

SHEMYA



**IF YOU'VE SEEN ONE
PACIFIC ISLAND YOU'VE
SEEN THEM ALL**

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INTRODUCTION

This paper was compiled as a Project Warrior Report, not as a documented historical paper. Every reasonable attempt was made to verify all information. The information for sections one through five was gathered from a variety of reference books and Alaskan Atlases that are available in any public library. The information in sections six, through nine comes from numerous sources to include: The Forgotten War by Stan Cohan, The Thousand Mile War by Brian Garfield, Top Cover by John Cloe, Arctic War Planes by Stephen Mills, Flight to The Top by Ken Ruble, and a semi official paper by 1st Lt. Leonard R. Barnes and Sgt Andrew Thomas. Additional information came from Shemya Base Histories that are filed in the Alaskan Air Command Historian's office. Much of what is written in section six through nine was also verified by undocumented conversations with men who were actually on Shemya during and after the war. A list of these men is included below. Many of the photos in this paper are from their personal collections. Other photos were provided by the Shemya Base Historian and the Alaskan Air Command Historian.



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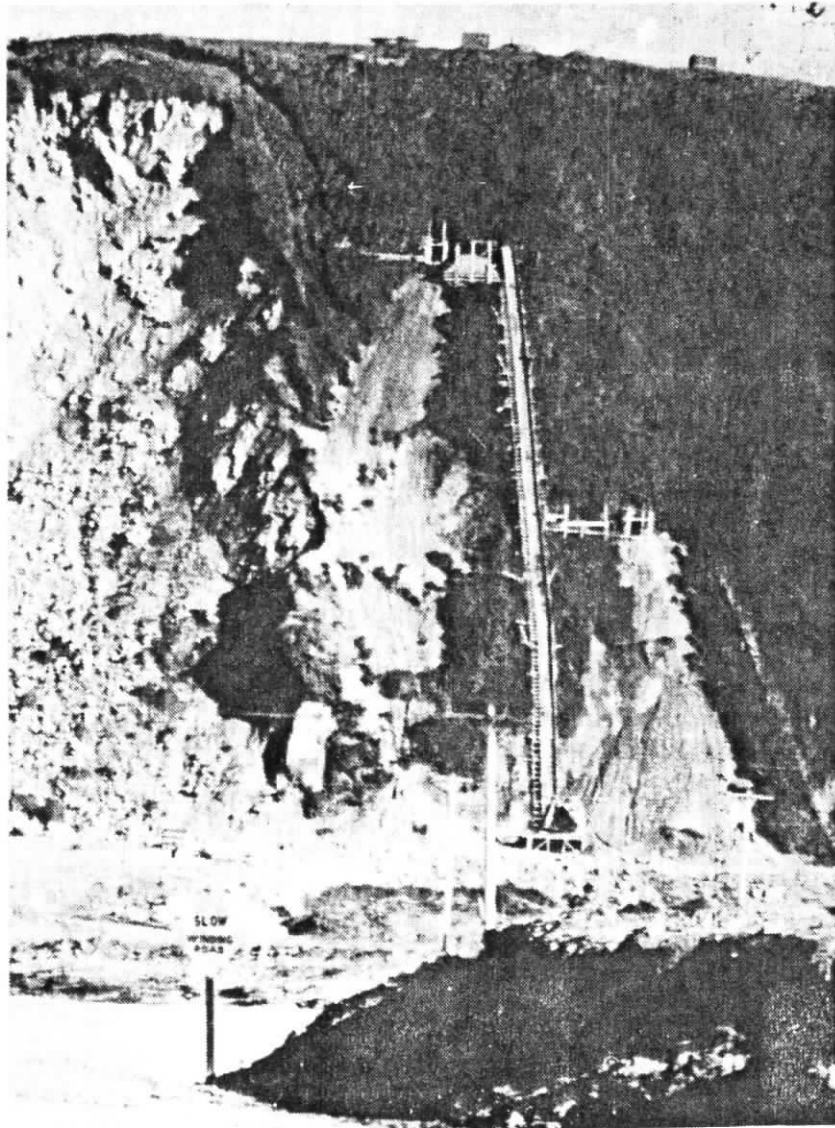
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GEOGRAPHY

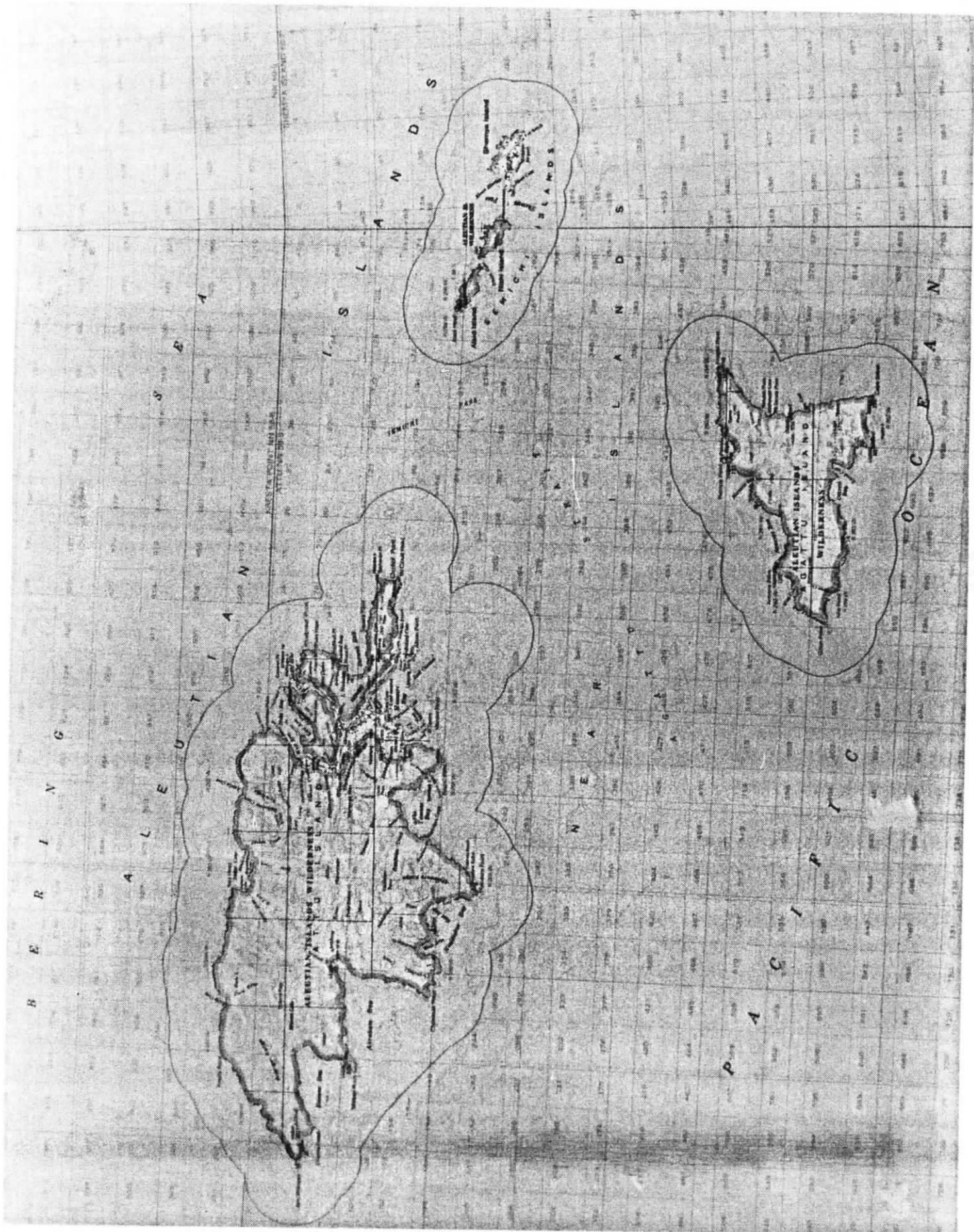
52 43' N and 174 6' E are the geographic coordinates of the Island of Shemya. This island is located near the end of an archipelago of islands known as the Aleutian Chain. The Aleutian Chain is a string of islands that runs from the southwest corner of mainland Alaska to within 100 miles of the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. The last two islands in this chain are in Russian territory. These last two islands are known as the Komodorski Islands. The larger of these two islands, Bering Island, lies only 180 miles west of Shemya. The Russian explorer, Vitas Bering is buried on Bering Island.

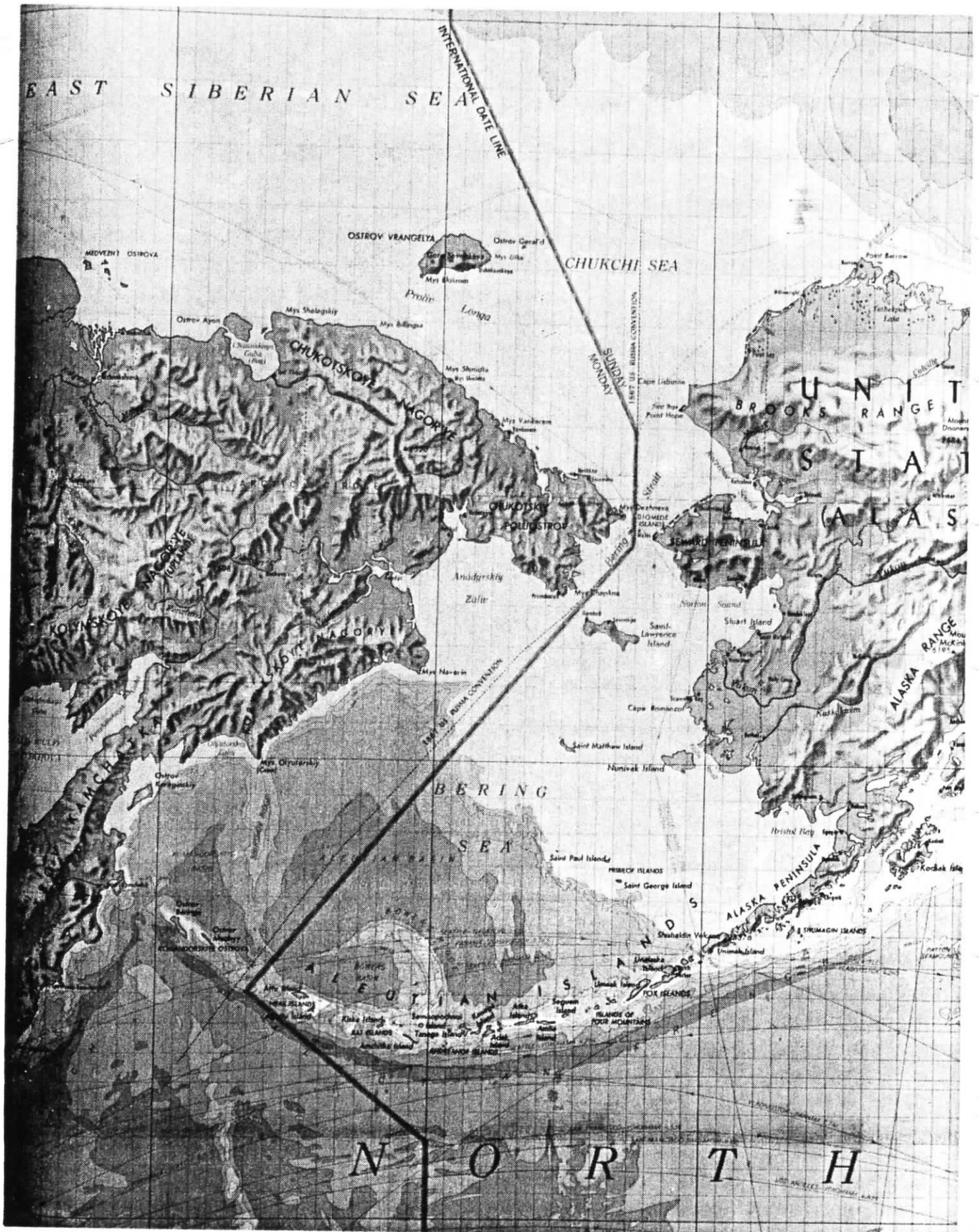
The last three islands in the American portion of the chain are Attu, Agattu and Shemya. These three islands comprise a group of islands known as the Near Islands. On a clear day, it is possible to see the northern side of Agattu from Shemya. Agattu lies about 25 miles south of Shemya. Occasionally, it is possible to see Mt. Terrible and the entire east face of Attu from Shemya. Attu lies 35 miles west of Shemya. Another term used in conjunction with Shemya is the Semichi Group. The Semichi Group refers to Shemya proper and the three small Islets of Alaid, Hammerhead and Nizki. These three islets can be easily seen from Shemya. They are similar in appearance and composition to Shemya only smaller. The Near Islands actually lie in the Eastern Hemisphere. However, if you look on any map you will notice that the International Dateline bends around the the Near Islands. For Geo-Political reasons, the Near Islands are considered to be in the Western Hemisphere even though they lie farther West than parts of Siberia. An Armed Forces Radio program once coined the term "East of Midnight" to describe the position of these islands. There are several other interesting ways to look at the geo-position of Shemya. Although Shemya is a part of Alaska, it's latitude is closer to Seattle than it is to Fairbanks. Shemya is also closer to either Tokyo, Vladivostok or Peking than it is to Washington D.C. Another interesting note to realize is that Shemya is five time zones away from New York City. AFRN broadcasts a live radio show on New Year's Eve night. The show starts just before 1900 Shemya time. At 1900 local you can hear New Yorkers ring in the new year. At 2000 you can hear them celebrate in Chicago. At 2100 you can hear the party in Denver. At 2200 Seattle celebrates. At 2300 the celebration reaches Anchorage. Finally, one hour later the new year reaches the Western Aleutians. The logo on a popular T-shirt really sums it all up with the saying "It's not the end of the world but you can see it from here".

The Aleutian Islands form a natural boundary between the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea. It is possible to stand on a vantage point on either end of Shemya and watch as the waves from the Pacific Ocean cross the waves of the Bering Sea. At certain times of the year you can clearly see the difference in color of the two oceans. The waters south of Shemya will at times be darker in color than the brighter Bering waters. After a storm the two bodies of water meet with great force, and huge splashes, eddies and whirlpools can be seen.



This 1946 photograph shows two of the three engineering test tunnels on the north cliff.





GEOLOGY

The Aleutian Archipelago was created by the motion of the Earth's crust. Large areas of the Earth's crust, known as plates are constantly but imperceptibly moving. The Aleutian Chain delineates the boundary of the Pacific and American Plates. The Pacific Plate is being forced under the American Plate. This action is known as subduction. Zones of subduction are characterized by vulcanism and earthquakes. The Aleutian Chain also defines the Northern boundary of what geologists call the Pacific Ring of Fire which is an area of vulcanism and earthquakes that circle the entire Pacific Ocean. The Aleutian Chain was created by both the buckling of the Earth's crust and volcanic activity.

Shemya is four and one half miles long at it's longest point. It is situated in an East/West orientation. The island is one and three-quarter miles wide at it's widest point. The island slopes upward from sea level on the Pacific side to a maximum height of 240 feet on the north shore. The southern beaches are characterized by brown sand rising slowly to meet the vegetation. The northern side of the island is characterized by black pebble beaches which meet steep cliffs. This black side of the island obviously gave rise to one of the island's nicknames of "The Black Pearl of the Aleutians". The substrate of Shemya is mostly igneous and consists of large amounts of basalt. Deposits of metamorphic and even some sedimentary rock can also be found on the island. There are no significant deposits of minerals or gems on Shemya. Rumors of jade on the island are unfounded. These rumors of jade stem partly from three mine shafts on one of the North cliffs. These alleged jade mines were in fact engineering test tunnels. Engineers used them to discover what the island was made of. Shemya is different than most of the rest of the Aleutian Islands in that it does not have tall jagged mountains and volcanic cones that are characteristic of the rest of the chain.

There are no naturally occurring harbors on Shemya. There are two unprotected bays that can be used for navigation. The Alcan bay is situated on the northwest corner of the island. The bay is about one half mile wide. It has a fairly flat sandy bottom that averages 40 feet or 7 fathoms in depth. There is a hazardous shoal near the center of the bay that rises to within eight feet of the surface of the water. Skoot's Cove is a much smaller anchorage on the southwest corner of the island. Skoot's Cove is only several hundred yards wide and is fouled with several reefs. The waters to the North of Shemya drop off steeply into what is known as the Abyssal Plain or the Aleutian Basin. This basin is flat and featureless and has a fairly constant depth of 12,000 to 13,000 feet. The waters to the south of Shemya are shallow and fouled with rocks and sea weed. The ocean floor gradually slopes toward a dramatic geographic feature known as the Aleutian Trench. This trench reaches a maximum depth of 26,000 feet and is the actual site of subduction spoken of earlier. The trench is about 150 miles south of Shemya. Tides around Shemya are chiefly diurnal. The difference between mean high and low water is about four feet.

FLORA AND FAUNA

Shemya, like the rest of the chain, is covered with a thick, knee high tundra grass. There are three major varieties of grasses or sedges that grow in the heavy clay that covers the volcanic substrate on the islands. These are: Bentgrass, Blue Joint Reed Grass and Cotton Grass. Walking across the Aleutian tundra can best be compared to walking across a field of wet mattresses. You must constantly step up out of the depression you made with your previous step. The grass grows, completes it's life cycle then dies to become part of the heavy humus supporting the grass. The grass is non nourishing to grazing animals. A variety of hearty wild flowers also thrive on the island. Flowers common to Shemya are: Asters, Buttercups, Monkshood and Violets. There are no indigenous trees on any of the Western Aleutian Islands. There is a saying that there is a beautiful girl behind every tree on Shemya. Invariably some enterprising G.I. will import trees usually for use by the island's pet dog. These imported trees are almost always called the Shemya National Forest. Despite the best efforts to keep these trees alive they will always succumb to the wind, poor soil or the dog.



A small female Stellar Sea Lion

There are no indigenous land mammals on the Western Aleutians. Today, these islands have a large population of rats and Arctic Blue Fox. Both of these animals were imported in the early part of this century. The rats were accidentally introduced as shipboard vermin. The fox were introduced deliberately as a cash crop. The islands made a perfect breeding ground for the fox. The enterprising fox farmers would plant several pairs of fox on rented islands and then harvest the island several years later. These fox are now the top of the ecologic food chain on the island and they have upset it's natural balance. The Western Aleutian Islands had a very large and varied bird population until the introduction of the fox. 183 species of birds have been identified in the Aleutians. Of those, 130 species are migrants. The fox have nearly eradicated the ground nesting birds by raiding nests and eating the eggs or young chicks. Naturalists have completely removed these fox from the island of Agattu and have successfully reintroduced the Aleutian Goose. Birds on Shemya are relatively scarce. The Arctic Raven, Arctic Owl, Sea Gull, Storm Petrel and Rock Sand Piper can be seen. There are also a large variety of ducks to be seen in the waters around Shemya. These ducks include Pintails, Eiders, Harlequins and Scoters. Large numbers of Stellar Sea Lions can be seen basking on the rocks on the North and East sides of the island. Occasionally, whales, seals, and walrus can also be seen from the island. More than once, a dead whale has washed up on shore. A dead whale can stink up the entire island if the winds are just right. A variety of fish inhabit the waters around Shemya. Salmon, Flounder, and Japanese Perch can all be found. Common crustaceans are found in the tidal pools around the island. Some experts attribute the bright color of the Bering Sea to a virtual carpet of Sea Urchins in the shallow waters. Dolly Varden and Rainbow Trout have been reported in Shemya's lakes.



An Arctic Blue Fox

METEOROLOGY

Another nick-name for the island is the "Home of the Forty Knot Fog". The Western Aleutian islands are also known as the world's weather factory or the birthplace of the winds. Without a doubt the weather in the Western Aleutians is often the worst weather in the world. A unique combination of meteorologic conditions make the Aleutian Islands one of the few places in the world that can have strong winds and dense fog at the same time. The fog is produced when the temperature and dew point spread is less than five degrees, and condensation nuclei are present. These conditions exist almost constantly in the summer months. Two semipermanent pressure systems and two air masses are constantly doing battle in the region. There are two basic seasons with two short transition periods. The summer or foggy season runs from June through August. This season sees winds with a southerly component. The winds are driven by the Pacific High Pressure System. This wind is relatively warm and moist. Velocities average 15 knots. Temperatures rarely rise above 50 degrees. Precipitation usually falls as mist or very light drizzle. The winter season sees winds with a northerly component. These winds are driven by The Polar Low Pressure System. Velocities average 20 knots. Precipitation falls in the form of snow. The snow that falls rarely accumulates due to the winds. This polar air is cold and dry. Temperatures vary only a few degrees either side of the freezing point. Violent weather can and does occur at any time of the year. Winds as high as 130 miles an hour have been recorded. The lowest recorded barometric pressure readings occurred in October of 1977. The remains of Tropical Storm Harriet pushed the mercury to 27.35" at Adak and was off the glass at Atka! A local phenomenon known as Willy Waws have destroyed untold property and taken many lives. Willy Waws are sudden violent wind gusts that are created when a northwesterly wind pushes the cold dry polar air over the top of the warm moist maritime air. This inverted combination of air masses causes extremely unstable atmospheric conditions that can only be found elsewhere on the leading edge of air mass thunderstorms. There is one good thing to be said about Shemya's weather. Because Shemya has no mountains, it does not suffer from "up slope fog" which plagues most of the rest of the chain.

EARLY INHABITANTS

Amateur archaeologists have discovered several pre-historic Aleut habitations on Shemya. Artifacts have included pottery, and both bone and stone tools. There is no evidence that there was ever a permanent Aleut presence on Shemya. These excavations indicate that a number of fish camps did exist at one time. Carbon dated skulls as old as 500 years have been uncovered on Shemya. The Aleuts had several large settlements on Attu (both pre-historic and modern). It can be assumed that these Attuans hunted, fished and trapped on Shemya. The history of these Western Aleut people is one of tragedy. In the late 1700s, Russian trappers discovered these peaceful people. Soon, less than honorable men came and enslaved the men and women. Many times, uprisings would result. One such uprising did occur on the Island of Attu. To this day, the location of this uprising is still known as Massacre Bay and Murder Point.

In 1942, the U.S. government feared the Japanese would attack the Aleutian Islands. For all the right reasons but with poor planning the Aleuts were relocated to mainland Alaska, during the war years. The relocation was poorly organized and executed. As a result, many Aleuts died from pitiful living conditions and disease. The Aleuts never reoccupied Attu. Many Villages in the Eastern Aleutians were resettled after the war.

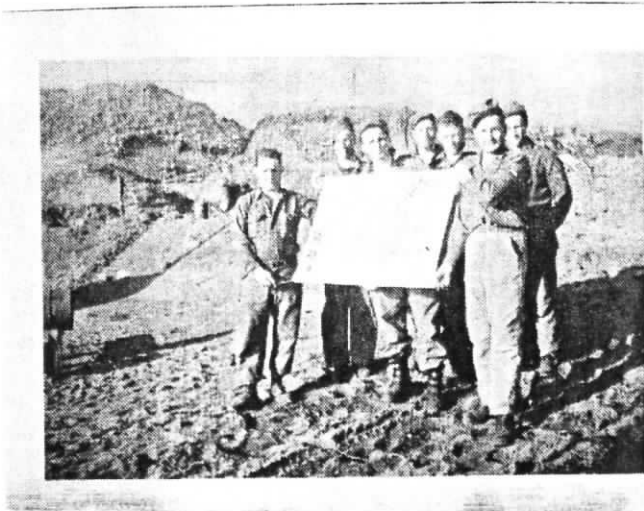


Human skull on display in Shemya library
skull is carbon dated to 1475AD

JAPANESE INVASION

By mid 1942, the Japanese Imperial Army had established a strong hold on the Western Aleutian Islands. A permanent Garrison on Kiska and an on again off again presence on Attu were the two major Japanese installations, in the early part of the war. The original purpose of occupying these islands was to force the American Navy to divert some of it's fleet from the South Pacific. In later parts of the war, Japan feared a northerly invasion of their homeland. Those fears were increased by the Doolittle/Hornet raids. These garrisons would serve as effective road blocks to the feared advances by the U.S. There was also strong propaganda value in attacking and occupying American possessions. The Japanese Imperial Headquarters misinterpreted some random military activity in the Eastern Aleutians as a precursor to the anticipated northern invasion. To counter this threat, Admiral Yamamoto directed Col. Hosogoya to reoccupy the abandoned Japanese garrison on Attu and to occupy Amchitka and Shemya. The task force was assembled at Paramushiro under the command of Lt. Col. Hiroshi Yanekawa. 1100 men from the 303rd Independent Infantry Battalion were slated to occupy Shemya. Their job was to build a runway on Shemya. An advanced party of engineers had already landed on Shemya and surveyed the runway. On October 29th 1942, 1100 Japanese infantrymen were sailing for Shemya. The island was within sight of the landing craft when a single American B-24 droned overhead. Lt. Col. Yanekawa assumed that his small invasion force had been spotted and that a strong counter attack would soon follow. He turned the invasion fleet around and returned to Paramushiro. The irony of this action was the fact that the B-24 had not seen Lt. Col. Yanekawa's little fleet of ships.

The only Japanese to set foot on Shemya, during the war, were the hand full of engineers that had marked out the location of a runway. Thanks to a solitary American patrol aircraft, the Battle of Shemya would not have to be fought.

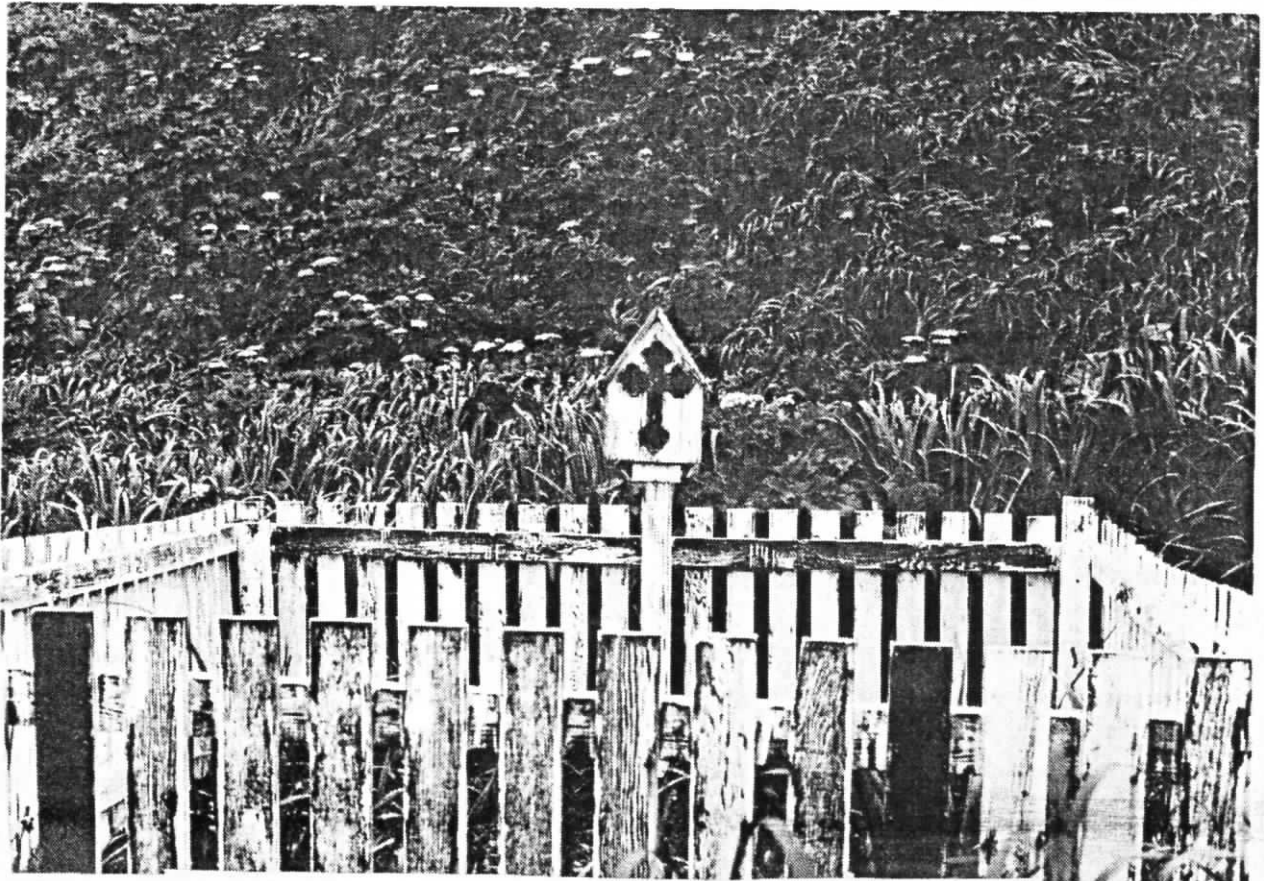


Japanese souvenirs such as this could be found on Attu but not on Shemya.

THE AMERICAN INVASION

America, too, realized the value of Shemya. American planes were having to fly from the Eastern Aleutians to bomb Kiska and Attu. If they had a permanent base in the Western Aleutians the job of routing the Japanese from American soil would certainly be made easier. The Western Aleutian Islands were surveyed and Shemya was chosen as the site of this new base. Shemya was chosen because it was relatively flat. That fact meant a runway could be built rapidly. Secrecy was critical to a successful invasion and occupation. To mask the exact location of the island, Shemya was given the Code Name 'Voluble'. Voluble would be occupied under orders designated Movement 7871-A.

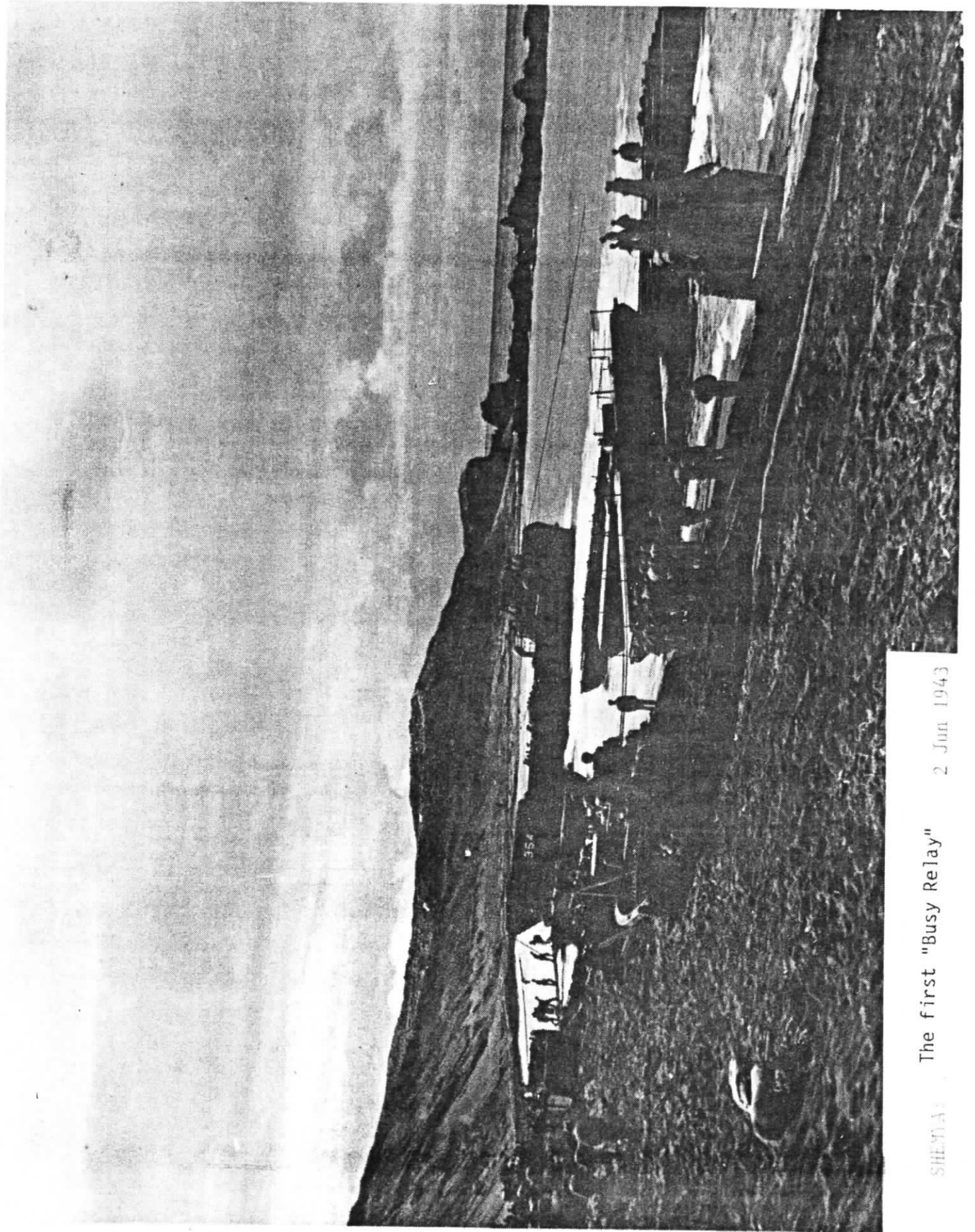
Prior to the actual invasion, Col Benjamin Talley and a small group of Alaskan Scouts slipped onto the island to verify that the Japanese had not occupied the island. The scouts quickly combed the island. The only thing they found was evidence of the small Japanese engineering party that had been on the island the year before. They also discovered a small trapper's cabin and two Russian graves. The dates on the graves were 25 March 1926 and 30 March 1930. On 30 May 1943, only three days after Col. Talley's group of scouts had landed, elements of the Forth Infantry, under command of Brig. Gen. Copeland, boarded ships and headed for Voluble. After 6 hours of being tossed around in heavy seas, Task Force 16.10 landed under cover of thick fog. The Americans had arrived.



Russian graves discovered by American scouts in 1943



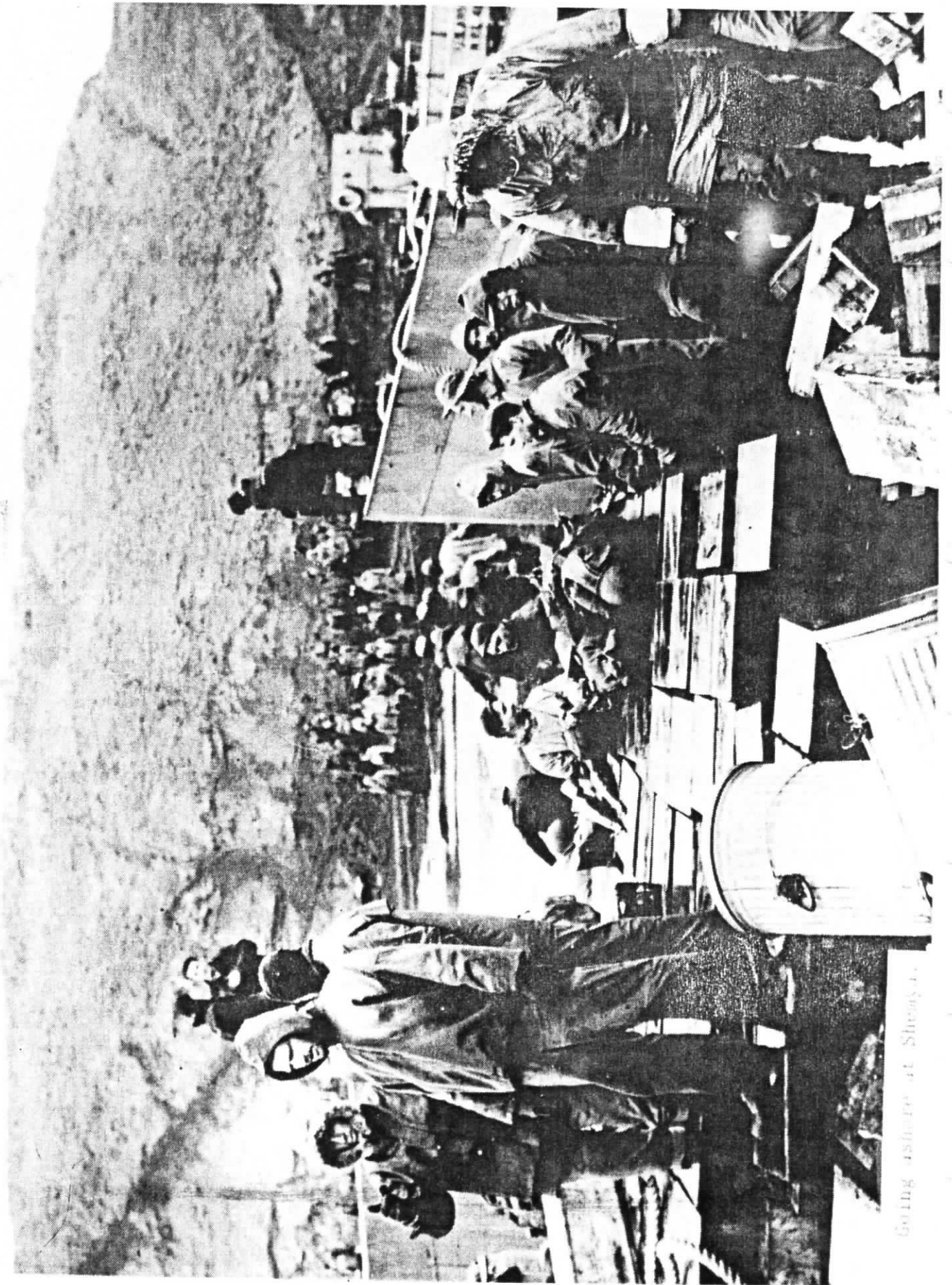
"VOL 3LE", early 743



2 Jun 1943

The first "Busy Relay"

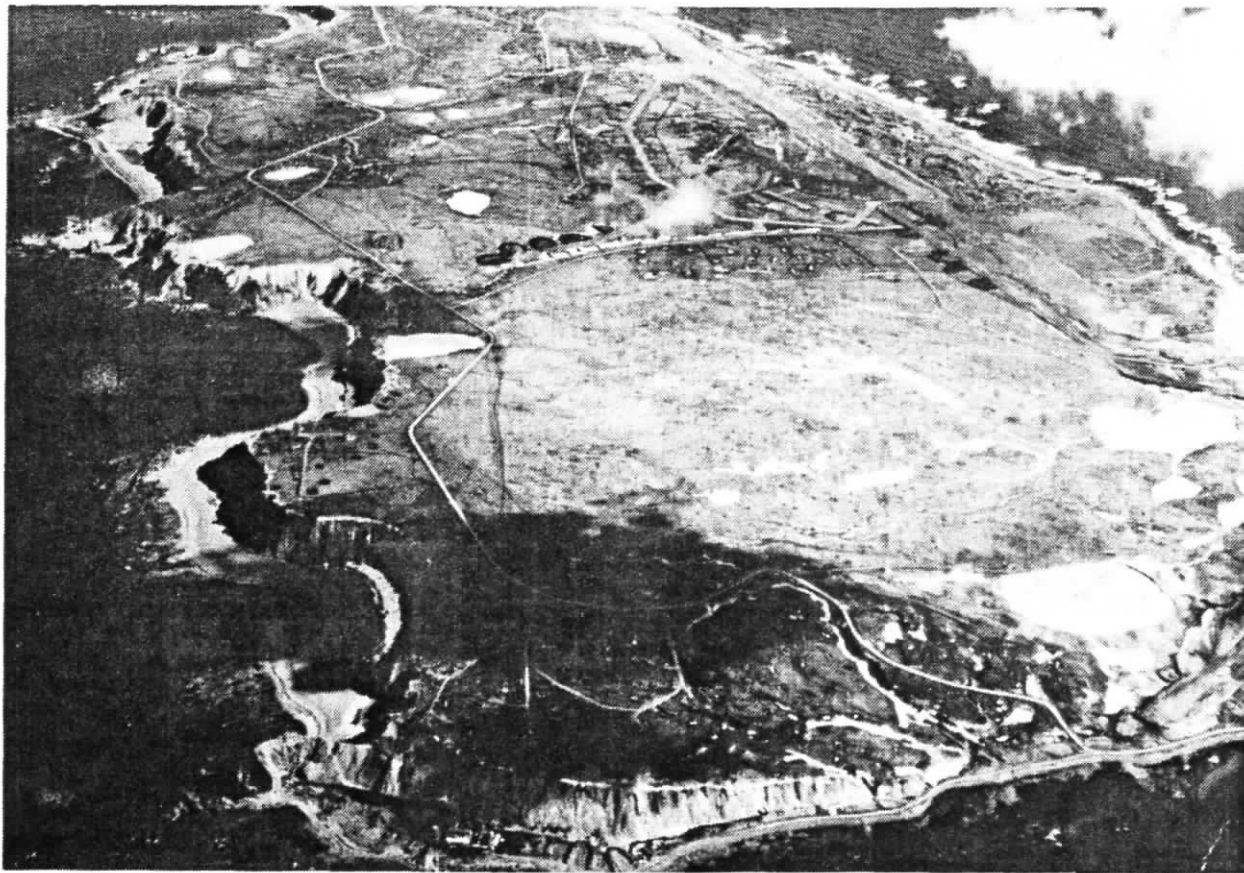
SHEPHERD



Going ashore at Shemya.

BUILDING A BASE

After the invasion, Shemya recieved yet another name. Throughout the war, Shemya would be known only as APO 729. The first order of business for the American engineers was the same as for the Japanese. They surveyed a 10,000 foot runway. The runway, from the start, was designed for use by the new B-29 superbomber. Interestingly, the U.S. runway was sited in the same location as the runway the Japanese had intended to build. Two fighter runways were also laid out. On June 21 1943, the bomber runway was only 6000 feet long and was paved only with Perforated Steel Plate but was ready for the first medium weight aircraft. On 24 June 1943, a C-53 transport landed on the strip, officially opening the Airdrome. Work on the bomber runway (officially known as runway 'A') continued. Hills at either end of this runway were leveled. Work continued on the two fighter runways known as 'B' and 'C'. A large complex of taxiways and parking reventments were also under construction. On 23 July 1943, the first contingent of P-40 fighter aircraft arrived. On 10 August 1943, the first of the 343rd's P-38s arrived. On 13 August 1943, the first flight of heavy bombers arrived. A flight of five B-24s lead by Capt. I.L. Wadlington circled the field twice while construction equipment cleared the runway. They finally landed, and APO 729's real job of pushing the Japanese off of the Aleutians began.



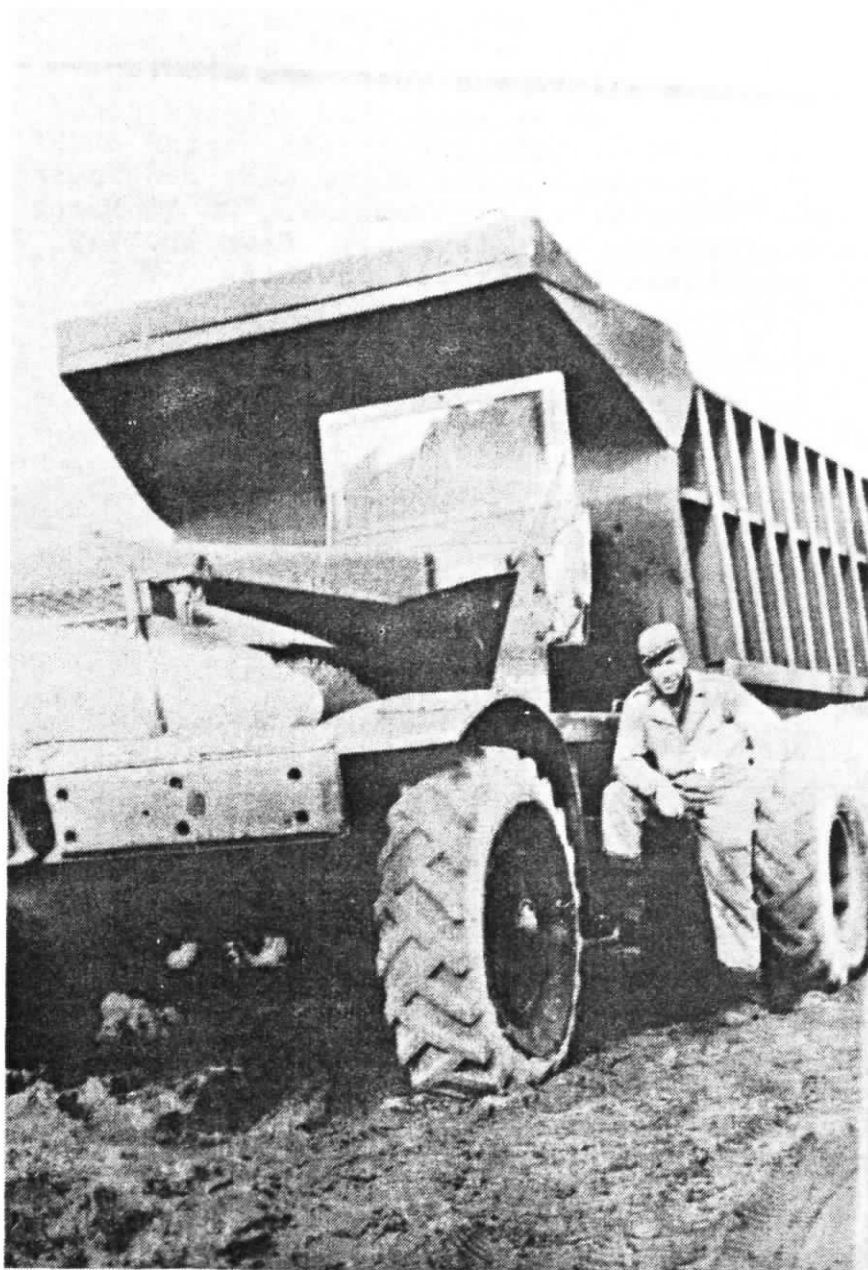
Valuable. Runway A under construction, summer 1943

*Shemya, Alaska
1944*



Runway "A" also visable are hangars 2,3,5 and 6

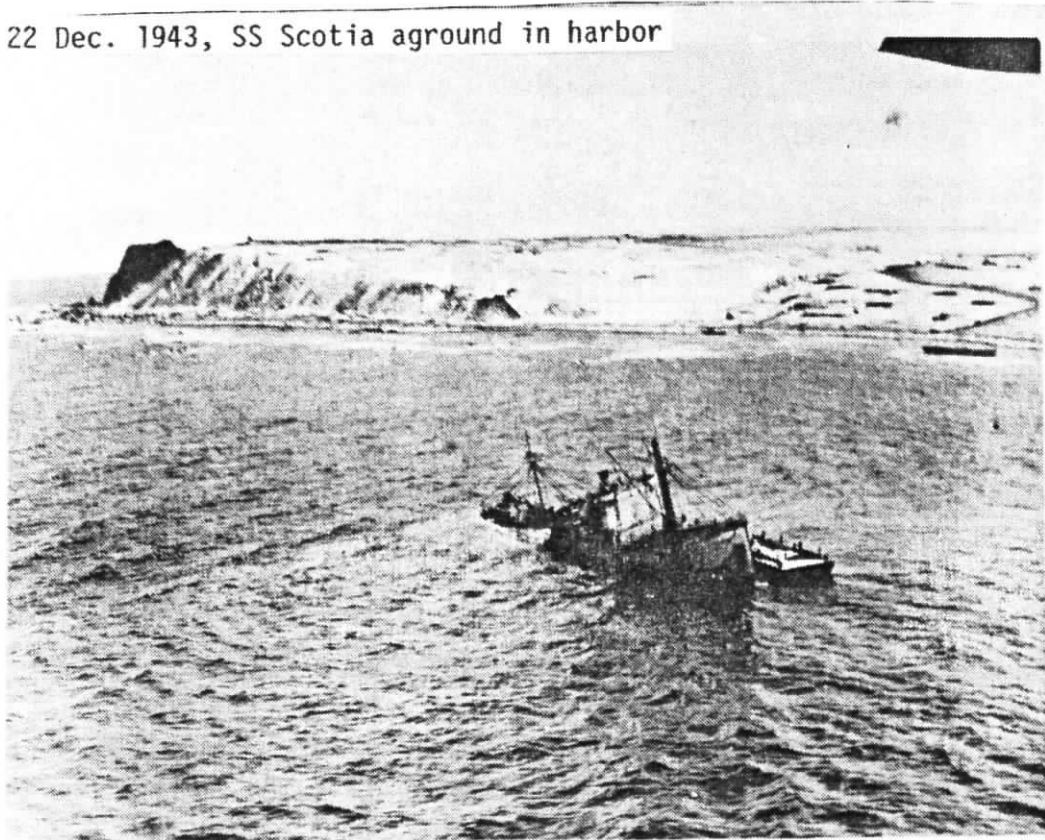
An experiment designed to remove fog from the airdrome was constructed down the length of runway "A". A half pipe was laid parallel to the runway. White gas was poured into the pipe at the rate of 50,000 gallons per hour. The gas was then ignited. It was hoped that the heat from the burning gas would dissipate the fog. Unfortunately, all the flames did were to further obscure the runway and further disturb the already turbulent air.

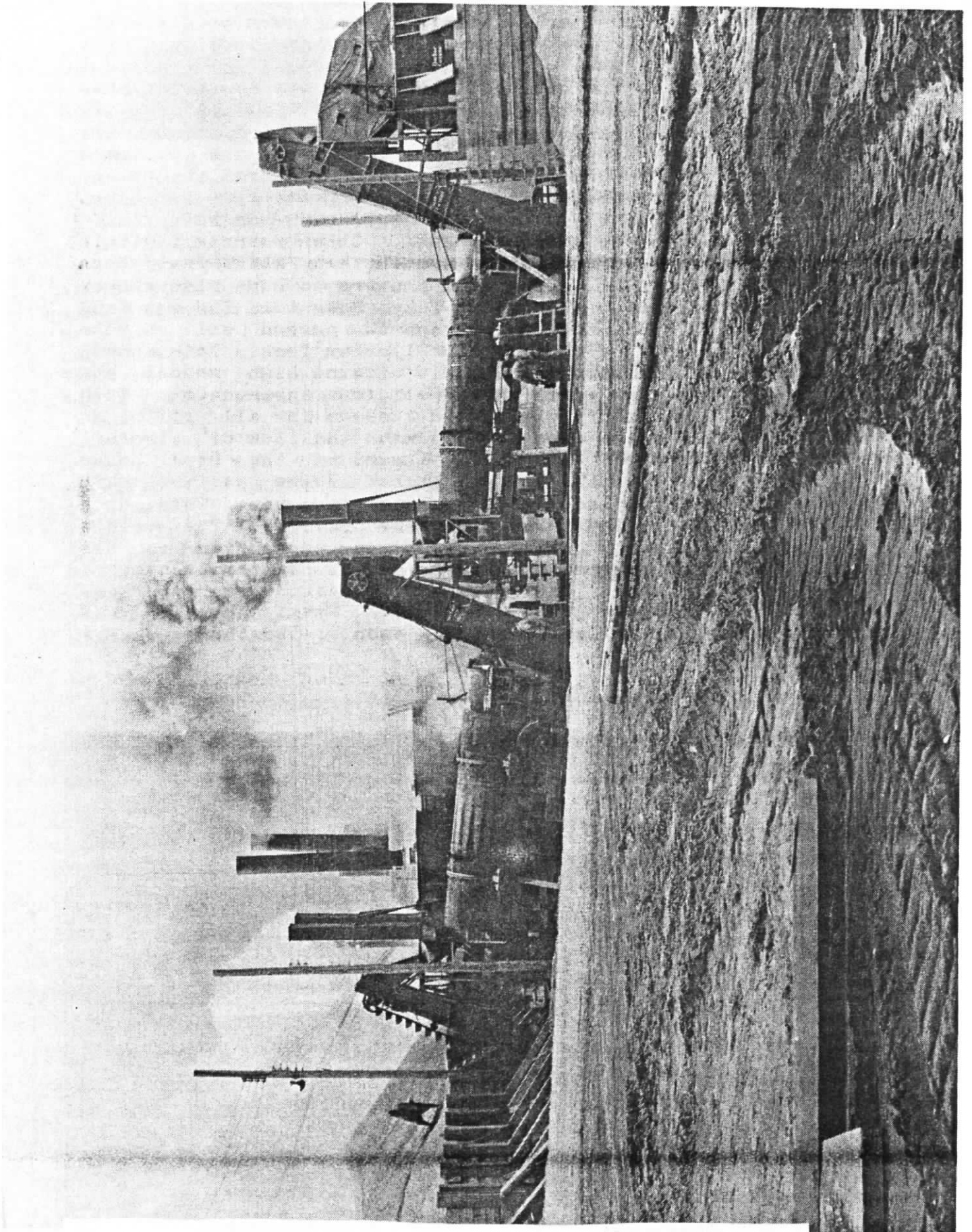


Construction equipment used to build breakwaters

In addition to building the runways, engineers began building roads and port facilities. Rock was quarried from the cliffs along the north shore and from a pit atop the island. Sand was scraped up from several sites on the island. Other supplies had to be brought to the island by ship. This was a very hazardous operation in that there was no dock built to unload the supplies. Materials had to be transferred onto barges and other shallow draft vehicles and then transported to the beach in Alcan Bay. On 22 December 1943, the supply ship, S.S. Scotia struck the submerged reef in the middle of Alcan Bay and sank onto the reef. The Scotia remained on the reef all during the war years. She was still there as late as April of 1947. At some point after that, a storm blew the Scotia off of the reef. She now lays in 45 feet of water in the center of Alcan Bay. The only evidence of the once famous landmark is an annotation on the harbor chart of Shemya. Construction on a breakwater and ships dock continued but would not be completed for several more months. On 16 March 1944, the first bombing mission was launched from APO 729. A flight of B-24s bombed the Japanese island of Onkotan.

22 Dec. 1943, SS Scotia aground in harbor

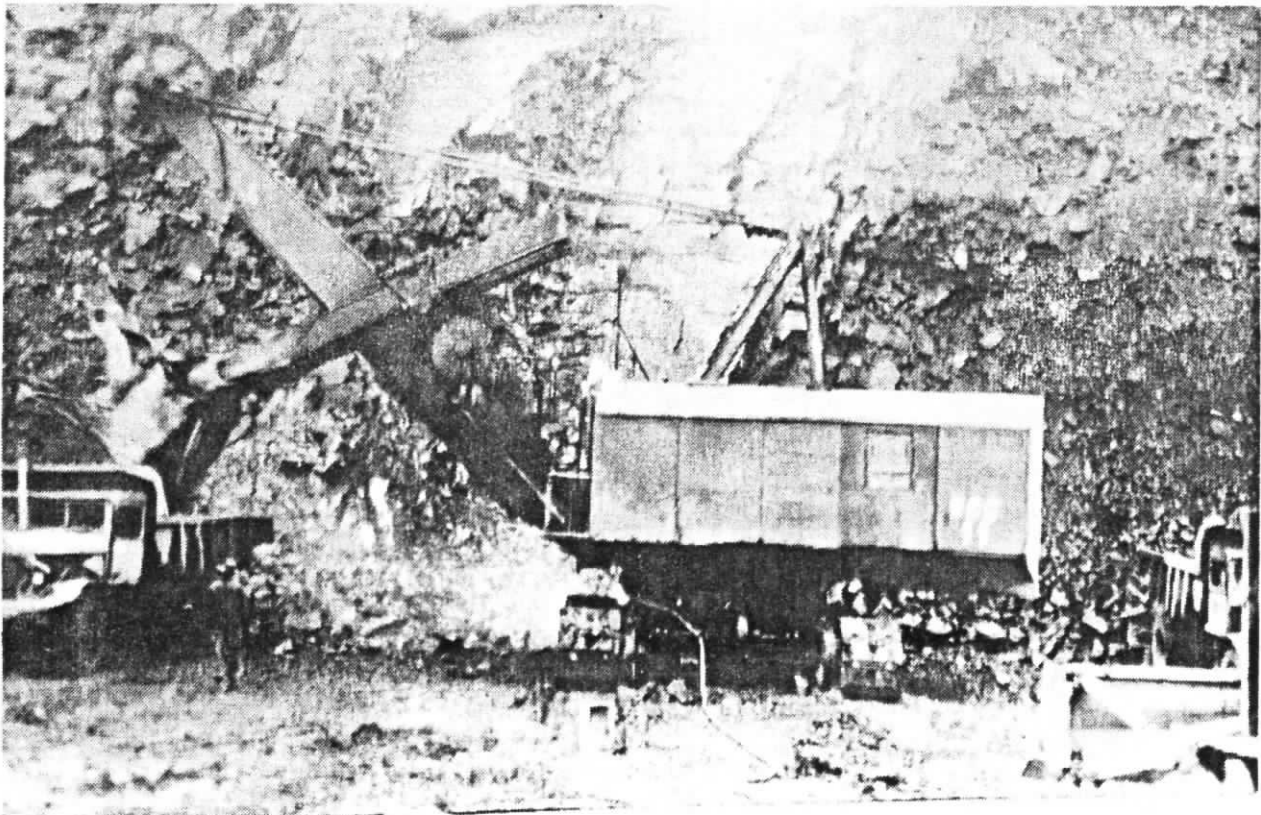


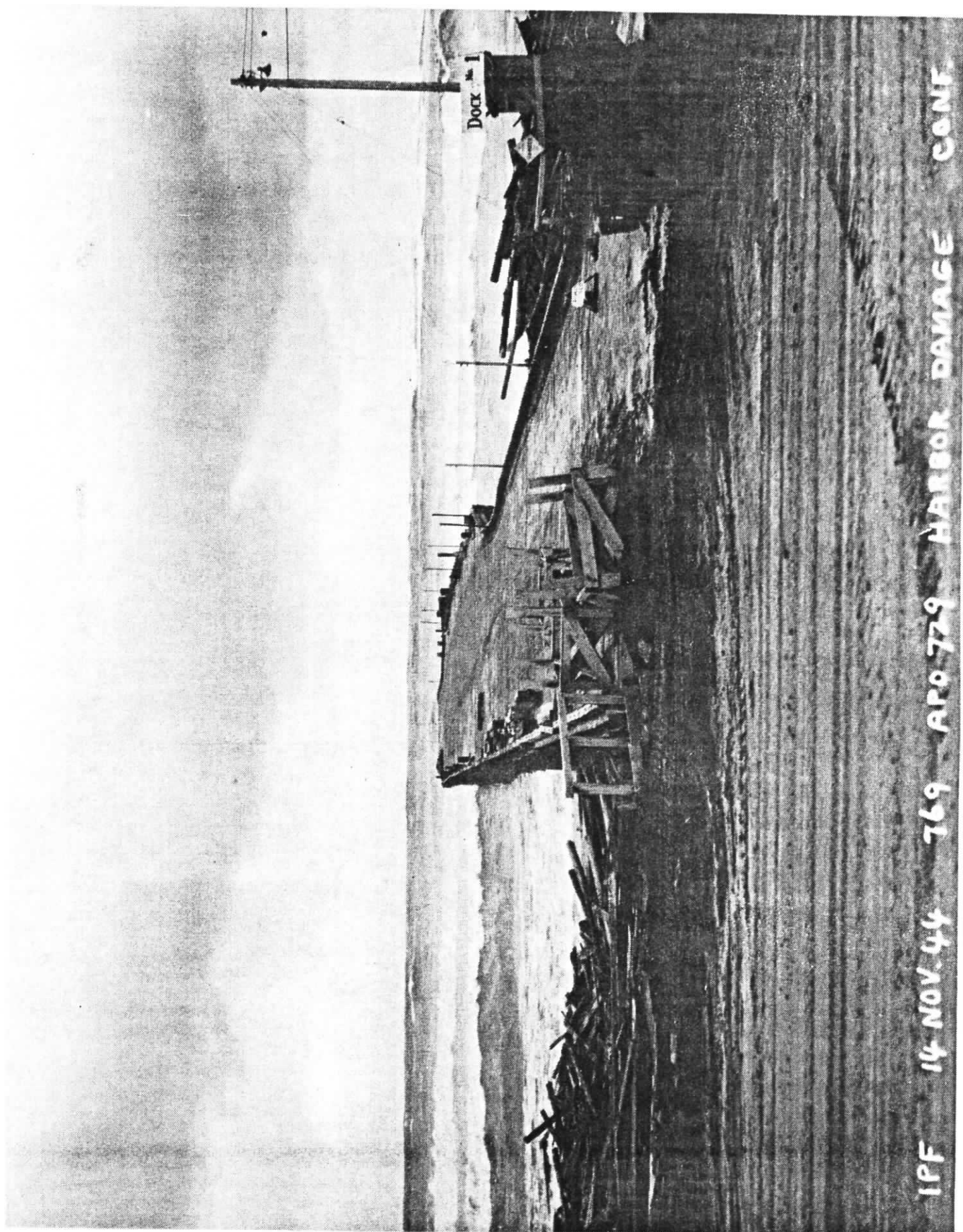


This Barber Greene portable batching plant was the world's largest

Contrary to popular stories, there were women on the Rock. In January of 1944, five nurses were assigned to the field hospital. In May of 1944, other niceties were in place. Ice cream was available in the chow halls. Food was now being served on dishes instead of mess kits. One year to the day after the first Americans landed on Shemya a theater was in operation. The island now had it's own Post Office. Not all of the island's problems were solved. One supply memo indicated that the toilet paper still had not arrived. To further aggravate that problem, only three of the planned 40 miles of sewer pipe had been laid. Latrines were located in unheated tents. Other reports indicate that a fresh water distribution system had still not been completed. Men were still taking cold showers in home made shower houses. On May 26 1944, the famous Tokyo Rose told the men (and women) on Shemya that they would soon be pushed off of the island. May also saw the opening of Willy-Waw Tech. This school was organized by the base chapel. It offered high school and college level classes in addition to religious instruction. This school also gave mandatory classes in Russian for all officers. These classes in Russian were to help with the flow of aircraft that transited through Shemya, as a part of the Lend Lease program. On June 8 1944, the S.S. Caderetta became the first ship to tie up to the newly completed dock in Alcan Bay. This dock made the unloading of very heavy equipment possible. The world's largest portable asphalt batching plant was transported to the island. Supplies and equipment arrived for the construction of 14 large Birchwood hangars. These hangars, like the runway, were designed to accommodate the new B-29. Small hangars and maintenance shops as well as towers for each of the three runways were now in use.

This shovel came to the island via the new dock





IPF 14 NOV. 44 769 APO 729 HARBOR DAMAGE CONF.

Dock 1 being destroyed by a northerly blow, 14 Nov. 1944

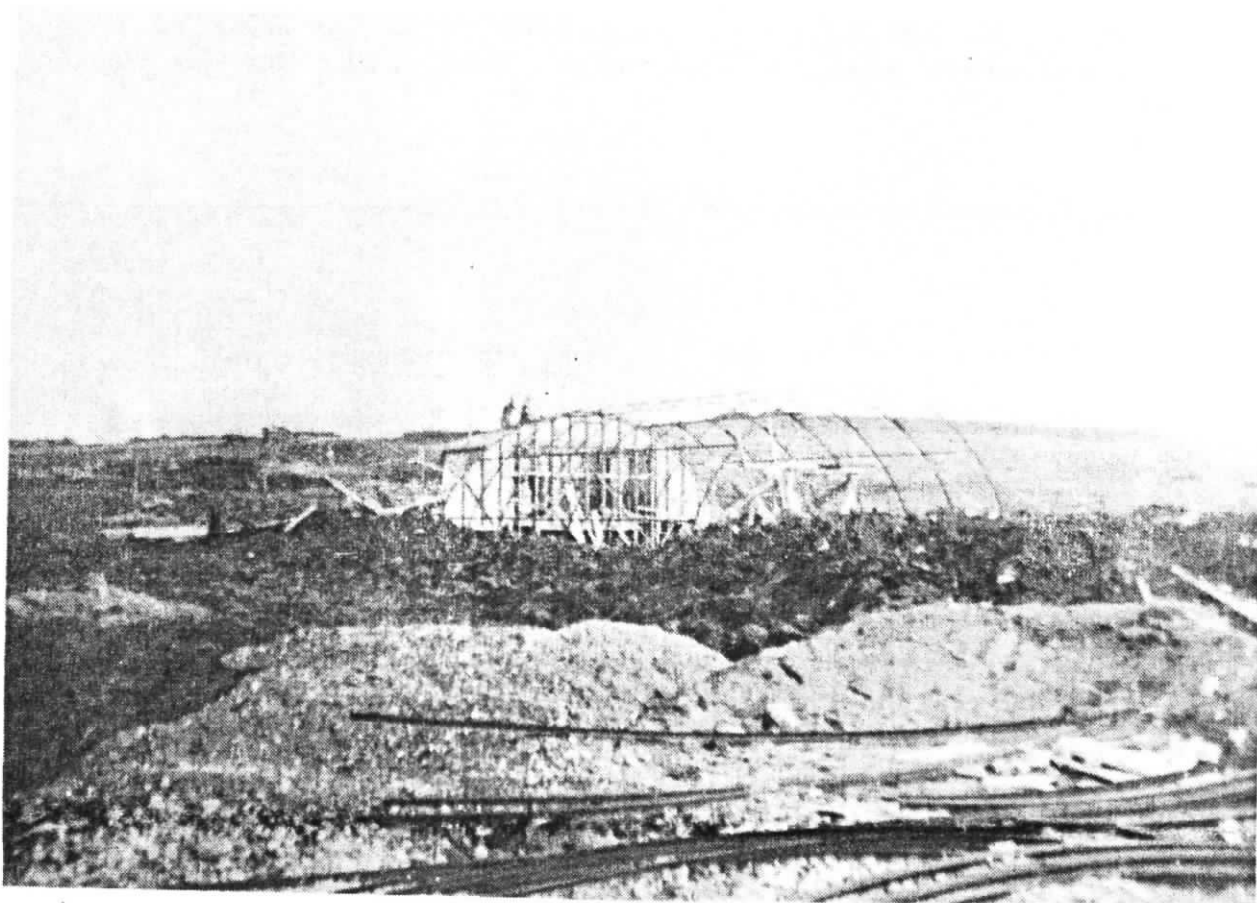
In 1944, another experiment to help control the elements was tried. A large steel pipe was laid across the mouth of the Alcan Bay. Holes were drilled along the length of the pipe. Compressed air was then pumped through the pipe. The theory was that the rising column of air bubbles would neutralize the heavy waves that constantly battered facilities in the bay. This experiment, like the fog dispersal unit, did not work. In fact, on 21 and 22 July a heavy storm destroyed several hundred feet of the breakwater. In August of 1944, the asphalt plant was in operation and paving of the runways was under way. In September of 1944, a Red Cross worker by the name of Mrs. Elizabeth Bates became the first civilian lady on the island. On 13 and 14 November 1944, a severe storm further damaged the breakwater and reduced the dock to driftwood. With the destruction of the only dock on the island, resupply of the island fell mainly to the hands of the Air Corps. A fleet of C-47s and other utility aircraft were used.

Despite all of the amenities on the island, the war was still raging throughout the Pacific. APO 729 had several defensive systems on the island. The most formidable were nine 37MM anti-aircraft guns. These guns were mounted in emplacements on the high ground on the East end of the island. The concrete and steel structures were connected by underground tunnels. A Japanese submarine is reported to have been sunk by one of these guns. Another official document states that a sub was rammed and sunk by a U.S. destroyer, just off the coast of APO 729. This action occurred on 20 Jun 1944. The island had several dozen concrete and steel "pill box" machine gun emplacements. The cliffs on the north side of the island had tiers of barbed wire. All men on the island were trained in small arms and in the use of bayonets.

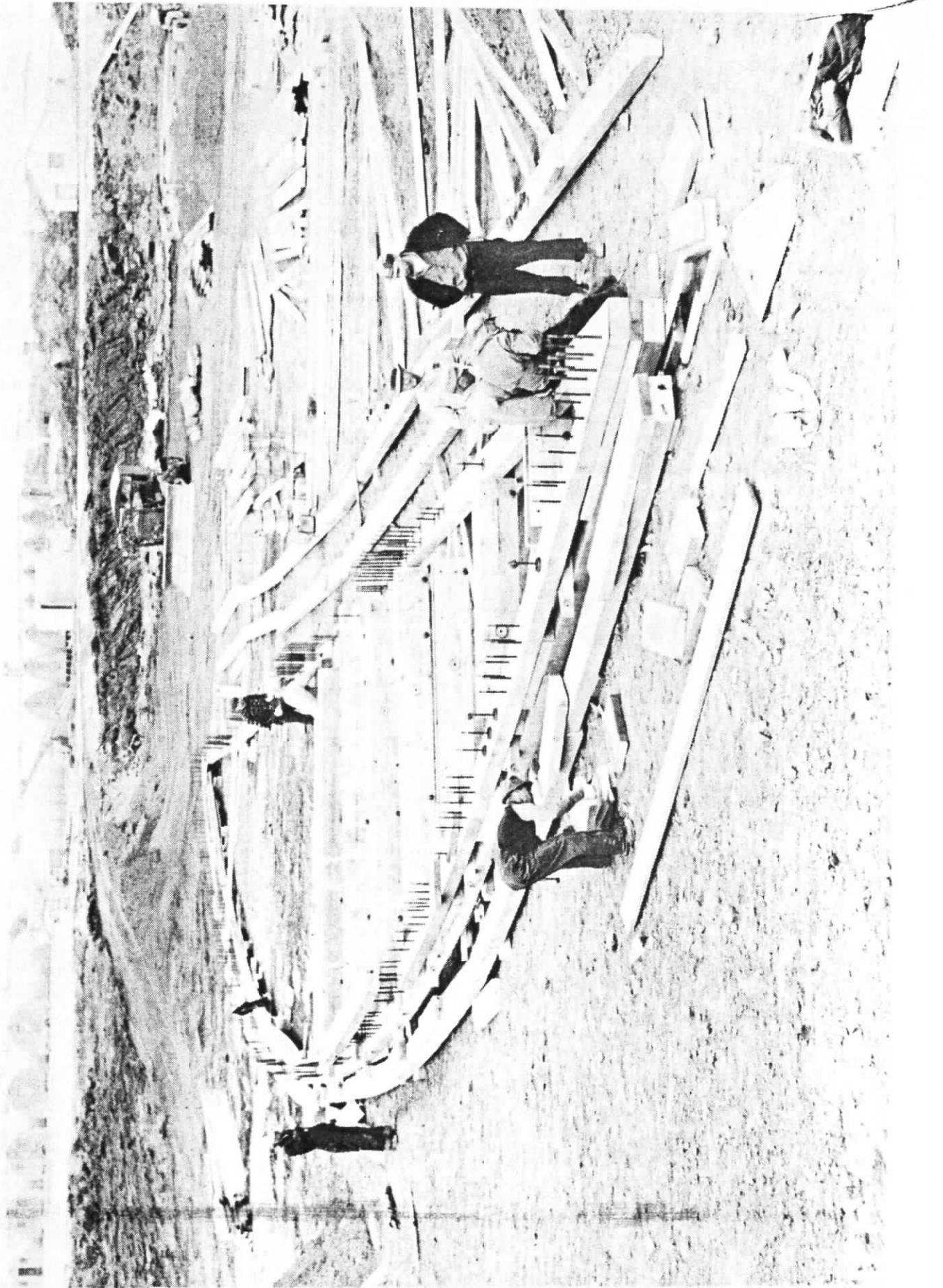


This dock was located where the barge now rests

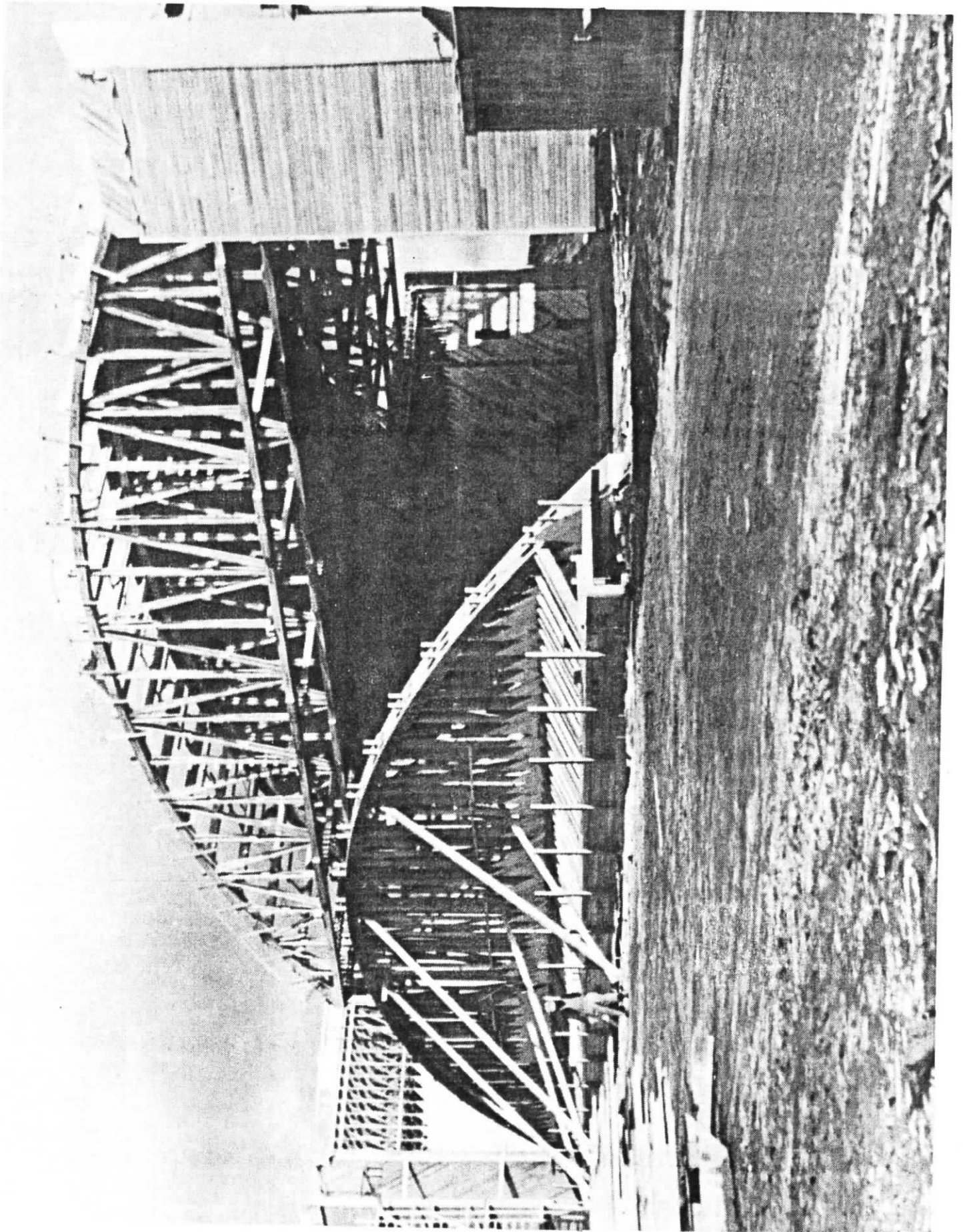
Living and work facilities ranged from floorless pyramidal tents to a variety of prefabricated huts to conventional wooden structures. There were three major types of huts. The Jamesway hut consisted of laminated wooden bows attached to a wooden floor. A rubberized fabric was stretched over the bows. The Pacific hut was the most common living facility. It resembled a Quonset hut but was made entirely of wood. The true Quonset hut was made from corrugated steel. The need for steel was so great in 1944-45 that Shemya saw very few Quonset huts. The third type of hut found on the island were called Stout Houses. Stout Houses were air transportable, all wood, bolt together structures. The Stout House resembled a tree house (without the tree of course). In December of 1944, the recreation center opened in a new wooden structure. One of the main features of the rec facility was a 3000 book library. In February 1945, a real PX opened in a real building. Some of the items that were in demand were Silex coffee pots, radios, hot plates and shoe strings. In March of 1945, it was reported that six Birchwood hangars were under construction. Hangar Two was 88% complete and would be completed within two months. Hangar Three was at 80%. Hangar Six was only 10% complete and Hangar One was at 40%. In April 1945, a new steel dock was ready to receive ships in Alcan Bay. A total of five docks of various sizes and quality were now available for use on the island. There were also two submarine pipelines that were used to transfer fuel oil from ships directly to tanks without having to use the dock facilities.



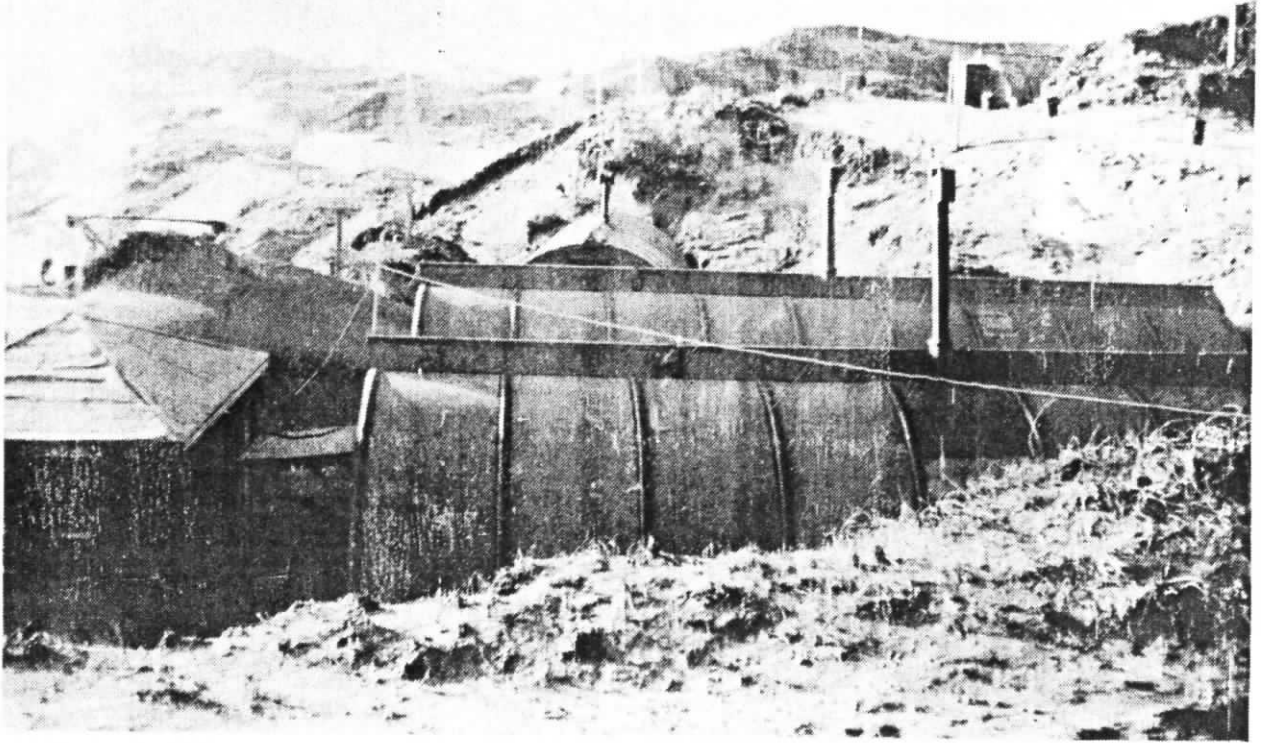
A Jamesway hut under construction



Hangar 2 under construction. Sept. 1944

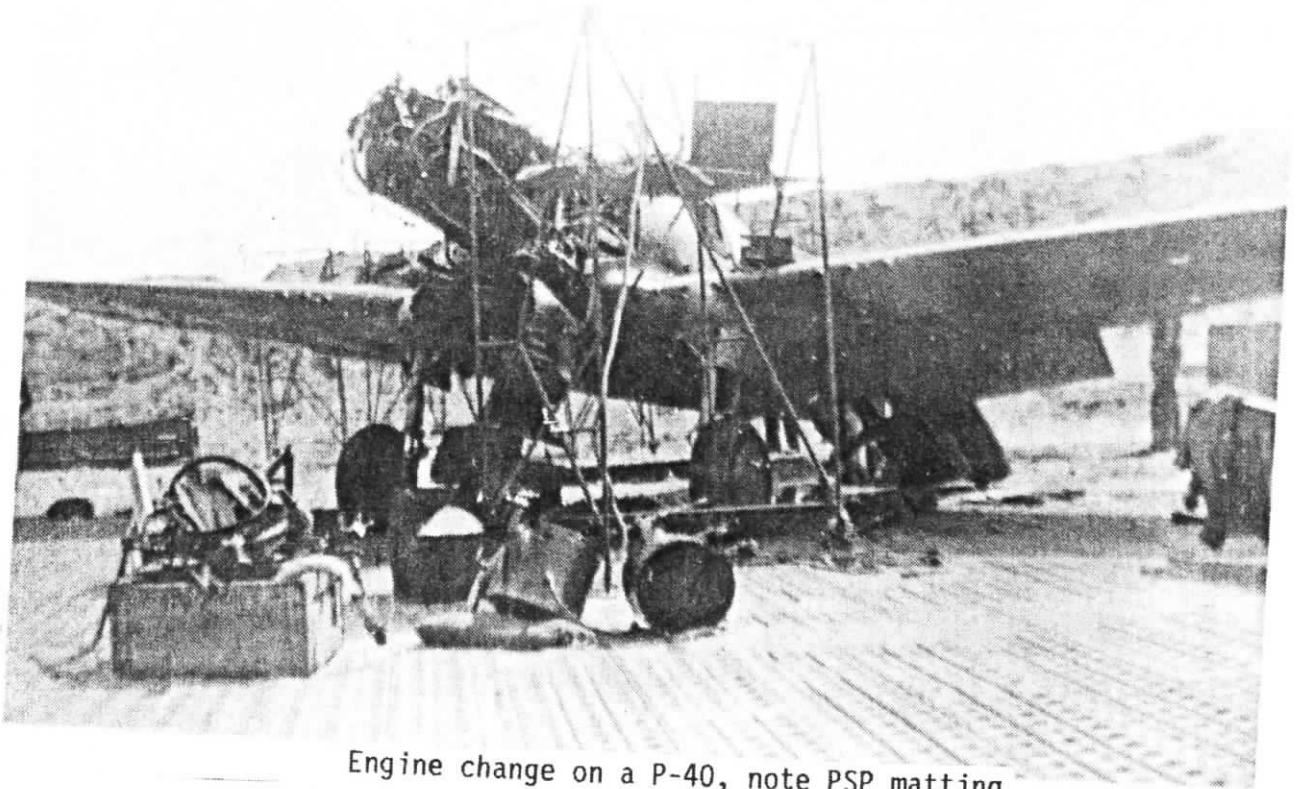


Hangar 2 under construction March 1945

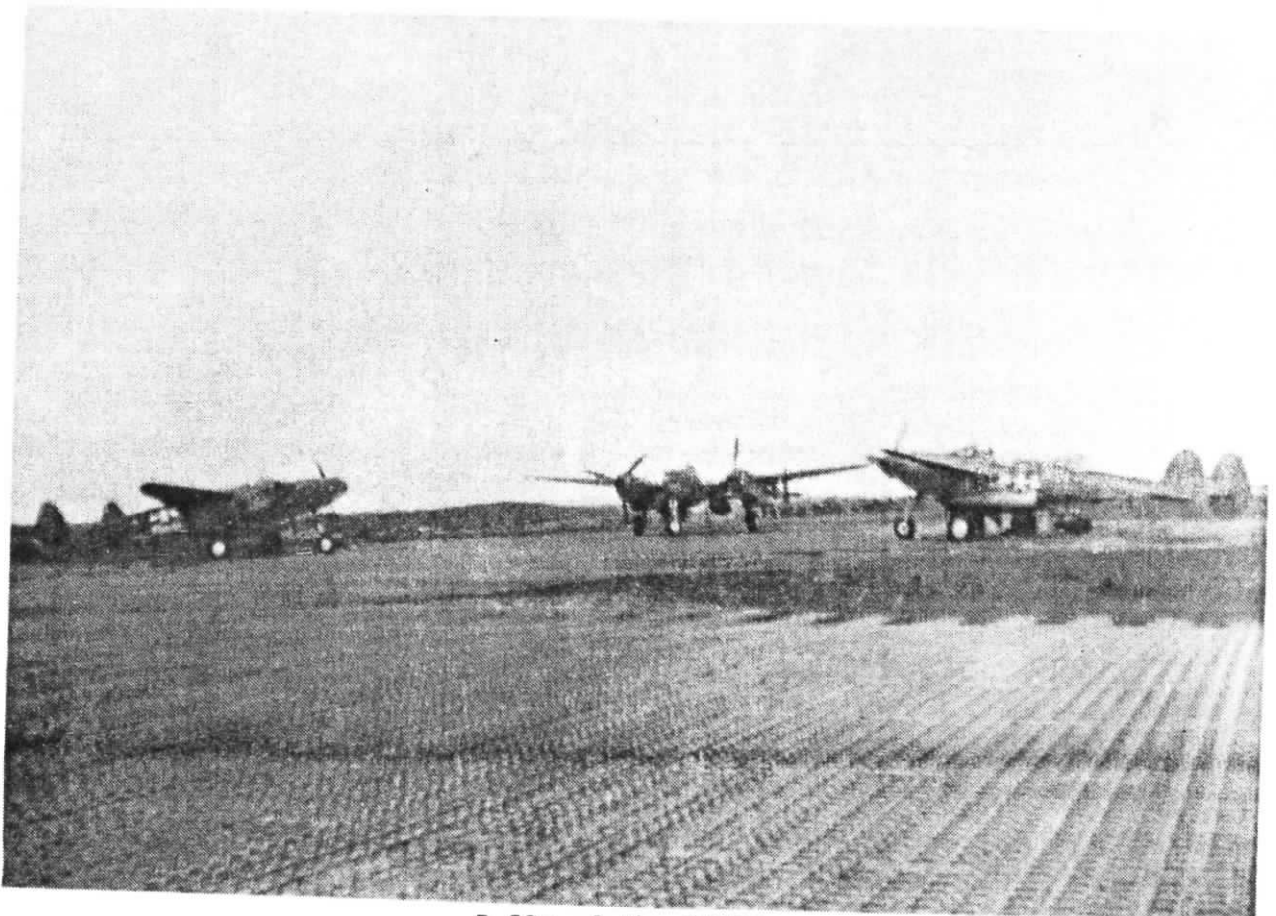


Typical Shemya working facilities circa 1944

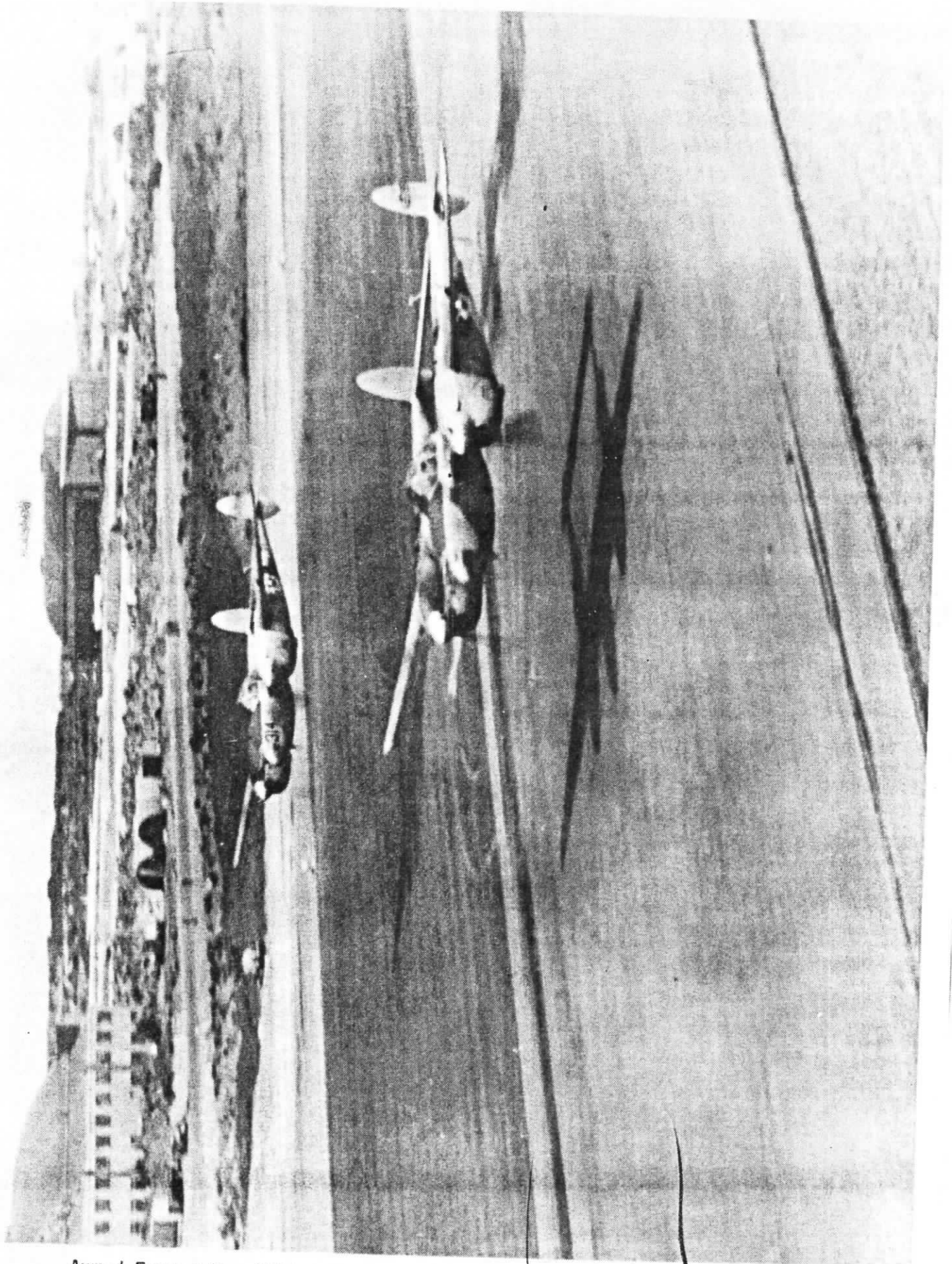




Engine change on a P-40, note PSP matting



P-38s of the 343RD



Armed Forces Day 1944. Hangar 5 in foreground hangar 6 in background



Base self defense included foxholes and bayonets



This .30 caliber machine gun was found on Buldir Island



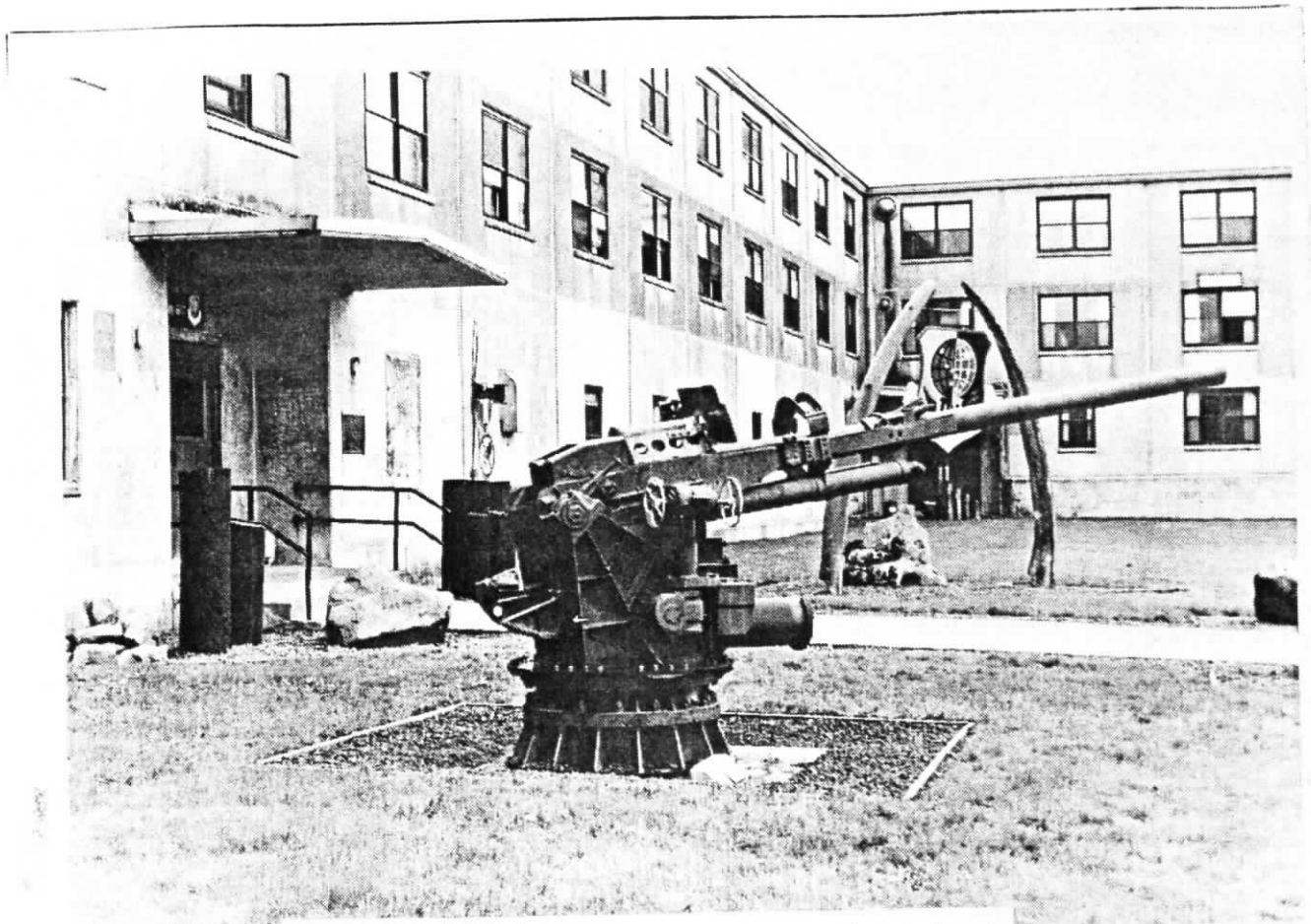
B E R I N G

S E A



LEGEND

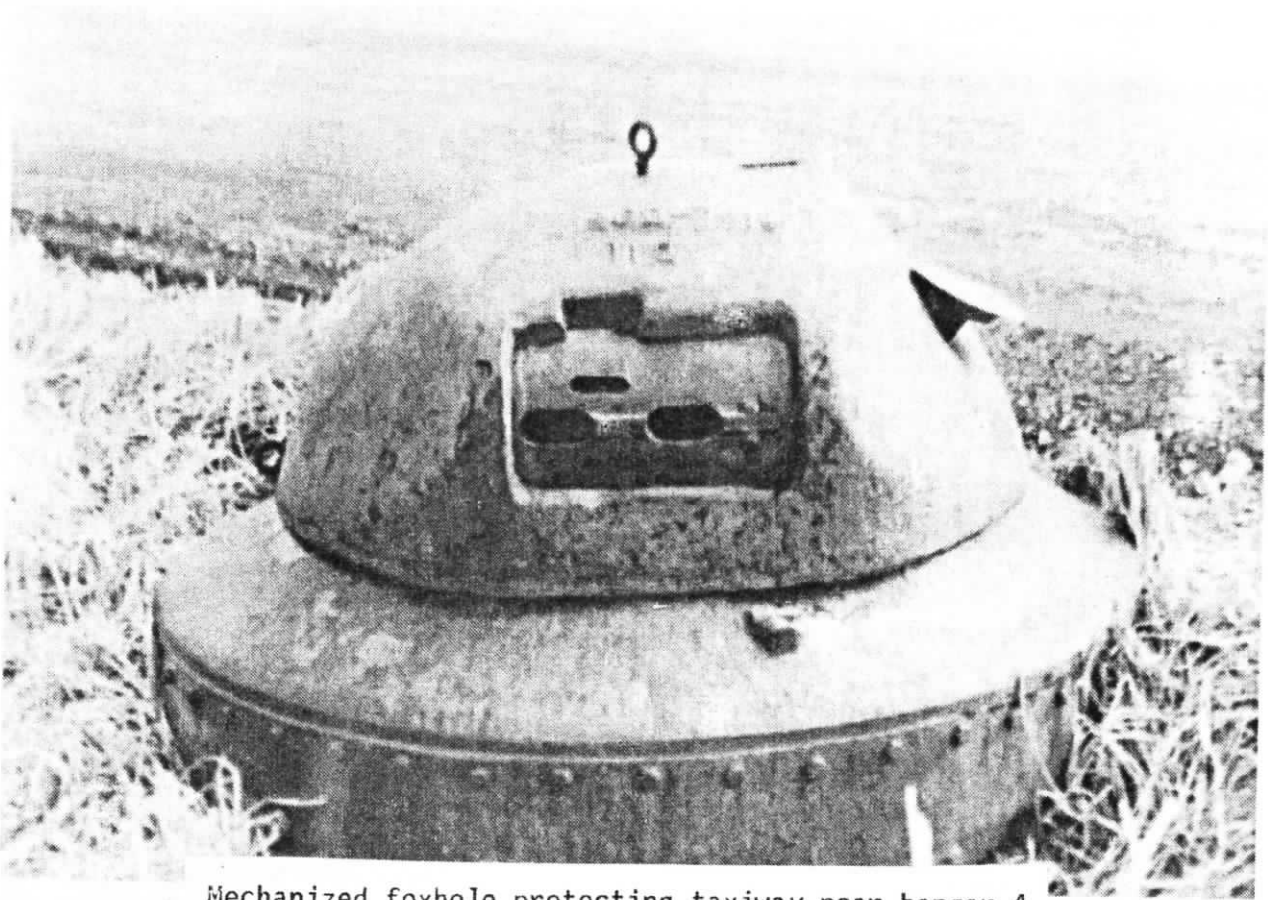
- P I E R S , W H A R V E S & D O C K S
- G E N E R A L C A R G O T E R M I N A L
- S T O R A G E W A R E H O U S E
- ◻ C O L D S T O R A G E W A R E H O U S E



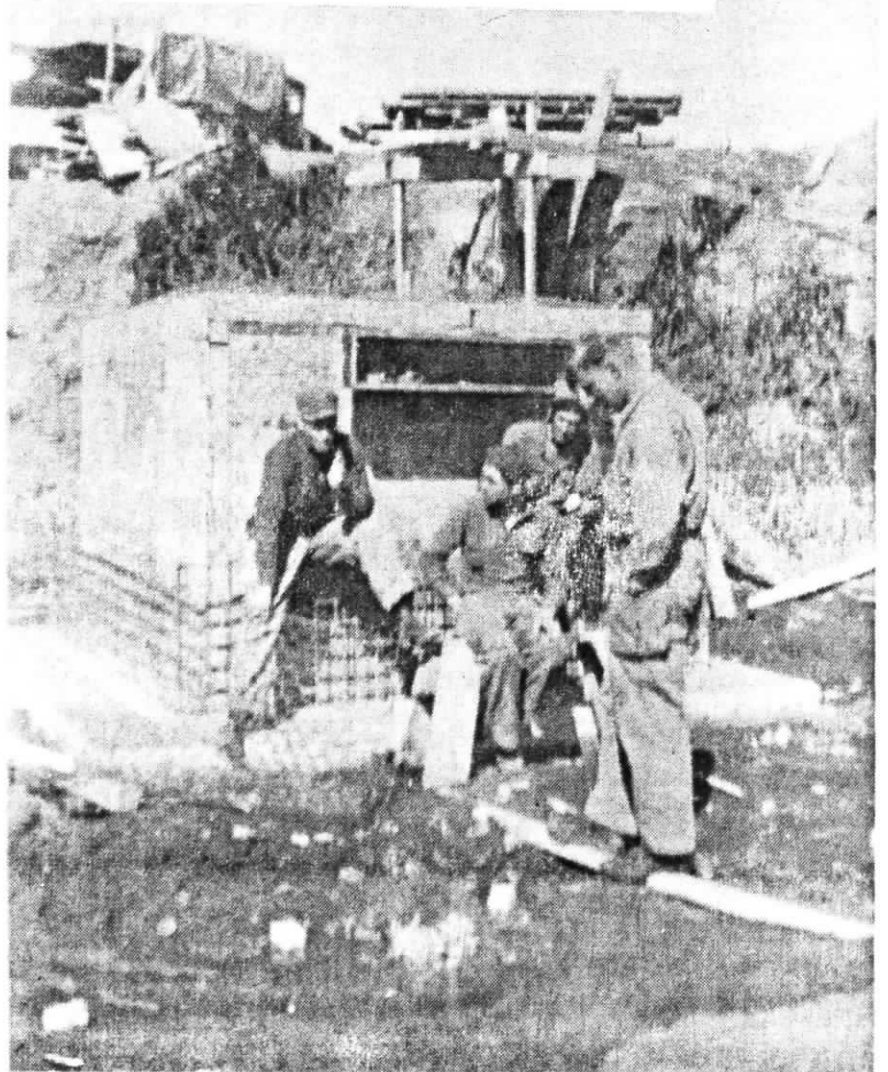
This is the last 37mm gun left on the island



All that remains of one of the 37mm gun mounts



Mechanized foxhole protecting taxiway near hangar 4



Construction of "Pillbox" machine gun post

No in-depth attempt will be made, in this paper, to report on the specific military combat activities conducted from APO 729. It should be realized, however, that APO 729 was instrumental not only in the routing of the Japanese from the Western Aleutians but also in attacks made on the islands of Japan. Some of these sorties were some of the longest overwater flights of the war. Combat sorties were flown in P-38s, P-40s, B-24s, PB4Ys, PBVs and various other combat aircraft. An interesting incident occurred on 13 April 1945, when twelve Japanese balloon bombs were sighted over the islands. P-38s from the 343rd shot nine of these bombs down before they could do any damage to the U.S. Another interesting fact is that only one B-29 landed on APO 729 during the war. This B-29, named the Amiable Amazon, was on a moral run. It did not fly a combat sortie from APO 729. The B-29 was stationed at Ladd Field in Fairbanks for cold weather testing. The Superfort was escorted by 6 P-38s and made a pass over the runway at 310 miles per hour before landing on the runway that was built to accommodate it. The Amiable Amazon spent the night on APO 729 and then returned to Ladd. The construction of Birchwood hangars halted with only six of the planned 14 being built. Hangar One was used by the Navy to house their PB4Ys and other amphibious aircraft. Hangar Two was used by Base Flight. Hangar Three housed the 343rd and 344th's P-38s and P-40s. Hangar Four was used by the 11th Fighter Squadron. Hangar Five was assigned to the 15th Tow Target Squadron, and Hangar Six was used to house the 404th Bomb Squadron's B-24s.

The highlight of June 1945 was the arrival of three highly modified SB-17Gs. These aircraft were used for sea search operations. Each of the aircraft had a 27 foot boat strapped under its belly. The boat could be dropped by three large parachutes. The boats were equipped with motors, sails and rations. The last WW II combat sortie, flown from APO 729, took off on 13 August 1945. B-24s from the 404th bombed the Kashiwabara Staging Area on the Island of Paramushiro. The six plane formation was lead by Maj. Gen. Brooks, the Commanding General of the 11th Air Force.



The only B-29 to land on Shemya during the war

POST WAR SHEMYA
(THE DARK AGES)

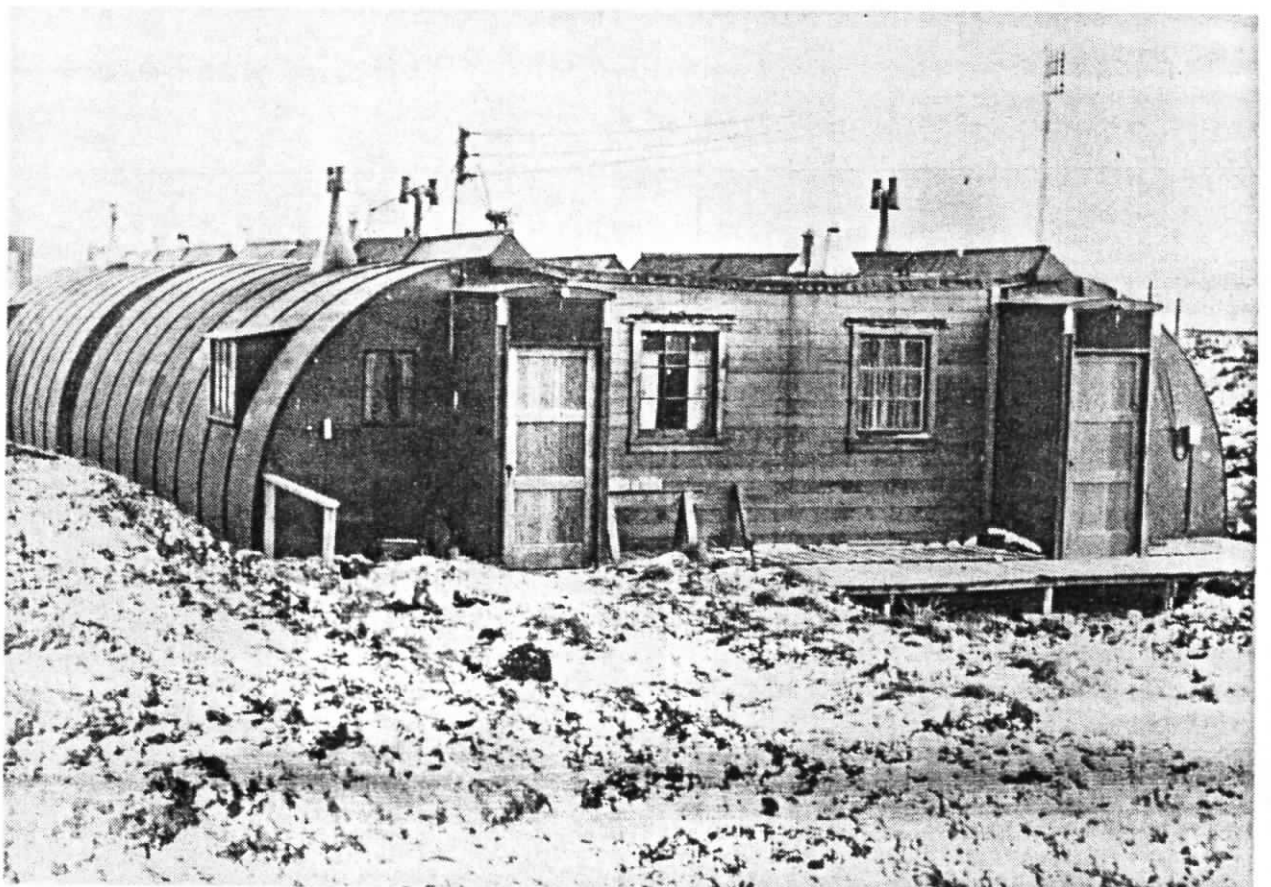
The demobilization of Shemya was rapid and efficient. Men were rotated off of the island as the units were disbanded. Men left by a point system. The more points you had the quicker you left the island. The base reverted to standby status and was used occasionally for various military activities. On September 16 1945, four B-29s were sent to Shemya to act as escort and rescue ships for a long distance flight from, now pacified, Japan to Washington D.C. The long distance flight was forced to stop at Chicago. A second attempt was made in November. Again, two B-29s were stationed at Shemya to escort the long distance flight. These two B-29s left on 6 November 1945.

Recorded histories of Shemya between 1946 and 1958 are scarce. Very little is known about the activities on the island. These few scraps of information did surface. Due, in part, to the efforts of Col. Jamison, the Post Commander, Shemya became an accompanied tour. The first dependent arrived on 4 Mar 1946. In November 1946, a base history reports that there were 71 families on the island. The dependents consisted of 64 wives, 49 children and even one mother-in-law! In 1947 the number had climbed to 90 families. The island even had it's own school house. The school was called The School in the Bend of the International Dateline. In the summer of 1947, a C-47 crashed into the PX warehouse near the Alcan Bay. In one corner of this warehouse were hundreds of cases of Coca Cola. These cases of Coke were damaged but not destroyed. During the clean up of the crash site, the cokes were bulldozed over onto the beach and in some cases actually dumped into the Bering Sea. For over 40 years this pile of Coke bottles has made for interesting souvenirs. These same bottles have helped to perpetuate the Shemya Jade rumors. The broken bottles that were dumped into the surf have been polished by sand and wave action into little blue-green faux-gems. The small round 'jewels' can be found along several North shore beaches. Someone must have once knick named these polished pieces of broken coke bottle glass Shemya Jade. Ever since that time the rumor of the jade has been unstoppable. Sad but true, there is no jade on the Rock.

An interesting side note should be added here. In the very early 70s the U.S. Government made plans to detonate an atomic bomb under the island of Amchitka. Part of the preparation for the blast was to survey the island's WW II ruins. In one warehouse was found a sizable quantity of K rations. Each box of rations had a net weight of 35 pounds. They quickly were dubbed 35 pound rations or 35 pound rats! It wasn't long before someone wrote home and told about the 35 pound rats they found in one of the warehouses. The news quickly spread across the nation in newspapers about giant rats found at the proposed site of the nuclear explosion. Anyway, so it also goes with Shemya Jade too.

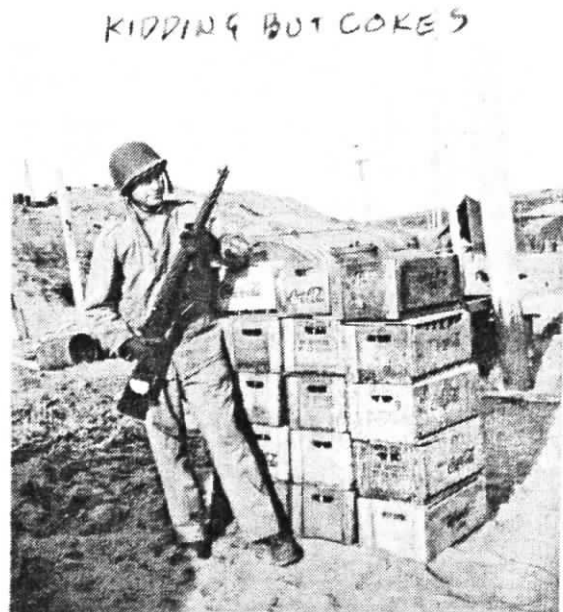


The School in the Bend of The International Dateline



The family quarters of Sgt E.D. Frasch

By February 1949, the number of families had been reduced to 12. We also know that the 375th Weather Recon Squadron stationed several WB-29s on the Rock, from December 1948 to May 1949. One of the WB-29s known to have been assigned there was 44-62214. "2214" is Eielson's very own "Lady of the Lake". It is also known that the base fell into disrepair, as did the bases on Attu and other inactive sites in the Aleutians. The base did see some activity during the Korean Conflict. The Military Air Transport Service (MATS) used Shemya as a refueling stop for Aircraft bound for Southeast Asia. Northwest Orient Airlines (NOA) also used the island as a refueling stop. The airline invested a considerable amount of money in their Shemya operation. They upgraded existing hangars, messing and lodging facilities. They maintained a permanent work force of over 50 NOA personnel. NOA was able to use the GCA, weather and other services that the military used, that is until the end of the Korean Conflict. In 1954, the military closed Shemya. As a part of the shut down of the island the airdrome was deactivated. NOA realized such a savings by using Shemya as a refueling stop that the airline went to the extreme of leasing the island and even purchasing and operating their own G.C.A. and other related airdrome services. The facilities on the island officially were known as the Shemya Airport. Unofficially, NOA personnel called the island Schmoos.



WERE SCARCE
THIS WAS FOR PHOTO AND
SIGNAL SUPPLY

SHEMYA REBORN

In January of 1958, the Alaskan Press became aware of construction plans for a secret ballistic missile detector station at Clear Alaska. The project had been kept from the public until contracts had been awarded and construction workers were being hired. In early June 1958, the press caught wind of more rumors. This time of another detector site on the Island of Shemya. When Air Force officials were pressed for answers, they declined comment until, on the 14 June 1958, the Air Force officially made the announcement. The supersecret site would be very similar to the one already under construction at Clear. Estimated cost of the project was 250 million dollars. As many as 600 men would be required to build the 3 huge antennas and support facilities. First phase of construction would begin in July 1958. On 15 June, the first contingent of workers were flown to Shemya. Another 100 men were to be flown out the following week. On 5 July 1958, the first shipment of equipment and supplies left Anchorage. This first shipment, worth over 2 million dollars, was the largest single shipment to ever leave Anchorage.

The General Electric Company was the prime contractor for the sensor system. G.E. would also operate the station after it was complete. A combine known as B.E.C.K. would actually build the detector station. Soon, the three screen antennas, each the size of a drive in theater screen were going up on the highest point on Shemya. These western facing antennas would provide early warning of any missiles coming at the U. S. from the Soviet territories. The island also had two very large tropospheric communications antennas that faced East. These antennas, known as the White Alice Station, provided for all of the island's communications needs.

On 23 June 1958, General Order number 35 established an Air Base Squadron (provisional) at Shemya Airport. Northwest Orient Airlines was evicted from the island, as was the CAA. The remilitarization of Shemya was under way.

Life on the island in the late 50s and early 60s was austere. Men were living in buildings that were designed to last for the duration of the war not for the duration. The years of neglect had taken their toll on every facility on the island. The runway required resurfacing and shoulder repair work. Likewise, the taxiways and roads were in gross need of repair. Living and working facilities were leaky and mildewed, at best. The weather had completely destroyed many buildings and rendered others beyond economic repair. The power and utility systems were in need of repair. All of the hangars required rehabilitation. Literally everything had to be fixed. The island was a huge dump. Abandoned machines of war were laying everywhere. Tens of thousands of fuel oil drums and countless pieces of unexploded ordinance were scattered all over the island.

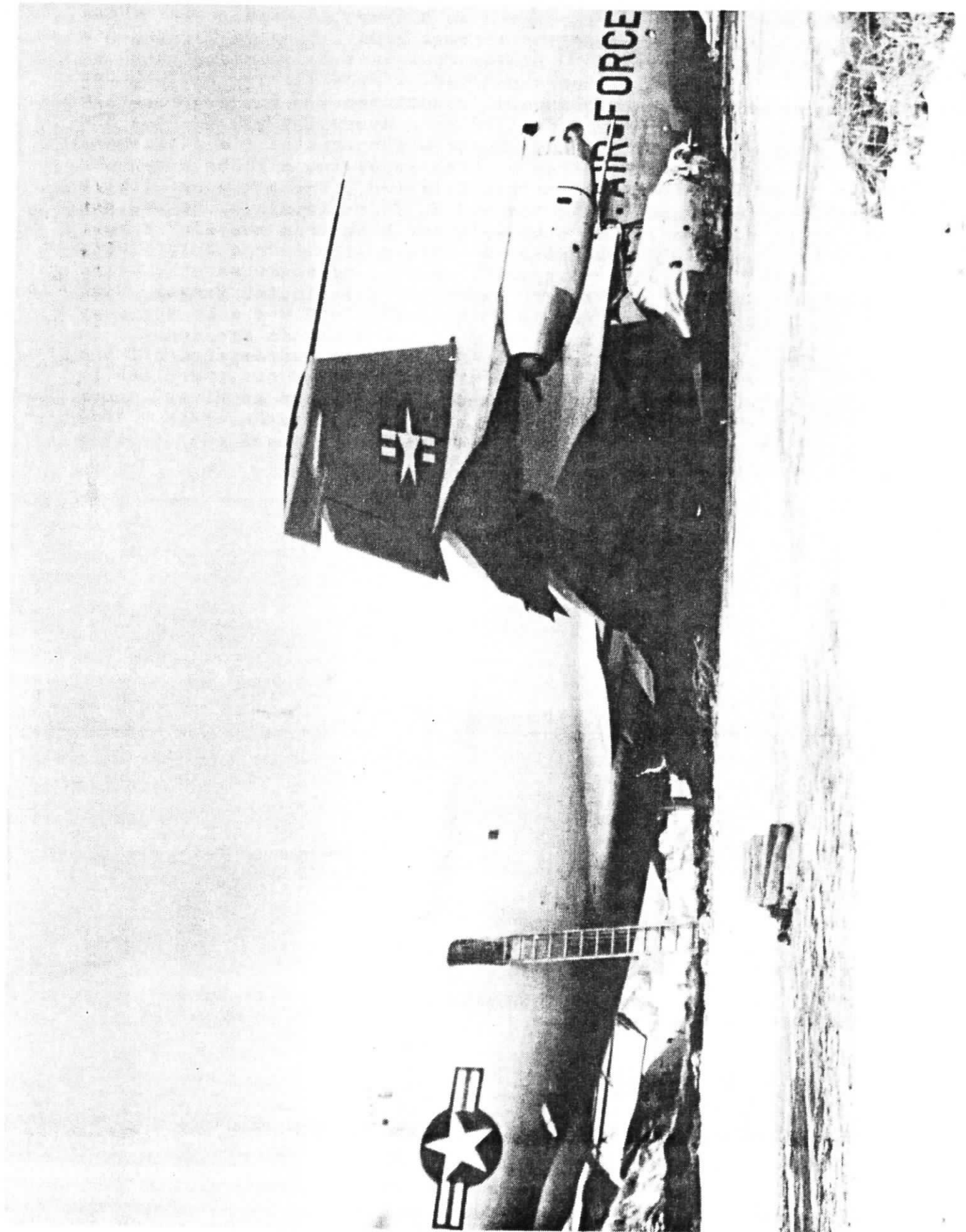
As the island came back to life, records once again began being kept. One report dated 19 July 1958, gives an idea of the activities going on. The report indicates that all salvage operations on the island were ceased. The report also indicates that the decontamination of Alcan Bay was under way and that a five man explosive ordinance disposal team was on the island destroying all known UXOs. In November 1958, the tug boat Wando, piloted by Kelly Sprauge, was towing Barge #18 to Shemya with a full load of diesel oil. Capt. Sprauge was attempting to sling shot the barge into the bay so that the barge would be facing out to sea when it was tied up. Capt. Sprauge successfully entered the bay, being sure to avoid the Scotia wreckage. He started a 180 degree turn to starboard when a North wind caused the tow ropes to go slack. Tug boat pilots refer to this condition as being in irons. The wind continued to blow the barge. At one time the barge was actually pushing the Wando, nearly capsizing her. The tow ropes were cut and barge # 18 of the Crowley Maritime Company beached herself in the bay. The diesel oil was pumped out of the barge and an attempt to refloat her was made. This first attempt was unsuccessful. Then a heavy storm pushed the barge even farther onto the beach where she remains to this day. The damage now apparent on the starboard side of the barge was not caused by the beaching or the efforts to refloat her. It is no longer known how the barge was destroyed. It is interesting to note that barge # 18 was on her maiden voyage when she went aground.



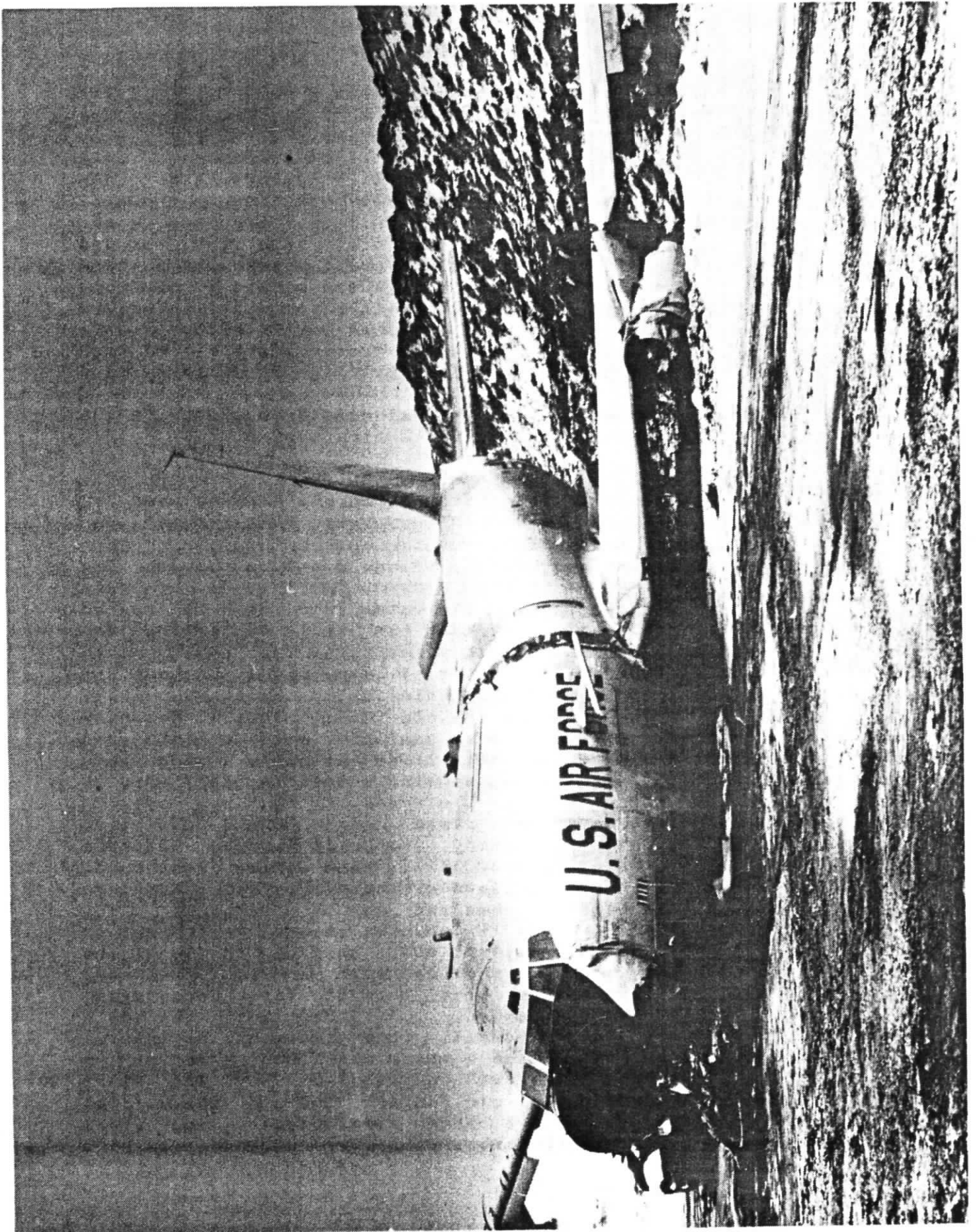
Repair work was initiated on Runway 'A' and only those taxiways servicing Hangars Two through Five. Hangars One and Six were not rehabilitated. Hangar One was used as the base motorpool. Hangar Six was abandoned. Very slowly, men and shops were moved into new concrete structures. The new composite building, (BLDG 600) was dedicated in January 1961. In 1962, the renovation of Hangars Two and Three was completed and Detachment One of the Sixth Strategic Wing moved two RC-135s known as Rivet Amber and Rivet Ball to the island. There was very little effort put into demolishing the old WW II buildings. The weather was doing a good job of that without help from the Air Force. There was one notable exception to this policy. On 4 July 1964, the island had it's biggest ever bonfire when the fire department set fire to the dangerously dilapidated Hangar Six. The new base chapel was completed in 1969. 1969 was also the year that the 6th Strat Wing suffered from two aircraft accidents. In Jan 1969, an RC-135 known as Rivet Ball hydroplaned off the end of the runway. The aircraft was destroyed but there was no loss of life. In June 1969, another RC-135 known as Rivet Amber left Shemya, with a full crew, never to be seen again. 1978 marked the year that the Base Fire Department moved out of it's WW II building.



Dedication ceremonies for bldg 600 Jan. 1961



The wreck of the Rivet Ball Jan 1969



Another view of the Ball

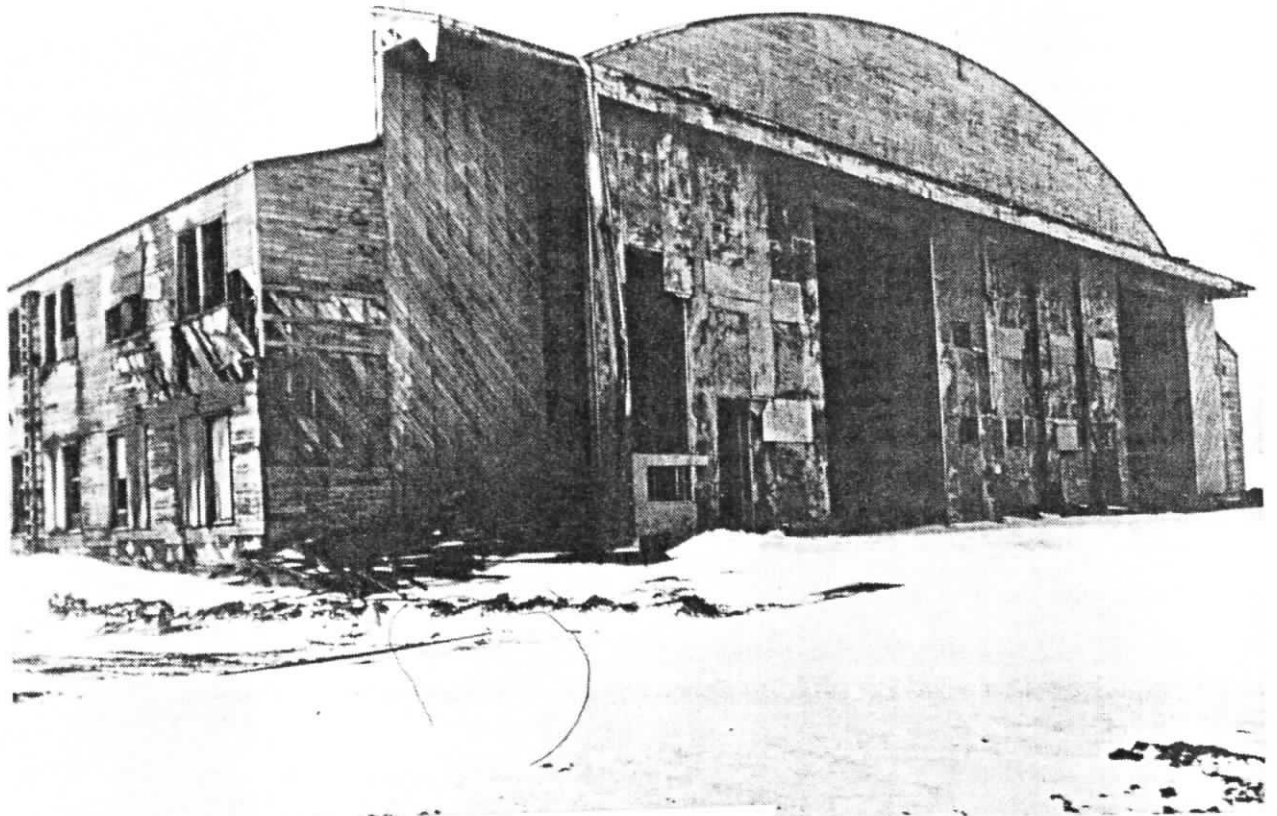
RECENT HISTORY

Hardly a foot of Shemya's topography has remained unchanged. Quarries have changed the face of the North Cliffs. Lakes have been drained or created as roads and taxiways altered water run off patterns. The tundra still has scores of reventments for both aircraft and buildings. Most of the WW II buildings and other facilities have been removed or completely reclaimed by nature. Today, a massive clean up is under way. All of the "heavy metal" junk such as truck chassis and boilers etc, have been removed from the island. All of the WW II aircraft wrecks have been buried in the island's land fill. All but one of the 37 MM guns are gone. Grading equipment is filling in reventments and other scars put in the tundra. There is a bay just east of Skoot's Cove that G.I.s called Barrel Bay. The bay was completely filled with thousands of 55 gallon oil drums. Today, the drums have been removed and the bay has been returned to it's natural condition. Gone is the cliff where all good gray steel swivel chairs went to die.

In January of 1977, an earthquake helped to return the island back to it's pre WW II configuration. A taxiway used to connect Runway "A" with the "B" "C" complex. This taxiway ran down the hill along the extended centerline of the big bomber runway. A large fill was required to bridge a natural canyon. The 1977 quake caused a fissure to open under this fill and through a lake at the head of the canyon. The water from the lake rushed through this fissure and breached the fill supporting the taxiway. The water then completely destroyed the base sewage treatment plant and then washed a lot of heavy metal junk out out to sea. A vertical shift, caused by this fault, now scars both of the fighter runways. Gone are the old G.E. missile detector antennas, replaced now by a newer, smaller, more sophisticated single antenna. Gone are the White Alice antennas, which have been replaced by a small unassuming satellite dish. Gone is the wreck of the Scotia. Gone is the wreck of the Rivet Ball. On 4 July 1978, the fire department razed Hangar One. Gone also is "Boozer". Boozer was a recovering alcoholic German Shepherd whose job it was to guard the chow hall. When Boozer died, on 31 Dec 1969, he was given a full blown military funeral. Boozer was laid to rest under a cement headstone near the base flagpole. Even this grave stone is gone (is nothing sacred?). There is still a bronze plaque on building 600, hailing Boozer as the greatest morale factor on Shemya since World War II. Other less famous dogs of the island were "Duke" from the fire department, and "Penny" and "Dozer" from G.E. On 15 Mar 1981, the Sixth lost another reconnaissance aircraft, this time with the loss of six men. Again, the weather was a major contributing factor in the accident. Hangar Five was abandoned in 1986. The Sixth Strat. Wing has moved out of old Hangars Two and Three. The Sixth now operates out of two brand new concrete and steel hangars. These new hangars are improperly numbered Six and Seven.



The burial of Boozer Jan 1970



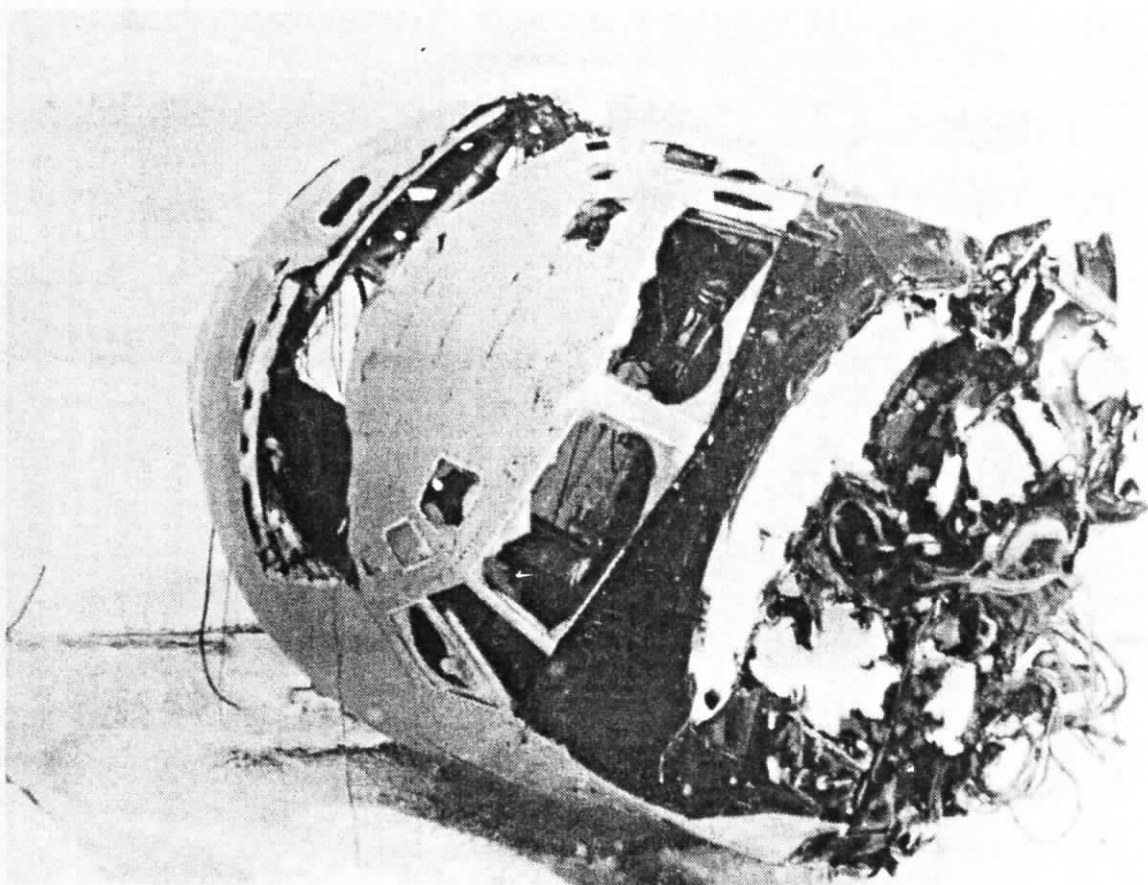
Hangar 6 circa 1964



Hangar 1 circa 1974



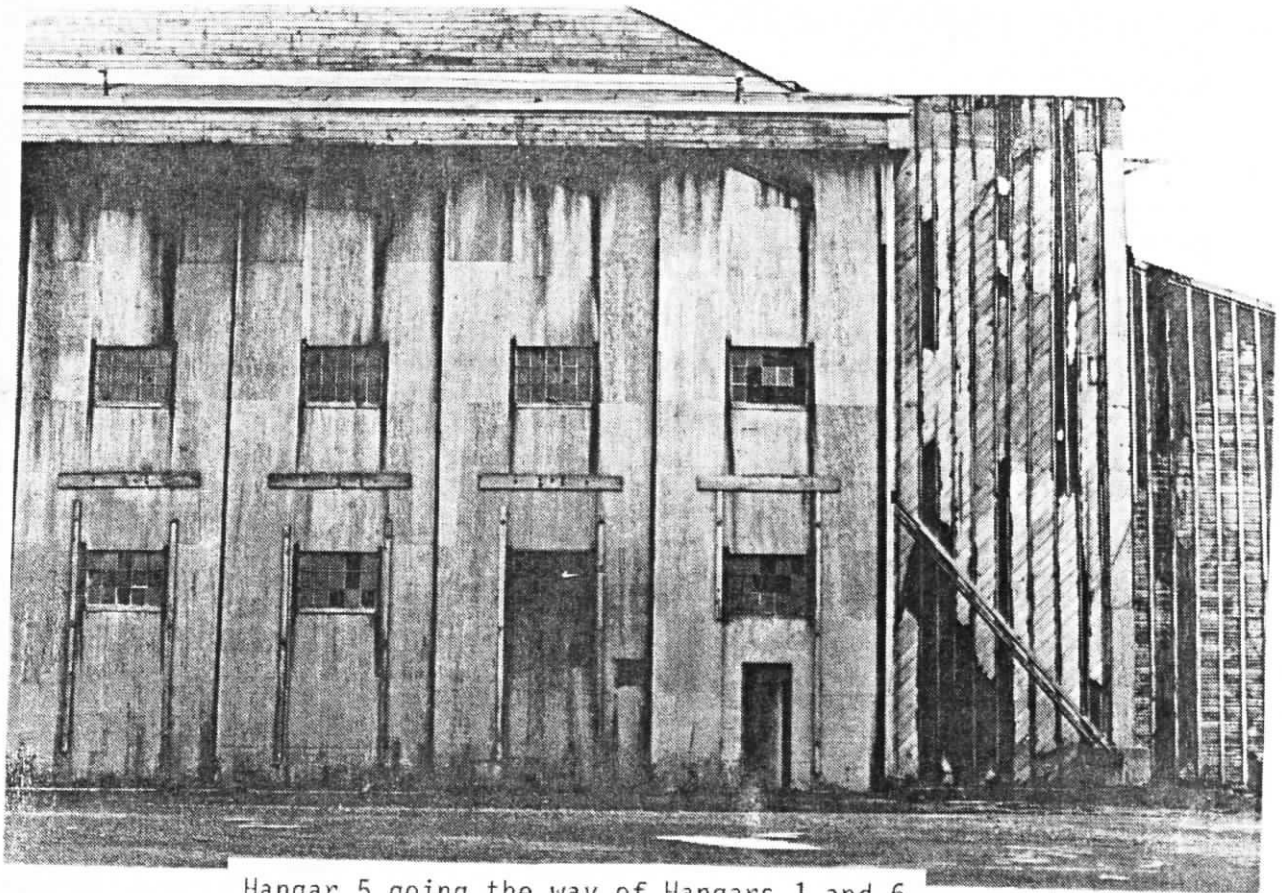
Earthquake damage near west end of runway "A"



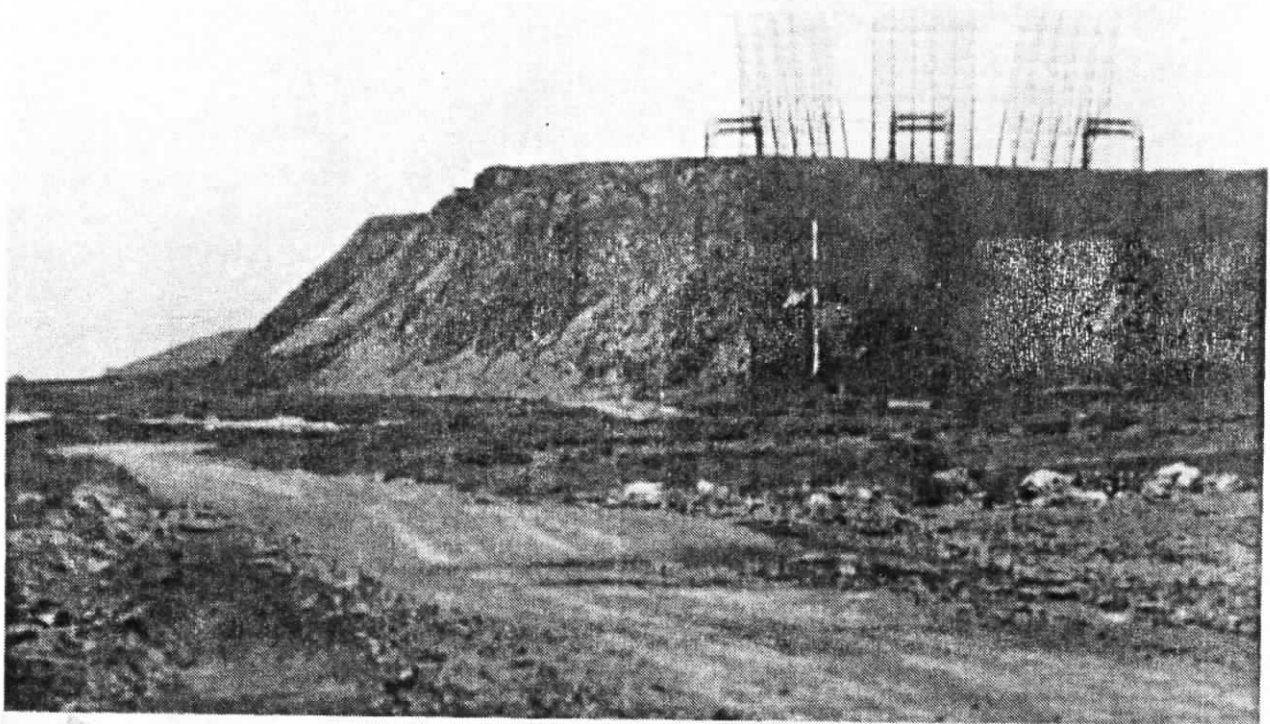
Wreck of the Rivet Ball circa 1975



This WB-29 wreckage sat on the site of the new Hangar 6
Hangar 4 is visible in the background



Hangar 5 going the way of Hangars 1 and 6



3 G.E. missile detectors circa 1974



Unidentified wreck parts near runways B and C



One of 3 P-38 wrecks that used to rest in the Shemya grand canyon

SHEMYA'S FUTURE

Shemya's geographic location makes it important for political reasons. It has served as an early warning site and as an intelligence gathering site for decades. With the advent of military satellites, one wonders how much longer Shemya will be needed by the military. One thing is sure. The winds will continue to blow across the tundra long after the last man leaves Shemya. The weather, creeping tundra, and the shifting ground will not take long to erase the last bootprints from the island and allow the varied wildlife of the Aleutians to retake the island. There is one other possible ending to this story. There was, at one time, a sacred tradition on the island that seems to have gone the way of Boozer and Hangar Six. It used to be a requirement that everyone leaving the island had to have a stone in his pocket. The theory being that if enough G.I.s came and left the island that the island would some day just disappear.

This then is the story of the Isle of Shemya in the Sea of Bering.