ALBATROSS PROBLEM AT SAND ISLAND, MIDWAY

The problem results from the many albatrosses, principally Layson, which for approximately nine months of the year, during daylight hours, continuously soar over the runways and approaches colliding with aircraft during the most critical periods of their flight, the landing and take-off.

This problem has been of major and ever increasing concern to the Navy for many years, and has been aggravated during the past few years due to the increased air operations occasioned by the establishment of the Early Warning Barrier.

Midway is an important link in the carrying out of the overall mission of the Navy. Not the least of its functions is to support the far-ranging planes which form the Pacific arm of the Continental Defense Barrier. These planes, each of which has more than twenty highly trained personnel on board, depart Midway on long overwater flights lasting from twelve to fifteen hours. The lives of the Navy airmen, plus the multi-million dollar value of the plane and its equipment, demand that every possible measure to insure their safety be adopted.

Statistics compiled at Midway Atoll during the 1957-58 season (October - April) show that collisions between albatrosses and aircraft were experienced during 40 percent of all daylight landings and take-offs in the peak month of November and at an average rate of 17 percent. Despite this high collision incidence and the serious damage which has, in some cases, resulted, we have so far been most fortunate that no Navy airmen have died nor have any aircraft been lost. However, the damage has forced aborted missions, lost airplane time and seriously interfered with Barrier operations. During the past year resultant costs have approximated $150,000.

In an attempt to find a solution to the problem, much research and study has been undertaken. Since 1955, at the request of the Navy, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior has conducted exhaustive studies. In 1956, under Navy sponsorship, experts from Pennsylvania State University spent nearly three months on Midway making observations. All possible solutions have been carefully considered.

Two recommendations resulting from these surveys appear to be promising:

a. Improve Green Island, Kure, as a habitat for the albatross. This project has recently been completed.

b. Perform certain contour modifications on Sand Island, Midway, to drastically reduce the number of birds soaring over the runways. The Navy has provided $110,000 for this project and the work will be completed as rapidly as possible.
Until the effectiveness of these two projects can be determined, the Navy will take no action to eliminate any birds except to the degree necessary to insure safety of flight.

The Navy is in complete sympathy with the desire to conserve our wildlife. It is our hope that the Sand Island project will safeguard our flight operations and that Green Island will become a major sanctuary for the albatrosses.