally constructed December 1939 to December 1940 to furnish temporary operational and minor upkeep facilities for seaplane squadrons flying over the waters between the Florida Keys and Cuba on Emergency Neutrality Patrol.

At least as early as February 1939, 18 planes of Patrol Wing Five, Air Scouting Force, U.S. Fleet, had been using old World War I ramps here, the planes sitting out in the weather and the men living in tents. Immediately after the President's declaration of a limited emergency status September 1939, Patrol Squadron 53 began arriving

with a dozen PBYS2, which, with occasional help from PBYS5s of VP 31, 32 and 33 and similar detachments (from Guantanamo, San Juan, Coca Solo and Norfolk), performed neutrality patrol in this area until mid-1941.

Plans for construction of the Air Base got under way concurrently with arrival of VP 53 in the winter of 1939, and the base was formally established as a Naval Air Station, as soon as construction was completed, 15 December 1940. Its function - as an operational neutrality patrol base - remain the same until June of 1941.

(II) Place in Chain of Command

a. Higher echelons to which NAS, Key West, has been responsible

All during the construction stage and for some months afterward, NAS came under command of the Commanding Officer, Naval Station, Key West, Florida. On 25 September 1941 it was placed under the Commandant Naval Operating Base, Key West, Florida, which was reestablished as of this date to comprise the naval shore activities of this area - Naval Station, Naval Air Station, and Naval Hospital - remaining under this command until 4 May 1942, when the Air Station was assigned to the Chief of Naval Air Operational Training Command. (NOB, Key West, was brought under Seventh Naval District until reassignment to NAOTC.) On 15 October, 1943 NAS reverted to Com 7 for fleet use as an activity of NOB. On 15 September 1944 it was again removed from NOB to be assigned to the newly created Naval Air Bases Command, Seventh Naval District, with headquarters at Key West and with the Commanding Officer of the Air Station serving also as the Naval Air Bases

Commander.

b. Lower echelons coming under cognizance of NAS: The seaplane base was the only activity to constitute Naval Air Station, Key West, Florida, until a need for expanded facilities arose while under NAOTC (May 1942 to October 1943).

First addition was Boca Chica Field, 6 miles east of the seaplane base and taken over from the Army 1 April 1943, because of its excellent runways, as a Naval Aviation Facility for land planes. It was re-designated a Naval Auxiliary Air Station 23 October a 1943 and established as a separate Naval Air Station on 8 February 1945.

Second addition, although obtained from the Army, was Meacham Field, 2 miles ESE of the seaplane base. This was leased property with short runways built up by the Army and was useful as a satellite field for visiting land planes, bounce drills, and as an LTA facility. On 10 December 1942 it was assigned to the Air Station by CNAOT as a satellite field. As early as March 1943 the Navy began construction there of blimp mooring circles and masts, but it did not take over the lease to the property until 1 July 1943.

U.S. Naval Magazine, Fleming Key, Key West, had come under the administrative jurisdiction of the Commanding Officer, NAS, up on its commissioning 13 October 1941, but always technical matters have been controlled from the start by the Bureau of Ordnance.

Orange State Pier was assigned to NAS by NOB, Key West, on or about the 25 November 1943 for the use of fleet aircraft and training at Boca Chica and the seaplane base, and it has since been operated and maintained as part of the latter

(Continued on page 14)

(Seaplane from page 13)

although the property itself still belongs to NOB.

(III) Changes in Function

a. By July of 1941 whole squadrons which had been operating from Key West on Emergency Neutrality Patrol- VP31, 33, and 52 - were ordered out, after very brief enjoyment of recently built facilities, and for a few months no planes were based here.

However, in March 1941 CNO had designated Key West to have “facilities for the operation and maintenance of two patrol squadrons” in support on the Navy’s 15,000 plane program. And in May the Navy Department had stated to the House Naval Committee in report aimed to procur appropriations for purchase of more land for NAS, Key West, that: “In the event that the neutrality patrol is discontinued, the Key West Station can be most advantageously used as a letter training base for an East Coast VP squadron. Climatic conditions and the availability of the excellent and extensive area for aircraft gunnery training render this location extremely desirable for the routine peacetime operations.”

This alternative was soon brought in focus. In June and July began a huge new program of construction to expand personnel and repair facilities, and in October the first change in the Air Station’s function took place.

Operational Training under ComAirLant (October to December 1941, March to December 1942) For in October 1941 arrived one of ComAirLant’s operational training squadrons, VP, of Patrol Wing Eight, with eight PB5As. Training predominated in the squadron’s program until declaration of war, when it was ordered away as temporary emergency work



Dredging seaplane runways. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

December 10 and 11, two planes leaving for Norfolk and six for Coca Solo. Beginning with February 1942, however, these planes dribbled back to Key West and by 1 April a sufficient number had returned to resume their operational training. This program carried on until September 1942 when VP 81 transferred to newly commissioned Fleet Air Wing Twelve and ComAirLant transferred its operational training elsewhere.

b. Early Wartime Patrol (December 1941 to January 1943) In the interlude just after outbreak of war and for several months thereafter, all anti-submarine patrols from Key West were handled by Coast Guard PB5s and OS3U3s (home ports St. Petersburg and Dinner Key, Miami, Florida) under control of the Commander Gulf Sea Frontier and the Commander Inshore Patrol, and by PB5As of Patrol Wing Five, including a re-organize VP 53 in Key West July to September 1942 and other planes from Coco Solo, Guantanamo and Pensacola. The one squadron permanently based in Key West at that time, VP 81, was here primarily

for operational training rather than patrol. Yet it was during this period the Nazi submarine menace reached its peak, the first sinking occurring February 1942, the number increasing until May (when 49 ships were attacked, 10 salvaged and 39 sunk), then gradually declining. The last Coast Guard units left about January 1943, although occasional planes returned from time to time for short duty after that date.

c. Operational Training under NAOTC (Seaplane, Land planes & LTA) (May 1942 to October 1943) Concurrent with these two other

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functions - as a base for A/S patrol planes and a center for ComAirLant training- NAS in May 1942 up on its assignment to CNAOT was slated to adopt still a third function as a training base for use of this newly formed command. At first it seemed to be the plan to transfer all training activities to Naval Air Operational Training and to put thousands of students through this station after moving out all fleet units. But the major part of the plan never quite materialized and ComAirLant continued to carry on its VP 81 training program independently here, only to be replaced September 1942 by training at operations under newly commissioned Patrol Wing Twelve. In fact, the largest number of students to be billeted at Key West at any one time, who so overflowed the existing facilities that they had to be quartered in double-bunk enlisted barracks, were charges of ComAirLant's rather than of NAOTC. Main construction of the Air Station, already under way at this time, was due to efforts of the fleet, NAOTC being instrumental in procuring only a few buildings, such as Synthetic Training and Link Celestial Navigation Trainers, and several boats.

It was during this mixed regime of ComAirLant and NAOTC, however, that NAS its greatest expansion with acquisition of Boca Chica field 1 April 1942 (negotiations being as far back as September 1942) for land planes operations and operational training, and of Meacham field 1 July 1943 as a Lighter-than-Air operational and training center.

On 15 October 1943 NAOTC relinquished control of the Air Station and of both these subsidiary activities.

d. A/S Patrol and Convoy Coverage under FAW 12 and

ComGulfSeaFron (September 1942 to date) Major wartime roll of the Air Station- the supporting of two to three operational squadrons on anti-submarine patrol and escorting convoy – dates from September 1942 when Patrol Wing Twelve (designation changed 1 November 1942 to Fleet Air Wing Twelve) was commissioned at Norfolk with its headquarters to be in Key West, Capt. W.G. Tomlinson, USN, commanding, reporting here 26 September. The new wing was established to give closer supervision of the anti-submarine air coverage under operational control of the Gulf Sea Frontier, this previously having been afforded by Patrol Wing Five, while administrative officer were over 1000 miles away.

With a major share of the task of combating the submarine menace on its shoulders, Patwing 12 immediately acquired VP 81 and assigned it to patrol and convoy work until on 18 December 1942 the squadron transferred to Commander Caribbean Sea Frontier (many of its personnel being retained to form the nucleus of Hedron 12 just organized in Key West 23 September). In November another squadron was added. VS3D7 (commissioned in Key West 1 November 1942, redesignated VS 62 on 1 April 1943) – whose 18 OS2U3s were likewise put to use as a strike, search and escort group. Other squadrons, of PBMs, arrived later for similar duty: VP 202 in February 1943, replaced in February 1944 by VP 213, in turn replaced November 1944 by VPB 204. An additional squadron VP 201, came in July 1944, since which time the station has supported three squadrons – VS 62, VPB 201 and VPB 204. Although wing headquarters moved from Key West 20 November 1942, a wing staff detachment was left behind to continue the work.

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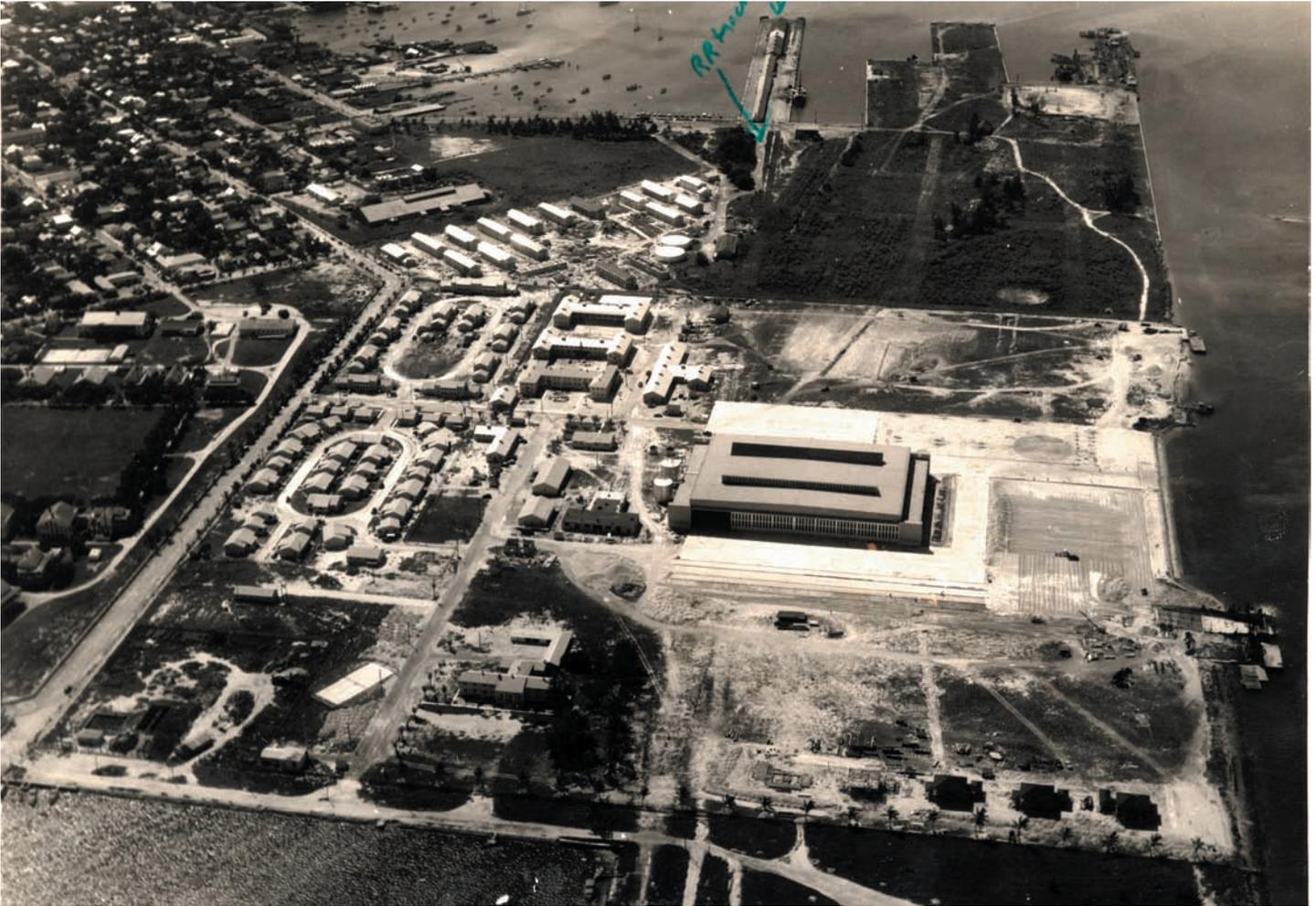
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Trumbo Point and the Naval Air Seaplane Base in 1941. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

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