

## PARTING SHOTS

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



The White Star Cannery boiler is seen against the night sky in April. Daily Astorian photographer Josh Bessex is collecting some of his favorite photographs at the end of each month to display online. See them at [www.dailyastorian.com](http://www.dailyastorian.com)

JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

## Civil War-era shell makes a big 'boom'

Fort Lewis team safely removes threat from Ilwaco neighborhood

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ILWACO, Wash. — Sub-contractors working on a construction project in the Sahalee neighborhood of Ilwaco April 22 uncovered an old, but still live artillery shell near Klahanee Drive, a major residential street.

It is the second such shell found in the area in the last three years and police and city officials say there are likely more still out there.

"Who knows," said Long Beach Police Chief Flint Wright, "but I have no doubt there's others up there."

Ilwaco Mayor Mike Cassinelli says the city council has no plans to order a thorough search of Sahalee hill and surrounding land, though he anticipates they will discuss ways the city could warn contractors and homeowners of the possibility that they might uncover a shell during otherwise routine construction, maintenance or landscaping work.

"We're concerned but there's not much we can do except tell people if they dig (shells) up, not to throw them to the side," Cassinelli said. But, he added, "We're not gonna go out and look for trouble."

Besides, he said, much of that hill has been dug up already over the years without incident.

The shell found last week had been discovered by an Il-



Casey Meling photo

An explosive coastal artillery shell discovered on the hillside of an Ilwaco, Wash., residential area during home construction roughly compared in size to the dimensions of a man's boot print. The shell, which may have been fired from one of the three forts that guarded the Columbia's entrance between the Civil War era and World War II, was disposed of by a team from Joint Base Lewis-McChord.

waco resident before, but not reported, police said. Over the years, brush and earth had hidden it once again.

#### Bomb squad summoned

Long Beach police officers and Ilwaco Fire Station personnel blocked off access to the neighborhood above

Baker Bay for much of the afternoon. A bomb-disposal team was summoned from Fort Lewis, a U.S. military facility near Tacoma, to check out the find.

Meanwhile, police, not knowing for certain yet if the shell was live or not, established a 500-foot buffer radius around the explosive.

"For the most part, we were pretty fortunate the homes that were right there were unoccupied at the time," said Wright later. One family did have to leave for the day, and police allowed people farther up the hill who had to get to appointments to leave.

"It's one of those things that, as long as it's left alone,

it's not going to do much," Wright said. "But if it's jostled, it could be quite dangerous."

The Fort Lewis Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) unit showed up around 4 p.m. Police suggested driving the explosive to the city's watershed area far from nearby neighborhoods, but the disposal unit said the shell shouldn't be moved in a vehicle.

They told Wright the shell dated from the 1850s. Munitions from that time were eventually used in the 1861 to 1865 Civil War.

Emergency personnel closed off the State Route 100 loop while two of the team members took turns carrying the explosive by hand down Sahalee hill, about three quarters of a mile, to an old rock quarry. There, they detonated it. Wright said the explosion was very loud, and Sahalee residents reported hearing an enormous "boom!" Team members said the concussion might have blown out Sahalee windows if it had been disposed of where it was discovered.

#### A military setting

The setting of considerable military activity during World War II, the Baker Bay shoreline leads to an installation called Fort Cape Disappointment during the Civil War, set up along with Fort Stevens on the Oregon side to guard the river mouth against possible Confederate attack. Although a Confederate ship did prey on Yankee whalers on this side of the continent, bored gun crews in the local area never saw enemy action.

In June 2012, bottle hunters found what appeared to be a bomb shell encased in

old dry clay along the Baker Bay shoreline near Sahalee. At that time, the Pacific County Sheriff's Department surmised it was fired from one of several nearby gun emplacements. All are now decommissioned, though some concrete fortifications from the Civil War era still exist at the cape.

#### Local bomb officer

Long Beach Police Officer Casey Meling who responded to the incident Wednesday also was the officer called out to deal with the bomb shell found in 2012.

He said the incident on April 22 was a "big deal, but basically a non-event." The officer's biggest concerns were to keep people away from the area and to make sure nothing moved the artillery shell.

Meling said the officers received incredible help and support from the Ilwaco Fire Department in blocking off the roads and securing the area.

Aged explosives inside old bombs and shells can remain dangerous for decades and even become unstable, blowing up without warning.

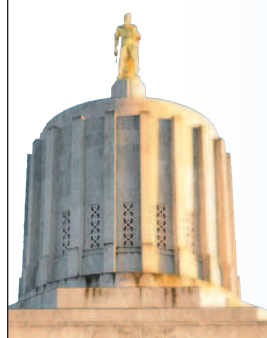
Shells from the 1850s to even the 1950s were not made to any real standard and people who encounter them now are dealing with a huge unknown, Wright said.

Given that two such shells have been discovered in the area recently, Meling and Wright anticipate they'll be called out again in coming years.

If anyone happens upon something they believe could be an old bomb or artillery shell, Wright and Meling say they should call 911 immediately.

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From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrud, Mateusz Perkowski