

# RCAF Station Marble Island

7 June 1943 - 10 August 1945

No 27 RD Marble Island, chosen for the Alliford Bay Sector, presented a number of obstacles. The RCAF had planned on beaching a small scow and constructing some sort of breakwater, but that never materialized. An aerial tramway would have to be erected to get to the actual Ops Site on top of a 425 ft high knoll. Plus, no fresh water existed on the island so it would have to be distilled from salt water. The station was beyond #9 Construction Maintenance Unit's expertise so the project was undertaken by Marwell Contracting. Their construction foreman was concerned that the engineering camp and tents would be blown off the island in the first storm and that he would not be able to get his material ashore. To solve the material problem a logger was contracted to build an 80'X40' raft using massive logs and lashed four times stronger than usual. The raft worked and they didn't quite get blown into the sea. Still people believed the project would be impossible to complete out there, and they were just about right..



The contractor managed to get the cookhouse and one bunkhouse roofed in just before the first storm hit with gusts well over 100 knots. Waves washed half the lumber out to sea and all the cement was destroyed, nails and hardware began to rust, the bricks were reduced to marbles, and the worst part was the loss of four months of rations. Luckily, most of the plumbing and electrical supplies had been moved into the buildings the day before.

In spite of such setbacks the diesel generators were soon in operation, the main cookhouse built, a gravity water system operating, there was hot water, a stove and oven, and a second cook to help with meals. The cement, bricks and lumber were replaced and building the steep railroad began. The little rail cars were pulled up the 300' incline by winch, then the final 200' by manpower. The acute shortage of water was a problem and it took several months to get the evaporators working well enough to supply the needs.

On 7 June, 1943 the Detachment became operational and started forwarding the plots to the Filter Room at Prince Rupert. The RCAF had a much larger transportation challenge as the service personnel had little, if any, experience in open ocean landings. Marble Island, known to its RCAF inhabitants as "Alcatraz", was perpetually in danger of being swallowed up by the Pacific Ocean - a place where every landing ought to have brought at least a Mention in Dispatches. The best that could be done was to anchor the barge about a mile from the landing area and float personnel and supplies ashore on large rafts. The crew, dressed in rubber overalls, would swim to shore on the incoming tide, ever aware of the surf pounding on the treacherous rocks. On 1 January 1944, two members were drowned during this procedure, and on 16 September, a sudden, crashing wave washed a member into the sea to drown.

Three deer were brought in by various means and soon made themselves quite at home on the island. The never ending flow of visiting doctors, dentists, padres, educators and staff personnel provided a break from the normal routine. A sports area for volleyball was built and basketball standards were erected so personnel could partake in sports. A piano, pool table, washing machine, and an electric cooler for the mess were brought in and the station's paper, the "Alcatraz", was started.

The fierce winter weather was always an enemy. Winds would reach hurricane force when the wind, rain, and high seas downed powerlines, and destroyed or washed away walkways and other infrastructure. Fishing parties and passing fishing boats helped add variety to the diet, especially during the frequent shortages caused by weather, when emergency rations were consumed. Aircraft from Alliford Bay would occasionally be used to drop necessities.



At 1530 hours, 6 August 1945 the unit ceased operations and work began to dismantle the radar gear. Operation Order No 60 was received ordering disbandment effective 10 August 1945. On 20 August, the last raft was loaded with the remaining fourteen officers and men and RCAF Stn Marble Island was no more. All of the original buildings are now gone except for the flattened remains of the original Rec Hall and the foundation for the radar tower. The two oil tanks are still there, and the original cookstove. Where the radar station once existed it has now grown over.

