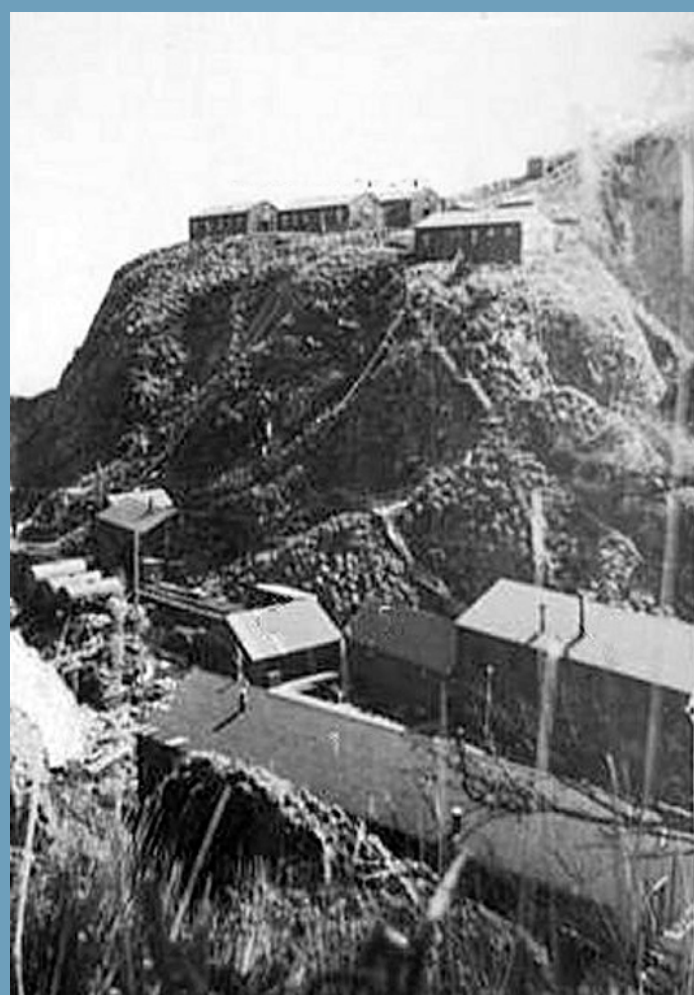


RCAF Station Cape St. James

11 November 1943 - 10 August 1945

Cape St. James was named by Captain George Dixon who rounded the southern point of the Queen Charlotte Islands on July 25, 1787 (feast day of St. James). In 1914 a lightstation was built on Cape St James Island. World War II began on September 3rd 1939 but little changed at Cape St James until 07 December 1941 when instructions were received that the light was to be turned off for the first time since 1914, the war in the Pacific had started. Even before the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Canadian Government had been asked by the US Government to complete the chain of radio defence (radar) that was already operating in Alaska and the US west coast by building some Canadian Radio Units. Initially two sites were chosen, but more were needed on the Queen Charlottes. One of three locations was the Cape - life at this end of the world was about to change radically.



#28 RU RCAF Stn Cape St. James was one of the easiest sites to build of all the west coast RUs, as no trees had to be cleared and the major infrastructure already existed and could be used with minor modifications. The lighthouse on the island was only manned by one keeper and was not considered by the Department of Transport to be a very important light as it was often in the clouds and there was no fog horn. The Department of Transport Agent at Prince Rupert agreed that DOT would accept a proposal to put the Ops Site and power unit in addition to the lighthouse and the keeper's house on the top of the island. The accommodation buildings would go on the middle level and the remainder of the buildings were to be located at the lower level beside the boat landing. There is no fresh water on the island so it would have to be brought in or sea water would have to be distilled, and since wood was scarce the station would have to be heated by coal or oil. Rose Harbour whaling station, 17 miles up the East Coast of Kunghit Island, provided a safe anchorage, aircraft operating location and emergency accommodations.

9 Construction Maintenance Unit (#9CMU) did the work bringing the site up to standards except for the operational equipment which #2 Maintenance Unit installed. At the start, water was imported from Rose Harbour and getting construction supplies on time proved difficult as most of it was brought in by coastal supply boats operated by the Marine Section of the RCAF. One of these vessels, the *B.C. Star* - M 427, went missing in July 1943 during a delivery. In the lengthy search little trace of wreckage was found. It had simply disappeared and no official explanation was ever recorded.

The station became operational on the 11 November 1943. Strong winds and quarterly overhauls caused occasional shut downs and offline times for the radar. The weather also caused problems with the food supply. There were periods in the winter when emergency rations were used on a frequent basis. The problem with these rations was the rats liked them too so it was a constant battle keeping the rats away. Partial solutions to the supply problem were hunting and fishing parties. The men became quite adept at supplementing the rations with fresh stocks of venison and fish. This unfortunately lead to more than a few mishaps and one death. When the occasion presented itself, rations were exchanged for fish - a welcome transaction for both parties. The weather also disrupted other supply replenishment. Occasionally their fuel supply got down to the last few hours of operations before the new supply would arrive. These situations were particularly bad in the winter time where it was not uncommon for storms to delay boats for 25-30 days. The winds also played havoc with the radar tower and the communications and power lines.

Life was not always difficult on the station as the members had an elected/appointed entertainment committee whose job was to find things to keep the men occupied in their off time. An area was blasted level in the lower camp so they could play volleyball, a hobby shop was built under the Rec Hall, cribbage and bridge tournaments were a hit as well as spelling bees, glee clubs and even archery. The YMCA and the canteen fund provided a piano, billiard table, phonograph-radio and a library. Films were shown frequently if the boat was able to deliver them. The station newspaper "Peat Pile News" was a very popular addition to station life, The lightkeeper and his wife were always included in the social activities on the station which was surely a blessing for them as well as their being able to get some fresh food occasionally.

All this activity started to come to an end on the 06 August 1945 at 0900 when the station was told to cease operations. Dismantling was commenced immediately. On the 10 August 1945 the M/V *Malahat* arrived with a party of seventeen # 9 CMU personnel to complete dismantling and packing. The unit was disbanded on this date. The *Malahat* arrived back with a large scow on the 17 August to load the equipment along with the kit of the personnel. A Sgt (Fitter/diesel) was detailed to remain behind to operate the diesel plant for the DOT radio equipment and a Naval Beacon. At 1700 hours, all service personnel finally departed on the MV *Malahat*, for RCAF Station, Alliford Bay. The lightstation was automated in 1992 and the old buildings were dismantled except for the light mast.

