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U. S. NAVAL AIR STATION
Navy 13 (One Six Three)
Fleet Post Office
San Francisco, California

Attu, most notorious of the Aleutians, lies at the extreme end of that partially submerged volcanic mountain range which stretches from the southern tip of Alaska to within 700 miles of the Asiatic mainland. Although the largest of the Near Island group, it is only 14 miles wide and 38 miles long. In topography, it is similar to the rest of the chain, featuring the same rugged coast-line, the same tundra-padded valleys, and the same treeless wind-swept mountains. Marking the collision point between the warm Japanese current and the frigid Bering blasts, this island, the western-most point of land in the Americas, suffers from miserable and unpredictable weather. Wind is a constant factor although it's speed and direction is an ever-changing variable. Precipitation in the form of rain, fog, snow, or sleet, is to be expected at any time. The uncomfortable climate, the unhelpful natural features, and the desolate isolation combine to make Attu's living and working conditions among the world's worst. Nevertheless, to the base-building Seabees Attu represented the goal to a journey begun at Sitka 2000 miles down the line.

Attu, along with Kiska, had been occupied by the Japs in June of 1942 following their unsuccessful attack on Dutch Harbor. Approximately 200 men composed the Attu garrison but the main installation at Kiska was several times larger and better developed. By-passing Kiska with the same finesse later shown in the South Pacific, the American task force attacked Attu on May 11, 1943.

The Army landed in two forces, one in Massacre Bay and the other around the West Arm of Holtz Bay. Little resistance was encountered on the beaches; however, the Japs made stubborn stands inland. On May 17 a juncture of the two forces was accomplished. After this union the Japs were slowly driven over Fishhook Ridge into the area between Chishagof Harbor and Sarana Bay. This was the situation prevailing when the Seabees arrived in Massacre Bay on May 21, aboard the Spica.

After laying around in the harbor for two days waiting for the decision to be made regarding the location of the base, the Seabees began unloading the 23rd of May. An air attack made it necessary for the Spica to put to sea, but unloading operations were resumed on the 24th.

The first detachment of Seabees numbered approximately 300 men from the 23rd plus specialists from the 12th and 21st Battalions. Lt. Comdr. Jacob M. Boyd (CEC) USNR, was in charge. His orders were to establish an auxiliary naval air facility with housing and utilities for approximately three hundred men.

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Once ashore the Seabees worked from day to dusk of the 16-hour Alsatian day. Work details organized aboard ship pitched into their assigned jobs with a vigor unheard of in their days down the chain. Cargo had to be unloaded, sorted, and stowed; tents had to be erected; communications had to be set up; guns had to be installed; plans and organization for the permanent installations had to be made.

Since the 7th Division had the military situation well in hand, the Seabees weren't called upon to demonstrate their fighting abilities. Although uninvited, the Seabees were such frequent and intrusive spectators to the battle that it was necessary for the commanding general to publish an order confining all naval personnel to the beach. On the night of May 29th, the hopelessly surrounded Japanese killed their wounded and made a fanatical banzai charge. Although they killed a large number of Americans, this charge marked the end of organized enemy resistance.

The conclusion of the battle found the Seabees well along toward the accomplishment of their jobs. Twenty-five winterized tents for housing personnel had been erected, a frame OCG type mess hall was in operation, sixty per cent of the cargo aboard the Spix had been unloaded. Excavation for a permanent water supply system had been started. A temporary communication system had been in operation for four days.

By the 6th of June NAF, Attu, was in commission. The following dispatch proudly announces this fact:

CONFIDENTIAL

JUN 060835

FROM: RDO ATTU
TO: RDO DUTCH HARBOR & ADAK

NAF ATTU COMMISSIONED THIS DATE IN ACCORDANCE USNOS 021400. LT.COMDR. BEN F. HARDIN, D-U(S) USNR IN COMMAND. PLEASE NOTIFY INTERESTED PARTIES. THIS FROM NAF ATTU FOR ACTION COMINSEC.

The speed and efficiency with which the Seabees worked is further attested by Admiral Reeves, then Commander of the Alaskan Sector, in his message to ComTaskGroup 16.2.1 on the 11th of June:

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BASSORAM

FROM: COMALSEC 11 JUNE 1943
TO: COM TASK GROUP 16.2.1

THE REMARKABLE RESULTS ATTAINED BY YOU AND YOUR TASK GROUP IN THE SHORT SPACE OF 3 WEEKS ON ATTU HAVE BEEN NOTED WITH PLEASURE AND PRIDE. THE ROUTING AND ESCORTING OF CONVOTS IS RUNNING SMOOTHLY AND EFFICIENTLY. THE PORT IS COMPLETELY ADMINISTERED. COMMUNICATIONS ARE ON A SOUND AND EFFICIENT BASIS. CONSTRUCTION WORK IS PROCEEDING WITH A SPEED AND ORDERLINESS THAT IS AMAZING. THE FACILITIES FOR SEAWAY SUPPLY, AND COMMISSARY ARE GOING CONCERNING. AS TO THE EXCELLENCE OF RESULTS OF THE LAST MENTIONED I HAVE FIRST HAND KNOWLEDGE. PLEASE PASS TO ALL CONCERNED.

Judging From Admiral Reeves confidential dispatch of 11 June requesting an additional battalion, it was at this time that the decision was made to make Attu more than an auxiliary air facility. Captain Mende's answering dispatch to Comalsec giving a choice of three battalions indicates that plans had not been perfected to the extent of scheduling the necessary construction personnel for such a development. The following day Admiral Reeves wired Comalsec to move the remainder of the 23rd to Attu. Without going into a discussion of the reasons for such extemporaneous decisions of the wisdom thereof, it can be safely assumed that the development of Attu into a naval base was not in accordance with any master plans made prior to the invasion.

CONFIDENTIAL

JUNE 110615

FROM: RDO ATTU
TO: RDO DUTCH
RDO KODIAK

REQUIRE ONE ADDITIONAL SWANNE BATTALION ADAM AND ONE ATTU WITHOUT DELAY. SUBORDY PLAN RESERVE BATTALION FROM SITKA AND ONE FROM KODIAK ABOUT ONE JULY OR SOON THEREAFTER AS POSSIBLE. ARRANGE WITH COMINTERN FOR TRANSPORTATION. NEWS DENIS COMALSEC FOR RICH. KODIAK INFO.

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JUNE 172235

FROM: RDO ATTU
TO: RDAK, DUTCH HARBOR, KODIAK

READE ANSWERS COMALSEC 170835. STRONGLY RECOMMENDS
DIVERSION 68th W.C.B. FROM KODIAK MAINTENANCE FOR
WESTWARD MOVE. SECOND CHOISE 22nd BATTALION SITKA.
THIRD CHOISE 79th FROM KODIAK. FOR INFO TO KODIAK
AND ADAK.

JULY 122155

CONFIDENTIAL

FROM: RDO ATTU
TO: RDO ADAK AND DUTCH HARBOR

MOVE ENTIRE 23rd BATTALION TO ATTU BY INCREMENTS SOON
AS PRACTICABLE REPLACING WITH 22nd FROM SITKA OR ONE
FROM KODIAK. SHIP AT ONCE ANY EQUIPMENT LISTED IN MY
122150 AND AVAILABLE IN ALSEC MAKING URGENT REQUEST
COMTHIRTEEN IMMEDIATE AVAILABILITY OF VESSEL. REMAINDER
OF EQUIPMENT TO BE PROMPTLY LOADED IN SEATTLE ENTIRE
CARGO FOR ATTU FILLING SPACE WITH BUILDING LUMBER DOCK
TIMBER AND PILING. REEVES ORIGINATES ACTION COMALSEC
INFO ADCOMALSEC.

As the Seabees became more familiar with their environ-
ment, range and variety of their activities increased. Stevedore
gangs continued to unload and sort cargo. Carpenter crews kept
busy building quarters and warehouses. The plumbers and electricians
worked to improve the water and power system. The road gang toiled
with the tundra to build roads through the Navy area and connecting
with the Army. A survey of the Navy real estate was begun. Pontoon
barges and a small boat dock were built to facilitate the unloading
of cargo. Work details were dispatched to the P.T. Base, the King-
fisher Squadron, and the Sub-Base to help those activities get
established. In addition to feeding them, the Seabees helped the
amphibs salvage their damaged landing crafts.

In their leisure the Seabees acted as guides, arranging
personally-conducted tours of the battle field for the benefit of
news reporters, merchant marines, and other late arrivals. A land-
office business was done in Jap souvenirs, and as the original
supply became exhausted the Seabees learned to manufacture Jap flags
dog-tags, and diaries which met the Imperial specifications.

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Contact with the Army introduced new refinements to advance base existence. In compliance with the spirit, if not the letter, of lend-lease, exchange of services and supplies between the Army and Navy were made by the primitive barter system. The Army had the trade advantage on food and clothing, but the Navy was in a better position with regard to plumbing, wiring, and whiskey. From the atmosphere of barter relations between the Army and Navy developed a spirit of mutual cooperation which contributed greatly to the expedient construction of both installations.

By the end of June the naval population of Attu numbered 1618, exclusive of Fleet Air Wing personnel. The station had 31 officers and 217 men. Two hundred and forty-three of the amphibious forces were still on the beaches. Ten officers and forty-eight men assigned to the P.T. Base were awaiting the arrival of their base. Scouting Squadron Number 56 was operating from Attu with 6 officers and 25 men. The other companies of the 23rd had arrived to bring the Seabee strength up to 31 officers and 1008 men.

On the 14th of July the 22nd Battalion arrived from Sitka aboard the U.S. S. Chaumont. Comdr. Noble was officer-in-charge. They established their camp on the point over-looking Casco Cove. When the decision was made to build an airstrip, this important project was assigned to the 22nd. Work was begun on the strip on the 17th of July.

To coordinate the activities of the 23rd, the recently-arrived 22nd, and the soon-to-arrive 68th, the 9th Naval Construction Regiment was formed. Lt. Comdr. J. M. Boyd (CNC) USNR, was in charge. As O-in-C of the regiment Comdr. Boyd assigned projects to the three battalion commanders, who distributed the work among the companies composing their respective command. Each battalion contributed personnel to the various regimental functions, such as supply, transportation, engineering. In addition to these regular assignments, special labor details were frequently called forth from the different battalions to concentrate on high priority jobs.

The Sixty-Eight Battalion, commanded by Lt. Comdr. L. W. Robertson (CNC) USNR, arrived aboard the S. S. Mormacraft on the 29th of July. Their first job was to erect living quarters, to unload their cargo, and to furnish men to different jobs around the base.

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By the end of July the Naval population of Attu numbered 4317, divided as follows:

<u>Activity</u>	<u>Officers</u>	<u>Men</u>
Naval Air Facilities	53	296
Btry. 903	2	47
Btry. 406	2	44
Btry. 403	2	43
Torpedo Unit	1	8
Amphibious	0	6
P T #13	7	105
Sub Base	8	127
Scout Squadron #56	5	53
Patrol Squadron	12	116
Patrol Service Unit	12	208
9th Regiment	91	3067

The area along the beach, which was later nick-named Navy Town, was beginning to assume appearance of civilization. The main street was muddy but passable in a jeep. The power, water, and communication systems were operating in an efficient manner. The tent housing was being augmented by the erection of more "Quonset" and "Pacific" huts. The two mess halls were doing a rushing business around the clock. The few heads had long waiting lines in which the Army was well represented. Seabee Supply was doing a wholesale volume from its two warehouses, several tents, and numerous dumps. Seventy-eight bents of the ship dock had been driven and 750 feet of the dock had been laid.

In the Sub-Base area there were nine living huts, a machine shop, one 40 x 100 warehouse, a head and a mess hall.

All three of the battalion areas had a mess hall, dispensary and head. The 23rd was occupying winterized tents, the 22nd had practically finished erecting their huts, and the 68th had just started on its housing.

The Kingfisher Base on Casco Cove consisted of a small paved section of the beach, a two-hut mess hall, and four living huts. Located near the tip of Murder Point were the eleven huts of the P.T. Base. No bents were in sight. After eleven days of constant work, the 22nd was able to report the first useable section of the runway had been completed. Comalsec wired congratulations by secret dispatch.

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SECRET

RADIO DISPATCH

DEFERRED

JULY 282128

FROM: RDO ADAK
TO: RDO ATTU

COMALSEC SAYS WELL DONE ON SNAPPY COMPLETION OF USEABLE SECTION OF FIRST RUNWAY. LESS THAN A MONTH.

While the naval installation on Attu was in this stage of construction, authorization was received from the vice chief of naval operations to expand the facilities. The new program called for the construction of two 5000' runways, 8 Kodiak hangars, 100 riveted hardstands, 24,000 bbl. Avgas Tank Farm, lighting system, operation tower, and other airport improvements. A 120-bed hospital was authorized. The ordnance and magazine area had to be increased in size. In addition to these specific projects, the proposed expansion meant an expansion of the power, light, water, sewer, communication, transportation, and supply systems.

With this growth of the naval air station, came an expansion of the minor activities under the command of the air station commander. The Sub-Base required more housing and a 1000' pier. P-T needed more housing, warehousing, and a causeway to provide a safe anchorage for the torpedo boats. The Nat Depot needed a small dock to launch its nets. The same story was true of every activity on the base.

To investigate and pass upon all construction work a planning board composed of representatives from the various station departments the minor activities, and the Seabees was established. It was their function to consider all proposed construction from the point of view of necessity, location, type, and integration with the general plan of development. Final approval was obtained from Comalsec or his administrative assistant. The planning board said what and when, then the Seabees went to work.

Since the rapid growth of the station brought with it increased shipping, the Second Section of the 8th Special arrived with on the 21st of August to handle this essential function. When the art. of shipping declined, the versatile Specials helped with construction.

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Thus reinforced by the addition of the 8th Special and 1018, the 9th Construction Regiment was able to take on more work. With "Seabee Jake" (alias Comdr. Boyd) acting as prime contractor the Regiment undertook the project of making Attu into a naval air station.

By virtue of seniority the twenty-third took the lead in managing the various regimental offices, shops, warehouses, and utilities. Under the direction of Lt. Comdr. Winter, the remainder of the battalion built the AvGas Farm, the laundry, the Warbara Theater, several hangars, and numerous warehouses and smaller structures.

Continuing the work begun in July, the Twenty-Second had both runways in operation before winter. Their carpenters were kept busy building hangars and erecting quonsets. Their water-front workers put in the P-T dock and helped the 23rd drive the main dock. The magazines for storing ordnance were built by 22nd crews.

The Sixty-Eighth, by virtue of its youth, was assigned the water and sewer systems and road maintenance, both of which entailed an unusual amount of shovel work. The 68th carpenters demonstrated their skill building the hospital, post office, ship's service, in addition to warehouses and hangars. In anticipation of the departure of the veteran 22nd and 23rd battalions, men were assigned to understudy their men in all projects which would continue.

As if to relieve the monotony of the 7-day work schedule, nine Jap planes made a brief return visit to Attu on the 13th of October. Both the Army and the Navy were on the alert and both let loose with all they had when the Japs came over at twenty thousand. The dotted red lines of the tracer bullets punctuated by the delayed puffs of the time-fused 90's made a beautiful and impressive display of aerial fireworks. The Seabees distinguished themselves by refusing to fire at the high-flying Betty's. Since there were no casualties and no damage was done to the installations, the raid was considered a success.

With the coming of winter, construction was impeded by weather unsuitable for outside work. Few were the days that the Seabees secured, but the high winds and blinding snow prohibited certain types of construction. In addition, the continued freezing temperatures made snow disposal a cumulative problem as the banks increased in size. The Seabees waged a continuous battle to keep the runways and vital roads open to traffic.

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Two weeks later, when the situation was well in hand, the Seabees loud-mouthed rivals, the Marines, landed and the "Bees began telling it to them. Although met at the dock with a bus and a brass band, the Marines complained about their barracks being cold.

On the last day of the year the 23rd Seabees embarked for the States after having spent sixteen months in the Aleutians. Two months later the 22nd left aboard the S.S. Gaines. As the senior surviving CMC, Comdr. L. W. Robertson succeeded Comdr. Boyd as officer in charge of the 9th Regiment. As an additional duty, he was made station public works officer. The Seabees under his command were the 68th, the second section of the 8th Special, Detachment 1018, and the three maintenance units which replaced the 22nd and 23rd Battalions.

The three C.B. Maintenance Units 547, 556, and 576, were merged with C.B. Detachment 1018 to form Battalion 138. This battalion was commissioned on January 16, 1944, with Lt. Fred C. Kravath acting officer-in-charge. Being a maintenance battalion, the newly created 138th was assigned work relevant to the repair and upkeep of the station and to the operation of facilities normally under the cognizance of Public Works. Included in this category were the maintenance of the airport, roads, and buildings; the running of the machine, blacksmith, carpentry, tire, battery sheet metal, and electrical shops; the servicing of repair of all automotive and heavy equipment; and the operation of the water, sewer, and power systems.

Under the capable direction of its former executive officer, Lt. Comdr. W. B. Cunningham, the seasoned Sixty-Eighth took over the completion of the unfinished projects left by the 22nd and 23rd. The 23rd left partially completed the AvGas Tank Farm, the laundry, the drydock pier, and several minor jobs. From the 22nd the 68th inherited the task of completing the airport, including several hangars, taxi-ways, and revetments. Confronted with these inherited projects in addition to its normal program, the Sixty-Eighth went forward under the forced draft. Although they made good use of their man-hours, and the 138th and 8th Special contributed many theirs, the work was never completed. As fast as one job was finished another would be assigned.

When the 22nd area had to be remodeled preparatory to occupancy by the officers of Fleet Air Wing Four, it was necessary to import more Seabees from Dutch. Lt. Julian Fleischmann & Co., an affiliate of the 85th Battalion, took the job. Working against time and toward luxury, the unit was able to complete the job according to "specmie" specifications in advance of the time set.

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In the spring of 1944, authorization was received for the installation of diesel and bunker oil storage facilities. The diesel layout was to be equipped with strainers and clarifiers and to have a storage capacity of 30,000 barrels. The bunker oil tank farm was to consist of twenty 10,000 barrel tanks. Heating equipment was to be installed to insure efficient pumping in all weather. Both systems were to be connected to the docks for receiving oil and servicing of ships. Construction was delayed for lack of materials, but both systems were ready to receive oil by summer.

Although it was a well established air station, the installation of fueling facilities marked a significant increase in the effectiveness of Attu as a naval base. With the completion of the provision warehouses, including two cold storages, Attu became capable of feeding and fueling a small task force.

While the tank farms were being completed, the Seabees broadened their construction experience by undertaking a wide variety of projects. The divers tried to salvage a BSP which sank off Agattu. The powder, monkey and rock workers developed a quarry to provide rock for the breakwater protecting the small boat anchorage. Becoming bored with the relative simple 75's, the Seabee electricians installed two 150KW generators and one 600 KW for the base power system. The base water supply was enlarged by the completion of a concrete-core earth-filled dam. To assist the PWD of NAP, Shemya, in constructing his installation, a small detail was temporarily assigned to that activity. The real outdoor Seabees got an opportunity to demonstrate their abilities in the amphibious expedition to Cape Wrangel. Station ship repair, accustomed to working steel hull, was caught without experience, tools, or materials when required to repair a concrete tanker somewhat damaged. This proved to be routine for the Seabees and hull and superstructure of the "rock" were soon as good as new.

By June the Seabees had practically completed the previously authorized construction program. Then orders were received to increase the width and extend both runways to 6500' each. To lengthen the East-West strip it was necessary to blast through solid rock. Extending the North-South runway involved the construction of 400,000 cu. yds. fill in addition to the removal and relocation of the station hospital. With these major projects to complete prior to Nov. 1st, help was required; it came in the form of 290 earth moving specialists from the 66th under the charge of Lt. Commander Stumph.

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Together with all available equipment from Adak with the 66th on the East-West extension and the 68th on the North-South and the hospital, major construction again went on the 24 hr. basis. Dredlocks, the patient patron of Alaskan Seabees, expedited drills, dynamite, and steel. The men of 138th were relentless in their efforts to keep the equipment running and the roads passable. The Army contributed by loaning carryalls and other equipment. The station was most cooperative in their efforts to complete airport construction and operations. By early October the East-West extension had been blasted through, graded, and declared completed. By mid-October the new dispensary had been moved one mile due east with loss of time or parent. On 23rd October completion of the North-South extension and taxiway connecting was announced.

Seven days later the Sixty-Eighth departed for the States. On 1 November 1944 the Ninth Naval Construction Regiment was disbanded. Lt. Commander Earl Ashlock skipper of the 138th took charge of the remaining Seabees in his capacity as station Public Works Officer. The days of construction were over; the days of maintenance and operation by Public Works were at hand.