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UNITED STATES NAVY AND MARINE CORPS BASES, DOMESTIC

PAOLO E. COLETTA, *Editor*
K. Jack Bauer, *Associate Editor*



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plant. With its various tasks now including LTA training, especially for ASW, and maintenance of 2,231 trucks, something had to give after Weeksville was made the homeport for Helicopter ASW Squadron 3. The solution adopted was to prepare a paved parking area for the trucks and to house the helicopters in one of the airship hangars (a new garage and shelter building would have cost \$450,000). As of December 1952 the value of the automobiles stored at Weeksville was set at \$7 million.

On 1 July 1957, the Navy Department decided to close a number of air facilities between that date and 1 December 1957. Among these was NAF Elizabeth City, which was disestablished on 1 October 1957.

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WESTMORLAND, CALIF., SALTON SEA NAVAL AIR BASE, 1942–1946

In a large area of sand dunes, the Salton Sea covers an area about twenty miles wide and forty miles long at a sea level of minus 241 feet. The nearest town is Brawley, thirty-five miles away, a bit north of Imperial and El Centro in the extreme southeastern corner of California. To add to its isolation, it is four miles from U.S. Highway 99 and forty miles from the nearest mainline railroad. However, because of its advantageous location it is sheltered from high winds by surrounding mountains and excellent climate (although summer temperatures reached 125°F and the humidity 90 percent), the Navy began using it as an emergency landing and operational area for seaplanes, which also used the sea to bomb targets. It was surveyed in early 1940, and the Navy Department and Treasury Department agreed to share the costs for buoys and a small pier at Sandy Beach for use by naval and Coast Guard planes, with support provided by the Coast Guard at El Centro. It also was a service site for seaplanes on ferry flights and in emergencies. Quarters near Eiler's Salton Sea Resort, Mecca, Calif., known as Seaplane Base, Salton Sea, were abandoned two years later for better ones at Sandy Beach.

The commissioning of Salton Sea Naval Air Facility occurred on 8 October 1942, Lt. Frank A. Robinson, A-V(S), commanding, under the command of San Diego Naval Air Center, its primary purpose being to serve as an operating base for VP-type planes, the first of these, four PBY-5As, arriving on 29 October 1942. On 27 March 1944 carrier planes were also sent there to engage in rocket work. On 10 August 1944 the facility was designated a Naval Air Base under command of the Commandant of the Eleventh Naval District, and on 22 De-

cember 1944 it was redesignated a shore facility to support twelve VPB(MS) or twenty-four carrier-type planes.

On the 2,780 acres the Navy acquired, of which 853 were government-owned, early in 1942 the Navy spent \$1,250,759 to build a seaplane ramp and also a 4,000-foot runway (a clay-surfaced strip). Late in 1942 these facilities were used by Paramount Studios for the making of the film *Wake Island*. The barracks built cost \$60,506, a marine railway completed on 1 August 1944, \$38,000, and a concrete runway for landplanes, about \$1 million.

In the summer of 1943, Salton Sea was chosen for rocket development work, the Navy cooperating with a unit from the California Institute of Technology. For this purpose a separate landing strip was completed on 15 February 1944. CASU-53, "Det. A" reported for rocket training on 27 March 1944. In July JATO (jet-assisted takeoff) was also tested on the base. And on 10 November 1944 experimental work began by an Army-Navy unit that used B-29s to conduct high-altitude bombing at between 25,000 and 40,000 feet. Nevertheless, the main mission of Salton Sea remained its rocket training for carrier-type planes, for which it provided targets and the availability nearby of five outlying fields for emergency use. Twelve crash boats and amphibian aircraft provided air-sea rescue service.

On 6 September 1945 the first of a series of Aviation Planning Directives determining the postwar status of the outlying auxiliary air stations and facilities in the Eleventh Naval District was received, and a "roll up" program was initiated. Included in the roll up was Salton Sea, which on 13 November 1946 was transferred to the War Department.

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WHIDBEY ISLAND, OAK HARBOR, WASH., NAVAL AIR STATION 1942–

NAS Whidbey Island is located on a narrow island between the Strait of Juan de Fuca and Puget Sound which is the second largest island in the continental United States. Access by modern highway is via routes 5, 525, and 20 from Seattle. The Olympic Mountains are thirty miles to the southwest; the Cascade Range forty miles to the east. The resulting weather is year-round mild temperatures, light winds, and above average flying conditions, with the sun shining for 75 percent of daylight hours.

The mainly Irish and Dutch pioneers in the Oak Harbor area of Whidbey Island, named after British Capt. James Cook's first mate, Joseph Whidbey, depended upon Indian canoes for transportation until steamers began serving the coast in the 1930s. With the decision in 1940 to build a two-ocean Navy, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox appointed the Rear Adm. John W. Greenslade