

JFK's 1963 visit brought joy to Astoria

Excerpt from Daily Astorian
By Ted Shorack
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Just two months before his death, President John F. Kennedy visited Astoria and brought good news to residents of the lower Columbia River.

Tongue Point, a former U.S. Navy base built in 1939, would soon become a location for Department of Defense and U.S. Coast Guard facilities, he announced.

Local and state leaders praised the president's decision and were hopeful for the economic stimulus it would bring to the region.

It was a wonderful day for several thousand who turned out to greet the 35th president of the United States.

Fifty-six days later came one of the worst days in American history.

On Nov. 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, shocking Clatsop County residents and people around the country, who still remember what they were doing when they heard of his death.

Following Hayes

When Kennedy visited Tongue Point on Sept. 27, 1963, he was only the second sitting president to visit Astoria, according to articles in The Daily Astorian. Rutherford B. Hayes had visited in 1880. Franklin D. Roosevelt never set foot in the city, but sailed by in a boat in 1934.

For the 1963 visit, Kennedy flew in by helicopter from Tacoma, Wash., and landed at Tongue Point at 1:30 p.m. The Daily Astorian estimated that between 5,000 and 6,000 people were there and some were lucky enough to shake his hand in front of Hangar 3.

Oregon Gov. Mark Hatfield arrived in time to greet Kennedy. U.S. Sen. Wayne Morse was the unofficial host for the visit and introduced Kennedy before his speech.

New use

Tongue Point had been a reserve fleet base between 1946 and 1960 and was no longer in use. A local committee formed and advocated that the Kennedy administration find a suitable use for the station. The committee of eight, which included state Sen. Dan Thiel, Judge Guy Boyington and Astoria Mayor Harry Steinbock, met briefly with the president before he spoke.

Kennedy's announcement was publicly released before he reached Tongue Point that day, but he reiterated the news in his speech. The station would become a school for senior civilian and military personnel offering training in procurement of weapons, he said, as well as a helicopter rescue base for the Coast Guard.

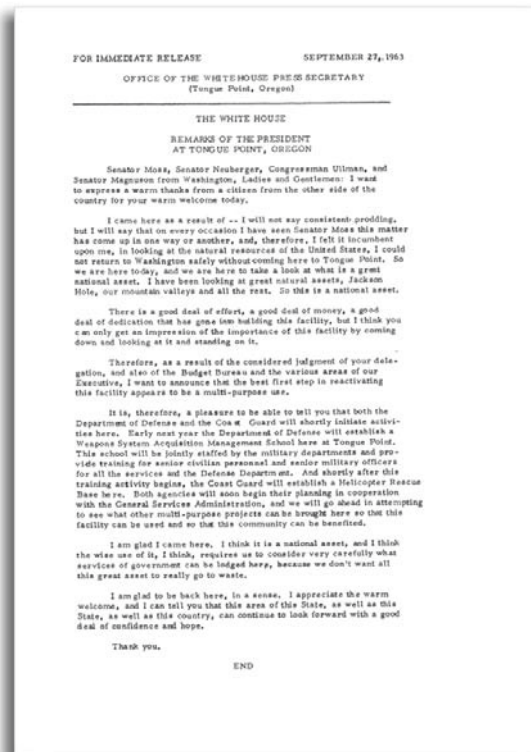
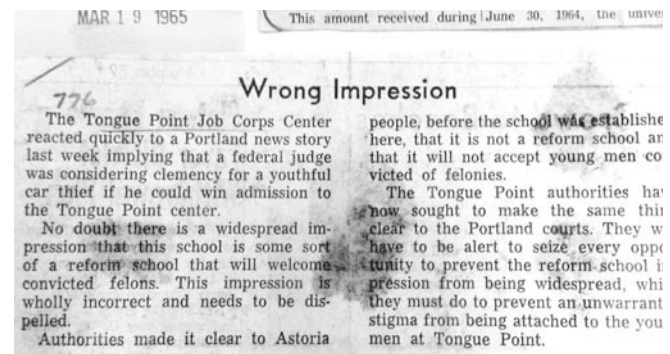
The training school was a surprise, but news articles had anticipated a base for the Coast Guard in Astoria. The Daily Astorian quoted Steinbock saying it was "great news." Others were appreciative of Morse's role in drawing attention to the station.

The potential federal presence meant an opportunity for jobs and a jump-start to the local economy.

Kennedy was quoted as saying he was pleased to make the announcement because it would put the facility to good use, but also "bring to Astoria economic benefits" the community badly needed.

In 1965, Tongue Point became one of the first Job Corps centers in the country. The career training program was created in 1964 under the direction of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty initiative and Sargent Shriver, Kennedy's brother-in-law.

The Coast Guard moved its air station to the Astoria Regional Airport in Warrenton in 1966, but it was originally established at Tongue Point in August 1964. A base remains at Tongue Point and is the home port of the Coast Guard Cutter Fir.



1963 John F. Kennedy Tongue Point Speech



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