Chignik Bomb Was Old Russian Shell

Tuesday, 09 July 2013

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Lauren Rosenthal/KUCB

As KMXT reported last week, an Air Station Kodiak helicopter transported a team of Army explosive experts to a remote beach near Chignik to examine a suspicious bomb that washed up onshore.

On paper, it was a standard assignment for the Army's explosive ordnance disposal team. But as KUCB's Lauren Rosenthal reports, the case still managed to turn up some surprises.

If you ask around, no one in Chignik has heard about a World War II-era bomb washing up on their shores. That's partially because the Peninsula village is fixated on salmon season right now.

It also has something to do with where the ordnance was found in early June. Mitrofania [mitt-trow-FANE-eeyuh] Bay is about 20 miles from the village.

“Where the bomb was -- I mean, it was nature. Where the bomb was, there was nothing around,” said Army Specialist Vincent Wallace. He's with the 716th Explosive Ordnance Disposal team out of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage.

They got the report of a Fish and Wildlife Service employee stumbling upon a bomb in Mitrofania Bay. The person took some photos to help identify the piece, but Wallace says they didn't offer a lot of clues.

“Well, we knew it was a bomb,” he said. “The shape and the construction of it led us to believe that it was pretty old. That narrowed it down a little bit, but we still had a wide range of options of what it could have actually been.”

The only way to know for sure was to examine the item in person. To do that, the army's explosives team partnered with the Coast Guard, and got a ride on an MH-60 Jayhawk helicopter from Kodiak last week to the beach where the ordnance was found.

Wallace quickly determined that the bomb was made out of aluminum -- a metal commonly used in fire or smoke bombs. But this bomb was engraved with Russian, and that's not so common.

“Once I found the Russian Cyrillic, that just finished out what it was. We were able to identify it as a 50-kilogram Russian fire bomb.”

Fire bombs are meant to be dropped from aircraft, to clear a path on the ground or destroy targets. They're usually filled with incendiary material like napalm or thermite.

Not this one, though.

“It was just a light aluminum shell,” he said.

Wallace says the bomb might have been empty for a reason -- perhaps to be used for training during World War II. Or, the incendiary material inside might have leaked out over the last 70 years.

Even so, it still presented a hazard. Wallace says his explosives team didn't want to leave the bomb on the beach for someone else to find -- and they definitely didn't want to fly back to base with it on board.

“Just to be safe, at that point, we disposed of it by detonation."