

THE MILITARIZATION OF THE PUGET SOUND: A GATEWAY TO THE PACIFIC,
1880-1900

By

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To the Faculty of Washington State University:

The members of the Committee appointed to examine the thesis of CHRISTOPHER R. HALDERMAN find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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Abstract

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This thesis examines the militarization of the Puget Sound during the nineteenth-century and its connection with an increasingly imperialistic-minded United States.

With the construction of the Puget Sound Naval Station beginning in 1891 and the subsequent installation of fortifications guarding the entrance and thereby protecting the naval station and cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and the newly established town of Bremerton, the Puget Sound became a highly valuable asset to the United States. The militarization of this area stemmed from the United States increased “imperial” interest in accessing the Pacific Ocean, and a military complex located in the Pacific Northwest offered the country a location that was closer to Japan and China than any other current naval base. With the Pacific Northwest secured, the United States had facilities along the Pacific coastline which could harbor a modern naval fleet, which was essential to power projection during this time.

Initial explorations were conducted by various surveying teams in the first half of the nineteenth-century, and this was coupled with growing interest towards expansion into the

Pacific Ocean. The strategic value of the area was well known by 1880, however, due to the massive decline in military spending following the Civil War, implementation of these plans was quite slow. Due to increasing expansionist rhetoric, the need for a modern navy capable of challenging powers such as Great Britain began to take shape by the early 1880's. To go along with a modern navy, the realization of the strategic value of the Puget Sound intensified due to the Endicott Board of 1886 which analyzed the poor state of American coast defenses and the 1888 naval commission tasked with selecting a site in the Pacific Northwest for a new naval station. The location ultimately chosen was Port Orchard, which encompasses modern day Bremerton.

With the construction of a modern navy and the Puget Sound's strategic value secured, the region grew into a formidable military complex by 1900. This complex formed a key component of the United States ability to expand into the Pacific Ocean. This complex also allowed for the region to prosper.

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Dedication

For my parents, Ronald and Lynn Halderman.

INTRODUCTION: HISTORIGRAPHY AND UNITED STATES IMPERIALISM CONNECTED TO THE PUGET SOUND

The Great White Fleet, the common nickname given to the United States naval fleet's tour of the world in the early 1900's, marked a proclamation that the United States was an imperial power that had the potential to challenge other imperial powers of the day. On order from President Theodore Roosevelt, the fleet, which comprised of the United States' most advanced warships, circumnavigated the globe starting in December of 1907 and concluding in February of 1909. Indeed, this would be the largest collection of battleships to ever circumnavigate the globe.¹ While masquerading as a voyage designed to show an attitude of good faith towards other nations, there was nonetheless an aura of majestic power being displayed with United States battleships, painted in glimmering white, steaming from port to port. The United States was a rising force in the imperial power scene. Whether viewing United States expansion from a domestic perspective, evidenced by the rapid expansion westward towards the Pacific Coast, or from an international perspective, highlighted by the United States victories over Spain in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898, there was no denying the growing power in the North American continent. Naval power at the turn of the twentieth century was the preeminent way to display and flex this muscle.

Theodore Roosevelt's Great White Fleet entered the Puget Sound on May 23, 1908. Comprised of 16 modern battleships of the United States Navy, the fleet toured the Puget Sound area, and importantly the Puget Sound Naval Yard, until May 27 of the same year. Why was an

¹ Kenneth Wimmel, *Theodore Roosevelt and the Great White Fleet: American Sea Power Comes of Age* (Washington: Brassey's, 1998), xii.

area of the United States, located in the upper northwest corner of the Pacific Northwest, on the list of stops for the tour of Roosevelt's grand naval fleet? Officially created in 1891, I argue that the Puget Sound Naval Station served as an outlet of United States imperial expansionist aims. Echoing symbols of Manifest Destiny, the construction of a base in the Puget Sound allowed for several diplomatic and strategic goals of the United States to be addressed. An advanced naval base served to further the aims of US expansion into the Pacific, while also consolidating and protecting the contiguous United States. While the naval bases located in San Diego and San Francisco have been historically important to the United States Navy, San Diego did not serve as an official US Naval base until 1922, and Hunter's Point Naval Shipyard in San Francisco was not purchased by the navy until 1940. Therefore, in the mind of an increasingly imperialistic United States government, an official naval base on the west coast of the United States gradually gained importance in relation to US imperial goals.²

The geography of the Puget Sound offered an excellent opportunity for the United States Navy. Bremerton, Washington, where the naval base resides, happens to be tucked away from the Pacific Ocean and is situated in an easily defensible location. Of course the United States was aware of this fact far earlier due to the United States Exploring Expedition from 1838-1842. This expedition conducted an extensive survey of the region, and immediately recognized its unique landscape and potential defensive capabilities. However it took several decades for this dream to be fully realized. After the Civil War, the Puget Sound became increasingly militarized and fortified resulting from the 1886 examination of United States coastal defenses by the Army Board of Engineers. In the same decade, an 1889 naval commission sent by the United States

² Walter LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1963), 11-12.

government tasked with selecting a site for a new naval yard ultimately chose the Puget Sound, and Port Orchard (present-day Bremerton, Washington) in particular, as the region to be developed. By the 1890's, in conjunction with the naval station itself, Fort Casey, Fort Flagler, and Fort Worden resulted as the product of these defensive projects and became known as the "triangle of fire." This increased militarization of the region is a direct result of the strategic importance of the area and increasing United States military ambitions. Thus, by the waning years of the nineteenth-century, the United States secured the Puget Sound as an important part of United States naval and imperial policy, directly influencing diplomatic and strategic thinking.

While the larger aims of United States expansionist and naval policy are important avenues of research, the local component of these larger narratives also warrants examination. I focus on what made the Puget Sound a strategically attractive area to the United States. This area was ultimately being chosen as a site for future United States military expansion and this is directly connected with an increase in imperialistic ambitions. Additionally, I will also address how the surrounding local communities developed and indeed argued with one another as a result of the increased expeditions and surveying brought about from the initial explorations and interest in the region. Important in addressing this question, the state and evolution of the United States Navy and coastal defenses will also be examined, as they were neglected in the immediate decades after the Civil War and needed to play "catch-up" to the established imperial powers. Furthermore, the establishment of a large military complex in a small community tends to reshape that community. In this vein, both military personnel and local members of the Puget Sound community became international actors that influenced the spread of American empire due to the region's ability to project American power through a modern naval installation.

Therefore “local history interacts with international history, and they meet on the ground.”³ How did the emerging local community interact with the increasing presence of the United States military? What was this local community’s attitude and awareness towards the larger aims of the United States? Additionally, what was the community’s role in attracting and supporting the base? By addressing these questions, the history of the Puget Sound, and the interactions between the local and the national are shown to be intrinsically linked.

In a sense, as Bremerton historian Fredi Perry claims in *Bremerton and the Puget Sound Navy Yard*, “Bremerton is the navy.”⁴ Without the presence of the Puget Sound Naval Base, the United States would have needed to adapt its strategic aims accordingly due to the lack of a sheltered, deep-water base in the northwest corner of the United States, capable of harboring the increasingly expanding United States fleet. Therefore the support of the emerging military/local community and their interactions with supporting the physical presence of the naval base and system of coastal fortifications is intrinsically linked to the growth of United States imperialism. The local community benefited economically and industrially from the naval complex, and the navy benefited from this support of the surrounding community. From 1891 onward, the Puget Sound and imperialism operated together as the United States began expanding its borders.

Additionally, the impact the Puget Sound Naval Yard had on the United States lasted far longer than the beginning of the nineteenth-century. In fact, the naval station continued to play a prominent role in United States’ naval strategy throughout the twentieth-century and on into the present. During the Second World War, the Puget Sound Naval Yard served as the primary

³ Jana Lipman, *Guantanamo a Working-Class History between Empire and Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 5-6.

⁴ Fredi Perry, *Bremerton and the Puget Sound Navy Yard* (Bremerton: Perry Publishing, 2002), introduction.

repair facility for allied ships engaged in the Pacific theater that were too heavily damaged to be serviced in Pearl Harbor. This increase in ship traffic resulted in a growth in the population of the area as well. Currently, the Puget Sound Naval Yard serves as a submarine repair and disposal facility and is in fact the only U.S. facility currently certified to recycle nuclear ships. This fact brings in a level of contemporary significance to both the shipyard itself and the surrounding Puget Sound communities, as they continue to play a role in United States military and strategic policies.

Existing Literature

There has been a wealth of information written about the nature and incremental growth of United States imperialism. While presently using “America” and “empire” is seen as a perhaps “taboo” subject due to the negative connotation often associated with the idea of imperialism, the United States acted as an imperial power towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Prominent works lending their ideas to this project include *American Empire: A Global History*, where A.G. Hopkins argues that United States imperialism should be viewed as part of a globalizing process, for American imperialism shares common characteristics with both contemporary and historical empires.⁵ Like Hopkins, Thomas Bender’s *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History*, similarly evaluates the concept of American empire in an imperial context that is “larger than the nation.”⁶ Bender’s aim is to challenge and undo the notion of American exceptionalism, and states that the United States cannot be framed as an

⁵ A.G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 12-13.

⁶ Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 4-5.

isolated nation not influenced by the global.⁷ Charles Maier's *Among Empire's: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* examines the notion that America was a "benevolent empire."⁸ Addressing the problematic nature of American empire, Maier asks how the United States would both expand and be a force for good. "Empires meant conquest and annexations; supposedly Americans did not do that."⁹ This question echoes Maier's concern that the United States commonly asserted that it was acting as a force for democracy and liberation. This newer, increasingly global approach to the historiography is necessary in order to remove the idea that the United States somehow developed in a geopolitical vacuum. Indeed, according to Maier, the notion of empire becomes lost if one evaluates the United States as free from the influences of global events. These concepts directly apply to the history of the militarization of the Puget Sound region towards the end of the nineteenth-century, as strategic and diplomatic influence in the Pacific sphere became increasingly important in order for the United States to assert itself as an imperial power.

At its core, empire requires the acknowledgement of the global. Taken together, the themes presented by these historians are important to this project, for the United States needs to be seen in an imperial sense, and not as a democracy bent on delivering freedom to other parts of the globe. Like other imperial nations, the United States was guided by the expansion of power and territory. Thus these historians' concepts are important to this project, as the examination of the interconnectedness between the Puget Sound and the surrounding community and the ability of this conjoined community to contribute to increasing American imperial power at the turn of

⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁸ Charles Maier, *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 2-3.

⁹ Ibid., 2.

the twentieth century needs to be explored. Important to this thesis is the economic and capitalistic implications of an expanding United States. Walter LaFeber's *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion 1860-1898* argues that economic causes lay at the core of American expansionist policy towards the latter-half of the nineteenth-century. Importantly, LaFeber surmises that American empire did not stem from "spur of the moment thinking", but rather was a culmination of industrialization.¹⁰ With this in mind, the militarization of the Pacific coast of the United States is characterized as a logical conclusion of nineteenth-century United States policies.

Changing the focus to American strategic and expansionist goals specifically to Pacific expansion, Norman A. Graebner in his 1955 work *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* specifically argues that access to the Pacific Ocean rested as the ultimate aim of the United States in the nineteenth century. Continental westward expansion ultimately provided the United States access to the three natural harbors located on the Pacific Coast: San Diego, San Francisco, and the waters of the Puget Sound.¹¹ Graebner demonstrates that these harbors formed the core of future American imperial aims. Access to natural harbors that could house modern ships became a strategic goal for the United States if it was to challenge both European powers in the Pacific and the emerging power of Japan. Using highly nationalistic sentiments such as Manifest Destiny, Graebner aptly describes the importance of the Pacific Ocean to the United States by the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹² Whereas Graebner describes the Pacific Ocean as the ultimate goal of United States westward expansion, Bruce

¹⁰ LaFeber, *The New Empire*, vii-viii.

¹¹ Norman A. Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study in American Continental Expansion* (Santa Barbara: Ronald Press Company, 1955), viii-ix.

¹² *Ibid.*, x.

Cumings, in *Dominion From Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power*, connects American westward expansion all the way to the heartland of China.¹³ Written more than half-a-century later, Cumings challenges the common historical view that the United States was focused more on the Atlantic side of the nation. Instead, Cumings advocates for a dual posture, “an Atlanticist dimension in United States relations with Europe and a Pacific dimension that began with the frontier and mid-nineteenth-century relations with East Asia.”¹⁴

Highlighting the importance of access to the Pacific Ocean to the increasingly imperialistic United States is easily connected to the creation of the Puget Sound Naval Yard. Without access to deep-water, natural harbors, America’s imperial aims would have been dealt a serious blow, as Graebner and Cumings aptly demonstrate. Therefore this project utilizes the assertions presented by these historians in relating the importance of the Pacific Ocean to United States imperialistic endeavors. The Pacific Ocean was a gateway to Asia, and the United States responded by constructing naval bases and bolstering populations along the west coast of North America. Specifically, the Pacific Northwest became more and more important to American policy, and the Puget Sound and communities located within it were embroiled in this increasing importance.

With this in mind, literature regarding Bremerton and the Puget Sound Naval Yard specifically is much more limited. However, Brian Casserly’s dissertation, “Securing the Sound: The Evolution of Civilian-Military Relations in the Puget Sound Area, 1891-1984,” provides an in-depth examination of the military presence in the Puget Sound area from the inception of the

¹³ Bruce Cumings, *Dominion From Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), ix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, ix-x.

naval base in 1891 through to the later decades of the twentieth century. Focusing on the history of the Puget Sound, Casserly examines the development of the “long relationship between Puget Sound communities and the military”, and the “changing nature of civilian-military relations over the course of the 20th century.”¹⁵ Drawing upon extensive primary sources, Casserly demonstrates the importance of the militarization of the Puget Sound area to United States strategic interests, while at the same time highlighting the importance of the public history concept of the “built environment”¹⁶ upon the development of communities.¹⁷ While Casserly’s emphasis is not placed on American empire and its connection to the Puget Sound community specifically, it is nonetheless clear from his work that the connections are discernible. Casserly leans on historical concepts brought forth in Roger Lotchin’s *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare Welfare*. Lotchin’s examination evaluates the union between the military and the metropolis, demonstrating how these two actors worked with one another. Cities competed for military bases and military contracts to ensure economic growth, which in turn pushed these

¹⁵ Brian Casserly, “Securing the Sound: The Evolution of Civilian-Military Relations in the Puget Sound Area, 1891-1984,” (PhD Dissertation: University of Washington, 2007), abstract.

¹⁶ In public-history terminology, the built environment refers to human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity. This can entail a place as small as a single house up to a larger built-space such as a large military complex. This is in contrast to the natural environment, which encompasses non-human constructed places and structures. However, the built environment must interact with the natural environment. In this case, the building and completion of the naval base and surrounding coastal defenses transformed the Puget Sound area from a “frontier” to an increasingly more urbanized location that was able to perpetuate and support American imperial agenda. Thus the natural environment in the area was continually built upon and transformed with the addition of the naval base itself, but also the surrounding community that developed in support of the base. For more on this subject, see Tim Cresswell’s *Place: A Short Introduction*, William Cronon’s *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, Dolores Hayden’s *Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Alan Baker’s *Geography and History: Bridging the Divide*, Seth Bruggeman’s *Here George Washington Was Born: Memory, Material Culture, and the Public History of a National Monument*, and Kathleen Brosnan and Amy Scott’s *City Dreams, Country Schemes: Community and Identity in the American West*.

¹⁷ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, abstract.

cities forward onto a national and “imperial” scene.¹⁸ These ideas are intrinsically linked to growth in the Pacific Northwest at the turn of the twentieth-century, as the region found itself on an increasingly international stage. The increasing military presence and resulting building of the Puget Sound community grew out of a response to the strategic interests of the United States.

The arguments presented by these scholars all shape the goals of this research. Taken together, they explore and answer what American imperialism is, and how it differs from other forms of imperialism near the end of the nineteenth-century. The United States, surrounded by large oceans on each side and rapidly industrializing, set its sights on increased revenue stemming from capitalistic ventures that required overseas territorial acquisitions. Additionally, United States imperialism conjured images of democracy and a civilizing mission aimed at spreading the liberties rewarded to citizens of the United States. Incredibly influential on imperialistic endeavors of this period rested on the concept of Social Darwinism.¹⁹ On this premise, the United States “had to seize whatever share of the earth it could, for not to do so would give advantages to rivals and in the long run would lead to defeat, decay, and decline.”²⁰ Therefore, imperial growth and the resulting militarization of the Puget Sound was a necessity, not a choice. Of course, currently these assumptions regarding the spread of true freedom and democracy are largely discredited, however they still served as useful political tools to alter public opinion, thus making expansionist rhetoric and policies all the more appealing. In this

¹⁸ Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xiii-xiv.

¹⁹ Social Darwinism refers to applying the biological concepts natural selection and survival of the fittest to sociology and politics. For more on Social Darwinism in the United States, see Richard Hofstadter’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought*.

²⁰ Ernest May, *American Imperialism: A Speculative Essay* (Atheneum: New York, 1968), 9.

sense, American imperialism was unique in that it blended these concepts, resulting in a push towards the Pacific. Naval and commercial centers, such as those found on in the Pacific Northwest, therefore became important agents in imperial outreach.

Thesis Outline

To breakup this exploration and ever-increasing military interest in the Puget Sound by both the United States government and military, this research is broken up into three distinct but equally important sections which form the core of each chapter's premise. Each of these chapters form a coherent narrative and explanation regarding the rapid growth and militarization of the Puget Sound towards the end of the nineteenth-century. Chapter 1 focuses at first on the state of the United States Navy immediately following the Civil War, and emphasizes that the government was quite hesitant to put forth any funding on military building programs due to the great cost of the conflict. However, by the middle of the 1880's, an ever-increasing attitude of military growth stemming from increasing imperial ambitions saw both a rapid rise in the United States adopting new naval technologies as well as an interest in new locations to house and service a new fleet of warships. Following this examination of United States naval and strategic policies, the chapter switches focus to early explorations of the Puget Sound, starting with those conducted by George Vancouver and then Charles Wilkes near the middle of the nineteenth-century. Wilkes proved to be a pivotal player in the United States decision to develop and militarize the area, as the surveys that he and his crew conducted measured all manner of both the geographical attributes of the area, and their potential suitability to house large naval installations.

Likewise, chapter 2 immediately ties in with the initial explorations of the Puget Sound, and focuses on the efforts of Ambrose Wyckoff and the naval commissions instigated beginning

in the late 1870's to further explore the suitability of the area to house a naval installation. Importantly, the research demonstrates that by the 1880's, the Pacific Northwest coast of the United States had been increasingly developed in such a manner that the region was able to advocate for the creation of a naval installation in either Oregon or Washington. However, while the government was certainly aware of the strategic value of the area and its relative closeness to Japan and China (and the rest of the Pacific), that did not prevent conflict resulting between the various locations all vying for this naval base. As a large naval installation brings with it employment opportunities and increased development, California, Oregon, and Washington were all in competition for this prize. However, the 1888 naval commission, headed by renowned United States Naval Officer Alfred Mahan, concluded that the Puget Sound, and in particular the area of Port Orchard, was chosen precisely because of its strategic value and defensibility. Officially began in 1891, the Puget Sound Naval Station rapidly grew to become one the nation's chief outlets of imperial power throughout the 1890's and into the 1900's. Additionally, the city of Bremerton was established alongside the naval base by German entrepreneur William Bremer, and this community also flourished as a result of the naval station.

Finally, chapter 3 looks at the continued growth of the Puget Sound with regards to its immense strategic importance to the United States. The research demonstrates that the government was indeed aware of the value of a naval installation housed somewhere in the sound, even if they were not willing to devote funding to it until the late 1880's. Due to this, the government conducted numerous fortification surveys of the area since the initial explorations of Charles Wilkes. Almost every survey conducted concluded that the sound itself offered a wide array of locations suitable for modern coastal fortifications. By the middle of the 1880's, a committee was assembled, known as the Endicott Board, which was tasked with analyzing the

state of the country's coastal fortifications. They deemed the existing defenses almost entirely worthless, and recommended new fortifications in order to protect the coastline. A heavy emphasis was placed on the Pacific Coast, due to an increasingly imperialistic-minded government. How to defend both a potential naval installation in the Puget Sound as well as the growing industrial and commercial centers of Seattle and Tacoma was a main point of consideration resulting from the findings of the Endicott Board. Consisting of Fort Flagler Fort Casey, and Fort Worden, and collectively known as the "triangle of fire", these fortifications were constructed in the 1890's as a way to safeguard the Puget Sound Naval Station.

Importantly, these chapters illustrate the growing importance of the Puget Sound and its communities to the United States with regards to the country's changing strategic policy. Emerging out of the decline of the Civil War, the United States embarked on a rapid period of military growth beginning in the late 1880's. This rapid growth is intrinsically linked to the Pacific Northwest, and in particular, the Puget Sound due to its natural strategic value and ease of defending. Due to this, the militarization of the Puget Sound is tied to the growing trend of imperialism that the United States embarked on near the end of the nineteenth-century.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DECLINE OF THE UNITED STATES NAVY AFTER THE CIVIL WAR AND INITIAL EXPLORATIONS OF THE PUGET SOUND

Introduction

“That the United States Navy within the last dozen years should have been recast almost wholly, upon more modern lines, is not, in itself alone, a fact that should cause comment, or give rise to questions about its future career or sphere of action. If this country needs, or ever shall need, a navy at all, indisputably in 1883 the hour had come when the time-worn hulks of that day, mostly the honored but superannuated survivors of the civil war, should drop out of the ranks, submit to well-earned retirement or inevitable dissolution, and allow their places to be taken by other vessels, capable of performing the duties to which they themselves were no longer adequate.”²¹ In this quote, an American naval officer and strategist, writing in 1895, recalls the dilapidated state of the United States Navy following the Civil War and the urgent need to modernize. In this section, titled “The Future in Relation to American Naval Power”, from his major work, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, Mahan predicts that in order for the United States to expand, it needs a modern navy.²² Additionally, Mahan is intrinsically linked with the militarization of the Puget Sound, as he led the 1888 naval commission tasked in locating a site for a navy yard in the Pacific Northwest. Taken together, the future of United States imperialism and the Puget Sound are intrinsically linked.

Echoing many of the claims about naval power made by Mahan, the twentieth century is often thought of as a distinctly “American” century with regards to both power and wealth

²¹ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1897), 137-138.

²² *Ibid.*, 138.

accumulation. Connected to this and playing an important role in the accumulation of this power was the emergence of the United States Navy as one of the premier fleets in the world, capable of even challenging the likes of Great Britain. Certainly both World War 1 and World War 2 greatly redesigned the role of the United States Navy, changing its nature from a fleet designed for coast defense into a modern force that had the ability to influence international affairs. However, this was not always the case, and indeed in the latter half of the nineteenth-century the United States Navy was regarded as a miniscule force barely capable of defending the nation's coasts. Coincidentally, in the aftermath of the Civil War, Congress was generally unwilling to authorize funding for military projects, and this included the construction of new naval stations.

While this is accurate, the fact that the government was unwilling to spend money on new military installations on the Pacific coast did not necessarily mean that the groundwork for these eventual projects was not laid. Conducting explorations and surveys of the Pacific Coast of the United States, coupled with almost prophetic-like teachings of naval strategists such as Alfred Mahan, the beginnings of ideas pertaining to the Pacific coast as a tool for American imperial expansion into the Pacific Ocean have their roots in the middle of the nineteenth-century. Both the Navy itself and American naval strategy generally underwent a gradual transformation from a maligned and underfunded unit following the Civil War in the 1870's to an increasingly modernized force by the beginning of the 1890's. This was coupled with an increasing interest in constructing a naval station somewhere on the Pacific Northwest coast of the United States which would serve as the northern sister-base to the naval station already located at Mare Island in California. There were several reasons for this. One was the proximity of the Pacific Northwest to both Japan and China when compared to California, and also the existence of British Naval forces in Vancouver directly north of American holdings in the Puget Sound.

Importantly, much of the surveying of the Sound, both for military and commercial value, had been completed by Charles Wilkes and the United States exploring expedition from 1838-1842. This groundwork proved to be immensely useful in gradually transforming the Puget Sound area from one associated with ideas of a “frontier” to an area that was ripe for commercial and industrial development due to both the natural resources available and plentiful amount of natural harbors. The local communities that developed here during the latter half of the nineteenth-century, including Seattle and Tacoma, would prove to be major factors in the later decision to militarize the sound by the late 1880’s. Thus, the initial explorations of the Pacific Northwest and specifically the Puget Sound by Wilkes and his crew helped to shape the future of the area with regards to its ease of defense and imperial outreach capabilities due to its ability to house a modern naval station, which in turn could service a modernized naval fleet. In this chapter, the state of the United States Navy immediately following the Civil War and its gradual modernization will be examined first. This is followed by an examination of the United States Exploring Expedition conducted by Charles Wilkes and the resulting links pertaining to the future ability of the Puget Sound to be developed and militarized.

Setting the Scene: Decline, Imperial Ambitions, and the Navy after the Civil War

Before the question pertaining to why the United States chose to construct a naval base and militarize the Puget Sound in the 1890’s can be addressed, the country’s strategic situation in conjunction with its severely declined naval capabilities needs to be analyzed. The United States emerged from the carnage and destruction of the Civil War in 1865 wary about military spending and build-up. The aftermath of the war instigated a dramatic decline in military spending, and this lack of funding particularly hampered the Navy. In the 1870’s and 80’s, the United States

lagged far behind Great Britain, France, and Germany in naval technology and spending.²³

United States Secretary of the Navy William Hunt stated that the US Navy of the early 1880's amounted to an insignificant force. From a Civil War peak of 700 ships, the navy had dwindled to a mere 26 effective ships by 1881.²⁴ This is understandable, as the country, now united again, spent a large sum of money rebuilding the both the integrity and industrial capabilities of the nation.

However, expansion and imperial ambitions were nonetheless on the periphery of national interests. These interests required an expansion of naval forces and playing "catch-up" to rival European powers. After the Civil War, the fundamental orientation of the United States pointed firmly towards the West and the Pacific. Rather than look to Europe for answers, the United States looked westward towards the spoils of the Pacific Ocean.²⁵ The United States, with vast land and resources at its disposal, certainly had the potential of becoming a large empire that had the ability to challenge Europe's largest empires. Not content with just expanding to the Western border of the North American continent, the Pacific Ocean and beyond were in America's sights and the lucrative prospects of trade with Japan and China were well known. San Francisco and San Diego were certainly important acquisitions, as well as the vast inland empire wrested from Mexico decades earlier, but United States strategists were chiefly after harbors, not land for pioneers.²⁶ Finding suitable harbors on a limited budget during the midst of

²³ Cumings, *Dominion From Sea to Sea*, 142.

²⁴ Brayton Harris, *The Age of the Battleship: 1890-1922* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1965), 2.

²⁵ Cumings, *Dominion From Sea to Sea*, 39.

²⁶ Michael Lind, *The American Way of Strategy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55-56.

the hangover of the Civil War meant naval buildup and militarization were stagnant for several decades.

A large and powerful naval fleet, centered in the Pacific, would ultimately allow for the United States to challenge powers already entrenched in the vastness of the Pacific Ocean. The Dutch, British, Germans; and importantly the recently modernized Japanese as a result of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, all posed significant threats to American foreign interests. The Japanese “threat” is of particular note, as evidenced by the later confrontation between Japan and the United States during the Second World War. Japan, with victories over China in the first Sino-Japanese War in 1895 that leveraged control of Korea and a victory over Russia in 1905 during the Russo-Japanese War continued to ascend as a Pacific power, and the United States assumed an attitude of watchfulness and vigilance. Japan embarked on a trajectory of empire that resulted in the violent collisions of the twentieth century.²⁷ Therefore militarization of the Pacific Coast and a naval building program became more and more paramount. Due to budgetary constraints, a “naval revolution” in the United States would not take place until the early 1890’s, with the Naval appropriation act of 1891.²⁸

Specific mention of an increasingly imperialistic Germany is also necessary. Recently united as a single country by Otto Von Bismarck in 1871, Germany rapidly ascended the imperial ladder and indeed challenged Great Britain for both imperial and naval power. By the middle of the 1880’s, German colonial possessions consisted of large areas in Africa and the

²⁷ J. Rogers Hollingsworth, *American Expansion in the Late Nineteenth Century: Colonial or Anticolonialist?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 69.

²⁸ Walter Herrick, *The American Naval Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 7.

Pacific.²⁹ Territories in the Pacific included New Guinea, the Marshall Islands, Samoa, and the Marianas. German and British conflict was becoming increasingly more likely, and the naval arms race between the two powers produced a record number of new capital ships. The United States, wary of German and British power in the Pacific, certainly took notice. The scramble for Pacific colonies resulting from a strong German state in the late-nineteenth century produced a rapid growth in imperialism from all of the major European powers, as well as in Japan.

The events that transpired in the 1890's are commonly held to be the height of United States imperial ambition. Often referred to as the "imperial moment"³⁰ by historians, this decade marks a turning point in American strategic thought. Therefore it is warranted to explain that historians including Thomas Bender argue that this moment was not "unthinking" or "accidental."³¹ Far from this idea, in actuality gaining land and power was part of United States strategic thinking. Bender surmises that a Republican vision of an independent United States with imperialistic goals would triumph by the end of the century. Hopkins argues that by 1898 the United States became the ex-colonial republic, and "suddenly, and very visibly became an imperial power."³² The United States, and particularly its navy, began to assume a more active role in global politics, particularly in Asia.³³ Notably the Spanish-American War must be thought of in an imperial context. Famously the sinking of the United States second-class battleship the USS Maine (although now known to be an internal explosion) provided the catalyst for American conflict with Spain in Cuba. Rallying public support for war with Spain with cries of

²⁹ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 625.

³⁰ Bender, *A Nation Among Nations*, 190.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

³² Hopkins, *American Empire*, 337-338.

³³ William Braisted, *The United States Navy in the Pacific, 1897-1909* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1958), 21.

“Remember the Maine!” proved critical.³⁴ After the loss of the *Maine*, numerous patriotic sentiments and a desire for retribution appeared throughout the country.³⁵ Far removed from the concept of a benevolent empire and a struggle to liberate Cuba and the Philippines from Spanish control, United States victory converted the Navy from a Western Hemisphere defense force to the “protector of an empire extending halfway around the world.”³⁶ This change from a coastal defense force also necessitated a change in naval tactics and technology, as ships with flat-bottomed hulls designed for shallow water were not suitable for trans-oceanic voyages. Indeed, deep-water harbors such as the Puget Sound were the perfect candidate for supplying such a fleet, and an increasingly imperialistic United States required defensible harbor locations. However, the abysmal state of the fleet during the 1870’s and early 1880’s certainly did not warrant the construction of new naval facilities.

Specific evidence for the derelict nature of the United States Navy is appropriately explored in the opening volumes of *The Naval Annual*, which was a British publication tasked with analyzing the comparative strengths of the various naval forces of the world.³⁷ The initial 1886 publication in the series makes scant recognition of the United States Navy, indicating the United States’ lack of global power. Importantly, in the 1886 Report Committee on Naval Affairs, Secretary of the Navy William C. Whitney stated, “Our Navy is not equal to what it was

³⁴ Hopkins, *American Empire*, 354

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 368-369.

³⁶ Braisted, *The United States Navy*, 21-22.

³⁷ *The Naval Annual* was a British publication started in 1886 by British politician and Governor of Victoria. Primarily concerned with the British Royal Navy, the *Annual* reported on the strength of individual navies by assessing their numbers and technologies. Previously, this information was available, but not in any condensed volume, so these publications allowed for quicker summaries of an individual nation’s naval strength. Additionally, naval strategy and foreign policy initiatives are also detailed, including the reports made by the United States Secretary of the Navy to Congress, as well as the state of coastal defenses.

in 1860, but all other maritime nations, profiting from the lessons taught during our civil war, have vied with each other in improving their navies.”³⁸ In addition, the committee report later detailed the quick rise in both naval weaponry and armor, but concludes that it matters little to the United States. “We have neither the one nor the other- no gun mounted that can pierce an enemy’s armour- nor armour on a completed vessel, or on a fort, that can resist an enemy’s guns.”³⁹ The *Naval Annual* of 1887 and 1888 followed much of the same tone.

Interestingly, by 1889, the report from Secretary of the Navy Whitney indicates measures taken by Congress designed to improve both the strength of the navy, but also the modernization of United States coastal defenses. He stated that in 1885, the United States possessed no vessel of war which matched any first-rate naval power, and that in 1886 within the United States, “it would be quite impossible for the United States to produce within its territory either the armour required for armoured ships or the guns necessary for their armament. As at present, the country would be entirely defenseless in the absence of any ability to produce armour or the larger high-powered guns.”⁴⁰ This statement is indicative that while the navy existed as an ineffective force, so too did the manufacturing capabilities of the United States. While this report reads as a somber reminder of the poorly equipped navy, it concludes by stating that the United States Congress had been slowly approving more money for naval development and procurement. For instance, the United States naval budget in 1889 amounted to 5,648,980 dollars more than it was

³⁸ T.A. Brassey, *The Naval Annual, 1886* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin and Co., 1886), 507.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁴⁰ T.A. Brassey, *The Naval Annual, 1889* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin and Co., 1889), 676-677.

in 1888.⁴¹ This would continue to grow in the early 1890's, as the United States began to seriously strengthen their naval forces.

By 1891, the United States navy witnessed increased ship and coast defense production. The 1890 Secretary of the Navy report indicates steady progress due to the construction of new battleships such as the USS *Texas* and the USS *Maine*, but nonetheless it reveals that more progress was still needed. Within the context of the militarization of the Puget Sound, the report adopted a hopeful tone, stating that increased naval strength meant that it will be “reasonable to believe that Boston, New York, Philadelphia, New Orleans, San Francisco, and cities on the Puget Sound would become centers of naval strength instead of being, as they are today, conspicuous examples of maritime weakness, and inviting objects of maritime attack.” Interestingly, the Secretary of the Navy made it clear in this report that the purpose of this growing navy was not for conquest, but for defense.⁴² Regardless, the timing and inclusion of the Puget Sound in this report is indicative of the growing importance of the area. Evidence for this increased importance is indicated by the recently completed naval commission to find a site in the area for a naval base and the assessment of United States coastal defenses.

In 1892, the United States Navy succeeded in securing larger and larger amounts of funding due to concerted lobbying efforts in Congress. This coincided with the establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station in 1891 along with the founding of the city of Bremerton, Washington. The 1892 edition of *The Naval Annual* provided evidence for this growth. Previously, the United States and its navy was relegated to the appendices of this publication, yet the 1892 volume provides the U.S. Navy with its own section near the beginning- which is

⁴¹ Ibid., 693.

⁴² T.A. Brassey, *The Naval Annual, 1891* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin and Co., 1891), 463.

indicative of it being thought of as more the equal to first-rate powers such as Great Britain, France, and Germany. The opening remarks state that the American dockyards are bustling with activity, and that the navy “has made great progress, and are remarkable for a rapidity in the rate of construction which is only equaled in England.”⁴³ Numerous modern cruisers and battleships were being constructed, and importantly, they were constructed by American shipyards and steel facilities. United States Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Tracy, in his annual report to Congress, stated that most of the lingering wooden ships that plagued the navy throughout the 1880’s were now almost totally replaced with modern vessels. Additionally, Tracy repeatedly remarked upon the importance of the Pacific for both American commercial interests and the dissemination of American influence.⁴⁴ This is supplemented by what Tracy claimed is an ever-increasing support from the public, who wanted to see the United States become a more powerful actor on the world-stage. This would, of course, link to the ideas put forth about by historians Bruce Cumings and Norman Graebner. Increasing public support for expansion beyond the Western continental border of the United States went hand in hand with increased naval spending and production.

Importantly, Benjamin Tracy also made clear in his report that it is in the best interest of the United States to avoid war. Rather than war, Tracy sees the United States operating as a “commercial neutral between these mighty contestants.”⁴⁵ In this case, contestants is a reference to changing landscape of the Pacific, as European imperial powers battled with Japan for control in the region. This is important to note, since although the United States Navy was growing, it was still not as powerful as it would become in the later years of the 1890’s and the first decade

⁴³ T.A. Brassey, *The Naval Annual, 1892* (Portsmouth: J. Griffin and Co., 1892), 30.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 479.

of the twentieth century. Furthermore, the increased commercial and industrial power could be leveraged and certainly used to increase wealth. Monetary appropriations for the navy in 1891 and 1892 amounted to upwards of 88,000,000 dollars, a dramatic increase from the previous years. This buildup, distinctly American, stemmed from American materials and American labor.⁴⁶

A modernized navy supported the United States' growing and increasingly aggressive foreign policy. In 1897, prominent United States naval officer, strategist, and historian Alfred Thayer Mahan published *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, which bolstered arguments of U.S. overseas expansion and the need for a strong navy to support territories and trade routes. Writing earlier in 1890, Mahan's preface titled "The United States Looking Outward" describes a strategic situation in which Mahan is aware and in favor of the "spread of American commerce to all quarters of the globe", which necessitated a surge in naval power.⁴⁷ Importantly, Mahan argued that the United States needed a "two-ocean navy that could patrol both coastlines and the Pacific out to a radius of 3,000 miles."⁴⁸ Furthermore, Mahan indicates the woeful ability of the 1880's United States Navy, while also stressing the importance of the Pacific Coast to United States imperial interests. Interestingly, he further surmised that U.S Pacific ports, and San Francisco and the Puget Sound in particular, were undefended which put the United States at risk from rising Pacific powers such as Japan.⁴⁹ Mahan concluded by

⁴⁶ Ibid., 483.

⁴⁷ Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, 5.

⁴⁸ Cumings, *Dominion From Sea to Sea*, 142.

⁴⁹ Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power*, 22-23.

advocating for the increased militarization of the Western coast of the United States. Importantly this included the establishment of a larger navy and the modernization of the coastal defenses.

By the mid-1890s, the United States military began to plan a war with Spain to obtain Spanish possessions in the Caribbean and the Philippines. The strategy, which involved blockades and direct engagement with the smaller Spanish fleet, required a large naval commitment. After its victory over Spain in 1898 and eventual annexation of Puerto Rico and the Philippines, the United States used its navy to enforce its influence in the Pacific and the Western Hemisphere. Eventually, in 1907, President Theodore Roosevelt (who was known for being an enthusiastic supporter of a strong navy) authorized the around-the-world sail of the United States' Great White Fleet as a display of U.S. naval power. The United States embarked on a more imperialized offensive mission, guided by a strong navy. This transitioned the navy from an old strategy of defensiveness, towards a new strategy dictated by modern ships and technology, and imperialism.⁵⁰

The Puget Sound Naval Yard, along with naval bases in San Diego and San Francisco would not have been as pertinent to American imperial expansion if not for the rapid advancements in naval technology and policies of the second half of the nineteenth-century. Furious arms races between global players emerged, and the navy (in particular the evolving concept of the battleship) asserted itself as the dominant force of empire and diplomacy.⁵¹ Large

⁵⁰ Kenneth Hagan, *American Gunboat Diplomacy and the Old Navy: 1877-1889* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 4-5.

⁵¹ With the launching of the Majestic class of battleships in the 1890's, the British revolutionized the modern battleship. From the conclusion of the United States Civil War through to the 1890's, there was a wide variety of different ship types, however with the Majestic class, the British laid the foundation for what would become to be called the pre-dreadnought type of battleship. With four heavy guns in armored gun turrets, a propellant switch from black-powder to smokeless-powder, advanced steam powered engines, and heavy armor, this class of ship was

fleets of increasingly larger and more powerful ships demanded larger repair and fueling stations. The US Navy ,and naval technology more generally, transitioned from a backwater, neglected navy purposed solely for defense,⁵² into Theodore Roosevelt’s powerful Great White Fleet that visited the Puget Sound in May of 1908. An increasingly modernized and powerful navy required suitably advanced ports and harbors, and the Puget Sound was a prime candidate for this development.

The construction of new harbors and ports in the United States also required an extensive examination of the nation’s ability to defend these locations. Like the state of the United States Navy after the Civil War, annual budgetary allotment for coastal defenses was kept to a minimum. In addition to the lack of funding, the system in place for analyzing coastal defenses was outdated. Previously, the United States Board of Engineers planned and constructed these defenses, but the rapid advances in technologies as previously mentioned caught the board off guard and hampered their ability to adapt.⁵³ For this reason, the Army Corp of Engineers spent the next 20 years assessing and experimenting with a new system designed to protect an increasingly expanding United States. While this planning took place, Congress continually refused to provide funding for new construction. In 1874, the House Committee on Military Affairs concluded that completing and arming a new series of fortifications would cost a large amount of money, “much greater than the government is ready to expend.”⁵⁴ This idea was

copied by other navies. For more on this naval arms race, see Brayton Harris’s *The Age of the Battleship: 1890-1922*.

⁵² Walter Herrick, *The American Naval Revolution* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 3.

⁵³ Robert Browning, *Two If By Sea: The Development of American Coastal Defense Policy* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 128-129.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

somewhat warranted, however, as Congress assumed that any new construction would quickly be rendered obsolete due to the rapid advances made in naval technology.

As the United States pushed further westward and secured the Pacific Coast, decisions needed to be made in relations to assessing the current coastal defenses. The dominant theory held by Congress post-Civil War implied that the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans provided enough of a deterrent to would-be attackers. This was certainly a convenient attitude to prescribe to if one was unwilling or unable to spend the necessary funds to revamp the entire nation's system of defenses. The Corps of Engineers disagreed with this assessment, and argued that by 1885, "the coast was virtually defenseless."⁵⁵ An up-to-date system of fortifications and weaponry simply did not exist. The Corps of Engineers did recognize the value of the United States being insulated on both sides by large oceans, but their reports to Congress in the 1880's indicate these natural barriers would not be enough. In his 1880 annual report to the Secretary of War, Chief of Engineers H.G. Wright stated that the oceanic barriers were insufficient to provide continued peace when coupled with the "pacific" tendency of the United States. Furthermore, he opens his report by stating, "The Report of the Chief of Engineers shows that our fortifications are not in a condition for the defense of important cities and depots of military and naval supplies, in case of war with any of the maritime powers."⁵⁶ This is telling, as the "tendency" he was referring to was the increasing imperialistic aspirations of the United States, which could put the country in direct conflict with rival powers. Wright proceeded to implicate that a war with one of the powerful maritime powers was inevitable, and that action needs to be taken immediately.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.,141.

⁵⁶ "Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers" (United States, 1880), iii-iv.

⁵⁷ Ibid., iv.

Although the Board of Engineers continued to argue for an improved system of coastal defenses in the early 1880's, Congress was largely unmoved. It is interesting to note that one of their reasons for not constructing a new system of defenses stemmed from the inability of the nation's manufacturing capabilities in constructing modern weaponry for these fortifications, so the decision on whether or not to construct fortifications became moot.⁵⁸ However, as the United States continued to express goals in the Pacific, which echoes Norman Graebner's argument, Congress became more and more willing to accept that the nation's current defensive systems were insufficient. By 1881, Congress substantially increased appropriations for the development and manufacture of weaponry.⁵⁹ Interestingly, the willingness of Congress to appropriate funds specifically for coastal defenses still represented a minority of the budget. For instance, in 1885 the Naval Appropriations Committee recommended a total of 955,000 dollars for the year, and of this only 100,000 dollars was provided for the "repair and preservation of existing defensive works."⁶⁰ To put this number into perspective, the Board of Engineers sought a total of 7,303,000 dollars be devoted to repair and construction of the nation's coastal defenses. However, in the same year, Congress also began to take steps to address the dilapidated state of the existing defensive works.

Addressing these concerns, suitable locations for a national gun foundry as well as new methods of manufacturing were investigated. As the United States embraced its power throughout the continent and began to look increasingly towards the Pacific, modernized coastal defenses became a necessity. In this vein, the 48th Congress included a far-reaching clause in the

⁵⁸ Browning, *Two If By Sea*, 148.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 149.

fortification appropriation bill, requiring President Grover Cleveland to appoint a board headed by the Secretary of War. The aim of this board was to “examine and report at what ports fortifications or other defenses are most urgently required, the character and kind of defenses best adapted for each, and the armament....torpedoes, mines, or other defensive appliances necessary to defend the coasts.”⁶¹ Additionally, the board was allotted 100,000 dollars for the “protection, preservation, and repair of fortifications and other works of defense for the fiscal year ending June 30th, 1886.”⁶²

This board was soon known as the Endicott Board, after its head, Secretary of War William C. Endicott. The conclusions reached by this board would have far-reaching effects, directly linked to the developing militarization of the Puget Sound. Due to the arguments of the previous Board of Engineers, and importantly the closing of the land frontier and end of the Indian Wars as argued by Graebner and Cumings, this resulted in a full-fledged assessment and resulting modernization of the United States coastal defenses. A country with serious imperial ambitions necessitated a modernized system of defenses. The Endicott Board’s recommendations inspired and shaped the future of United States coastal defense policy for decades to come. Heeded by the conclusions of this board, roughly 300 heavy guns were installed around continental harbors as a first line of defense.⁶³

Within the context of the Puget Sound, the conclusions of the board are importantly linked with the creation of a series of defenses designed to protect both the naval base and the

⁶¹ “The Statutes at Large of the United States of America, From December 1883 to March 1885, and Recent Treaties, Postal Conventions, and Executive Proclamations” (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1885), 434.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 434.

⁶³ Emanuel Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States: An Introductory History* (Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington D.C., 1970), 70.

economic centers of Seattle and Tacoma.⁶⁴ Within an imperial context, it is helpful to reference Hopkin's notions on the evolution and creation of an American empire. After the Civil War, the United States underwent a series of transformations, from a nation based more on agriculture to a nation based more on industry. Imperialism served as part of this solution, as expansionist rhetoric required a modern military and a manufacturing sector able to keep up with these demands. Therefore imperialism and capitalism went hand in hand within a context of United States expansion.⁶⁵ Rapid changes to the American shipbuilding, weaponry, and steel industries are directly linked to American expansionist policies. While the Puget Sound was militarized by the 1890's, this would not have been possible without the surveys of the region in the previous decades. The exploring expedition led by Charles Wilkes in the 1830's and 1840's proved to be instrumental in this regard.

Initial Explorations of the Puget Sound: Charles Wilkes and the United States Exploring Expedition

The history of the Pacific Coast of the United States is also a maritime history. Access to the waterways and straits of the coast provided the United States a way to project power beyond the continent. While certainly economic interests were a primary concern when selecting sites for expansion, these coastal regions also need to be defensible. When naval power was the dominant form of projecting force, more readily defensible locations for such economic centers become all the more important. It is important to realize that the Pacific Coast of the North American continent offered relatively few natural, deep-water harbors, capable of sheltering and supplying the ever-increasing size and tonnage of warships. The coastline of California, Oregon,

⁶⁴ Browning, *Two If By Sea*, 151.

⁶⁵ A.G. Hopkins, *American Empire: A Global History*, 339.

and Washington, running approximately 1500 miles, is also rugged and mountainous.⁶⁶ Though few in number, acquiring these natural harbors were of immensely important strategic interests to the United States. Graebner claims that the American territorial objectives in the Pacific Northwest, particularly the Oregon territory, had been clear from the beginning of the nineteenth-century. The primary objective being, “access to the magnificent harbor of the Puget Sound through the Strait of Juan de Fuca.”⁶⁷ He further surmises that national interest in the Pacific Northwest guided American policy of the nineteenth-century, and that there was an almost unilateral consensus regarding the nation’s purpose regarding expansion westward.⁶⁸ If this is in fact true, then acquisition of the Puget Sound and the ultimate creation of the naval base in 1891 are centered on the notion of imperial expansion. While certainly a bold claim, it is not unwarranted. Examining the initial expeditions into the region offer some insight into the known strategic and economic value of the sound.

One of the first explorations into the Puget Sound came from British Royal Navy Officer George Vancouver’s 1791-1795 expedition aimed at exploring the Pacific coast of the North American continent. While early, many of the names now commonly associated with the region stem from this expedition. Admiralty Inlet, Puget Sound, Whidbey Island, Vashon Island, Mount Rainier, Mount Baker, Mount St. Helens, and Hood’s Canal all acquired their nomenclature from this expedition.⁶⁹ Interestingly, while Vancouver’s expedition certainly accomplished a lot in terms of mapping the area, Vancouver and his team never actually charted the specific waters

⁶⁶ James Hitchman, *A Maritime History of the Pacific Coast, 1540-1980* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 1-2.

⁶⁷ Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, viii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

⁶⁹ Perry, *Bremerton and Puget Sound Navy Yard*, 6-7.

around what would become Bremerton and the site of the naval base specifically. What Vancouver's expedition did do, however, was to highlight the importance of the region to potential colonization. A United States led exploration of the area would have to wait. That survey would be accomplished several decades later by United States Naval Lieutenant Charles Wilkes and his crew.

The United States Exploring Expedition, conducted from 1838 to 1842, aimed to survey the Pacific Coast of the North American continent. The expedition was authorized by an act of Congress in 1828, allowing the United States President to send a ship to explore the coast, islands, harbors, shoals, and reefs. Unfortunately, the resolution was not actually acted upon until a decade later due to a lack of funding.⁷⁰ Within a larger context, the results of this exploring expedition provided the United States with a glimpse of a broader Pacific world, and this was one that was seemingly open to imperialism. While Wilkes and his crew did not singularly focus on the Puget Sound during this expedition, they nonetheless remarked on the sound's potential strategic importance. Writing in 1841, Wilkes stated, "Nothing can exceed the beauty of these waters, and their safety: not a shoal exists within the Straits of Juan de Fuca, Admiralty Inlet, Puget Sound, or Hood's Canal, that can in any way interrupt their navigation by a seventy-four gun ship. I venture nothing in saying, there is no country in the world that possesses waters equal to these."⁷¹ A poignant takeaway from this summary is Wilke's remark that none of the waterways would impede the passage of a seventy-four gun ship. This fact will become paramount to the construction of the naval base later, as Wilkes is focusing on the depth of the

⁷⁰ Richard Blumenthal, *Charles Wilkes and the Exploration of Inland Washington Waters: Journals from the Expedition of 1841* (Jefferson: Macfarland and Company, 2009), 3.

⁷¹ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, Volume IV (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1856), 305.

sound, which will subsequently mean the waterways will not need to be dredged to allow for the passage of large naval and commercial vessels.

While Wilkes made observations and surveys about the larger Puget Sound, his examination of Port Orchard, which would serve as the future home of the City of Bremerton and the Puget Sound Naval Yard is indicative of the future value of the region to United States naval policy. Named after George Vancouver's clerk, Harry Masterman Orchard, Port Orchard is located in an easily defensible area due to its isolation from the main waterway of the sound. Wilkes makes numerous statements about the potential of Port Orchard as a future harbor. In his journal entries from the United States Exploring Expedition during his time in the Puget Sound, he states that Port Orchard "offers all that could be desired for the safety and equipment of vessels." Furthermore he states, "it is needless to state to point out any particular place of anchorage; every part of it may be used, and that resorted to will depend upon future settlements may be formed."⁷² The connections that Wilkes made and wrote down in his reports and journals are therefore easily linked to the assessment made by the naval commission of the 1880's to probe the area for suitable locations for a naval installation. Additionally, in his published narrative recounting the exploration, Wilkes stated that he and his crew explored the waters of Port Orchard for over nine days, and that there were multiple safe harbors, as well as water being deep enough for the largest class of vessels.⁷³

In addition to the physical descriptions of the landscape, the United States Exploring Expedition made substantial evaluations of the Native Americans of the region, and the suitability of the area for white settlement. In his 1842 report to the United States Secretary of

⁷² Blumenthal, *Charles Wilkes*, 95.

⁷³ Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition*, 479.

the Navy Abel P. Upshur, and in reference to the Indian populations of the sound, Wilkes stated, “The Indians are rapidly decreasing in all parts of the country. The causes are supposed to be their rude treatment of diseases and the dissipated lives they lead.”⁷⁴ Wilkes then proceeded to describe the potential habitability of the region to white settlers and states that the few that are already there are “orderly and industrious.”⁷⁵ Extrapolating from this statement, it is easy to link what Wilkes was describing to the future economic potential of the sound in addition to its inherent strategic value. Indeed, a mere decade later in 1853 the main industries established on the Puget Sound in Washington Territory included logging and milling. By this time, over 40 large mills existed, and the region became increasingly important for supplying lumber to the United States.⁷⁶ Throughout his report, Wilkes made repeated assertions pertaining to the vast amount of natural resources in the region, particularly timber and fish. Therefore the United States had further incentive to pursue development and settling of the region.

When referencing the Oregon Territory, Wilkes unintentionally highlighted the future strategic value of the Puget Sound and Strait of Juan de Fuca when compared with the Oregon Territory. Wilkes’ reports on the Oregon Territory are quite indicative to one of the advantages that the Puget Sound possesses when compared to other areas of the Pacific coast for potential harbors. Referencing the Columbia River, Wilkes remarked on the abundance of sand and an ever-changing landscape. Wilkes states, “None of them can be deemed safe ports to enter, and that the entrance to the Columbia is impracticable two-thirds of the year.”⁷⁷ This fact becomes

⁷⁴ “Report of Charles Wilkes to the Secretary of the Navy, 1842,” reproduced in “Report on the Territory of Oregon,” *Quarterly of the Oregon Historical Society* 12 (September 1911), 292

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁷⁶ Hitchman, *A Maritime History of the Pacific Coast*, 41.

⁷⁷ “Report of Charles Wilkes to the Secretary of the Navy, 1842”, 278.

more important later in the 1880's, when the United States became increasingly interested in establishing a naval base on the Pacific coast. This point is indicative with regards to the complications that the United States commission of the 1880's would need to address. While the mouth of the Columbia River might have been easily defensible, the amount of sand and changing conditions made it an unsuitable choice for an expansive naval facility that needed large docks. Thus it becomes clear that Wilkes' findings in 1841 were taken into account by the later naval commission. Additionally, when referencing the interior of the sound, Wilkes notes in his journal, "Puget's Sound and its inlets offer every advantage for naval or commercial purposes." Moreover, Wilkes describes the sufficient rise and fall of the tide and how this would allow for the construction of large dry docks.⁷⁸ Due to the early survey work done by Wilkes and the expedition, the potential strategic value of the greater Puget Sound region was certainly known to the United States, even if they were slow to act upon it. However, the surveys were heavily utilized by later explorations of the area.

Casserly surmises that due to Wilkes' endearing description of the region's potential for defendable harbors combined with increasing nationalistic and expansionist rhetoric aimed at the American public helped to increase the United States government's interest in the region.⁷⁹ In 1841 the United States still had to secure the larger area of the Pacific Northwest. In 1846, the United States secured its claim to the region south of the 49th parallel, after protracted negotiations with Great Britain. Additionally, in the 1840's the United States acquired California following their victory in the Mexican- American War. With this victory and negotiations settled

⁷⁸ Blumenthal, *Charles Wilkes*, 101.

⁷⁹ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 78.

with Great Britain, access to the long line of Pacific Coast territory now belonged to the United States.⁸⁰

The Wilkes expedition and the early survey work done proved crucial to the United States' determination in securing the area. Evidence for the importance of the United States Exploring Expedition in the eventual decision to militarize and develop the Puget Sound can be found in an 1867 article titled "Puget Sound Fortresses and Navy Yard" from the *Washington Standard*. In reference to the potential economic importance of the region, it states, "the forests of timber for navy purposes, coal in abundance, and already several mines of iron, the Government appears at last to be going determinedly to work to build fortifications and a navy yard on Puget Sound."⁸¹ Additionally, the potential sites for these fortifications are mentioned, and indicate Whidby Island, Port Wilson, and Port Townsend as suitable locations.⁸² The early groundwork laid out here would eventually become Fort Casey, Fort Townsend, and Fort Flagler, which were known as the "triangle of fire". This phrase meant that these forts were able to provide overlapping fields of fire which in turn would make it quite dangerous for enemy naval vessels to enter the Puget Sound. These forts were designed to protect both the eventual naval installation as well as the growing communities of the region. Charles Wilkes is provided with due credit, as his surveys proved useful in this analysis.

Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, any real construction waited until the findings of the Endicott Board, formally released in 1886. Although the Civil War delayed any real military establishments in the area until the 1880's, the surveys conducted during the United States

⁸⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁸¹ "Puget Sound Fortresses and Navy Yard," *Washington Standard*, 14 September 1867.

⁸² Ibid.

Exploring Expedition proved crucial to the establishment of communities in the area, particularly the development of large population centers such as Seattle and Tacoma. The early explorations of the Sound and the development of these communities, coupled with the economic viability of the region, provided an impetus for continued government interest in the area. As mentioned, the rapidly changing naval and coastal defense technology would prove to be paramount to this development. While the Wilkes expedition proved influential and informative due to the surveys and descriptions of the land, it would not be until more forcefully enacted commissions of the 1880's that the establishment of naval installations and their associated defenses were agreed upon and construction begun. The early work done by Wilkes and the early settlers in the region kept the Puget Sound continually in the mind of American strategists, even if this was on the periphery. As tensions with rival European powers decreased, American imperial ambitions increased, as the concept of an empire cloaked in the ideas of liberty began to take hold on expansionist lines of thinking. Masking expansionist rhetoric under the veil of American democracy certainly bolstered both congressional and public support of the idea.

Conclusion: The Puget Sound's Strategic Value Secured

A well-developed naval base required an existing infrastructure in order to support it. Transitioning from a borderlands area on the fringes of United States territory into an urbanized area, the Puget Sound experienced this transition in full force by the end of the 1880's. On a large-scale, the Western Coast of the United States experienced heightened growth during the latter-half of the nineteenth-century. The Gold Rush in California, the expansion of railroads across the nation, and the booming logging industry (especially pertinent to the growth and economic value of the Puget Sound) all instigated an increase in population. The Puget Sound area was no exception.

As United States power grew, a heightened defensive presence in the region also grew in necessity as the Pacific Ocean became increasingly important to US foreign policy.⁸³ Casserly surmises that a growing idea of “security consensus” emerged, allowing both the military and civilians (made up of locals, immigrants, and Native Americans) to cooperate and achieve their goals.⁸⁴ Even Charles Wilkes himself argued that militarization of the region could provide facilities that could service a “great maritime nation,” as quoted in Casserly’s work.⁸⁵ The military defended national security and imperial ambitions, while the surrounding Puget Sound communities benefited economically from the ever-increasing military presence. Therefore the emerging local community, whether knowingly cognizant or not with regards to the formulation of American empire, was nonetheless directly involved in its spread towards the Pacific. The military benefited from the presence of an established local community due to the abundance of workers already inhabiting the area, and the local community benefited from the increasing militarization of the area and the economic and industrial security it provided due to the creation of an uptick in employment opportunities. While this is true, the Puget Sound was not uninhabited before American expansion into the region.

It is worth addressing the native inhabitants of the Puget Sound region. As the United States pushed westward across the North American continent, both settlers and the military encountered a multitude of American Indian inhabitants. This, of course, is no different in the Washington and Oregon territories, and more specifically, the Puget Sound region. With increasing Euro- American movement and railroad expansion westward, the United States

⁸³ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, abstract.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

government wanted to protect its settlers from Native American attacks and incentivize further settlement. With the securing of the Pacific coast, United States strategy for dealing with Native Americans switched from a large number of smaller installations scattered across the interior of the western U.S. to a smaller number of larger posts strategically located around urban areas and transportation hubs.⁸⁶ Federal laws such as the Donation Land Act of 1850 provided economic incentives to settlers, offering land at little or no cost.⁸⁷ This was at the expense of the native populations already inhabiting the area. Either removed through force or through payment, the many native communities of the area were relocated, making the development of these lands much easier. The eventual outcome for the Native American population of the Puget Sound region was the signing of the Treaty of Point Elliot in 1855. This treaty set up several reservations for the tribes of the area and essentially secured the land for white settlement.⁸⁸ As a result, increased logging, mining, and urban development skyrocketed. With the relocation of the Native American populations complete, the United States could turn further Westward, which ultimately meant the vastness of the Pacific Ocean.

By the 1880's, the United States government supported increasing militarization of the Puget Sound area. With increased militarization in mind, the actual Puget Sound Naval Shipyard's inception lies in the late 1880's, with the United States government growing increasingly aware of the strategic value of the area due to the previously conducted surveys. Increased imperialistic ambitions were made easier due to the beginnings of the modernization of

⁸⁶ Ibid., 73-74.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁸ Interestingly, Casserly states that the US Navy was not a significant force in quelling the Indian threat at this time, and the only role it played was when the USS Decatur helped protect white settlers 1856, due to Native American resent from the signing of the Treaty of Point Elliot. Ibid., 80-81.

the United States Navy during the decade, in addition to the serious evaluation of the existing coastal defensive systems of the country which resulted in the Endicott Board publishing its findings in 1886. While there were developing communities dotting the landscape, and the Native American question had been dealt with decades earlier by the signing of the Treaty of Point Elliot in 1853, the Puget Sound region continued to develop, and lobbying by the military gained more ground.

The eventual outcome of the increased importance of the Pacific Northwest to United States strategic and imperial goals was the 1889 commission which saw United States Navy Lieutenant A.B. Wyckoff evaluate potential sites for naval bases in the region. Previously, Wyckoff spent more than 12 years convincing the Navy and Congress of the need for a new naval installation in the area. In fact, a bill was introduced as early as 1880 to develop lands in the Puget Sound for naval purposes, but due to budgetary constraints, the measure did not pass.⁸⁹ Additionally, Washington gaining statehood in 1889 made lobbying efforts for a naval base and fortifications easier, as they now had power in Congress. The commission proved to be instrumental in a naval base being established at Bremerton in 1891. That same year, William Bremer established the city of Bremerton, Washington. This would prove to be the formal beginnings of the cooperation of the military and local community in the region, as they experienced increased United States imperial ambitions together.

The decision to militarize the Puget Sound, and specifically the area of Bremerton, owes much to the initial explorations of the region conducted by George Vancouver and Charles Wilkes. The surveys and findings of the region made it clear with regard to the potential viability

⁸⁹ Perry, *Bremerton and Puget Sound Navy Yard*, 13.

of a naval base and surrounding fortifications, due to the known strategic value of the area. However, the decision to develop a naval base in the region would be challenged by other emerging communities of the Pacific Coast. Facing a concerted lobbying effort by California against the construction of a naval base in the Puget Sound due to the fear of a decline of the industry around the Mare Island Navy yard near Vallejo, progress was slow.⁹⁰ The conclusions of Wyckoff and the 1889 committee, coupled with the findings of the Endicott Board, made it clear that development of Bremerton would move forward. In the subsequent chapters, the growth of the United States Navy, the 1888 naval commission's report, and the development of Puget Sound fortifications as a result of the Endicott Board will be analyzed, as well as the actual construction of the Puget Sound Naval Station.

⁹⁰ Casserly, *Securing the Sound*, 25.

CHAPTER TWO: AMBROSE WYCKOFF, ALFRED MAHAN, AND THE SEARCH FOR A NAVAL YARD IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Introduction

The end of the 1880's brought a renewed sense of vigor within the context of the United States building up its military assets, both in a defensive and offensive state. As the nation emerged from the devastation and military decline following the Civil War, a heightening of both military spending and production became a direct consequence. The situation of both the United States Navy and its system of coastal fortifications were deemed inadequate with regards to dealing with a modern threat. At the same time, it was inadequate in being able to service a nation with heightened imperial ambitions due to possibility of attracting conflict with competing powers. Both of these factors directly influenced the development and militarization of the Puget Sound. A growing navy required modern naval bases, and these establishments needed defending. This meant that a concerted effort to evaluate the Pacific Northwest for a permanent naval installation became a top priority for the United States.

Encapsulating this heightened value of the Puget Sound to the United States military is found in an article from the November 1901 issue of *The Scientific American*. Written by the champion of the Puget Sound Naval Station Ambrose Wyckoff, he proclaimed,

It is the nearest point of the United States to Alaska, Japan, China, and the Philippines. It is situated on a perfectly land-locked harbor, where all of the fleets of the world could ride at safety in single anchor. It is perfectly defensible and can be made impregnable by forts, torpedoes, and submarine mines. It is easy of access either day or night by the largest vessels afloat. It has over a mile of waterfront, where the tide is almost imperceptible. There is no sediment in the water, and consequently no dredging has to be done a second time. There is a good supply of freshwater from local springs, and a large freshwater lake, only three miles distant, with an elevation of 146 feet. It is in proximity to the line of outer defenses of Puget Sound and accessible by disabled vessels, where they can repair in perfect safety. It is in seventeen miles of Lake Washington, where all of

the naval vessels of the Pacific can be laid up when out of commission as soon as the government canal, now being built, is completed.⁹¹

Perhaps Wyckoff was embellishing the attributes of the Puget Sound in this writing, as he certainly had an affinity for the area and the base, however his statement still holds true and accurately surmises its military and economic viability to a growing United States military aimed at expanding overseas.

Two major governmental actions of the mid to late 1880's are intrinsically tied to the establishment and development of both the Puget Sound Naval Station in 1891 and the growth of the town of Bremerton, WA. The first event is the 1888 naval commission established by Congress aimed at selecting a site for a naval yard in the Puget Sound, championed by United States naval officer Ambrose Wyckoff. Several years earlier, Wyckoff had already campaigned and petitioned Congress for the creation of a naval base in the Puget Sound, but this fell on deaf ears due to the fiscal situation of the United States military. With eventual approval, and after spending several years conducting extensive surveys and strategic assessments of various locations throughout the Pacific Northwest, the conclusions reached by the commission resulted in the establishment of the base near Port Orchard. The decision of Congress and the United States Navy to choose this site for their naval base directly impacted the growth of the town of Bremerton. From 1891 onward, the growth of both the naval base and the town were intertwined. These communities revolved and grew around one another, with the added benefit of the defensive fortifications being built to protect them.

⁹¹ Ambrose Wyckoff, "The Puget Sound Navy Yard," *Scientific American* No. 21, November 1901, 328.

The second important event are the conclusions reached by the Endicott Board⁹² in 1886 regarding the immediate need to address and modernize the nation's coastal defenses, which resulted in the establishment of a series of defensive forts in the 1890's designed to protect Admiralty Inlet.⁹³ This is important, as these fortifications protected both the commercial hub of Seattle and the newly established naval base near Bremerton. Eventually known as the "triangle of fire"; Fort Casey, Fort Worden, and Fort Flager resulted from the assessment reached by the members of the Endicott Board. This intricate system of defensive fortifications highlighted both the commercial importance of the Puget Sound as well as the immense importance the United States government put in the strategic value of the area.

These two governmental actions are worth exploring in greater detail to more fully examine the growth of the community of Bremerton and the accompanying naval base and their links to the rise of increasing thoughts of United States imperialism. The growth of the town of Bremerton and the creation of the Puget Sound Naval Station exemplified the growing imperial ambitions of the United States near the end of the nineteenth-century. Casserly surmises that as a result of both military and commercial growth, a "security consensus" emerged in the 1890's. This consensus allowed both groups "to achieve their separate but compatible goals for the region. Under this consensus, the military established installations that allowed it to fulfill its mission of defending national security and projecting American power into the wider Pacific

⁹² The Endicott Board was appointed under President Grover Cleveland and headed by Secretary of War William Endicott tasked with assessing the state of coastal fortifications and defenses in the United States. Its findings were released in the 1886 Report of the Secretary of War to Congress.

⁹³ Admiralty Inlet refers the area of water that connects the Strait of Juan de Fuca to the rest of the Puget Sound. It is located between Whidbey Island and the Northeastern part of the Olympic Peninsula. For more information on the geography of the Puget Sound, see Figure 2.1.

region. At the same time, Puget Sound cities gained a measure of economic security from the military's presence."⁹⁴

This growth can be viewed as a microcosm of the United States and explains the overall strategic and expansionist goals of the nation emerging in the 1890's. The nation had its sights set on expansion into the Pacific, and a prominent naval base located in the Pacific Northwest unquestionably allowed for this spirit to manifest itself. There was competition among various locations along the Pacific Coast of the United States who were all vying for an establishment of a naval base, but ultimately through political maneuvering and fortunate geographic location, Bremerton was chosen as the anchor of this new era of United States overseas ambitions. The repercussions from this were vast and long-lasting, but they contributed to the continual growth of the Puget Sound as a whole and heightened the importance of the region to the United States. No longer limited to living under a veil of the "frontier", the militarization of the Puget Sound resulted in the area being known on a more global level.

The increased global presence of the Puget Sound by the 1890's directly resulted from the findings of the Endicott Board in 1886 and the 1888 commission to search for a new naval yard on the Pacific coast. Certainly, credit must be given to the previous findings of the United States Exploring Expedition conducted by Charles Wilkes. In both cases, Charles Wilkes and his surveys allowed Wyckoff to follow in his footsteps and for an increased ability to persuade Congress that the Puget Sound had strategic value. Additionally, the Endicott Boards' surveyors were also aware of this value, making the decision to militarize the region all the more feasible.

⁹⁴ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 2-3.

Ambrose Wyckoff and the Initial Search for a Naval Installation on the Puget Sound

Even in the post-Civil War wake of military budget cuts and general lack of attention to constructing new naval stations, United States government and military officials nonetheless realized the advantages of having a large naval base in the Pacific Northwest that was capable of servicing and harboring a large fleet.⁹⁵ With Britain and its holdings in British Columbia immediately north of the Puget Sound, direct competition, in the minds of the United States, was inevitable. Naval installations in California were simply too far away to be of use in the event of conflict, as a fleet would require several days to come to the aid of the Pacific Northwest. Additionally, as proponents of a naval base located in the Puget Sound were aware, the Pacific Northwest offered the United States a point from which to explore the imperializing possibilities of the Pacific Ocean. Due to this, a heightened awareness and incentive to survey the sound for viable locations in Puget Sound began in earnest in the 1880's. Ambrose Wyckoff, a United States Naval Officer and longtime proponent of a Puget Sound naval installation, led this charge.⁹⁶

United States Navy Lieutenant Ambrose B. Wyckoff's admiration for a naval installation located in the Puget Sound started in 1877. Beginning in May of that year, Wyckoff served a tour of duty with the Coast and Geodetic Survey. Lasting three years, Wyckoff and his crew charted

⁹⁵ Prominent United States strategist and Officer Captain Alfred T. Mahan was a repeated proponent for the United States creating a naval station in the Pacific Northwest due to the locations relative closeness to Japan and China when compared with California.

⁹⁶ Due to Ambrose Wyckoff's repeated lobbying efforts, both President Cleveland and Secretary of War Benjamin Tracy became increasingly interested in a Pacific Northwest naval installation.

the waters and coasts of the upper Puget Sound and Commencement Bay.⁹⁷ Leaving the Puget Sound area in May of 1880, Wyckoff immediately began corresponding with naval authorities in Washington D.C., where he sang the praises of the Puget Sound with regards to its ability to harbor an easily defendable naval installation. Wyckoff succeeded in getting a bill introduced to Congress in 1880 to select lands near the Puget Sound for the purposes of establishing a naval installation in the Puget Sound, however, the measure did not pass due to Congress's unwillingness to appropriate funds to this type of project. Simply put, the United States still found itself wary of increased military spending. Unfortunately, Wyckoff was sent to China by the Navy with new orders, as he was not permanently stationed in the Pacific Northwest. However his perseverance continued and he was so persistent in his clamoring for constructing a naval installation on in the Puget Sound that he became known in the Navy as "that Puget Sounder."⁹⁸ Wyckoff later wrote that if he would not have been transferred to China and had remained in Washington D.C., "I believe our naval station would have been started ten years sooner than it was."⁹⁹ The persistence of Wyckoff in his calling for a naval base in the sound is telling, as he had experience in surveying locations for the navy, and his expertise certainly informed him that the Puget Sound contained multiple locations that were ideally suited for a naval station. The conclusions reached by Wyckoff and his team were quite similar to those reached by Charles Wilkes and his surveying teams decades earlier. It would not be a great leap forward in surmising that Wyckoff was indeed aware of the findings of Wilkes' surveys.

⁹⁷ Fredi Perry, *Bremerton and Puget Sound Navy Yard* (Perry Publishing: Bremerton, 2002), 13.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Wyckoff himself states that between 1878 and 1879, “while engaged in the hydrographic survey of Puget Sound, I tried to interest the naval authorities in having a naval reserve of two-hundred thousand acres of government timber lands made.”¹⁰⁰ During his initial survey of the Puget Sound, he and his crew were well aware of the potential industrial and commercial interests of the region. Unfortunately, because Wyckoff was sent off to China instead of continuing to try and influence Congress to attain lands for a naval base in the Puget Sound, these large timber reserves went unused. Wyckoff stated “The timber on the reservation would now be worth several million dollars.”¹⁰¹ It is quite interesting to note that Wyckoff was persistent in stating the value of the region in terms of commercial value, as a way to instill interest in the Navy with regards to developing the area. Wyckoff was certainly aware that despite the decreased interest in appropriating funds to military ventures, highlighting the potential value of the region would be paramount in convincing the Congress to authorize funds for this project. With this being the case, in the late 1870’s and early 1880’s the United States government was still unwilling to devote a large amount of funding in the creation of new military installations. It would take both the economic recovery from the Civil War and the increasing imperial ambitions of the United States, combined with the Pacific coast of the United States becoming less of a frontier to more of a gateway to the Pacific Ocean itself in the 1880’s to really grant Wyckoff’s wishes.

During his tenure with the initial expeditions into the Puget Sound waters, Wyckoff, on numerous occasions, identified the potential ability of the region to harbor both a naval installation and the industrial viability associated with this. In his reminisces about the

¹⁰⁰ Wyckoff, “Puget Sound Navy yard”, 328.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 328.

establishment of the naval installation titled “Reminisces of the Survey of Puget Sound and of the Establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station” and included in a 1901 issue of the *Washington Historian*, Wyckoff states, “During my three years’ service on the Sound I became deeply impressed with its wonderful natural advantages, its splendid geographical position, and the great natural resources of the region of which it was the outlet.”¹⁰² This of course, echoes the claims made by previous expeditions into the region- notably Charles Wilkes and the United States Exploring Expedition. Additionally, and important to the future construction of a naval installation, Wyckoff mentions the great width and depth of the sound, as well as its ability to handle all sizes of both military and commercial ships. Interestingly, and perhaps trying to embellish the attractiveness of the sound a bit, he states that “even sailing vessels could make their way to Seattle and Tacoma without a pilot.”¹⁰³ Wyckoff’s statement was certainly to make both the United States Navy and industrialists aware of the immense value of the region and its ease of development. In addition to the defensibility of the sound and the natural resources available in the region, Wyckoff, when summarizing his initial three-year survey of the Puget Sound, did not let the strategic value of the region escape his examination.

Firstly, Wyckoff stated that a naval base in the Puget Sound would serve the United States well as it would be the closest point to Alaska as well as serving as a direct counter to the British naval station located at Esquimalt, which was directly north of the Washington Territory. The proximity of British forces to American holdings certainly filled United States’ strategists with fear, as the British maintained the most powerful navy in the world at this time.

¹⁰² Ambrose Wyckoff, “Reminisces of the Survey of Puget Sound and of the Establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station” *Washington Historian* No. 2 (Washington State Historical Society: Tacoma, 1901), 58.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 58.

Additionally Wyckoff poignantly stated that the British were already engaged in extensive development of the area.¹⁰⁴ The inclusion of the British threat in Wyckoff's initial surveys of the region provides evidence to the notion that the United States was not interested in the area solely for commercial or industrial development, but was also looking ahead to possible future conflict with Great Britain about accessing the riches of the Pacific. Therefore, a naval installation in the Puget Sound would be able to directly challenge British supremacy in the Pacific Northwest. Certainly Wyckoff was aware of this fact, and mentioning this to Congress would eventually prove to be a useful endeavor. Further cementing the strategic value of the region, Wyckoff stated that it was "several hundred miles nearer Japan and China and Chicago and New York than San Francisco, and it was at once apparent to a naval officer that this was the place for our principal naval establishment on the coast."¹⁰⁵ Unpacking this statement shows that the Puget Sound was indeed closer to foreign opportunities in the Pacific, but also that the region, in Wyckoff's mind, was more ideally suited to serve as a connection between the Pacific and Atlantic coast's within the continental United States. Highlighting the apparent deficiencies of the naval establishment of Mare Island in California served two purposes for Wyckoff.

Wyckoff was certainly accurate in stating that a naval installation located in the Puget Sound would provide more of a direct access to Japan and China and any potential imperial ventures that the United States deemed necessary with regards to its foreign policy. Secondly, and perhaps more important to Wyckoff, was drawing the government's attention away from California and refocusing it on the Pacific Northwest. This was due to new military installations generally bringing in increased commercial and industrial developments as well. Roger Lotchin's

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 58-59.

central argument in *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* perfectly encapsulates this dynamic.¹⁰⁶ Lotchin states that city leaders who employ federal military resources help create large “urban empires”, and that metropolitan-military complexes allow for a substantially increased growth rate.¹⁰⁷ If the Puget Sound, and the developing population centers of both Seattle and Tacoma were able to tap into this resource, then the development of the region would certainly accelerate.

Wyckoff proceeded to mention the natural resources available in the Puget Sound, and indeed states that the large amount of lumber and coal that the naval installation at Mare Island in California comes from the Puget Sound, which was over 900 miles away.¹⁰⁸ In addition to this, during his three-year survey of the region, large deposits of iron ore were found in the Puget Sound region. It is important to note that during his initial survey of the sound, timber was still the primary material used to construct naval vessels. Wyckoff stated, “It was still the era of wooden ships and our new steel navy had not been even thought of.”¹⁰⁹ Due to this, the United States Navy was keen on reserving large areas of timber around the country for naval purposes, and Wyckoff used this to his advantage in advocating for the development of the sound. He surmised that there were thousands of acres of the finest timber within five miles of the water, and fortunately this land was still owned by the government and not in private hands. This fact is quite telling, as in the 1890’s the government would run into significant barriers and delays when

¹⁰⁶ Roger Lotchin is an urban and western historian who focuses primarily on nineteenth and twentieth-century California cities, and focuses on their growth and development.

¹⁰⁷ Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1992), 346.

¹⁰⁸ Wyckoff, “Reminisces of the Survey of Puget Sound and of the Establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station”, 58.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

trying to secure land for the construction of Puget Sound fortifications due to much of it being in private hands by that point. Unfortunately, Wyckoff's tactics were not successful in 1880. However, taken together, the availability of plentiful amounts of natural resources needed in both building and maintaining a naval base certainly were in the region's favor.

One final remark from Wyckoff in trying to convince Congress to construct a naval installation in the Puget Sound relates to the climate, which he stated as "not too hot nor too cold," and that "such a combination of advantages for a naval station could not be found elsewhere in the United States."¹¹⁰ Wyckoff, being a staunch advocate for development of the area, was not blind to the lack of population and development of the region in 1880, and indeed stated that this is a problem when compared to locations in California. However, he surmised that "anyone familiar with the facts could surely foretell that the shores of the Puget Sound would someday be densely populated."¹¹¹ Obviously this turned out to be quite the true statement, as both Seattle and Tacoma, as well as Bremerton, experienced rapid growth in the 1890's and the first decade of the 1900's.

After being relocated from the Puget Sound to Washington D.C in 1880, Wyckoff continued his advocacy for a naval installation by trying to convince members of Congress as well as naval officials to strongly consider developing the area. From his personal account of his actions, he stated that he succeeded in impressing Captain E.P. Lull who was the hydrographic inspector of the United States Coastal Surveys Committee, Chief of the Bureau of Navigation Commodore Whiting, and R.M. Thompson who was Secretary of the United States Navy at the time. He urged that "two-hundred thousand acres of the most accessible timber lands should be

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 58-59.

selected as a naval reservation.”¹¹² Reasoning for this would be that a very modern navy yard could be built for almost no cost to the government, and the timber acquired would be worth over several million dollars. Unfortunately, the concept of American capitalism prevailed, and Wyckoff stated that the government did not heed his advice, and instead the valuable timber and land was sold to “mill companies and rich syndicates.”¹¹³ Again, this would prove to later complicate the future task of the government acquiring lands near Port Orchard for a naval base, since by 1891 much of the land was privately owned.

Referencing the failed bill introduced to Congress in 1880 to select lands near Puget Sound for naval purposes, Wyckoff indicated that the bill was actually favorably received by the House of Representatives Naval Committee, but unfortunately he was ordered to China for naval duties, and without his presence in constantly applying pressure in favor of the naval installation, Congress did not appropriate funds for this venture. Encapsulating this situation, Wyckoff proclaimed, “the prevalent ignorance in Congress and among the naval authorities regarding the resources and natural advantages of Puget Sound was so great that no measure was passed.”¹¹⁴ Wyckoff certainly had reason to bemoan the decision of Congress, but without an uptick in naval building and imperial aspirations, the United States was simply not yet ready to devote funding to this new naval establishment. Wyckoff proceeded to make trips to Washington D.C. at his own expense to further the cause for the Puget Sound. He spent the next seven years lobbying government and naval officials and was constantly applying pressure. Interestingly in his memoirs Wyckoff himself mentions that he became known in the Navy as “that Puget

¹¹² Ibid., 58-59.

¹¹³ Ibid., 59.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 58-59.

Sounder”.¹¹⁵ By 1888, Wyckoff’s diligence finally paid off and Congress authorized the president to appoint a commission to select a site for a naval station north of the 42nd parallel of north latitude.

The 1888 Commission: The Puget Sound Naval Station Realized

Due in part to Wyckoff’s concerted efforts in lobbying for a naval station located in the Puget Sound as well as changing national attitudes towards territorial and naval expansion by the latter half of the 1880’s, Congress finally decided to pay more attention to the matter of a naval installation located in the northern part of the Pacific coast. Casserly states that the government began paying additional attention to Wyckoff as a result of the changing attitudes among naval officers and political leaders towards “both territorial and naval expansion”.¹¹⁶ These actions were at the center of the United States wanting- or perhaps needing, another naval base. Norman Graebner stated the roots of American expansion lay in American military and diplomatic policy that focused on securing the acquisition of the Pacific coast, and that indeed the “land was necessary merely as a right of way to ocean ports.”¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Graebner claimed that American interest in the Pacific was always anchored to specific waterways along the coast. Quoting a passage from the *Baltimore American*, Graebner stated that “through the Fuca Strait, moreover, lay the new passage to the East which would bring America the wealth and splendor which had always gone to those who commanded the trade of the Orient.”¹¹⁸ Certainly this quote

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 58.

¹¹⁶ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, 89.

¹¹⁷ Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific*, 218-219. Norman Graebner was a historian who primarily focused on United States diplomacy and strategy.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 221.

appears outdated now, but it does still accurately sum up the importance of the Puget Sound region to United States' imperial interests.

Wyckoff's ability to convince members of both Congress and the military to strongly consider developing the sound greatly improved when he was appointed assistant to Commander George White. White happened to be the Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, which proved to be very useful for Wyckoff.¹¹⁹ Wyckoff, with this new level of influence, convinced White the value of a naval installation in the Puget Sound.¹²⁰ Additionally, and concurrently, Wyckoff was not the only person interested in this naval installation. While Ambrose Wyckoff was convincing various politicians and military officials, Oregon Senators John H. Mitchell and Joseph N. Dolph both lobbied Congress and called for a commission to examine the Northwest coast of the United States for a site in which to construct a new naval shipyard.

While this was advantageous to Wyckoff's goal, Mitchell and Dolph were not necessarily in favor of the naval base being constructed in the Puget Sound. As United States Senators from Oregon, they were in favor of a site located on the mouth of the Columbia River. While both stressed the lack of defenses on the Northern Pacific coast of the United States, and much like Wyckoff, they also realized the region's vast amount of natural resources. Their remarks during the 50th session of Congress state that a shipyard capable of repairing warships would be a major contribution to the nation's defenses as well as power projection capabilities by allowing vessels to operate in the Pacific Northwest during times of conflict.¹²¹ Interestingly, Casserly surmises

¹¹⁹ The Bureau of Yard and Docks was the naval office in charge of all of the nation's shore establishments, which included naval bases and depots.

¹²⁰ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 89-90.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

that the both Mitchell and Dolph were well aware of the increased funding and development cities and towns received as a result of a military establishment, and this fact was certainly a factor in their lobbying efforts to Congress.¹²² Regardless of their specific goals, Wyckoff, Mitchell, and Dolph were granted their wish in September of 1888. With devoted support from both the Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks George White as well Admiral of the Navy David Porter, Congress finally granted Wyckoff the commission he had been asking for to select a site for a naval installation in the Pacific Northwest.

The 1888 Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude was approved by Congress on September 7, 1888 and appointed on November 30 of the same year. Interestingly, the 42nd parallel is the northern border of California. This was done due to the existence of the naval installation located at Mare Island, and the need for a naval station farther north on the Pacific Coast.¹²³ The commission's findings were included in the 1889 Report of the Secretary of the Navy, specifically on September 15. The text from the Congressional Act reads, "The Secretary of the Navy be, and he is hereby, required to appoint a Commission comprised of three competent naval officers, whose duty it shall be to examine the coast north of the forty-second parallel of north latitude, in the State of Oregon and the Territories of Washington and Alaska, and select a suitable site, having due regard to the commercial and naval necessities of that coast, for a navy-yard and dry-docks."¹²⁴ Furthermore, Congress authorized the commission to ascertain the value and potential

¹²² Ibid., 90.

¹²³ Perry, *Bremerton and Puget Sound Navy Yard*, 13.

¹²⁴ "Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude" *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Navy* (Government Printing Office: Washington D.C., 1889), 124.

purchase of private land if need be, as much of the land in the Pacific Northwest was by this time under private ownership.¹²⁵ The fact that Congress stated that the commission would look at a variety of locations in the Pacific Northwest for a new naval installation is telling. This makes it clear that the Puget Sound was not the de facto location for such an installation. Due to the lobbying from senators and city-boosters around the Pacific Northwest, multiple sites needed to be evaluated.¹²⁶ However, the creation of this commission did finally make it clear that a new naval base was a pressing concern for an increasingly expansionist-minded United States.

The three naval officers chosen to helm this commission were Captain Alfred T. Mahan, Commander C.M. Chester, and Lieutenant Commander C.H. Stockton.¹²⁷ Alfred Mahan was well known for his writings regarding the importance of a strong navy in both a nation's defense and overseas interests and because of this, Mahan led the commission. Mahan, who Casserly calls the "Navy's emerging strategic visionary,"¹²⁸ was perhaps the perfect candidate to lead this expedition into the Pacific Northwest, as he would be able to fully evaluate a location's potential benefits for harboring a large naval installation. Perhaps one of Mahan's most important notions with regards to a powerful navy was his attitude towards isolationism. Mahan stated, "All, whether they will or no, are members of a community, larger or smaller; and more and more those of the European family to which we racially belong are touching each other throughout the world, with constant friction of varying degree."¹²⁹ This forward thinking attitude meant that

¹²⁵ Ibid., 124.

¹²⁶ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 90-91.

¹²⁷ Wyckoff, "Reminiscences of the Survey of Puget Sound and of the Establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station", 59. These three officers were chosen due to their strategic knowledge and their military service in the Civil War, which provided them valuable insight in locating a defensible location.

¹²⁸ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 90.

¹²⁹ Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, 161.

Mahan recognized that there would be conflict in the scramble of European imperial powers in the Pacific, and therefore he knew the value of a modern naval installation that could expedite naval expeditions across the ocean. Due to this, Port Orchard- the eventual location of both the Puget Sound Naval Station and the town of Bremerton, WA, was an early frontrunner in the commission's evaluation, much to the delight of Wyckoff.

Writing to Captain Mahan regarding his appointment as President of the Commission, Secretary of the Navy W.C. Whitney asked that the commission make a full and detailed report, and after a final meeting at the Navy Department on December 3, 1888, they departed for the Pacific Northwest. Additionally, Secretary Whitney laid out nine special requirements that must be addressed when searching for this new naval installation. The first is a good harbor of sufficient size and depth that could provide accessibility for the largest and heaviest of vessels. The second is a favorable position with regards to being situated behind multiple lines of defense. The third is security from water attack due to natural surroundings. The fourth is deep water with moderate currents surrounding the locations. The fifth is a "favorable position with the respect to the lines of interior communication (by rail or otherwise) with the principle sources of supplies."¹³⁰ The sixth is that the ground surrounding the naval base be suitable for heavy construction and capable of harboring excavated docks and basins. The seventh is the location be in close proximity to centers of labor and supplies. The eighth is the "healthiness of the climate and its suitability for out-of-door labor."¹³¹ Finally, the ninth requirement is the existence of an ample supply of fresh water.¹³² While this sounds like an exhaustive list of requirements, it is

¹³⁰ "Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude", 125.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 125.

clear that right from the start that the Puget Sound contained multiple locations that met all of them. This was a set of requirements that other areas, like the mouth of the Columbia River in Oregon, would not be able to contend with. Nonetheless, the commission was instructed to survey the entire Pacific Northwest coastline.

Importantly, the commission was also instructed that before their departure, they contact the Chief of Engineers of the Army to discuss the potential and state of fortifications in the Pacific Northwest. The Endicott Board conducted its analysis of the state of the United States coastal defenses in 1886, and had released its findings a year later, so the 1888 commission had access to these surveys. The Puget Sound was undefended, however it did provide for ample opportunities with regards to coastal fortifications, which was another plus in favor of a naval installation in the region. Secretary of the Navy Whitney therefore mentions, “Fortifications that are in progress, or under consideration, for the improvement of any harbors or waters that come within the scope of your examination.”¹³³ His use of the phrase “under consideration” is important within a Puget Sound context, as surveys pertaining to the viability of fortifications located in the region had been conducted ever since Charles Wilkes led the United States Exploring Expedition into the area during the early 1840’s. All of these reports repeatedly claimed that the waters were easily defensible, and this was made even more effective as naval artillery increased in both size and range.

Whitney directed Captain Mahan to also obtain any hydrographic surveys from the Coast Survey Office which would be of immense use to the committee, and finally instructed the Commandant of the Mare Island Naval Station in California to provide the committee with any

¹³³ Ibid., 125.

assistance they require, which included vessels for surveying and transportation.¹³⁴ This proved to be a task that the Mare Island Naval Station would disagree with, as any additional naval station on the Pacific coast could potentially take profit away from California. However, even with these setbacks, coupled with a delay in meeting the Army Fortification Board in New York due to illness, the commission finally left for the Pacific coast on January 22, 1889 and reassembled in San Francisco, California on February 1, 1889.

Mahan indicated that the commission intended to make a thorough analysis of the Pacific coast starting with the mouth of the Columbia River and Portland, Oregon. While the commission did obtain thorough hydrographical data on most of the coast, they decided to expedite their survey of Lake Washington near Seattle. This was because there was a severe lack of hydrographic and topographic data pertaining to the lake. Mahan stated, “Lake Washington has been prominently discussed and advocated as the best site for a navy- yard.”¹³⁵ Therefore, the commission needed to make a thorough survey of the Lake and the surrounding area, which was very close to the city of Seattle and only 6 miles from the Puget Sound. While this is true, this fact also reinforces Casserly’s premise that various city officials dotting the Pacific coast had the commission thoroughly on their minds with regards to profits and growth associated with new military installation construction.¹³⁶ While the cities benefited from military construction, this was not necessarily a one-way street.

Mahan recognized the assistance that local civilian communities could provide to the commission and stated that prior to their arrival to the Pacific coast, a list of twenty questions

¹³⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 126.

¹³⁶ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, 90-91.

was distributed to “the officials of the principal cities in the region to be visited, or to persons of reputation residing at smaller centers near possible sites for a navy-yard.”¹³⁷ In a sense, this was a chance for the various local communities throughout the region to advocate for and embellish their communities to the United States Navy. Interestingly, the list of questions sent to the communities is provided in the appendices of the commission’s report. The questions ask for information regarding local quantities of timber and lumber, a community’s ability to locally produce iron and steel, and coal. Additionally, the commission was interested in machine shops in the area, as well as the supply of manual labor. Related to the supply of labor is the population size within a twenty-mile radius. Temperature, annual snow and rainfall, as well as the availability of fresh water was also alluded to. Perhaps in a more morbid sense, the commission asked what the death-rate was for each community and any associated diseases that were prominent in the area. Finally, any railroads that travelled through each community was asked for.¹³⁸ Certainly for the United States Navy, the location and its ability to harbor a modern naval installation and associated defenses was the important factor in deciding between the various locations, but the community’s ability to construct such an installation without much outside help was also valuable, as this would drastically cut build times.

Of note is the fact that local community boosters tended to turn out in high numbers in anticipation of the commission visiting their respective communities. Casserly states that these

¹³⁷ “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”, 126.

¹³⁸ “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”, 150. The full list of the questions that each community was asked for can be found in the appendices section under Appendix A in the report and is titled “Information Desired by the Commission Appointed to Select a Navy Yard Site Upon the Northwest Coast.”

communities regarded the naval installation as “fair game for us all to hunt” and indeed spent time and resources in trying to persuade the commission in the advantages of their particular location.¹³⁹ Additionally, prominent Seattle citizens tried to convince naval commission that Lake Washington was the ideal place for the site of this new naval yard, several factors influenced this idea. One was that Seattle officials knew the government was interested in building a canal from Lake Union through to Lake Washington, and this canal would provide the navy access to a freshwater harbor that could be easily defended. However, the canal was not built yet, so Seattle boosters ultimately failed in this endeavor. While Lake Washington might have made an ideal location for a naval station, the canal would impose serious size constraints on military vessels trying to reach the lake.¹⁴⁰ South of Seattle, the growing city of Tacoma was also actively trying to convince the commission to seriously consider both Gig Harbor and Quartermaster Harbor as sites for the naval station.

Interestingly, an example of these communities’ excitement over the commission can be found in several articles from the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* preceding the arrival of the commission. By directly publishing the community’s answers to these questions, the public became increasingly excited about the prospect of a naval installation due to the job security this would bring. Mahan’s tactic was quite successful in soliciting answers from communities dotting the Pacific coast, ranging from Portland to locations across the entirety of the sound. Published on December 18, 1888 by the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* and titled “Puget Sound Naval Yard”, this article firstly advocates for the skill of Tacoma’s workers as well as their “patriotism”, coupled with the growing possibility of international complications between Great Britain and America.

¹³⁹ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, 91.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

Of note is the mentioning that the navy yard is “fair game for us all to hunt”, and that Tacoma has appointed “committees to besiege the commission which is charged with the duty of examining all points and recommending that most suitable in respect to the national purposes for which naval stations are required.”¹⁴¹

Throughout the article, the writer proceeded to negate the viability of the other locations for a navy yard in an act of boosting Tacoma’s chances. Importantly, the article does mention that Seattle is perhaps the frontrunner due to its size, but claimed that the biggest obstacle to Seattle is that “an expensive canal and series of locks are necessary”, in reference to the canal needed to reach Lake Washington.¹⁴² While certainly advocating for Tacoma, the author accepted that the navy yard needs to be “properly located” and that “there is no use in anybody’s getting hysterical on this subject, as its decision is not likely to be governed in the slightest degree by local desires or influences.”¹⁴³ This is an important point because the chances that any of these community boosters and advocates would have any real say in the outcome of the commission was relatively low, and indeed the commission would chose a location based on ease of defense, rather than an already developed community.

Further evidence regarding the importance of the commission’s questions is found in an additional article from the *Tacoma Daily Ledger* titled “Report of the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to the Naval Board” and published on February 13, 1889 relates to the request that Tacoma city officials received with regards to the arrival of the naval committee and the list of questions they needed to answer before their arrival. Anticipating the arrival of Captain Mahan,

¹⁴¹ “Puget Sound Navy Yard,” *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, December 18, 1888.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Tacoma put together a committee to try and answer the questions in the best manner possible. It is telling as to the level of care that the mayor of Tacoma puts into answering these questions, as the city certainly had high hopes that either Gig or Quartermaster Harbor be chosen by the committee.¹⁴⁴ The article details the answers provided to the committee's questions.

Embellishing the amount of timber and lumber located in the area is done with great care, as well as the amount of coal. However, and certainly to Tacoma's disappointment, they stated that steel and iron are "obtained from the East and California, but steps are being taken to erect iron and steel works on the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad."¹⁴⁵ Interestingly and in response to the living conditions of Tacoma, the article stated "at present the rents are exceptionally high owing to the unusual demand consequent upon the large immigration into this region."¹⁴⁶

Another factor the committee considered was the general well-being of the local population. Tacoma's answer is telling, and they indicated that the death rate in Tacoma for the previous year (1888) was 8.49 per one- thousand people, although they make sure to clarify that this was not due to disease. To back this claim up, they solicit their most notable doctor, H.C. Bostwick, to respond directly to this question. He stated, "With my experience of thirteen years in the practice of medicine in this place, I cannot say that there is any disease that is or has been especially prevalent in this locality."¹⁴⁷ However, to explain the rather high death-rate in the area, he explains that due to the large number of mills and other manufacturing enterprises in the area that most of the deaths are due to on-the-job accidents. The article proceeded to tout the

¹⁴⁴ "Report of the Committee of the Chamber of Commerce to the Naval Board," *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, February 13, 1889.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

future developments planned for Tacoma, and that it would be in the commission's interest to strongly consider the city for the naval station.

It is clear that Tacoma, and the other locations under consideration in the Pacific Northwest, took the consideration of the committee to be of great importance due to the massive boost to the economy of the region associated with a large construction project such as a naval base. While each location was certainly aware of the viability of Port Orchard, which was located across the sound from Seattle and a fair distance from Tacoma, they nonetheless tried their best to sway the commission. However, the commission still needed to conduct a thorough survey of the area and reach this conclusion on their own.

It stands to reason that the city of Seattle indeed had their sights set on the commission choosing Lake Washington as the future site of the naval station. Evidence for this is found in two articles from the February 14, 1889 issue from the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. The first, simply titled "The Naval Commission", speaks of the delight that the commission hastened their plan to examine Lake Washington first, instead of remaining in Portland. While the commission made this move because they knew that obtaining accurate surveys of Lake Washington would be beneficial, and not necessarily because the lake was the front-runner, Seattle officials nonetheless took this move as a sign that they were in the lead.¹⁴⁸ While the article acknowledges that other locations in the Pacific Northwest will be evaluated by the commission, it stated that, "We of Seattle believe confidently that of all the places which have been or can be suggested, Lake Washington has the most advantages and the fewest disadvantages."¹⁴⁹ To clarify this, the article maintained that this is because Lake Washington is composed of freshwater, Seattle has a

¹⁴⁸ "The Naval Commission," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 14, 1889.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

large population size in which to provide a steady pool of labor for a large construction, numerous railroads, and close proximity to timber, coal, and iron works. Oddly, no mention of the enormous cost of the not-yet built canal connecting the lake to Puget Sound is mentioned. Obviously, city officials wanted to highlight positive traits, and not negative ones.

The second article from the same newspaper, titled “To View Lake Washington: Arrival in Seattle of the Naval Commission”, made it clear that the commission is to be taken care of and all of their concerns and needs are to be met. Seattle’s Mayor Moran seemingly made sure the commission thought well of Seattle, and established a committee to tend to the needs of Captain Mahan and the members of the party.¹⁵⁰ Interestingly, and obviously trying to show the glamorous elements of Seattle, Mayor Robert Moran stated, “At 9 o’clock this morning the commission accompanied by about 20 of Seattle’s most distinguished citizens will sail on the *Manzanita* to Salmon Bay.”¹⁵¹ From a tour of the water of Seattle, the commission would then head to Lake Washington to conduct their survey of the lake. Importantly, the article mentions that, “the commission has been provided with considerable data, including the replies of Mr. Begg to their twenty questions, Secretary Kittinger’s report to the Board of Trade, annual additions of Seattle newspapers, Colonel Haller’s report on Seattle’s advantages as a site for a naval station, and data as to the cost of constructing the Lake Washington canal.”¹⁵²

The responses that the numerous locations provided to Mahan’s naval commission illustrate the extremely competitive, and lucrative, nature of trying to secure a large military installation. While the various towns and cities made sure to answer the list of twenty questions,

¹⁵⁰ “To View Lake Washington,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 14, 1889.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

it is clear that going above and beyond the call of duty, and at least in Seattle's case, was certainly an option worth trying. This fact lends itself well to the notion that Puget Sound Naval Station really was "fair game" for the communities dotting the sound, even if the naval commission was considering strategic and defensive interests over established population centers and manufacturing capabilities. It seemed conflict, rather than cooperation marred to commission's decision making abilities. Determined opposition not only from Eastern and Californian military and business personnel, but also from other candidates within the northwest was seemingly commonplace.¹⁵³

After the extensive examination of Lake Washington concluded, Mahan indicated that the commission spent the next five weeks in a "minute examination of all of the waters collectively known as the Puget Sound, together with the more important parts of the coast from Port Angeles, on the Straits of Juan de Fuca, eastward to and including, Bellingham Bay; also the Haro Archipelago, or San Juan group of islands."¹⁵⁴ Mahan noted that at almost every location they visited, interested citizens routinely turned up and tried to show the commission any points of interest if they had even a remote connection to the commission's goals. This is interesting, and can be construed as another attempt by locals to sway the decision-making of the naval commission by being overly hospitable, although Mahan does not overtly state this.¹⁵⁵ However, this type of action does fit in with the known actions of the Puget Sound communities, and especially larger areas like Seattle and Tacoma. Even with this attention from the larger cities' citizens, Mahan and the commission became increasingly encouraged at the prospect of the naval

¹⁵³ Reh, *Fifty Dollars and Acre: A History of the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard*, 1-2.

¹⁵⁴ "Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude", 126.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

base being located in Port Orchard, which was on the West side of Admiralty Inlet, located between Dye's and Sinclair Inlets.

On March 20, 1889, the naval commission returned to Portland, Oregon so that they could conduct a more thorough evaluation pertaining to the suitability of the Columbia River for a naval station. While the city of Portland itself would not have minded the naval station within the vicinity of the city itself, Astoria, Oregon was also advocated for. Vancouver, Washington, was also clamoring for the commission to consider the Columbia River for the naval station site. Mahan stated that Major Handbury of the United States Engineers kindly escorted the commission around the various locations under consideration on the Columbia River. Astoria was regarded as a prime location for the naval station by locals due to it being tucked inside the mouth of the Columbia River, and had indeed published their answers to the 20 questions sent out earlier by the naval commission.¹⁵⁶ Of course, the commission had many additional questions. These included the defensibility of the area, the depth of the river, and the ability of the river to be properly dredged due to the shifting sands as a result of the tides and flow of the river, much like Charles Wilkes surmised during his expedition several decades earlier.¹⁵⁷ Major Handbury and other prominent citizens from Portland, Vancouver, and Astoria did the best they could to sway the decision-making of the commission, but many felt that it was to no avail, and the commission seemed to already have made a decision.

¹⁵⁶ The full list of Astoria, Oregon's answers to the Naval Commission's list of twenty question can be found in the February 12, 1889 edition of *The Daily Astorian* newspaper.

¹⁵⁷ "Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude", 127.

Evidence for this is found in several newspaper articles from the region. Many of them share the same type of thoughts, that the the commission spent too much time in the waters of the Puget Sound and merely visited the Columbia River as a matter of procedure. A March 23, 1889 article from *The Daily Astorian* titled “The Naval Commission” describes the arrival of the naval commission to the Columbia River. Interestingly, the article stated that the chief requirement for this new naval station was draft of water, and that “The United States Navy was to be when built, fully equal if not superior in equipment to that of any other power.”¹⁵⁸ New naval warships required a channel at least 30 feet deep to accompany them, and the article mentions that the naval station in San Francisco was only 33 feet deep, and this was considered the standard. This fact severely hampered a naval station being built on the Columbia River. Furthermore, the article states that a representative from *The Daily Astorian* interviewed Captain Mahan and the naval commission and afterward stated, “while thoroughly non-committal, and of course without prejudice or predilection on the matter, the writer gathered from his interview with the commission that their visit here yesterday was purely perfunctory, and that they have already decided upon the location that they will recommend in their report.”¹⁵⁹ This location was, of course, Port Orchard, as the article details that the commission discussed in length the suitability of Port Orchard during the interview.

An additional article from *The Daily Astorian* from March 30, 1889 takes a bit more of a depressing tone with regards to the failure of the commission to adequately examine the Columbia River. It claimed, “the naval commission has completed examination of the Columbia River, in a ten hour run from Astoria to Portland. Eleven hours on the Columbia, and one month

¹⁵⁸ “The Naval Commission,” *The Daily Astorian*, March 23, 1889.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

on the Sound. Now who can doubt that the location on the Sound was foreordained?"¹⁶⁰ While the writer stated that if the location on the Sound was the best for a naval station, the commission could have let the people on the Columbia "down a little easier"¹⁶¹, as they had spent large sums of money and time to basically be brushed aside. However, it was not all doom and gloom for the people on the Columbia River, as even a naval station located in the Puget Sound would mean considerable naval and commercial traffic would flow between San Francisco and the Puget Sound. The mouth of the Columbia River was between these locations, and therefore would receive considerable shipping traffic. As for Port Orchard being chosen, the April 5, 1889 edition of *The Daily Astorian* had this to say. "A Washington dispatch says the naval commission have selected the Port Orchard site on the sound for the navy yard. That's old news. Astorians knew it ten days ago. Well, it's a good thing for the northwest coast and we heartily congratulate our neighbors on the sound on the selection."¹⁶² While individual cities and communities certainly battled over this naval yard, for the Pacific Northwest as a whole, the addition of a large naval yard certainly bolstered the region's national and international presence and strengthened its ties to United States imperialism. With their examination of the Columbia River complete, the commission had finished their survey of Pacific Northwest and left for the East coast of the United States on March 24, 1889. Interestingly, Mahan noted that the commission did not think it necessary to personally visit Alaska, or in fact any part of the coast north of the forty-second

¹⁶⁰ "Says the Vancouver Independent," *The Daily Astorian*, March 30, 1889.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² "Washington Dispatch," *The Daily Astorian*, April 5, 1889.

parallel other than the locations already visited.¹⁶³ Such was the value of the Port Orchard site to the commission.

Why the Puget Sound and Port Orchard?

With Captain Mahan and the rest the commission members reaching the end of their examination of the Pacific Northwest coast for a naval yard, they now needed to fully justify why Port Orchard was the ideal site and how they came to this conclusion in a relatively short period of time. First and foremost, the distance from the Mare Island Naval Yard in San Francisco to Cape Flattery, which is the northernmost point on the Pacific coastline of the United States excluding Alaska, is 900 miles. This is a vast area of coastline for one naval station, and as Mahan notes, “the character of the coast is most inhospitable.”¹⁶⁴ Importantly, there are few natural harbors (except for one location), and almost all of them are relatively unusable from a commercial or naval point of view. The lone exception that Mahan is referencing is of course the Columbia River. While the commission realized the commercial and possible naval capabilities of the Columbia River, they were quite concerned that at times the mouth of the river was impassable, and the new, heavier naval vessels could not pass through due to the limited depth of the area.¹⁶⁵ Unfortunately for Portland, Vancouver, and Astoria, this effectively ruled out the Columbia River as the location for the Pacific Northwest naval station.

The commission was quick to describe the value of the Puget Sound area as a whole to the United States, and indeed surmised that its valuable features “all combine to indicate it as a

¹⁶³ “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”, 127.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

great commercial center of the future.”¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the location is connected to both the East coast of the United States and San Francisco by railroad, and has access to ample natural resources. The commission’s report proceeded to spend a great deal of time detailing the defensibility of the region when compared to the Columbia River, and additionally, Mahan is necessarily quite concerned with Great Britain being directly North across the Puget Sound. With a naval base tucked away on the United States side of the Puget Sound, a large naval base would be able to both harbor and repair a large naval force capable of (theoretically) challenging the naval supremacy of Britain. This Puget Sound naval base would also be able to service the important commercial and industrial centers found on the Columbia River, and would remove both locations’ naval dependency on San Francisco.¹⁶⁷ Mahan described the importance of this new naval base to United States strategic goals by stating, “it is a question of establishing a base of operations, without which our military position on the northwest coast cannot be maintained.”¹⁶⁸ A key takeaway from this remark is that this naval base was not being considered as merely a component of the nation’s defenses, but a component of an increasingly expansionist-minded United States looking out towards the Pacific. With British forces already present in the region, a naval base on the Puget Sound would send a powerful message regarding the power and ambitions of the United States.

Regarding a naval base located in Alaska, the commission surmised that although Alaska offers many potential defensible locations for a base and is close Japan and China, “it would be a drawback to a fleet to have to traverse the distance which separates Alaska from the nearest

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 128.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 128-129.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 128-129.

possible naval base in the United States.”¹⁶⁹ The final report to Congress made by the commission divided up the viability of the various locations as follows: The Pacific Seaboard from the forty-second degree north to Cape Flattery, Alaska, the coast-line on the Straits of Juan de Fuca, the San Juan Islands, the interior of the Puget Sound, and interestingly a special section devoted to discussing the viability of Lake Washington, which was likely included to appease Seattle city-boosters as Casserly states.¹⁷⁰ While describing each location, the commission noted that while many of the areas located on the coast north of Portland or in the greater area of the Puget Sound might be easily defensible, the problem with many of them seem to be a lack of development and population centers the farther away from Seattle and Tacoma they were. For this reason, many of the sites were ruled out fairly easily.¹⁷¹ However, the commission did reach the conclusion that, “the Puget Sound should be the locality in which the yard should be placed.”¹⁷² Furthermore, the commission divided up potential locations in the region as follows: The Puget Sound below (north) of the Narrows, Hood’s Canal, Possession Sound (with Similk Bay and Port Susan), the Sound above the Narrows, and finally Port Orchard.

The report provided an in-depth description for each location, and its associated advantages and disadvantages, however the commission does spend a disproportionate amount of time and detail regarding the Port Orchard site. This seems to indicate that Mahan and the rest of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 129. For a more detailed description as to why the commission did not personally visit Alaska and disregarded its viability as a site for the new naval yard, see Section II on page 130 of the “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude.”

¹⁷⁰ Casserly, “Securing the Sound”, 92.

¹⁷¹ “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”, 129-134.

¹⁷² Ibid., 134.

the committee members were well aware of the value and suitability of the location to house and sustain a large naval base, and thus were inclined to describe its value in its entirety. While the commission does admit that there were multiple areas on located in the region that could potentially house a naval base, Port Orchard was to be recommended. Mahan stated, “The Commission having been led, by a process of comparison and elimination, to the conclusion that Puget Sound is the best locality for a navy-yard in the entire region it was directed to examine, have, through a similar process, applied to the sound itself, reached the opinion that Port Orchard possesses advantages over all its other divisions, and that the particular site should be sought behind Bainbridge Island.”¹⁷³

Perhaps in a bit of a forward manner, the commission spoke to any potential negatives of Port Orchard first, as if to get that out of the way first and show that there are not really that many issues with the area. This negative aspect is the fact that Port Orchard is across the sound from both Seattle and Tacoma, and the commission states that these two cities are, “now, and seem likely to continue, the chief centers of commercial and manufacturing on Puget Sound.”¹⁷⁴ However, even with this negative aspect, the commission deemed Port Orchard to be such an ideal location for a naval yard due its defensibility and ability to house dry-docks and other large naval facilities to be too impressive to pass up. In light of this, the commission stated that a navy yard has a two-fold mission to fill. The first is that it is a business establishment for carrying on certain work of a very special kind, and the second is that a navy yard is a base of operations for

¹⁷³ Ibid., 138. For more information on Port Orchard and the geography of the inner Puget Sound, see Figure 2.2.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 138.

the defenses of the United States. Importantly, this second mission is more important, and thus takes precedence over business and economic considerations.¹⁷⁵

With military and defensive attributes placed at the forefront of the commission's decision making, Port Orchard had a lot of qualities going for it. Mahan indicated this by stating, "Port Orchard is the citadel of Puget Sound, not to be reduced except by long and regular approaches, even if the outer defenses be forced and the rest of the Sound be in the hands of the enemy."¹⁷⁶ Mahan's description of Port Orchard succinctly sums up why this location was the most suitable site for a new naval yard. While its military attributes were obvious, the commission did not discount its economic viability entirely. Even with Port Orchard being ten to fifteen miles from Seattle, and double that from Tacoma, shipping supplies across the Sound was entirely feasible. Interestingly, Mahan noted that while the commission was instructed to "avoid surmises on the future and confine itself to present conditions," they believed that railroad communications to Port Orchard would take place soon.¹⁷⁷ This unwillingness for the commission to avoid "surmising" about the future had a large part in dooming Lake Washington as the site for the naval yard.

With Port Orchard being selected by the commission, they proceeded to analyze four different locations within Port Orchard itself. These were as follows: A peninsula on the west side of Bainbridge Island, the north side of Dog Fish Bay, the west side of Point Glover, and Point Turner- at the entrance of Dye's Inlet. This fourth location was ultimately recommended by the commission. Bainbridge Island itself was rejected due to its isolation from future railroad

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 138-139.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 139.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 139.

lines. Dog Fish Bay and Point Glover were rejected because of their susceptibility to attack or too deep of water for a naval yard, respectively.¹⁷⁸ Specifically, the decision was further refined to Sinclair Inlet, which is close to, but offered much more favorable conditions than Dye's Inlet. Ultimately, the site recommended by the commission contained 1,752.2 acres and "will afford a mile and a half of waterfront on Sinclair Inlet."¹⁷⁹ The site met all of the requirements laid down in the Navy Department's instructions to the commission from November 30, 1888. This was an exhaustive list and included mandates pertaining to defensibility and the ability to house large docks and naval buildings, and of course, placed military aims ahead of commercial and industrial aims.¹⁸⁰

Finally, Mahan noted that the portion of the Congressional instructions which required the commission to ascertain the value and price of the land if it was privately held was executed "with much difficulty" due to the "speculation in land in this section of the country is probably at its ripest stage."¹⁸¹ After meeting and hosting a tumultuous series of debates with local land and business owners, the site recommended, comprising of 1,810 acres, was appraised by a committee composed of prominent businessmen and leaders from the Puget Sound at 33,129 dollars. Interestingly, the site's owners' valuation was placed at 37,964 dollars. Nonetheless, the commission accomplished its goals and was now ready to submit its recommendations to Congress.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 141-142.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 143. The full list of why the Port Orchard site best met the requirements put forth by the Navy Department are found on pages 143-145 of the "Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude".

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 147-148.

¹⁸² Ibid., 148-149.

Conclusion

After submitting their report in 1889, Wyckoff stated that Congress was at first unwilling to act on their recommendation, and for that matter, constructing any naval yard located in the Pacific Northwest.¹⁸³ Casserly indicates that this was partly due to the government still being unwilling to devote large sums of money to new military projects, but also due to the commission's decision for the new naval yard to be located in Port Orchard being actively rejected by business interests in Seattle and Tacoma and the Puget Sound at large, who were unwilling to be defeated and lose potential profits. This was coupled Oregon Senators Dolph and Mitchell also actively disagreeing with the decision of the naval commission.¹⁸⁴ However, as the United States proceeded to become more and more expansionist near the end of the 1880's, coupled with increasing ambitions of a more modern navy, a Pacific Northwest naval base became more of a necessity.

With the Washington Territory achieving statehood late in 1889, Ambrose Wyckoff, who through all of this and since the late 1870's had advocated for a Puget Sound naval installation, finally saw his realization come to fruition. With Washington now having access to political representatives in Congress who could lobby for military facilities, the seemingly stagnant state of the Puget Sound naval yard gained momentum when Wyckoff, in conjunction with Washington Senator John B. Allen, Senator Watson Squire, and Congressman John Wilson succeeded in establishing a second commission aimed at recommending a site for a dry dock in the Pacific Northwest. This was somewhat of a calculated ploy, however, as Wyckoff knew that a smaller dry dock would be more readily accepted by opponents of a full on naval yard due to

¹⁸³ Wyckoff, "The Puget Sound Navy Yard," 328.

¹⁸⁴ Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 93.

its smaller cost and footprint.¹⁸⁵ This second commission, of which Wyckoff was a member, visited the Pacific Northwest in October of 1890. Despite efforts of Seattle and Tacoma city boosters, the second commission recommended the same spot as the first commission. Wyckoff stated that the new commission embraced over 1700 acres located on Sinclair Inlet, and that the price was twenty dollars an acre.¹⁸⁶ Stating that, “no place in the Northwest possesses the advantages of Port Orchard”¹⁸⁷, the commission solidified Port Orchard as the site for both a dry dock and naval base.

Shortly after this, Wyckoff and Washington’s Congressmen succeeded in securing an amendment in the Naval Appropriations Bill of 1891 that allowed for funds to be set aside for the purchase of the first 200 acres of this new naval yard. In a fitting gesture, Secretary of the Navy Tracy ordered Wyckoff to the Puget Sound to complete the purchase of this land, and officially took command of the new Puget Sound Naval Station on September 16, 1891. In an important moment to Wyckoff, and due to his dedication and acknowledgment of the value of the sound to United States strategic interests, Wyckoff’s daughter received the honor of digging the first shovel full of earth to mark the beginning of construction of the dry dock and navy yard on December 19, 1892.¹⁸⁸ Additionally important to the creation of the naval base was the establishment of the city of Bremerton by German immigrant and entrepreneur William Bremer

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 95.

¹⁸⁶ Wyckoff, “The Puget Sound Navy Yard”, 328.

¹⁸⁷ “*Report of Commission on Selection of Dry-Dock Site on Pacific Coast North of Forty-Second Parallel*” (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1890), 12-13.

¹⁸⁸ Wyckoff, “Reminisces of the Survey of Puget Sound and of the Establishment of the Puget Sound Naval Station”, 62-63.

in the same year. Bremer certainly knew the advantages that the construction of a new naval installation would bring to a new town clamoring for resources and development.

The naval installation continued to grow in importance during the early years of the 1890's which placed the Puget Sound at the forefront of United States' strategic and imperial policy. With an increasingly modernizing navy, the United States began to hold an increasingly expansionist outlook on the Pacific Ocean. While the naval installation was secured in the Puget Sound, the job was not fully complete, as a new naval station such as this required a modern system of coastal defenses. The next chapter will analyze the process of defending the Puget Sound in order to fully militarize the location.

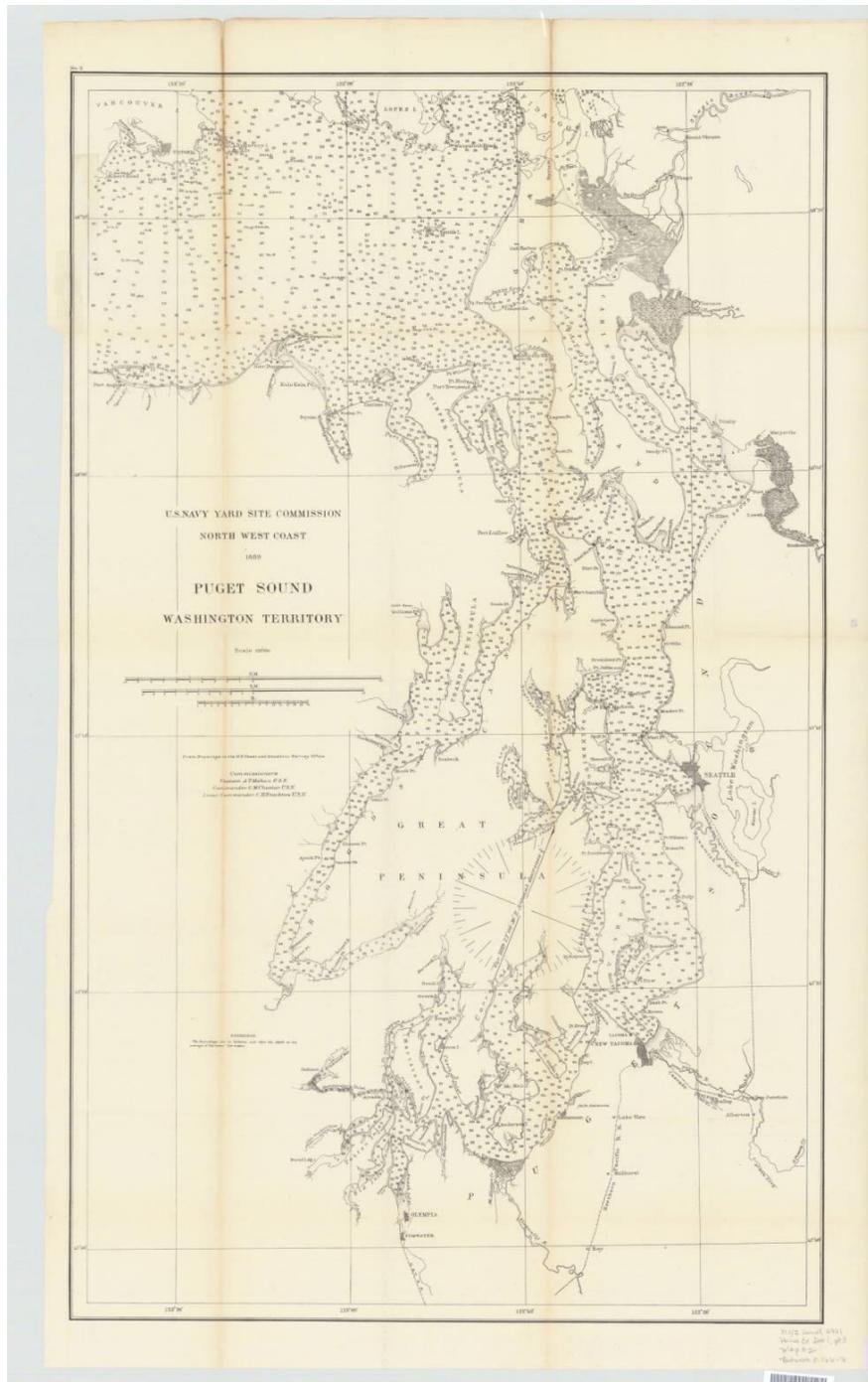


Figure 2.1. This map of the Puget Sound was included in the Naval Commission’s Report to the Secretary of War in 1889 and describes the geography of the Puget Sound. Source: “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”

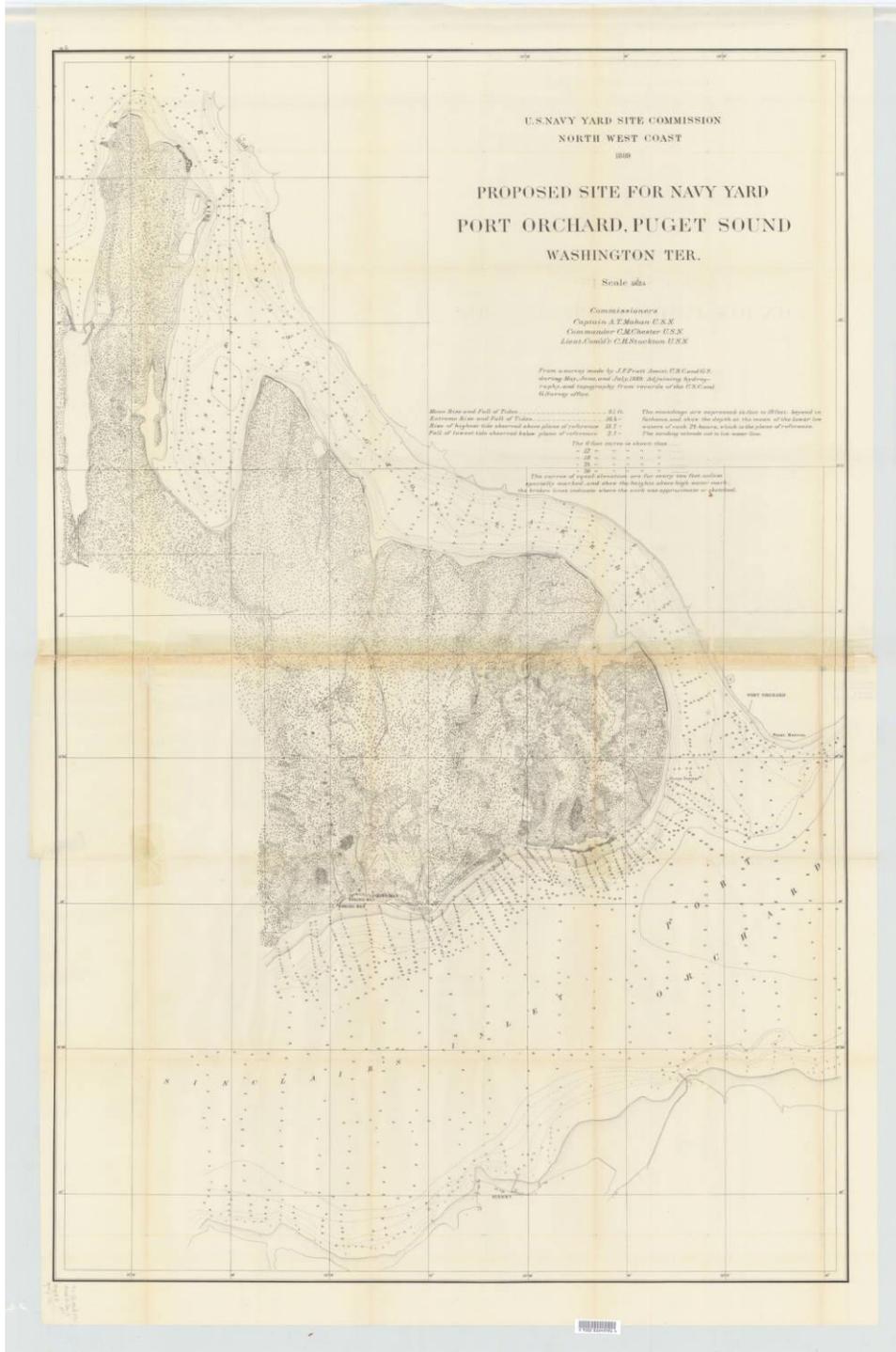


Figure 2.2. This map of the Port Orchard area details the many areas under consideration for a naval station by the Naval Commission. Source: “Report of the Commission to Select a Site for a Navy-Yard on the Pacific Coast North of the Forty-Second Parallel of North Latitude”.

CHAPTER THREE: THE 1886 ENDICOTT BOARD AND THE FORTIFICATION OF THE PUGET SOUND

Introduction

Like any large military complex, a new naval installation required a complex system of defenses in order to protect it. By 1891, when the Puget Sound Naval Station was formally established, the derelict state of American coastal defenses had been examined and addressed due to the increased military spending produced during the 1880's. Although the United States took much pride in its coastal fortifications during the 1850's and through the Civil War, by the end of that conflict the systems in place became rapidly outdated as both naval and artillery technologies quickly grew to outrange established fortifications. Defensive forts such as Fort Sumter¹⁸⁹, which witnessed the first shots fired during the Civil War, were no longer adequate by the beginning of the 1870's. In fact, fortifications such as these were woefully obsolete. This fact was not lost on United States' military leaders and strategists, and by the 1880's comprehensive plans to survey the state of these defensive systems were put in place. This resulted in the formation of a board comprised of civilian, Army, and Navy personnel tasked with analyzing the current fortifications and recommendations as to possible ways to improve them.

Historian Emmanuel Raymond Lewis stated, "In the entire history of warfare, few principles have been as durable or nearly absolute as the one concerning the superiority of guns ashore over guns afloat. Accordingly, for several hundred years the permanent emplacement of heavy artillery to defend cities and naval bases on or near the sea as an almost universal practice

¹⁸⁹ Fort Sumter is a sea fort located in Charleston, South Carolina. Importantly, the first Battle of Fort Sumter took place in April of 1861 which marked the first hostilities of the Civil War. For more on this, see *Allegiance: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the Beginning of the Civil War* by David Detzer.

among maritime nations, for the mere presence of such defenses ordinarily constituted a highly reliable deterrent to naval attack.”¹⁹⁰ This statement encapsulates the position of the Puget Sound in the 1890’s, as a new naval base had just been established, as well as the town of Bremerton. This was in addition to the commercial and industrial centers of Seattle and Tacoma being present. These factors necessitated the construction of a modern series of fortifications and defensive lines tasked with their protection. After the Board of Fortifications released their findings in 1886, further militarization of the Puget Sound became paramount to the nation’s national security. Taken together with the increasing expansionist policies of the United States, the area would grow to become a heavily fortified section of Pacific coastline due to the construction of a series of modern fortifications designed to ensure the security of the naval base and the local communities within the Puget Sound.

This chapter will analyze the state of American coastal fortifications during the latter-half of the nineteenth-century and the findings reached by the Endicott Board in 1886. In short, this board stated that the existing fortifications in place in 1885 were inadequate when pitted against modern naval forces, and an expansionist-minded United States might attract conflict. Therefore, the fortifications needed to be quickly updated. Additionally, the specific surveys conducted with regards to defending the Puget Sound will be examined. The defense of the Puget Sound became a large factor in United States’ policy due to the presence of the Puget Sound Naval Station and the abundance of valuable resources and commercial centers. Due to this, the region witnessed the creation of a series of fortifications collectively known as the “Triangle of Fire” by the

¹⁹⁰ Emmanuel Lewis, *Seacoast Fortifications of the United States: An introductory History* (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.: 1970), 3. Emmanuel Lewis was a historian who focused on military installations as well as the longest-serving House Librarian for the United States House of Representatives Library.

1890's. These fortifications grew to become a formidable deterrent to would-be attackers of the region. With the creation of these fortifications, coupled with the establishment of the naval yard, the militarization of the region was fully realized by the end of the nineteenth-century.

The Endicott Board and The Puget Sound's Strategic Value

By the early 1880's, the dire situation of the strategic defenses of the United States was well known. The annual congressional reports issued since the end of the Civil War made this all the more apparent. By 1885 the situation was important enough that President Grover Cleveland appointed a joint Army, Navy, and civilian board aimed at assessing and fixing this issue. Under a provision of an act of Congress, President Cleveland stated, "An act making appropriations for fortifications and other works of defense, and for the armament thereof for the fiscal year ending June thirtieth, eighteen hundred and eighty-six, and for other purposes, approved March 3, 1885, a Board, to consist of the officers and civilians hereinafter named, is appointed to examine and report at what ports fortifications or other defenses are most urgently required, the character and kind of defenses best adapted for each, with reference to armament, and the utilization of torpedoes, mines, or other defensive appliances."¹⁹¹ As the United States entered into a period of increasing expansion and imperialism, the coastal defenses of the nation became more and more important. Termed the Endicott Board after then Secretary of War William Crowninshield Endicott, the board released its findings a year later in 1886. The findings painted a grim picture of the nation's defenses, and any new naval base construction in the Pacific Northwest without proper harbor and inlet defenses would render the establishment vulnerable. Thus, the

¹⁹¹ William Endicott, "Report of the Board on Fortifications or Other Defenses", (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1886), 5.

conclusions reached by this 1886 assessment were extremely important to the militarization of the Puget Sound beginning in the 1890's.

Casserly claims that the militarization and eventual fortifying of the Puget Sound rose due to the cyclical nature of United States' military and governmental spending, and this spending was driven by developments on an international scale.¹⁹² Evidence for this is found by the government's decision to fortify the region arriving in the 1890's, which was several years after the findings of the Endicott Board were released in the 1886 congressional report. This action indicates that the establishment and growth of the naval base and resulting development of the economic value of the Sound went hand in hand, and indeed the civilian and military communities revolved and grew from one another. In Bremerton's case, since this evolving town was solely dependent on the naval base, the decision to fortify the area brought a level of security with it not often witnessed by "frontier" establishments. Therefore, due to this increased military presence, Bremerton was able to grow under the protection of the modern fortifications, which in turn allowed for a more active role in the name of United States expansion and imperialism.¹⁹³

In 1885, Congress authorized the fortifications bill and a board designed to assess the state of US coast defenses. Interestingly, Congress required that the board be comprised of two civilians in addition to the Secretary of War, two line (rather than staff) naval officers, two ordnance officers, and two members from the Army Corps of Engineers.¹⁹⁴ It was hoped that this diverse array of individuals would result in a range of opinions that would fall out of the existing grasp of the military and governmental bureaucracy. A quick ten months after the inception of

¹⁹² Casserly, "Securing the Sound", 71.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 72.

¹⁹⁴ Browning, *Two If By Sea*, 151.

the board, they released their findings in January of 1886. This detailed and far-ranging report included more than just an examination of the dilapidated state of the fortifications, but also a rationale for the expanding of these fortifications.

Extrapolating from this, the United States surely saw that its current defensive system was clearly inadequate for a country with increasing imperialistic, and therefore economic ambitions. Importantly, with regards to the Puget Sound- both the growing commercial hubs of Seattle and Tacoma and the soon-to-be Puget Sound Naval Station- the Endicott Board's conclusion stated that "the primary purpose of a coastal defense system was to protect the nation's important commercial ports from attack or bombardment, particularly where the port city doubled as the site of a navy yard or anchorage."¹⁹⁵ Additionally, these defenses were charged with the protection of merchant shipping when it reached the coast. Finally, the report stated that coastal defenses needed to protect American vessels employed in the vital coastal trade along the seaboard.¹⁹⁶ A sudden surge in military planning and spending coincided with the arrival of the United States military and its civilians to the Pacific Coast, and further pointed towards the Pacific Ocean and its potential economic viability. Whichever way the United States decided to call their impending actions, it was certainly a form of expanding imperialism.

These findings are directly applicable to the Puget Sound, as the United States continued to develop this region both in military and economic/industrial terms. Therefore, the fortifying of both the interior of the Puget Sound and its entrance became more and more imperative as the 1890's moved forward. The board's findings were released in the 1886 Congressional Report and laid the groundwork for the level of work that needed to be done in order to modernize the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 159.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 159-160.

country's defenses. These defenses did not comprise solely of fortifications, but also industrial capabilities that could produce home-grown large-scale naval and coastal guns.

Previously reliant on European nations (mainly Great Britain), the board sought to rectify this shortcoming- indeed if a country aims to increase its global outreach and influence, it needs to be able to produce its own arms and munitions. This fact was certainly not lost on the members of the Endicott Board, who repeatedly stated the need for improved industrial capabilities, while also being defended by modern fortifications. While the board was well aware that the United States could continue to buy from Europe, they also saw that with many European suppliers producing all that they could to keep up with their own conflicts, it might be years before the United States would acquire their goods. Additionally, purchasing abroad meant money going overseas. In an effort to stimulate the national economy and promote pride in national industries, the board rejected all notions of foreign suppliers of coast defense weapons and supplies.¹⁹⁷

In a bid to explain the dire and neglected state of the entire nation's defensive system, the report opens with Endicott himself surmising the entirety of the commission's findings. In reference to the annual reports submitted to Congress from 1880 to 1884, he stated "it suffices to state that the coast fortifications, which in 1860 were not surpassed by those of any country for efficiency, either for offense or defense, and were entirely competent to resist vessels of war of that period, have, since the introduction of rifled guns of heavy power and of armor plating in the navies of the world, become unable to cope with modern iron or steel-clad ships of war; far less to prevent their passage into the ports destined for attack."¹⁹⁸ Important here is the emphasis

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 160-161.

¹⁹⁸ Endicott, "Report of the Board on Fortifications or Other Defenses", 5.

placed on the protection of ports that might come under attack. While the 1886 report does not overtly mention an imminent invasion, it does continually stress the possibility.¹⁹⁹ Although the Puget Sound military installations had not been built at the time of the report's Congressional publication, what it laid out was certainly pertinent for choosing of a location in which to build a naval base.

Within a context of rising imperial ambitions, the report placed heavy emphasis on the vulnerability of the entire Pacific coast of the United States, and states that from Alaska to California, the nation is entirely defenseless. Certainly written in an attempt to conjure fear and support for their cause, Endicott goes as far as to say that the Pacific Coast of the country "invites naval attack" and that the "property at stake amounts to billions of dollars", which was an incredibly large amount in 1886.²⁰⁰ The developing and growing communities situated in the Puget Sound were therefore encompassed in this assessment. It is interesting to note that much of the report lays out in terms of the Pacific Coast being defenseless is easily connected to why the Puget Sound was ultimately chosen due to its easily defensible nature afforded by the natural harbors and singular points of access.

Connected to this, one of the main goals of the board was to ascertain which ports in the United States were the most vulnerable, and therefore were in the most urgent need of new defenses. It stated, "The first in the order of the duties imposed upon the Board is to examine and report at what ports fortifications or other defenses are most urgently required."²⁰¹ The Puget Sound, or even the city of Seattle, Washington, was not on this list. This fact lends credence to

¹⁹⁹ Browning, *Two if by Sea*, 160.

²⁰⁰ Endicott, "Report of the Board on Fortifications or Other Defenses", 6.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

the notion that since there was naval base in the Puget Sound in 1885-1886, the members of the board did not deem it necessary to defend in its current state. However, this changed in the early 1890's with the construction of the naval base and the immediate decision to install and expand coastal fortifications to defend the region. Interestingly, the members of the board were well aware that they needed to be able to adapt to changing levels of importance with regards to "what locations constituted the urgent needs list." They stated, "It is not necessary or expected that the order of urgency should be strictly followed in the lower part of the list of ports prepared by the Board, for it is likely that pending the period at which these ports will be reached in their order, changes impossible to foresee may occur in their relative importance and urgency, and such changes may also modify the extent of the defenses and armament proposed in particular cases, so that what may be taken from one will be added to another."²⁰² This level of forward thinking and willingness to adapt was certainly important with regards to the fortifications of the Puget Sound being built relatively quickly after the Puget Sound Naval Station was established in 1891. This lends credence to the notion that an increasingly Pacific-looking United States needed to make sure funds were set aside in order to defend the vulnerable Pacific coast of the country.

While the naval base was not yet established, the idea of a future which would require the defense of the Puget Sound and its strategic importance was not lost on the members of the commission. For instance, when referencing Seattle, Washington, the board stated that "this place was growing rapidly, and has large trade in lumber and supplies."²⁰³ The board report also mentioned the rapid spread of the United States into the Pacific Northwest in its entirety,

²⁰² Ibid., 20-21.

²⁰³ Ibid., 82.

claiming, “The country is growing so rapidly since the completion of the Northern Pacific Railroad that the places cannot be described because of this growth.”²⁰⁴ Additionally, and coherent with the national state of the nation’s defenses, “The town could be shelled from any position in harbor or from outside in Puget Sound at any distance from one-fourth of a mile to greatest range possible.”²⁰⁵ The committee made similar claims in reference to Port Townsend and Olympia. Interestingly, the construction of the Puget Sound Naval Yard eventually made the area itself vulnerable to attack, and this was coupled with a changing in U.S. naval policy from a coastal-defense force towards a truly trans-Pacific fleet.

The unsettling nature of stating that these areas are liable to being shelled with relatively little resistance offered to the attackers highlights the neglected state of both the nation’s defensive systems and more specifically the rising interest of the navy in the Puget Sound area, and the Pacific Northwest more generally. Importantly, the statement that the area is experiencing rapid population growth is telling as to the increasing importance of the region to the nation as a whole. While examining the list of ports and natural harbors of the United States, the report seemingly hinted at the future militarization of the Puget Sound and the Straits of Juan de Fuca. It stated that “the entrance can be defended against hostile forces, but it must be considered as exposed at present.” Furthermore, the report claimed that “the area would be very valuable for a hostile force.”²⁰⁶

While it is true that the bulk of the Endicott Board’s emphasis was placed on already developed harbors and naval stations, it is incredibly enlightening to examine the statements and

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 131.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 82.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 131.

claims made with regards to the Puget Sound. A level of forward thinking was at play, with the committee members seemingly aware of the future potential that this area had to offer. Newer methods of coast defense could be utilized. Robert Browning, in *Two if by Sea: The Development of American Coastal Defense Policy*, illuminates the increase in naval professionalism and intelligence beginning in the 1880's.²⁰⁷ The Naval War College was founded in 1884, and for the first time, detailed ways the navy could carry out its obligation to defend the coast be analyzed and undertaken.²⁰⁸

By 1889, after the reports of the Endicott were published in 1886, United States naval Captain William T. Sampson called for many of these recommendations to be implemented and proposed an idea for a system of detailed coastal defense systems at the US Naval Institute in 1889. He advised that cities and industrial areas that land fortifications, “if placed far enough in advance of the cities they protected, were a sufficient and complete protection.” Additionally, for these fortifications to be effective, the areas under protection needed to be able to force a passage between systems of defensive forts where they could provide an overlapping field of fire.²⁰⁹ This is pertinent to the defensive fortifications that were eventually built to cover the Puget Sound and Straits of Juan de Fuca. The passage into Seattle and the soon to be built Puget Sound Naval Station was narrow enough for this action to be accomplished. The eventual “triangle of fire” established by the overlapping ranges of Fort Flager, Fort Casey, and Fort Worden essentially funneled hypothetical enemy naval forces through a small channel, forcing them to deal with fire

²⁰⁷ Robert Browning was a historian who focused extensively on United States military history and specifically focused on United States coast defense policies.

²⁰⁸ Browning, *Two if by Sea*, 162-163.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 163.

from all sides. Certainly when engineers were looking at fortifying the sound, they used the findings of Captain Sampson.

While the fortifications that eventually protected the Puget Sound were constructed in the 1890's, prior to this it was not lost on the United States government that expansion into the area would require extensive defenses. Due to this, a detailed examination as to the extent of what these fortifications would look like needed to take place. On March 27, 1888, only two years after the Endicott Board's report to Congress, the United States Senate passed a resolution titled "Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound." This collection of various letters and transmissions between both engineers and officers of the Army engage in a lengthy and detailed account as to the future of the Puget Sound and possible fortifications.²¹⁰ Brigadier General and Chief of Engineers J.C. Duane stated that "The fortification of the waters of Northwest Washington Territory, assumes different phases, according as a naval station with yard and docks be there established or not, and if so established, the details of that fortification will be influenced by the location of the station, and in so far cannot be determined until the site is determined upon."²¹¹ Furthermore, Duane stated that not only should the potential future naval base be considered, but also the rapidly growing economic potential of the region.

Connected to this, Duane, in his opening letter in this series of reports, indicated that Great Britain maintains a naval establishment at Esquimalt on Vancouver Island, and the accompanying naval force there "would prevail over any which we could spare to oppose it in

²¹⁰ "Letter from the Secretary of War Transmitting in Response to Senate Resolution of March 27, 1888, Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound," Senate Executive Document No. 165, 50th Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1888), 1.

²¹¹ Ibid., 1-2.

that region.”²¹² While it is easy to cast this off as fear-mongering with an intended goal of securing funding for these fortifications, it should be noted that Great Britain and its forces were considered a legitimate threat in the Pacific Northwest at the time. Therefore, fortifying this area and constructing an accompanying naval base in addition to protecting the growing industrial and economic viability of the region was of the utmost importance. Additionally, the presence of Great Britain and its Canadian holdings just North of Washington Territory can be likened to a competing imperial power with direct access to the Pacific Ocean and any profits associated. Since the United States Navy was soon to undergo a period of rapid modernization, it makes sense that modern fortifications were needed to protect a valuable investment such as this.

Alfred Mahan, in *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future*, recognizes both the need for a powerful navy both in terms of the defense of ports and cities, but also for the defense of “her rights, her obligations, or her necessary interests.”²¹³ Undertones of ambitions of imperialism are easy to pull out here, as Mahan knew the value of the Pacific coast as well as the possible problems that the United States may encounter with Great Britain as the two nations competed for dominance of the Pacific. General Duane proceeded to detail the advantages that a naval station located in the Puget Sound would offer but acknowledges that the creation of these fortifications mainly hinge on the construction of a naval station. In his concluding remarks, he stated, “When the ordnance is prepared, or about to be provided, the naval station located, or the ports become of increased importance, then the action corresponding to these conditions would be taken.”²¹⁴ This is interesting to note since Ambrose Wyckoff and the committee tasked with

²¹² Ibid., 2.

²¹³ Alfred T. Mahan, *The Interest of America in Sea Power, Present and Future* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1897), 156-157.

²¹⁴ “Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound”, 3.

locating a site for a naval base in the Puget Sound were conducting their surveys at the same time as the reports on fortifying the sound were released. Of course, Duane surely knew about this committee, but had no way of knowing if the information provided by Wyckoff and his team would be acted upon by the United States government. However, it is clear from these reports that the United States was surely aware and interested in the militarization of the Puget Sound, as well as the rapidly growing economic and industrial importance of the region. These points are easily connected to the notion of an increasingly imperialistic United States.

With regards to the growing economic and industrial importance of the Puget Sound, the various contributors to the Puget Sound fortifications report frequently discussed this fact. For instance, in 1885, Brigadier General Nelson Miles called for the importance of militarizing the entrance of the sound as soon as possible. Writing to the Assistant Adjunct-General of the Division of the Pacific, he stated, “I am fully impressed with the necessity of the government taking such action as will secure proper defense to the great commercial interests of Puget Sound; these are constantly increasing every year, and have now reached such magnitude as to become of national interest.”²¹⁵ Miles then surmised that there are a variety of locations that have potential military usefulness in the Puget Sound, and called for a “board composed of naval officers” to determine the appropriateness of such sites.²¹⁶ Interestingly, Miles stated that Lake Washington had many advantages as a site for a naval yard. Specifically, he mentioned Lake Washington being a lake of fresh water of great depth, and its close proximity to the deep water

²¹⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

of the Puget Sound.²¹⁷ This detail is a surprisingly a common thread among many of the reports about potential locations to militarize and fortify in the region.

Lake Washington was frequently mentioned as being a potential location for a naval station. Due to its location near the commercial and industrial centers of both Seattle and Tacoma, it makes sense that Lake Washington be considered for military purposes. The report mentioned that in 1871 surveys were conducted designed to research the feasibility of projects designed to open up Lake Washington to the waters of Puget Sound. The President of the Board of Engineers for the Pacific Coast, Lieutenant Colonel B.S. Alexander stated, “the object of the reconnaissance was to ascertain if this lake could be connected with Seattle Harbor by a ship-canal.”²¹⁸ The team conducted extensive surveys surrounding the feasibility of creating a canal that linked Lake Washington to the Puget Sound, as well as the necessary locks to isolate Lake Washington’s freshwater from the saltwater of the region. This is important, as saltwater is detrimental to both wooden-hulled and the newer types of iron-hulled ships that were coming into service by the conclusion of the Civil War.

Alexander also remarked on the defensibility of Lake Washington and Seattle. He claimed, “For the defense of the entrance to the canal by either of the latter routes, and the holding of Seattle Harbor against a maritime attack, the occupation of a few positions on the highland overlooking Sandy Point and Smith's Point, and of some position the opposite shore would be necessary.”²¹⁹ Alexander concluded his report by stating that if the Government of the United States was given a chance to create a naval depot in the Puget Sound, it would be wise to

²¹⁷ Ibid., 16.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

not pass it up. Connecting this to future goals of imperialism, he noted that the Puget Sound is “on one flank of the Pacific front of the United States”, but the nation is “still in its infancy with regards to population and resources.”²²⁰ This is telling, as being written in 1871, it provides evidence that the potential military viability of the region was known at this time.

Importantly, Alexander also mentioned that “there are only three places on the Pacific coast of the United States where navy-yards or naval establishments of any kind can be established, where they can be made secure.”²²¹ These are San Francisco, San Diego, and the waters of the Puget Sound. This is particularly important, as this fact became a prominent issue when it came time to decide on a location for a new naval station in the Pacific Northwest. Due to the commercial and industrial infrastructure that grows in accordance with a large military installation, fighting over the rights to have these installations built in respective areas erupted. Of course, San Diego and San Francisco did not want a naval installation to be built in the Pacific Northwest, as this would take commercial interest and development away from their areas. Evidence for this is found in 1885 when the fervor of new fortifications and naval installations surrounded the Pacific Northwest. In response to General Mile’s call for fortifying the Puget Sound, Colonel Seaforth Stewart of the United States Engineer Office in San Francisco, California stated, “While concurring in the importance of preparations for the defense of Puget Sound, it seems to me that of San Francisco and of our great commercial ports on the Atlantic Coast should first be assured.”²²² Interestingly, Colonel Stewart then acknowledges the committee assembled to assess the state of the nation’s coast defense systems and points out that

²²⁰ Ibid., 10-11.

²²¹ Ibid., 10-11.

²²² Ibid., 17.

San Francisco is ranked much higher than any location in the Pacific Northwest. While Stewart is certainly not blatantly trying to neglect new naval installations and fortifications located in the Puget Sound, it still is clear that there was a level of combative bureaucracy at play here, with various ports all vying for military funding. Since, in 1885, no fortifications or naval installation existed yet in the Puget Sound, Colonel Stewart's recommendations certainly make sense.

These types of actions are reminiscent of Roger Lotchin's ideas put forth in *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare*. Lotchin surmises that California city builders set out to construct a series of great metropolises, and that effort is what created close ties with the military. The civilian and military interacted in a close relationship, and growth was secured and heightened because of this revolving interaction.²²³ With regards to California, Lotchin states that as early as 1854, the United States government created a navy yard located in Vallejo, California. From that time onward, Californian politicians and military personnel were aware of a military installation's ability to boost both growth and funding.²²⁴ Of course, the emerging and growing commercial and industrial centers of Seattle and Tacoma wanted in on this type of development. Brigadier General Nelson Miles again advocated for the importance of militarizing the area. Writing in 1884, Miles voiced his shock that the country had neglected the Puget Sound for so long, due to the rapidly growing commercial interests. He stated that, in his opinion, "the Puget Sound should, receive the same protection as is given to like interests and places in other parts of the country."²²⁵

²²³ Roger Lotchin, *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), xvii-xviii.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

²²⁵ "Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound", 21.

In response to this, Chief of Engineers Brigadier General John Newton stated that while he acknowledges the growing importance of the Puget Sound to the United States, the matter of fortifying the region should be postponed “until it can be ascertained whether it is the intention of the Government to establish a naval station in or about the waters of the Puget Sound.”²²⁶ This remark poignantly demonstrates the complex situation that the area found itself in. On one hand, Seattle and Tacoma needed protection as growing commercial and industrial hubs. On the other hand, the government was seemingly unwilling to devote funding to this cause until a naval station was constructed. This highlights the interplay between civilian, governmental, and military interests. It can be argued that this was a situation that would take some time to resolve, since 1885, the search for a proper naval base in the Puget Sound was still several years away, although the navy was certainly interested in a base due to the location of the Puget Sound at the forefront of the United States’ access to the riches of the Pacific.

The conflicts of interest mentioned above is quite common throughout the entirety of the Puget Sound fortifications report, highlighting the many facets at play and competing interests at work, even between members of the United States Army Engineers military officers. While this type of competition seems relatively normal and in line with wanting to secure funding for specific areas, overall it also speaks to the growing interest that the United States maintained in the Pacific coast, owing to its increasing aims of the Pacific markets. Historian Norman Graebner surmised that United States expansionist policy of the latter half of the nineteenth-century placed the nation “firmly on the distant coast”, meaning the Pacific coast.²²⁷ Furthermore, he stated that

²²⁶ Ibid., 22.

²²⁷ Norman Graebner, *Empire on the Pacific: A Study of American Continental Expansion* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1955), 225-226.

due to the nation's acquisition of land and cities on the Pacific coast, a "speedy communication will be opened up with China, and a profitable trade enjoyed, which must soon pour the wealth of that nation into our laps."²²⁸ Certainly Graebner's notion illustrates the valuable Pacific markets that awaited the United States, and the Pacific ports of the United States all wanted access to these markets. Therefore luring in military and government funding and building was a necessary step in securing their access to these profits.

Public support was also necessary in order to maximize the amount of funding and notoriety that the Endicott Board produced. While perhaps it is bold to relegate this as a form of fear-mongering, an article written by United States Engineer Officer Eugene Griffin in an 1888 issue of the *North American Review* clamored for public support of new fortifications by illustrating to the public the possible dire situation that the country's coastal cities found themselves in. Titled "Our Sea-Coast Defenses", Griffin summarized the findings of the Endicott Board and released them to the public. In an attention grabbing intro, Griffin illustrated the danger that American ports were in, and stated that "there is approximately six thousand million dollars- worth of destructible property; that is, property which might be destroyed by the fire of a hostile fleet."²²⁹ As an engineer, Griffin interestingly claimed that even if the United States possessed the finest navy in the world, it would still not be enough to deter or prevent an attack on the nation. The country was simply too large, and there were too many ports and cities to

²²⁸ Ibid., 225-226.

²²⁹ Eugene Griffin, "Our Seacoast Defenses", *The North American Review 1821-1940*, 147 no. 380 (University of Northern Iowa, 1888), 64-65.

protect.²³⁰ Due to this fact, it was therefore imperative that Congress immediately acted upon the conclusions reached by the Endicott Board.

Griffin indicated that prior to 1860, the United States maintained one of the best systems of coastal defenses, but after the “great struggle from 1861-1865”, the nation was in serious debt, the merchant marine annihilated, and the navy was left to decay and fortifications to crumble away.²³¹ Continuing with this attitude of despair, Griffin then pointed to the rapid developments in naval and artillery technology in the 1870’s and 1880’s, and indicated that the navy cannot fill in this defensive gap. Quoting an 1885 statement made by then Secretary of the Navy William Collins Whitney, “At the present moment it must be conceded that we have nothing which deserves to be called a navy. It is questionable whether we have a single naval vessel finished and afloat at the present time that could be trusted to encounter the ships of any important power—a single vessel that has either the necessary armor for protection, speed for escape, or weapons for defense.”²³² There is no doubt that Griffin choosing to use a direct quote from the Secretary of the Navy was a successful tactic, given that he was trying to instill a sense of imminent destruction to the United States public.

While Griffin was seemingly right to convey a sense of doom and gloom regarding the state of the nation’s coast defenses, the fact that the Endicott Board released its findings in 1886 meant that Congress was already aware of the situation. Although this was the case, Congress appointed no funding towards new fortifications, as motions failed to clear both the House and

²³⁰ Ibid., 67.

²³¹ Ibid., 65.

²³² Ibid., 67.

the Senate. This was also the case in both 1887 and 1888.²³³ Therefore it becomes quite understandable that Griffin, as a United States Engineer Officer, made a public plea for the results of the Endicott Board to be acted upon. Griffin blamed the apparent unwillingness of Congress to act upon the findings of the Endicott Board on four main factors. Griffin stated these as, “(1) Political expediency. (2) We shall have no more foreign wars; no nation dare attack us. (3) Guns and forts can be improvised when war becomes imminent or is actually upon us. (4) There is no necessity for immediate action. We can wait the further development of guns and armor, and ultimately profit by the costly experiments of foreign powers.”²³⁴ Interestingly, he then proceeded to call attention to the constitutional mandate of “providing for the common defense”, and claimed that the members of Congress behind this unwillingness to update the nation’s defenses “are politicians, not statesman.”²³⁵

In lieu of scathing reports such as the one from Eugene Griffin, by the end of the 1880’s Congress finally began to address the call for action as indicated by the Endicott Board. Taking the situation in the Puget Sound into consideration, this was certainly a victory, as Ambrose Wyckoff, by the end of the 1880’s, had convinced Congress to let him and group of naval officers and engineers locate a suitable site for a permanent naval yard in the region. Coupled with increased efforts to construct new fortifications to protect a new naval base, it seems as if men like Griffin were successful in bringing this issue to the forefront of American politics. While this is true, it is also the case that the United States was on an overall path of increased

²³³ Browning, *Two If by Sea*, 168-169.

²³⁴ Griffin, “Our Seacoast Defenses”, 72.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 72- 73.

military spending. Indeed, if a primary goal of the country was to expand into the Pacific, then a modern navy coupled with modern defenses became increasingly important.

An important player throughout the latter half of the 1880's with regards to the adoption of the Endicott Board's advice was the civil and military engineer Thomas Casey. Casey was a respected engineer at the time, particularly for his work completing the Washington Monument in 1878 while serving as a Lieutenant Colonel and Head of the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds. He was promoted to Brigadier General and served as the Chief of Engineers for the United States Corps of Engineers in 1888. With regards to the state of the nation's coast defenses, Casey was quick to get to work and stated that "the element of time cannot be disregarded."²³⁶ His work in convincing Congress to act quickly and appropriate the necessary funds to this national project proved paramount to the nation's defenses as a whole, but also to the future defenses of the Puget Sound. Evidence for this fact can be clearly seen because one of the eventual Puget Sound fortifications is named after him. Fort Casey, located on Whidbey Island, became one of the core defensive components of the "triangle of fire" fortifications designed to guard the region from attack.

In fact, along with an increased concern for new fortifications, the end of the 1880's also witnessed the rise in the ability of the United States to manufacture its own steel and weaponry. Browning stated, "by the end of the 1880's American ordnance development began to escape from the doldrums."²³⁷ This combination of increasing manufacturing capabilities coupled with an expanding navy and new coastal fortifications firmly cemented the growth of the United States with regards to its ability to project its power beyond the Pacific coast of the North

²³⁶ Browning, *Two If by Sea*, 173.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 169.

American continent. The Puget Sound became a veritable hub of this increasing industrial and military activity, as the region offered both a large supply of resources such as timber, and easily defensible locations for both a naval installation and defensive fortifications. While the end of the 1880's brought with it a finality in so far as the United States Congress was finally able and willing to make good on the recommendations put forth by the Endicott Board, there still remained the situation of deciding on exactly how to defend the Puget Sound. Due to the rapidly evolving technology of both naval armament and armor, as well as coastal defense artillery, this was an issue that did not have an easy to decide on answer. However, there were decade's worth of reports that analyzed this particular dilemma that proved invaluable in determining the eventual locations of Fort Casey, Fort Flagler, and Fort Worden.

Browning notes that by the end of the 19th century, the system of coastal defense outlined by the Endicott Board was "beginning to take substantial shape."²³⁸ In the early 1890's a redoubled effort began in selecting new sites for fortifications in addition to updating already constructed fortifications.²³⁹ While Congress was still perhaps slow to act in actually building these fortifications, new building projects nonetheless took place at a greatly accelerated rate when compared with the 1880's. This of course correlates to the defensive situation in the Puget Sound. Seattle and Tacoma were rapidly growing cities and ports, and the Puget Sound Naval Station necessitated the immediate construction of defenses. Importantly, the entire building period of fortifications from 1885 to 1905 are now known as "Endicott Period" defenses, and thus served to protect the nation during this increased era of imperial gains. The Puget Sound was at the forefront of this endeavor.

²³⁸ Ibid., 177-178.

²³⁹ Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 10.

What to Fortify?

“The principal stumbling block in the way of a fortification plan for the northwestern waters was removed in 1891 when the United States established the Puget Sound Navy Yard at Bremerton, in the Port Orchard vicinity, deep within Puget Sound.”²⁴⁰ This statement from a 1956 *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* article details the United States interest in fortifying the region. Additionally, the article stated, “as one student of Washington military history has stated, had it not been for this event the Sound would probably have gone for years without adequate protection despite the protests of its citizens, the efforts of Congressman, and the recommendations of the generals, because the plan of defense eventually drawn up was one for the defense of the Navy Yard.”²⁴¹ This accurately describes the situation in the Puget Sound pre-1891. While the government was aware of the ease of installing fortifications in the Puget Sound, it took the creation of a naval base to bring these acts into fruition.

Moving back to the viability of fortifications located in the Puget Sound, the reports pertaining to Puget Sound fortifications offer additional evidence pertaining to the growing importance of the area to United States imperialist policy. While it is proven that the United States had an interest in militarizing the area, exactly how this was to be enacted had yet to be determined. Included in the “Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound” are several important examinations of this dilemma. Reaching back to 1866, it is clear that the government was already delving into this issue. A survey was conducted in 1866 and submitted to the Office

²⁴⁰ John Hussey, “Fort Casey: Garrison for Puget Sound,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 47, 1956, 38. For information regarding sites chosen to fortify in the Puget Sound, see Figure 3.1. Additionally, see Major General John Gibbon’s 1889 article titled “Puget Sound- A Sketch of its Defenses” from the *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

Board of Engineers in 1867 that specifically tackled this problem. As a result of Engineer Order No. 64, the report stated its intent as, “having examined the Straits of Fuca and the waters of Admiralty Inlet and Puget Sound, with the view of determining the system of defense which ought to be adopted for these waters.”²⁴² From there, a detailed account of the various locations that would prove to be valuable as both permanent and temporary locations for fortification are analyzed. The sites that would eventually prove to be the locations chosen for Fort Casey, Fort Worden, and Fort Flager are all included in this analysis. This is interesting as it demonstrates that this research was taking place, even in the atmosphere of an immediate post-Civil War era which brought with it reduced military funding. Even with this being the case, the United States government still considered it prudent enough to analyze the complexities of defending a future military and commercial hub, which highlights the importance of the Puget Sound itself to future American policy.

Echoing earlier claims made by Chief Engineer General Totten during the 1850’s, the report assumed that the United States would maintain a level of naval inferiority to Great Britain, but this can be somewhat alleviated by the construction of coastal fortifications. The board members stated, “If it were possible to close the mouth of Admiralty Inlet by fortifications, the great extent of waters that would thereby be guarded would justify a large and prompt expenditure.”²⁴³ Interestingly, the board members indicate that Neeah Bay and Port Discovery, which are located at either end of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, were prime candidates for fortifications. However, since the entirety of Admiralty Inlet cannot be closed by fortifications due its great width, a third location is also necessary. This harbor would be located further back,

²⁴² “Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound”, 29-30.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 35.

and therefore it would be within the safety of the other forts. This statement is a precursor to what would eventually be chosen as a “triangle of fire” system of fortifications, due to their ability to overlap their fields of fire. The engineers surmised that three such harbors would render the Puget Sound entirely secure, however it would still require the naval forces from San Francisco to reinforce them in the case of a naval attack.²⁴⁴ Even with the advancements made in coastal and naval artillery by the 1880’s and early 1890’s, the system of defenses that the Board of Engineers proposed in the 1860’s still proved to be true.

One problem that seemingly gave the engineers trouble in choosing locations for future fortifications was the sheer amount of suitable harbors available to them. So well adapted was the Puget Sound for militarization that the engineers had much difficulty in deciding on this. They mentioned, “If there were only one or two good harbors in these waters the difficulty of choosing between them would be easy, but the trouble is there are so many such places, each with its advantages and disadvantages, as to make the choice between them difficult and render the discussion of the question, if we enter upon their comparative merits, almost interminable.”²⁴⁵ In fact, in 1894, the United States Fortification Board selected 11 points on the Sound as “being suitable for the construction of coastal defense installations.”²⁴⁶

The board members proceed to mention Port Discovery, Port Townsend, Port Ludlow, Port Gamble, Hood's Canal, Port Orchard, and Seattle itself as possible locations to construct fortifications. They admitted that while they did not end up specifically answer this question, they did note that, “they were favorably impressed with the advantages of the Port Orchard

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 36.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 38.

²⁴⁶ Hussey, “Fort Casey: Garrison for Puget Sound”, 38.

Channel, to the westward of Bainbridge Island, for naval purposes.”²⁴⁷ The surveyors reported, “This is a fine sheet of water, perfectly defensible by inexpensive fortifications at the entrances south and north of Bainbridge Island. The shores are comparatively low, and therefore favorable.”²⁴⁸ Port Orchard, of course, is the site that Ambrose Wyckoff and his team chose for the naval station, as well as the location of Bremerton, WA. Again, this report reinforces the idea that both the United States government and military were heavily interested and invested in militarizing the Puget Sound. Additionally, the members of this survey hint that in the future a joint committee of both Army and Navy officers should be organized to scrutinize the best locations for both naval and military installations. Of course, this call would be heeded in the 1880’s, and both locations for defensive fortifications and a naval installation would be decided upon.

Chief of Engineers Major General A.A. Humphreys concluded the report by stating that the findings of the board are that they do not recommend the construction of any fortifications at the present time. However, he again reinforced the claim for a joint board to be sent to the Puget Sound to select a site for a naval installation, and when this was completed, that the harbor be immediately fortified.²⁴⁹ Of course, General Humphreys could not have accurately predicted the reluctance of the United States government to construct any new military installations and fortifications in the wake of the Civil War, however the surveys built upon the likes of previous missions such as the United States Exploring Expedition under Charles Wilkes. All of these

²⁴⁷ “Reports Relative to Fortifications Upon Puget Sound”, 38.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

surveys maintained a similar thread regarding the immense value of militarizing and fortifying the Puget Sound, as well as the increasing commercialization and industrialization of the area.

With all of this information to examine, and the multitude of potential locations for fortifications available to the United States Corps of Engineers, selecting sites for new construction needed to take a number of ideas into account. The first was the location of the Puget Sound Naval Station itself, and the second was the defense of both Seattle and Tacoma. An interesting point pertaining to the dilemma of choosing sites for these fortifications has to do with the rapid technological advancements in warship design and power. Within the Endicott Board's report to Congress, the committee stated, "It is not generally considered possible to bar the progress of an armored fleet by the mere fire of the battery; some obstruction sufficient to arrest the ships within effective range of the guns is necessary." The engineers explain that the waterway needs to use newly developed submarine torpedoes, which in the 1880's refers to a static mine that is anchored to the seafloor.²⁵⁰ This is further reflected by new training initiated by West Point. In 1884, the academy updated their now fifty-year-old textbook on coastal fortifications to contend with these new technologies, and stated that submarine mines, sunken hulks, booms, pilings, and rope obstructions are all applicable.²⁵¹ In the case of the Puget Sound, since the majority of the waterway is quite deep, submarine mines were the logical course of action, designed to work in tandem with coastal artillery fire.

Although it took just over a decade for Congress to authorize the appropriate funding for Puget Sound coastal fortifications, by 1897 the locations for and construction of these defenses were finally coming to fruition. The naval station located at Port Orchard, now Bremerton, had a

²⁵⁰ "Report of the Board on Fortifications or Other Defenses", 9-10.

²⁵¹ Browning, *Two If by Sea*, 177.

few years to develop by this point, as it was established in 1891. In the Chief of Engineers 1896/1897 report to the United States Secretary of War, the first mentioning of sites being concretely located for these fortifications are mentioned. The report stated that the acquisition of new sites for fortifications is paramount, and with regards to the Puget Sound, “negotiations are still in progress for sites at Puget Sound, Washington. All available funds for the purchase of sites for seacoast defenses have been pledged.”²⁵² Captain Harry Taylor of the Corps of Engineers, stated that his immediate orders as of January 15, 1897, was to purchase the land for the appropriate sites for three fortifications in order to create an overlapping field of fire effect, as mentioned in the previous fortification reports on the Puget Sound. He indicated, “There are no existing works of defense on Puget Sound. During the year title was obtained to two of the sites needed for defensive works, and negotiations are in progress for the acquisition of a third site. The failure to attain these sites as early as desired has seriously delayed the progress of construction work.”²⁵³

Of course, these three sites would be Fort Casey located on Whidbey Island, Fort Flager located on Marrowstone Island, and Fort Worden located at Port Townsend. Taylor mentions that funding was appropriated by Congress in June of 1896²⁵⁴, which allowed for the construction of two emplacements consisting of 12 inch guns and four emplacements of 10 inch guns “by contract at one of the sites obtained during the year of 1897.”²⁵⁵ The same would be enacted upon the second site, and once acquired, the third site as well. The actual congressional act appointed funding for fortification locations at Point Wilson, Marrowstone Point, and

²⁵² Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), 7-8.

²⁵³ Ibid., 21.

²⁵⁴ Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 21.

²⁵⁵ Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers 1897, 21.

Admiralty Head. These correspond to Fort Worden, Fort Flager, and Fort Casey respectively, although the fortifications would not receive these names until several years later. Interestingly, provisions for more modern coastal artillery pieces on disappearing carriages was also allowed for.²⁵⁶ This would prove to be beneficial as large caliber artillery pieces utilizing a disappearing carriage that allowed crews to reload and service the weapons from cover became the hallmark of many of these Endicott period fortifications. Browning states that this design was less expensive than an all steel enclosed turret type of gun battery, and that the massive earthen protection offered to these guns was actually superior “in most respects to that provided by armor plate.”²⁵⁷ This is evident when looking at the design and construction of the three “triangle of fire” fortifications of the Puget Sound. All three of these forts utilized large caliber cannons mounted on a disappearing carriage, with the whole battery of guns protected behind concrete and earth defensive works. In the wake of this impending construction, Washington Senator Watson C. Squire remarked during the congressional debates of 1896, “strong defensive works at these three locations would present a fairly successful obstacle to the forcible entrance of hostile ships, and thus the entire Sound would be comparatively secure.”²⁵⁸

The Board of Engineers, although making progress, was still hampered by what they deemed to be annoying delays in finalizing the acquisition of the third fortification site. In the fiscal year from 1897-1898, the Board of Engineers report to Congress stated that the negotiation for the third site was taking longer than expected. Stating, “The acquisition of land for purposes of constructing seacoast defenses is in nearly every case attended by annoying delays,

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

²⁵⁷ Browning, *Two if By Sea*, 177-178.

²⁵⁸ Hussey, “Fort Casey: Garrison for Puget Sound”, 38-39.

particularly where the aid of the courts must be invoked through the medium of condemnation proceedings. Whenever possible, title is obtained by direct purchase, but often the owners of land do not seem to be disposed to deal fairly with the Government, or else the titles to the land are involved, and in these cases resort to the courts with consequent delays is unavoidable.”²⁵⁹ Due to the conflict between the growing commercial, industrial, and civilian populations of the Puget Sound and the United States military, securing the defenses of the region was wrought with delays. However, by the end of 1898, the third site had been acquired, “partly through purchase and partly through condemnation.”²⁶⁰ Condemnation, of course, refers to the act of eminent domain, which itself refers to the power of a government to take private property and make it available for public use. This fact highlights the conflicts that arose due to the government’s willingness to adapt the Puget Sound for military usage, now that there existed a large naval station at Bremerton, WA, capable of servicing naval fleets destined for the Pacific.

By the end of the 1898/1899 fiscal year, the Board of Engineers reported that all of the sites for fortifications were fully acquired, and that multiple large caliber artillery installations were completely installed, and that plans for more gun emplacements were being considered.²⁶¹ Importantly, by the end of 1900, the Board of Engineers stated that “the defenses on Puget Sound are all of modern type.”²⁶² This portrayal of the quality of the defensive fortifications of the region is quite telling, as only several years earlier the military was having trouble securing the necessary locations for coastal defenses from private ownership. However, through outright purchasing and condemnation, once the land was acquired by the military, construction of the

²⁵⁹Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1898), 13.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 810.

²⁶¹ Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1899), 36-37.

²⁶² Annual Report of the Chief of Engineers (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 33-34.

actual fortifications proceeded quite rapidly, owing to the value the United States put on the Puget Sound, both as a naval base and as a booming commercial and industrial hub. This growth would continue in the first decade of the 20th century.

Conclusion

The narrative of the fortifying and thus securing of the Puget Sound, and specifically the naval base located at Port Orchard and the city of Bremerton, WA does not end in 1900. However, the last decade of the nineteenth century was a pivotal turning point in the militarizing of the region and the creation of a military enclosure on the Pacific coast of the United States, which was on the frontlines of an increasingly imperialistic United States. Through the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States spent a considerable effort in analyzing the possibility of defending the Puget Sound in accordance with both a future naval base in the area as well as the growing commercial and industrial centers of Seattle and Tacoma. Even in the downtrodden era (with regards to military spending) of a post-Civil War United States, Congress nonetheless authorized funding which allowed for joint military and civilian engineering committees to locate and examine possible sites of fortifications. While the funding might not have been available till the 1890's, the committees generally reached the same conclusions. These conclusions were that the Puget Sound offered a vast array of potential sites for fortifications, and the region itself was a prime candidate to be militarized because of this.

The 1885 committee eventually known as the Endicott Board proved to be the catalyst in the development of Puget Sound defenses. The members of the board all unanimously agreed that the state of the nation's coastal defenses was less than optimal, and in fact was quite outdated and ineffective within the context of the rapidly evolving of 1880's naval and artillery technology. Due to this, the United States was forced to address this problem. Additionally, with

growing imperial interests, particularly looking towards the Pacific, an undefended coastline worried both Congress and military officials. While an increasingly enlarged and modernized navy was also being constructed by the United States, coastal defenses would form the second line of defense in case of an attack, especially if the navy was off engaging in imperialistic ventures.

While the Endicott Board was the overall catalyst for the improvement of the nation's defenses, within the context of the Puget Sound the real factor in Congress deciding to authorize funding to build fortifications to defend the Puget Sound was the creation of the Puget Sound Naval Station near Port Orchard and the town of Bremerton in 1891. While defending commercial assets were a positive side effect of these fortifications, it is clear the naval base instigated the rapid construction of the "triangle of fire" fortifications of Fort Casey, Fort Worden, and Fort Flager. Although there were repeated calls for fortifying the region before the creation of the naval base (both from civilians and military officers located on the Pacific Coast), Congress repeatedly denied these requests, although the importance of defending the location was acknowledged. Due to this, it becomes clear that the United States indeed had its priorities set, and defending a naval base capable of serving imperial ambitions into the Pacific became a top priority.

Taken together, the creation of a modern navy and new coast defenses proved that the United States was entering a period of changing international policy. No longer merely residing in the gloom of the post-Civil War, the United States indeed was entering the world stage as an imperial player. Browning noted, "American coastal defense policy was intended to provide not only the mechanisms of actual defense, but to demonstrate to all potential enemies that the

United States was prepared to defend itself, and by virtue of being prepared, prevent conflict.”²⁶³

This attitude would continue in the early 1900’s, as the Puget Sound would become a crucial player in United States imperial policy, and the defenses built there deterred any potential threat. The naval base itself and the fortifications of the region would continue to be modernized, and under Secretary of War William Taft, a new board was formed in 1905 which again evaluated the readiness and modernity of the nation’s coastal defenses. The Puget Sound was certainly part of this analysis, and in accordance to its role in US foreign policy, the fortifications would be upgraded in light of the board’s findings.

²⁶³ Browning, *Two If by Sea*, 191.

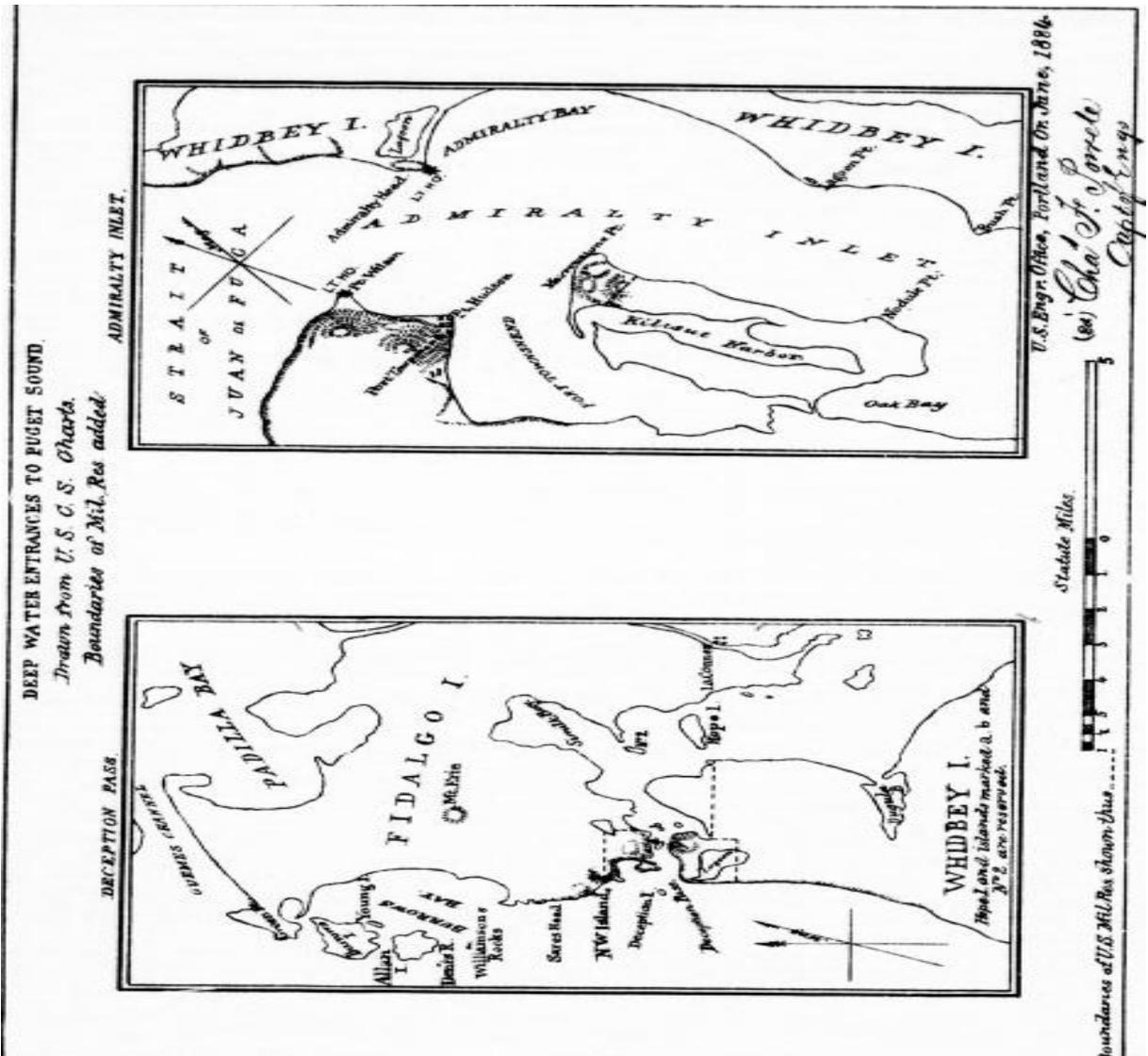


Figure 3.1. This map indicates possible sites for fortifications to defend the Puget Sound. Source: “Reports Relative to Fortifications upon Puget Sound”, 23.

CONCLUSION: THE MILITARIZATION OF THE PUGET SOUND COMPLETE AND A NEW ERA OF GROWTH

While this research focuses on the initial explorations of the Pacific Northwest and Puget Sound for future naval installations and fortifications as a way to propagate American concepts of Pacific imperialism and the resulting development of the Puget Sound Naval Station itself, that certainly does not imply that the military value of the area in any way diminished after the initial construction of the base and its expansion during the first decade of the 1900's. In fact, the base continued to grow in size and its garrison, and it continued to persist as an outlet for United States expansion overseas. Additional dry-docks were built and new facilities were constructed, in addition to the triangle of fire fortifications receiving ever-modernized artillery pieces as a result of the Endicott Board's successor, which was a new commission appointed under President Theodore Roosevelt under the direction of the Secretary of War William Taft. Known as "Taft Period" fortifications, new technological advancements in naval and artillery technology allowed for the creation of coastal defenses with even longer ranges. This was perhaps the ultimate expression of the original recommendations of the 1886 committee.

Therefore the Puget Sound continued to be at the forefront of United States international policy, which was a far cry from its designation as part of the frontier or hinterland merely a few decades earlier. As a direct result of the government's interest in continuing to militarize the area, the communities located within region prospered. Seattle and Tacoma, of course, took advantage of the development and commercial prospects that the naval installation attracted. Perhaps, though, Bremerton, Washington owes its rapid growth and indeed possible existence to the conclusions reached by the 1888 naval commission. The town was always tied to the

development of the base, and increased military activity and imperial interests into the 1900's towards the Pacific meant the location would continue to see a boom. As Casserly aptly describes in his dissertation, Bremerton, Washington can be taken as a case study regarding the effects that a large naval installation can have on a local community. While this is true, is it worth addressing the chosen ending date and conclusion of this research.

The initial explorations of the Pacific Northwest conducted by Charles Wilkes and Ambrose Wyckoff proved to be the catalyst in the United States' interest in the Puget Sound for military development. Throughout the 1880's, the nation had increasing imperialistic ambitions, and connecting the decision to both conduct a thorough investigation of the current state of its coastal fortifications and defensive systems while actively looking at locations for a new naval base in the Pacific Northwest to these interests is straightforward. Due to a number of reasons, including the natural defensibility of the area, the commercial and industrial capabilities, and the already developed communities of Seattle and Tacoma, the decision always circled back to the Puget Sound. Both the naval commission's decision on the Puget Sound and more specifically the Port Orchard location faced considerable criticism and angry lobbying from Eastern states, other Pacific coast states, and indeed the different communities within the area, with all of them vying for the naval base and associated defensive constructions which would directly result in a large increase in profits for each community. Therefore, each community was using the nation's growing imperial ambitions to their own advantage. While not necessarily outwardly concerned with the Pacific interests of the United States, using the government's willingness to construct new military installations was a viable tactic in securing economic and industrial growth.

While the Puget Sound did not stop "growing" in its military value by early years of the twentieth century, the foundations were already laid by this point. These foundations were built

upon the works of people such as Charles Wilkes, Ambrose Wyckoff, and Alfred Mahan, combined with the additional members that comprised both the 1888 naval commission and 1886 Endicott Board. The findings reached by the commissions built the foundations that allowed for the continued use of the area and cemented its military value. By 1900, the Puget Sound Naval Yard- as it was now known- was fully developed in such a manner that it was on the international stage. The decision of Roosevelt's Great White Fleet to visit the Puget Sound was not made at random but is direct evidence that the area was an important addition to United States security policy.

The communities located in the sound, coupled with the naval base, continued this elevation into the twentieth century. Importantly, the militarizing of the Puget Sound goes beyond an aspect of "self-defense" or securing borders, but, as shown through this research, was all tied into the eventual use of the region as a gateway to the potential riches of the Pacific. Additionally, due to the presence of the British directly north of the communities of Seattle and Tacoma, this served as even more of an incentive to secure the region. Due to these circumstances, the United States emerged from the post-Civil War gloom and actively constructed a modern naval fleet and accompanying naval installations. The Puget Sound was at the forefront of this era of military construction.

The Puget Sound continues to be an area of strategic value to the United States due to its continual use as one of the main naval bases for the United States Navy. Currently the base operates as the Navy's main submarine repair and servicing station and remains paramount to the country's strategic interests and power projection capabilities. Therefore the naval base and indeed the greater Puget Sound area continue to be incredibly important to United States policies. While terms like "imperialism" and "expansion" tend not to be used today as a way to

describe certain actions, there is no doubt that the naval station continues to serve as one of the premier locations on the Pacific coast that is capable of harboring much of the United States fleet. While the fortifications constructed as a result of the Endicott Board are no longer in use, the base itself continues to thrive. Coupled with this, Bremerton, Seattle and Tacoma continue to thrive. Echoing claims made by Ambrose Wyckoff regarding the future importance of the Puget Sound, the area indeed continues to play a large part in United States' decision making.

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