



# SCOTLAND



## DUTY IN THURSO

At left: One of the most interesting facets of life at the U.S. Naval Radio Station, Thurso, Scotland, is the existence of an ancient Scottish broch (fortification) within the station's boundaries. The slate cliffs on which the broch stands are being undermined by the constant pounding of the North Sea, and the broch will be doomed before many years. The sort of erosion that is occurring can be seen in PH1 Bob Wood's photograph on this page. Excavation is being completed with all possible speed before the site is lost to the sea.

## THE MENTION OF SCOTLAND

brings to mind images of men wearing kilts, the sound of bagpipes, the colorful uniforms of the guard at Edinburgh Castle, the beautiful Scottish countryside or large cities like Glasgow and Edinburgh. To others, Scotland is the birthplace of their ancestors, the land of Robert Burns, or the home of Scotch whisky.

And, this fascinatingly beautiful country is "home" for a small group of Navymen serving at the Naval Radio Station at Thurso.

The station, located just a few miles from Thurso—which is 319 miles from Edinburgh and Scotland's northernmost town—sits on a hill and overlooks the lush, green rolling hills of the surrounding countryside. There are few trees in this area of Scotland; consequently, the land is used for pastures for sheep and cattle.

The 92-man Thurso station, which opened on 3 Jan 1964, is a small part of a massive communications complex, the Defense Communications System. The system links Navy, Air Force, and Army communications facilities together with the NATO communications system. Additionally, Thurso provides a wide range of services to U. S. ships operating in the North Atlantic and North Sea areas, as well as to British and other NATO ships.

### Duty at Thurso

UPON ARRIVING at Thurso, each married man is allowed up to 60 days' temporary living allowance. The area offers many hotels and guesthouses, with bed-and-breakfast facilities, while the larger hotels offer the full range of accommodations, and an abundance of hospitality common to Scotland.

Housing in the Thurso area is very limited. There are however, 36 naval housing units available. Navy housing, which has a one- to six-month waiting list, is completely furnished and includes laundry facilities. The rent for civilian housing is reasonable;

however, utilities are high.

In a word, the duty is different. It's one of the few places (or perhaps, the only place) where a Navyman can be ordered where he will have the opportunity to participate in an archeological "dig." Excavations now underway at Thurso are attempting to reveal something about the lifestyle of the people who inhabited the area a thousand or more years ago.

### Facilities

THERE is a Navy Exchange and commissary on the station offering a limited assortment of merchandise and housewives have found they do most of their shopping in local stores. Items not found in the Thurso area can be ordered through either the exchange or from stateside retail outlets.

Because the station is small and does not have a dependents' school, grade school children must attend local schools. High school students can enroll in the U.S. Air Force High School at Lakenheath, England; they are flown home for holidays and school vacations.

The only medical facility on the station is a small sick bay which has a corpsman assigned. Patients who cannot be treated by the corpsman are referred to a local civilian doctor who works for the Navy on a part-time basis. There are a couple of hospitals in the area for patients requiring use of these facilities. The Navy corpsman also arranges appointments with a Thurso dentist for station personnel.

NEW CONSTRUCTION at the station is increasing at a rapid pace and self-help plays a prominent role. A recently completed two-lane bowling alley offers many relaxing hours to both sailors and dependents. Other self-help projects involved the remodeling of the EM Club, the completion of a basketball court, and extending the commissary-exchange building. Funds have also been approved for BEQ renovation

and for a multipurpose building which will house the station library and theater. Additionally, construction has already started on an auto hobby shop.

For the outdoor types, northern Scotland offers good bird hunting, plus excellent fresh- and salt-water fishing. There are also three golf courses in the area, each charging a mere \$6 a year for unlimited play.

In addition to operating the bowling alley, special services also offers a ceramics shop and a photo lab. Sightseeing trips and tours to the continent are available through the office and are usually offered at reduced rates. A weekly military logistics flight, with space available seating, departs from Wick Airport—about 25 miles from the station—for those going on holiday or leave.

A married man, accompanied by dependents, has a two-year tour while a single man has an 18-month tour of duty at the station. As if all the above isn't enough, Thurso duty is considered a sea tour for rotation purposes.

### Area Rich in Historical Interest

IT'S NOT EVERY PERSON who can say history took place in his backyard, but sailors attached at Thurso could make such a boast. There's evidence that prehistoric man and more "modern" people—from the 12th century—existed on the land now used by the American communication facility.

NEAR THE SEASIDE CLIFFS at the radio station are two ancient structures—one a chapel with adjoining graveyard, and the other a type of fortification known as a "broch."

The ancient chapel of St. Mary, also known locally as Crosskirk, is believed to have been built around 1200 A.D. It's the oldest church site in the area, and is preserved as a historic site.

The broch, which is an igloo-like structure built of stone, dates back to the first century A.D. This type of building is found exclusively in the two northernmost counties of Scotland, and the Orkney and

Shetland Islands to the north.

There are about 500 brochs within this general area and only a few have been investigated so far. The broch near the radio station is being unearthed now because it is close to cliffs which are being eroded by the sea. It is thought that the sea will eventually reach this area, thus making further archeological exploration impossible.

This broch, which dates from between 75 B.C. and 75 A.D., was a round tower about 45 feet high built entirely of stones without any type of mortar. The walls are about 18 feet thick and the interior space about 30 feet in diameter. The fortification was completely enclosed except for a narrow tunnel used as the entrance. After 20 centuries, the remaining walls now stand only 12 feet in height.

**I**NSIDE, Navymen have helped to locate traces of fireplaces and quantities of domestic rubbish including broken pottery, two bronze pins, bone tools, and a finger ring. While excavating the broch, one of the workers fell through the floor, unearthing a cistern within the walls.

Thurso was the center of Norse power on the Scottish mainland until the Battle of Largs (1263 A.D.) between Alexander III and Haco, king of Norway.

The prevailing theory is that the Thurso broch became too restricted for the people inhabiting it and that an exterior settlement of houses was built. Today these houses are being excavated with the help of Thurso Navymen and, so far, these teams have uncovered two human skeletons. Carbon tests are being made in an attempt to determine the age of the remains.

Dr. Horace Fairhurst, of the University of Glasgow's archeology department, is in charge of the Thurso excavations. Workers and sailors at the site—including some archeological students—are all volunteers. Many of the Navymen from the station have participated in the dig during their off-duty hours.

—Story and photos by  
PH1 Bob Woods

# SCOTLAND DUTY IN THURSO

Immediate right column, top to bottom: The U.S. NAVRADSTA, Thurso, Scotland, offers an excellent view of the Pentland Firth, and on a clear day the Orkney Islands are visible. A section of Navy housing in the town of Thurso, is representative of 36 units of three- and four-bedroom fully furnished houses available for eligible personnel. FRT-39 transmitters are some of the station's tools. Emergency power can be generated at the Thurso transmitter site. Middle column, top to bottom: An ancient Scottish broch being excavated on the station site reveals (top) the passageway which led to small houses outside the broch, built when living conditions became cramped within the fortifications. Traces of fireplaces (middle) and a well along with domestic rubbish and broken pottery were found when excavation reached the floor of the tower built 20 centuries ago. Many of the radio station's personnel and dependents have volunteered to help with the excavation (bottom) and spend much of their leisure time at the task. Far right column: top to bottom: A typical Scottish house occupied by a sailor attached to the radio station; Thurso's main street; the statue of Sir John Sinclair, First Baronet, who did much for the improvement of Northern Scottish agriculture, is located in MacDonald Square, Thurso.



