Appendix D1:

Cultural Resources Field Memo

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DOWL

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Maryellen Tuttell, DOWL
FROM:	C. Kennedy
DATE:	August 7, 2020
SUBJECT:	Condition Assessment: Concrete Observation Station, Sitka Alaska

On May 20, 2020, Cultural Resources Specialist Caitlin Kennedy conducted a field survey of a concrete building located within the proposed area of potential effect (APE) of the Sitka Seaplane Base Project (Figures 1 and 2). The purpose of the condition assessment was to ascertain the building's dimensions, overall condition, and designed purpose. This information will assist in a determination of whether it should be considered eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, either individually or as a contributing element of the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark (NHL).

Historic Context:

Sitka Naval Operating Base was originally established as an advance seaplane base in 1937 and was designated a Naval Operating Base (NOB) in 1942. During World War two (WWII) planes operating out of the Sitka NOB patrolled southeast Alaska and the Gulf of Alaska. Sitka NOB also provided critical defense for shipping in the Gulf of Alaska. Beginning in 1941 the U.S. Army established Forts Ray, Rousseau (which replaced Fort Ray as the headquarters for coastal defense in 1943), Pierce, and Babcock to provide defensive support to the Sitka NOB. As part of this effort the Army also constructed the Coastal Defense Network, a system of armaments and fortifications to protect Sitka Sound and associated Naval facilities. Sitka NOB was closed by the Navy in 1944 (Bush 1944; National Park Service 2020).

The Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL was designated in 1986 for its role in WWII defenses in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. The NHL is comprised of Sitka NOB and Fort Rousseau, including associated U.S. Army Coastal Defenses on eight islands. The National Park Service (NPS) is currently in the process of updating the 1986 nomination to account for changes to the NHL, including demolition or rehabilitation of buildings, and improved documentation of contributing features (National Park Service 2020).

Documentation of Building:

The concrete building is rectangular in shape with a slightly off-center observation slit situated on the north wall (Figure 3). There is a single entrance (Figure 4). The observation slit, which is roughly 16" in height, offers 180-degree views of Sitka Channel. At one time the observation slit had three upright metal supports. The walls range in thickness from approximately 12" to 20". Approximate interior dimensions are depicted in Figure 5. There are wooden boards set high on the interior walls and along the observation slit. Construction also included some earthworks, evidenced by a collapsed covered trench on the south side, and stone reinforcements on the north (Figure 6).

Review of archival materials (including maps and narrative descriptions of installation) yielded no documentation of this building (Bush 1944; U.S. Army 1944). One possibility is that it was constructed as a base-end station or observation station. Base-end stations similar to this building were used to triangulate the position and distance of enemy craft to guide artillery fire. The position of this building in relation to a battery of 90mm Anti Motor Torpedo Boat guns

constructed at Watson Point supports this hypothesis (Berhow 2020). Unfortunately, the available records associated with the artillery at Watson Point do not include this building (Figure 7). It is also possible that this building was constructed by Marine or Army infantry as part of series of small coastal fortifications that used to ring Japonski, Alice, and Charcoal Islands. These small defensive positions would have ranged from foxholes and trenches to more elaborate concrete buildings such as this (M. Hunter and M. Berhow personal communication to C. Kennedy [DOWL], August 7, 2020).

Condition:

The exterior of the building is slightly discolored and heavily overgrown with vegetation. The vegetation, which would have been entirely or partially cleared during use, has become overgrown, obscuring the view. The building also shows some signs of spalling on the northwest side, possibly a result of deflection, or weakness caused by erosion (Figure 8). Wooden boards set high on the interior walls, which may have been used to mount brackets for electrical wiring, show some moisture damage but are otherwise in fair condition. The concrete at the door and observation slit shows some deterioration, likely from erosion. The metal pipe supports for the observation slits are heavily corroded (in one case, entirely corroded), which has resulted in slight spalling of the surrounding concrete (Figure 9).

Recommendations:

The building fits within the historic context for permanent construction during World War II as its function was essential to the coastal defense mission of the military installations at Sitka NOB and Fort Rousseau (R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates 1997). It remains in its original location and construction materials typical of the period. Despite showing wear from decades of disuse, it still neatly conveys its original purpose as an observation building, either as a base-end station associated with nearby artillery at Watson Point or as one of a series of observation stations that once dotted the coastline of Sitka NOB and other Coastal Defenses. Today, this building is one of two intact concrete fortifications of this type on Japonsky, Alice, and Charcoal islands (M. Hunter personal communication to C. Kennedy [DOWL], August 7, 2020).

This building should be considered for inclusion on the National Register for Historic Places as a contributing feature to the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL. It retains integrity of location, design, materials, feeling, and association as defined by the nomination of the NHL. Although the 1986 and drafted update of the NHL nomination do not include this or any other similar buildings, there is precedent for inclusion of the base-end station/observation station as a contributing feature to the NHL. Other State and National Historic Landmarks (such as the Aleutian Islands World War II National Historic Area and Fort Rousseau Causeway State Historical Park), and state recreation areas (such as Caines Head State Recreation Area in Seward) have undertaken preservation and/or interpretive measures for similar WWII improvements.

References Cited

Berhow, M. (editor)
2020 *American Seacoast Defenses: A Reference Guide*. CDSG Press, McLean, VA.

Bush, J.D.
1944 *Narrative Report of Alaska Construction 1941–1944*. U.S. Army, Alaskan Department, Construction Division.

National Park Service
2020 *Draft National Historic Landmark Nomination: Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses*.

R. Christopher Goodwin and Associates
1997 *Historic Context for Department of Defense Facilities World War II Permanent Construction*. Prepared for U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

U.S. Army
1944 *Supplement to the Harbor Defense Project, Harbor Defenses of Sitka: Annex B*. U.S. Army, Western Defense Command.

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FIGURES

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Proposed Area of Potential Effect

N

Feet
0 75 150 300

Section 34-35, T55S, R63E, Copper River Meridian

Proposed Area of Potential Effect

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure1 | Date: August 10, 2020

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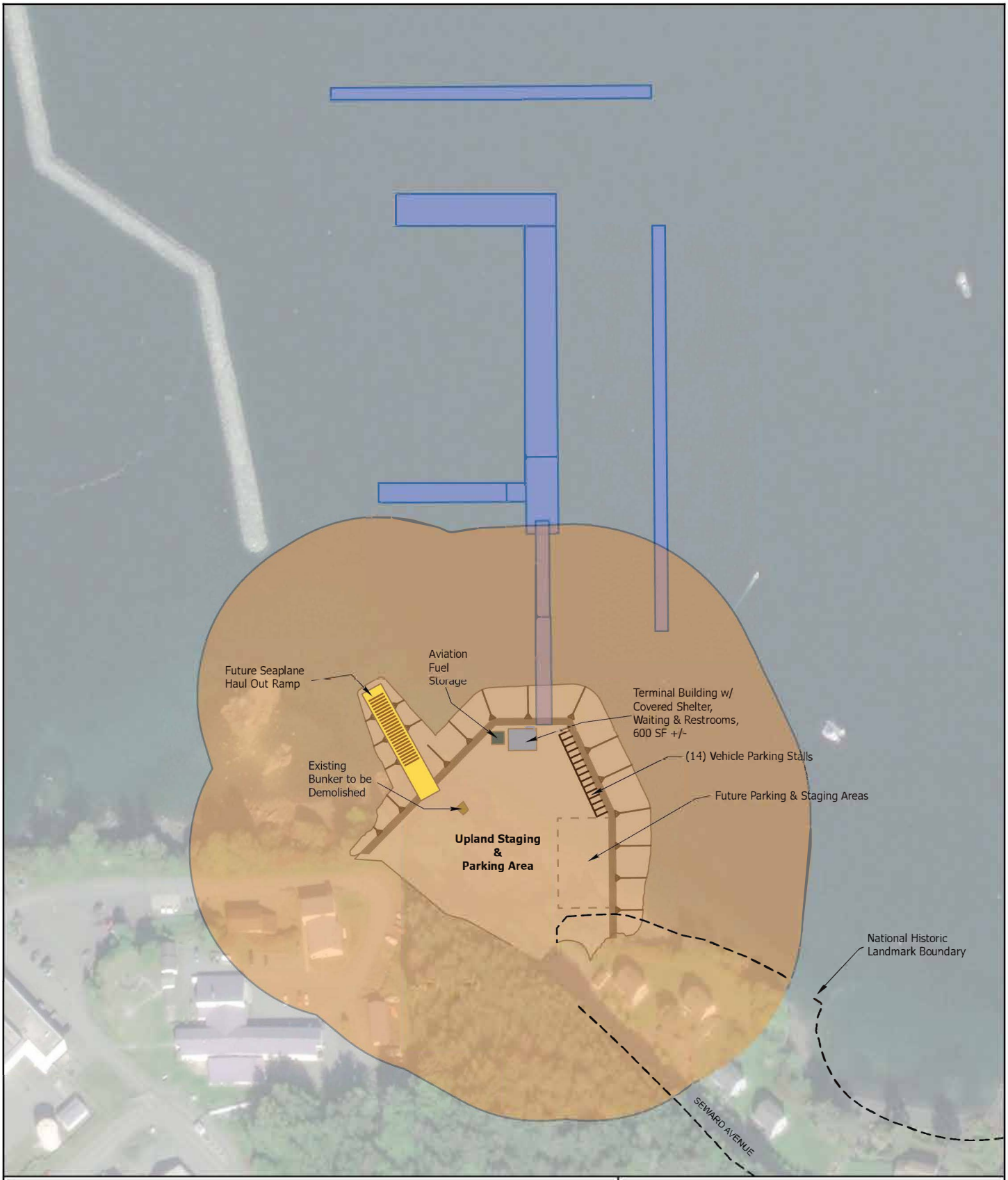
Service Layer Credits: World Imagery: Esri GIS, GeoEye, Maxar, CNES/Airbus DS



Proposed Area of Potential Effect

Marine Footprint (no fill required)

N

Section 34-35, T55S, R63E, Copper River Meridian

0 75 150 300 Feet

Proposed Project Elements

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 2 | Date: August 10, 2020

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Service Layer Credits: World Imagery: GeoEye, CNES/Airbus DS

Observation Slit Dimensions

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 3 | Date: August 10, 2020

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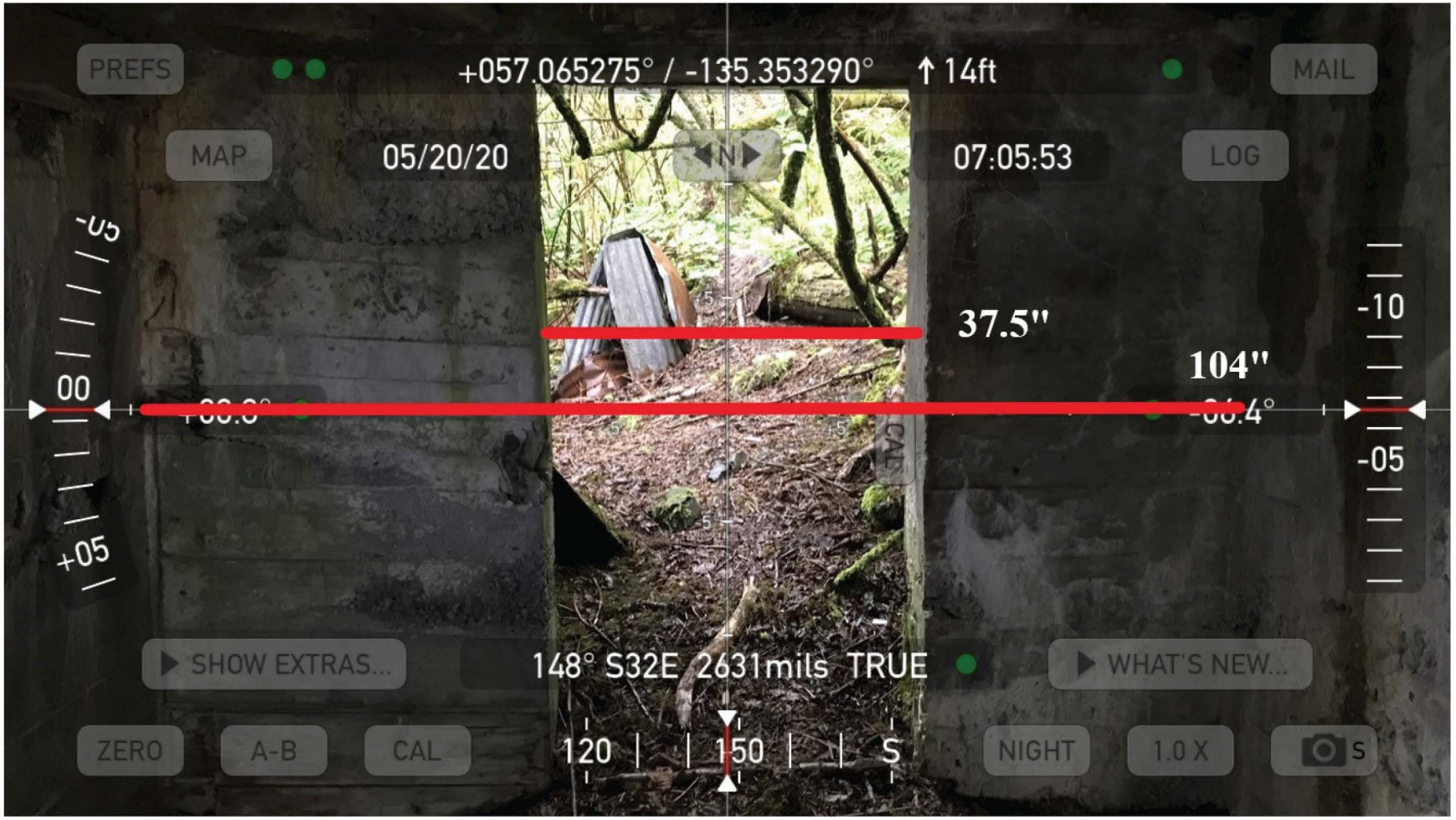

Entry Dimensions, Internal

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 4	Date: August 10, 2020

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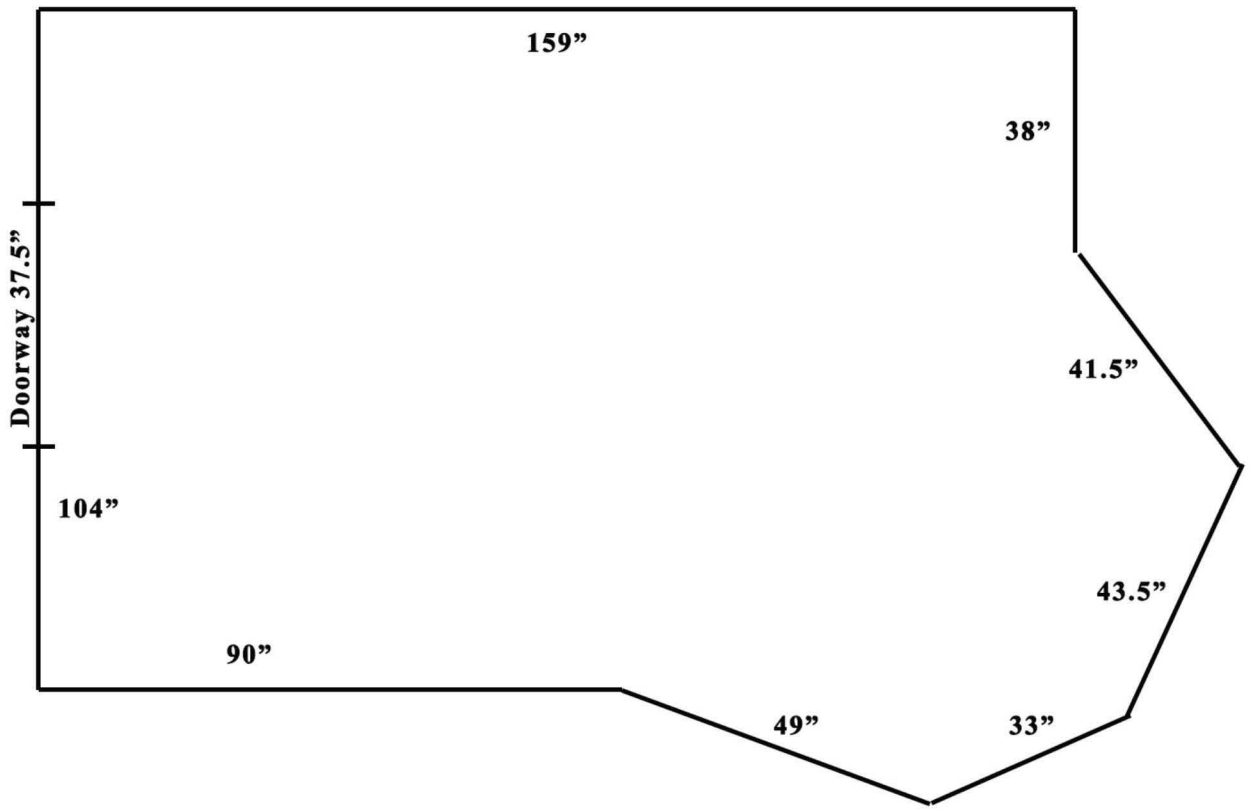

Interior Dimensions

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 5 | Date: August 10, 2020

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Ground Support, North (Seaward) Side

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 6 | Date: August 10, 2020

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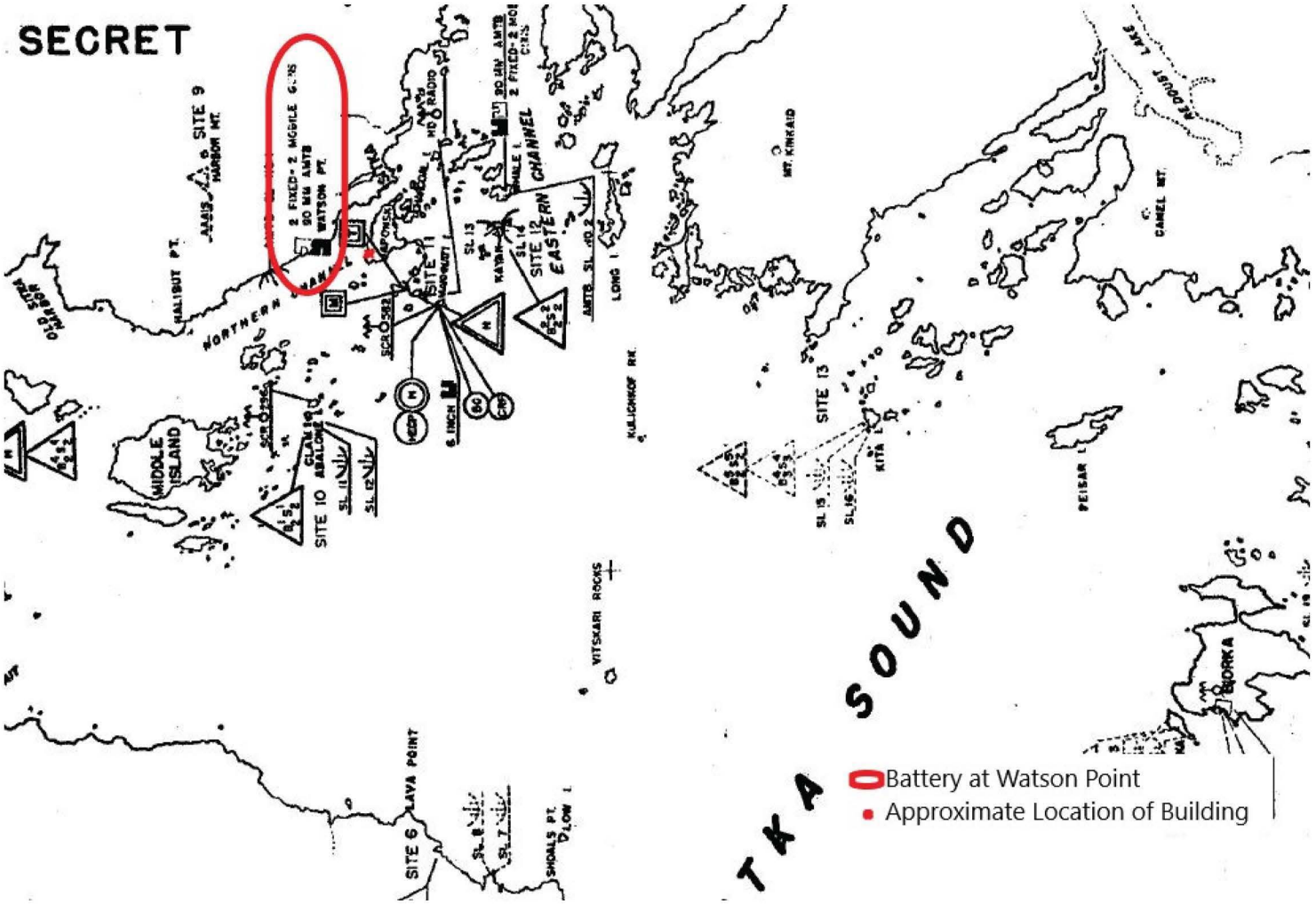

Source: Supplement to the Harbor Defense Project,
Harbor Defenses of Sitka: Annex B

As-Built Map

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 7	Date: August 10, 2020

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Light Spalling on NW Exterior Wall

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 8 | Date: August 10, 2020

Remains of Window Support, Spalling

Sitka SPB
Environmental Assessment

Figure 9 | Date: August 10, 2020