

**CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A WORLD
WAR II ARMY AIR FORCE FORWARD BASE:
SHEMYA, ALASKA, MAY 1943 - DECEMBER 1945**

By

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PREFACE

This study of the beginnings of Shemya Air Force Base is a unique publication in the Alaskan Air Command. Very few publications, for that matter, have described the details of World War II base construction. Because the Shemya base was on an isolated island, its forming was unlike any other in the American military establishment.

The Aleutian Islands, of which Shemya is a part, make up the only American territory that has known a foreign invader since the War of 1812. Shemya and Adak Islands, with the Japanese occupied Kiska and Attu Islands, were active war theaters, and Shemya served as a base to attack Japan after 1943. This use of the Aleutians gives the area a special interest in American military annals and Shemya as a base with a continued operational status has, in addition to the story of its building, an unusual place within the U. S. Air Force.

In Alaska, Shemya Air Force Base is of great interest. Its location west of the 180th meridian places it closer to centers of East Asian population than any other United States territorial military station. The fact of isolation gives Shemya a distinctness that intrigues Americans and Alaskans.

This study written by Capt. James L. Ross presents the reader with Americans who built a strong past under the most adverse conditions. Construction materials were scarce, and they came great distances; little was known about how to build structures in an unusual climate--some of Shemya's weather is equal to the worst in the world; and improvising was necessary. Within the monograph are details of how Shemya came into existence.

The historical materials from which Captain Ross has written his account were furnished by

the Historical Research Division of the Office of Air Force History, the Archives of the Alaskan Air Command, the Military History Office of the U. S. Army, Alaska, and other Alaskan and military sources. It is hoped that it is a forerunner of other detailed studies that concern the building of Aerospace Power in Alaska and the North Pacific area.

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(E. M. Salley, Command Historian)

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FOREWORD

The purpose of this study is to present the engineering, constructional and logistical problems encountered in the building of an air base in the Aleutian theater. War operations are treated only superficially as they relate to the importance of Shemya Air Base.

The military style of writing and educational level of the men on Shemya during the war, brought numerous errors in capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure and spelling. Since these are obvious, "sic" was used only after misspelled words and this policy increased the flow and ease of writing.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. John M. Weidman, Office of Air Force History, Alaskan Air Command, without whose vast knowledge of this segment of history, coupled with his sources of unpublished material, this paper could not have been possible. Acknowledgement is also made of the Office of Air Force History Archives at Maxwell Air Force Base which furnished the many original documents concerning Shemya.

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CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNING

The Aleutian Islands are a chain of volcanic rocks that divides the Pacific Ocean and the Bering Sea. Economically, they are almost worthless. Little or nothing will grow on them, except coarse tundra grass which is non-nourishing for grazing animals. In 1943, the islands were inhabited by thousands of blue foxes, about 3,500 Aleuts and a handful of non-native fishermen.¹

Strategically, the Aleutian Islands guarded the northwestern approaches to the North American Continent. Conversely, they could also threaten the northern approaches to Japan and the Kurile Islands. If occupied by enemy forces, they could challenge control of the entire North American continent. If in American hands and strongly defended and armed, they were a constant threat to the Japanese homeland.

Before World War II, American defense planners had all but overlooked these vital islands, as well as the entire Territory of Alaska. On the other hand, the Japanese had also evidently overlooked this area. The only official representative of the United States to visit this part of the world was an occasional Coast Guard vessel whose mission was to re-supply weather outposts on Attu and Kiska.² The first military recognition of the strategic value of the Aleutians came as a result of Major General Simon B. Buckner's trips down the "Aleutian Chain" in the winter of 1940. When Lieutenant General John De Witt, Commanding General, Western Defense Command, received the Defense Plan for Alaska dated December 3, 1940, the Aleutian Chain was included for the first time.

¹ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," (available through the United States Air Force Alaskan Air Command Historical Archives, n.d.), p. 18.

² "11th Air Force from Beginning to 1942," (available through the United States Air Force Alaskan Air Command Historical Archives, n.d.), pp. 18-19.

The Semichi Group is composed of three islands: Nizki, Alaid, and Shemya, which is the largest. With Attu and Agattu added, they comprise the Near Islands Group, at the Western end of the Aleutian chain.

Shemya Island is about four square miles in size. The extreme length from east to west is four and one-half miles, maximum width one and three-quarter miles. The island rises abruptly from its northern shoreline to an elevation of 200 to 240 feet, and along the southern shore has an elevation of forty to eighty feet. Most of the surface area of the island can be classified as typical Aleutian tundra. Sand dunes exist along the southern shore, and extensive beach gravel deposits line the indentations of the northern shoreline. These beds are graded from medium size pebbles to coarse boulders.

No harbors exist on Shemya. Three beaches are located at the western end facing the Bering Sea to the North, while three others on the southern shore face the Pacific. All approaches to these small beaches are through shallow water that is dotted with exposed and submerged rocks.

Fresh water is available from two groups of small lakes on the island. One group is located in the western end and has lakes varying from forty feet by eighty feet in area to the largest lake, which is 840 feet by 975 feet. The second group is scattered from the central section of the northern portion of Shemya to the east for about a mile and a half.³

Shemya was first considered militarily in the early spring of 1943 at a meeting which considered whether Kiska or Attu should be first attacked to remove occupying Japanese. Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, Commander, North Pacific Forces, believed that the Navy Construction Battalions ("Seabees") or Army Engineers could build a runway on Shemya in three weeks. Such an airfield could provide fighter protection to occupation troops landing on Attu. This small two-by-four island is relatively flat in comparison with the majority of the Near Island

³ "History of Shemya Army Air Force Base: May 1943 to February 1944," (available through the United States Air Force Historical Division Archives, n.d.), pp. 1-2. Note: All future references to this collection of papers and the monthly supplements will be "Histories of Shemya:" and the month.

Group, and it could thus be approached from all directions. Also, it offered few construction obstacles, while heavy fog, the curse of flying in the Aleutians, was absent for relatively long periods. This clearer weather was probably due to the lack of mountains, which by their absence eliminated another potential hazard to flying.⁴

As a result of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief, Pacific being unable to supply adequate shipping for an invasion of Kiska, Admiral Kinkaid announced on March 3, 1943, three distinct advantages for his plan to occupy Shemya and then to attack Attu:

1. It would reduce the obstacles caused by the constant west-to-east Aleutian weather, and permit more frequent bombing of Kiska.
2. It would enable search and attack missions to reach much farther to the west, thus facilitating the interception and destruction of Japanese supply ships bound for Kiska.
3. It would insure--if the Japanese failed to counterattack with strong new forces--that a reduction of Kiska was possible.⁵

On April, 1943, a joint directive from Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPac) and the Western Defense Command established May 7, 1943, as D-day for Attu. This directive has listed the following important tasks of the base building to the services in the North Pacific:

Objectives: The reduction and occupation of Attu and the occupation of the most suitable airfield in the Near Islands (Attu, Agattu, Shemya, Nizki, Alaid) at the earliest

⁴ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 258; "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 4.

⁵ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 259; "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," (available through the United States Army Alaska Historian, n.d.), p. 29.

practicable date . . . Near Island (Shemya: 18th Combat Engineers and 4th Infantry Composite Regiment from Adak).⁶

As a result of this order, an Eleventh Air Force directive was issued and all weather aircraft were instructed to circle Shemya to determine if any Japanese held the island. However, none were ever found.⁷ This is not to say that Japan had not tried to occupy Shemya.⁸ On November 28, 1942, U. S. naval patrols had intercepted a Japanese occupation force of two ships and 1,500 men, and had forced it to return to Paramushiru.⁹ The Japanese had counted on darkness and foggy weather to protect them from any severe American attack before March 1943; a landing would also have permitted them to construct an airfield for land-based planes on Kiska. The lack of this runway forced the Japanese to utilize float type aircraft which were aeronautically inferior to land-based planes.¹⁰

The original plans for the occupation of Shemya had called for the operation to begin simultaneously with the United States landing on Attu. Commander, Task Force 51, Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell changed this basic plan, and substituted a shore-to-shore operation. He reasoned that Shemya

⁶ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 265.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

⁸ "18th Engineers Regimental Diary for 3 June 1943, "(contained in "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944."). Later, a Japanese map found on Attu disclosed that an airfield had been planned in about the same location as the Americans built their original runway. Note: All future references to Diary, letters, etc., can be located in the histories for the month it was written.

⁹ "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," p. 470.

¹⁰ Stetson Conn, Rose C. Emgelman and Byron Fairchild, United States Army in World War II. The Western Hemisphere: Guarding the United States and its Outposts. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 273.

was unoccupied; it lacked good beaches; attack, screen, cargo, troop and transport ships were scarce; and suitable shelter facilities on the little two-by-four island were absent. Therefore, all troops and equipment were shipped directly from Attu to Shemya as they were required.¹¹

As a result of the tentative plans to occupy "Voluble," code name for Shemya Island, Headquarters, Voluble Forces was organized at APO 980, Seattle, Washington (Adak Army Air Force Base).¹² At 2130 May 24, 1943, these Headquarters closed at Adak and opened aboard the SS Mihiel, with Brigadier General John Copeland in command.¹³ Throughout the early preparation period, Adak had been the staging point for the Army Air Force troops designated at the time as Movement 7871-A.¹⁴

An advance party left Adak on May 20, 1943, at 1730 William, * aboard LST 461. Major William J. Niemi, Corps of Engineers, was in command until the party stopped at Attu, when Colonel B. B. Talley, Army Air Forces assumed command. The battle of Attu was still in progress and on May 27, 1943, the first effort to reach Shemya was made but rough seas caused the colonel and his men to return to Attu. On May 28th, another attempt was made from the destroyer Kane, and a landing was made at "A" beach at 1800 William by a group of nine officers and eight enlisted A. D. C. (Alaska Defense Command) scouts. The only

*William Time was the Anchorage, Alaska Time Zone.

¹¹ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 267; "Official History of the Alaskan Department; June 1940 to June 1944," p. 46.

¹² "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 4.

¹³ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁴ Ibid.

evidence of the enemy found was that from a previous year's surveying party that had made plans for a runway site.¹⁵

On May 30th, 2,500 troops under the command of General Copeland landed without opposition on Shemya. The 4th Infantry Regiment and 18th Engineers Regiment, known as Task Group 16.10, had spent six uncomfortable and sickening hours in six transport ships before landing under cover of thick fog.¹⁶ To make easier the landing of heavy construction machines, materials, and personnel, a favorable landing area had to be found that would permit easy and rapid building of a breakwater and docks. Beach "B" near the western tip of the island and facing north, was selected, as the width of a sandy beachline at this point was about 300 yards. Since this spot was considered the most suitable for permanent development, the sandy dune area directly to the north was eliminated as a possible site for the airdrome, but instead was reserved for a port facility, beaching operations and sorting area.

The engineers immediately began construction of a 10, 000-foot runway to accommodate long range B-29's on the southern shore of the island and by June 21st, it was ready for use by medium

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 4-5;"Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," (available through Information Officer, Shemya Air Force Base, APO Seattle 98736). p. 3. Very little information is available on any early native Aleut inhabitants of Shemya, fishermen or trappers. One trapper's cabin and two graves bearing wooden crosses with Russian characters were found by a security reconnaissance team commanded by Colonel B. B. Talley. The dates on the crosses were March 25, 1926 and March 30, 1930. Once construction was begun on the new base, many bones and skulls were also unearthed in the sand. "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 3 and 5.

¹⁶ "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," p. 3; "Official History of the Alaskan Department. June 1940 to June 1944," pp. 73 and 533; "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 265.

¹⁷ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 5-6.

range B-24 aircraft.¹⁸ However, B-29 aircraft were not available until 1944. By then, rapid advance in the Central and South Pacific made bombing more advantageous from these areas. From these preparations, Shemya Air Base would grow into the largest Army Air Forces base in the North Pacific.

¹⁸ Samuel Eliot Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts, and Marshalls: June 1942-April 1944 (Vol. VII of History of United States Naval Operations in World War II. 15 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951). p. 52.

CHAPTER II CONSTRUCTION

War plans for the Aleutian theater called for Shemya to be the major base in the North Pacific theater. A chain of bases had been built west of Kodiak to support the campaign against the Japanese in the North Pacific. When the planners considered future employment of the VLR (Very Long Range) B-29 aircraft in the Pacific, they gave priority in the northern area to the construction of three 10, 000-foot paved runways at Shemya, Amchitka and Umnak. Two paved strips, one 7,500 feet and the other 6,000 feet, were to be built at Adak. Initial plans called for the first B-29 raids against the Japanese homeland to be staged from these North Pacific bases, but these plans were never carried out. Rapid advances in the South and Central Pacific, coupled with poor flying weather in the Aleutians and lack of targets, made extensive operations less desirable than from the other areas in the Pacific. During the war, only one B-29 landed in the Aleutians on a "morale run" and it was sent from the Cold Weather Test Laboratory at Ladd Field, Fairbanks, Alaska.¹ After the war, several other B-29's landed at Shemya while operating as escort aircraft in a distance test flight.

The 10, 000-foot Shemya runway, along with two 5,000-foot cross runways supported a variety of aircraft. The 404th Bombardment Squadron flew B-24's along with one Beechcraft AT-7, which was used for navigator training. The 344th Fighter Squadron flew both P-40's and P-38's. In addition, a North American AT-6 was utilized for pilot training. One RB-34, a UC-64A and numerous TB-26's were flown by the 15th Tow Target Squadron that was stationed on Shemya. The Navy assigned one squadron of PB4Y-2's, which were single tail versions of the twin tail B-24. Many administrative and cargo aircraft, such as the C-47 "Gooney Bird" flew in and out of Shemya during the war.

The decision to place the original main runway on Shemya slightly east of the south central part of the island was based on the following factors:

(a) uniform grades, practically flat; (b) located adjacent to the largest deposit of sand; (c) removed from port area; (d) excellent approaches; (e) removed from radar and VHF

¹ 11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 325.

sites; (f) minimum of taxiways on favorable grades to obtain maximum dispersal of aircraft standings; (g) excellent natural site for air base facilities and personnel in hollows of dunes and stream courses; (h) centerline passes through western tip of island and intersect both Nizki and Alaid Island for C.A.A. radio range installation; (i) clear of fog when higher ground to the North is blanked out (and later discovered true to a lesser extent of the East and West ends). Final location placed the East end of the main runway 3/4 mile from the East end of the island, and the western end 1 1/2 miles from the West end of the island, at a mean elevation of 88 feet and with a 0.15% grade. Azimuth, 107 Approx.²

The selection, however, of the 4,000-foot cross runway site involved many more obstacles than for the main strip. The east end of the island was eliminated because of excessive grades, rolling tundra, and inadequate distance in the proper direction for the required runway length. Since the port area, watershed and lakes were located at the west end, this area was also eliminated. After numerous centerline surveys were completed, the decision was reached to place the cross runway one-half mile west of the west end of the main runway, just outside the watershed, and bordering the east edge of the port area.³

The dispersal aircraft standings were placed in the area to the north of the main runway. The two principal reasons for this were the proximity of large deposits of sand, which were necessary for construction of taxiways and standings, along with nearness to the principal runway. By keeping the main runway surface at a land height of eighty feet, it was possible to reach these dispersal areas by building the taxiway on a good operating grade of about a two percent maximum. This is an essential factor in airdrome design.⁴

Less than one month after the original landing, on June 21, 1943, the first phase of runway construction had been completed. The airfield was ready for fighter aircraft and 70 per cent of the

² Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 6-7.

³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

length required for bombers was completed. On June 24, 1943, at 1435 William, Shemya airfield was christened with the landing of a C-53 Army transport aircraft.⁵

Authorization for runway length at Shemya was received on November 15, 1943, from General Buckner. The "bomber runway" (A) was to be 10,000 feet by 500 feet, while the "cross runway" (B) was to be 5,000 feet by 300 feet. Buckner further indicated that, "Paving of these fields is not yet authorized . . . Grading should be completed as soon as possible so that the fields will be ready when paving is authorized by the War Department."⁶

A month later, on December 29, 1943, authorization was given for paving the full length and width of the runways. The contract was awarded to S. Burch & Company and Morrison-Knudsen Inc., Central Building, Seattle, Washington. At the time, work was estimated to begin on July 1, 1944, when the contractor and materials arrived.⁷ Bituminous material was used and paving designs were based upon B-29 wheel loadings. Completion of the entire program was called for in the 1944 construction season.⁸

The original estimated time of July 1, 1944 was not met, and actual paving began on August 20, 1944.⁹ During this period while the base waited for the arrival of the paving contractor, most of the runway work consisted of filling in designated lines and hardstands. Sandbags had to be placed along the runway fill areas to secure the loose earth and sand, which were being constantly threatened by wind and rain erosion. Also, large amounts of earth had to be moved from runway approaches.¹⁰

⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶ Ibid., (letter from Commanding General, Headquarters, Alaskan Department to Commanding General, U. S. Troops, APO 729, U. S. Army, 15 November 1943.)

⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

⁸ Ibid., (letter from Commanding General, Headquarters, Alaskan Department to Commanding General, U. S. Troops APO 729, United States Army, 29 December 1943, paragraph 4.)

⁹ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 1.

¹⁰ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 1.

Once the paving contractor arrived, the paving plans materialized quickly. By the close of August 1944, approximately three thousand feet by two hundred and fifty feet of the west end of the main runway had been completed. The plan called for asphaltting the 10,000-foot runway first, leaving the east end opened to traffic. The steel matting which had formerly extended 6,225 feet from the east end of the runway was taken back to 5,000 feet. Over twelve inches of gravel base was laid on the graded portion before the actual asphaltting began. When the west end was completed, the process was reversed.¹¹ Authorization had also been received to prepare and pave the taxiway concurrently with the runways.¹²

Two additional runways, one 300 feet by 8,500 feet and one 300 feet by 5,000 feet, were authorized in July 1944.¹³ But only the smaller was constructed. Preliminary grading and earth moving on this runway, which was to be known as "C" runway, was begun on August 15, 1944. This runway ran in a northeast by southwest direction and by the end of August was 60 per cent complete in grading. In addition, the paving plan was changed, and it received priority over B strip.¹⁴ By December, all three runways were finished in use.¹⁵

In order to complete all of the paving as rapidly as it was done, the world's largest portable asphalt plant was built, and this had a capacity of producing six hundred tons of material per hour. Asphalt, cement, and sand were mixed, and then heated to a temperature of about three hundred and fifty degrees. After trucking the mixture to the runway, a Barber Greene asphalt paving machine laid it at a temperature of two hundred and fifty degrees. Two layers of two and one half inches depth each were put down, and then these were covered with a sealing coat of one inch.¹⁶

¹¹ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 1; "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 1.

¹² "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 1

¹³ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," pp. 16-17.

¹⁴ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 2.

¹⁵ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 2.

¹⁶ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 1

In May, the island was unable to produce enough gravel for the roads, to say nothing about the runways.¹⁷ Rock Quarries and crushing plants were then developed, and the largest one was located at the west end of the main runway. It produced better than between three to four hundred tons of rock in comparison to the north plant, which yielded only two hundred tons per hour. Large charges of dynamite had to be used to loosen the rock, and when the charges were fired the entire island shook from the explosions.¹⁸

Securing sand proved to be another major problem in the runway construction program. Sand finally had to be taken from between the buildings located in the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron Areas. When this quantity was insufficient, the whole Air Base Headquarters had to be relocated so that all the sand located in the east sector could be used.¹⁹

Another important part of the runway preparation was the installing of a Bartow Lighting System. This system was originally placed on the old east-end steel matted section of the main runway for night operations and low visibility conditions. Because paving of the west end of the runway was taking place, the operation of the asphalt plant caused the lights to be covered with a thick layer of soot and sand. A remedy was never found, and the entire system had to be cleaned before each use.²⁰ By October, the system had been installed on eight thousand feet of the main runway and all reports from the pilots confirmed that it was highly satisfactory.²¹

In November, the main runway was completed. By January, this system was in use on all three runways. In compliance with verbal orders from the Air Base Commander, these lights

¹⁷ "Daily Diary of S-4 Office (Supply and Maintenance) 23 May 1943."

¹⁸ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 2.

¹⁹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 12; "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 16.

²⁰ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 1

²¹ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 2.

were utilized for all landings and take-offs.²² To complete the system, brightness control regulators were installed, and the tower had direct control over the brightness of the entire system.²³ In addition to the Bartow System, approach lights were installed on the east end of the main runway, and they too proved to be of great assistance to the aircrews.²⁴

In January, plans were drawn for the erection of two new control towers on "B" and "C" runways.²⁵ By April, these towers had been completed and each tower now had complete control over the Barrow Lighting System on its particular runway.²⁶ The month before, the 84th Ground Radar Team (C) had begun a ground control approach system on Shemya.²⁷

A fog-dispersal unit was laid concurrently with the paving construction, and it insured maximum use of the runway and safety of the crews and their aircraft during fog. It was placed on the east end of the main runway for a distance of five thousand feet. When operating, it burned fifty thousand gallons of white gasoline per hour.²⁸ The runway system was completed with the building of the gasoline tankage storage area, and this was located between the north branch of the taxiway and the water shed.²⁹

The single most important construction project after the runways was the building of a breakwater and dock. Civilian experts and engineers designed this system, and a plan was submitted to Eleventh Air Force Headquarters. Until the dock system was complete, all supplies had to be transferred from ships

²² "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 1.

²³ "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 2.

²⁴ "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 2..

²⁵ "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," pp. 1-2.

²⁶ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 2.

²⁷ "Histories of Shemya: March 1945," p. 2.

²⁸ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," pp. 1-2.

²⁹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 9.

to landing craft, and then towed ashore 30 By May 1944, approximately 158,000 cubic yards of fill had been placed for a landing facility, and the harbor was at least useable.³¹ The completion on July 25, 1944 of the Crib Dock, which consisted of 300 feet of dock 40 feet wide and 1,400 feet of dock 60 feet wide, left the construction of the breakwater system the only project necessary to complete the harbor facilities.³² This entire system solved the problem of transferring supplies from ship to landing craft.

Work continued on the breakwater system. In August, breakwater number one was extended 550 feet eastward, reaching a length of 800 feet in an eastward direction, while its overall length was 3, 500 feet.³³ As soon as suitable rock was available, it was placed on the seaward side to act as armor rock, but no armor rock had been placed on breakwater number two during this month. This breakwater extended 1,630 feet.

In September 1944, in an attempt to neutralize the high waves that were being driven directly into the harbor, an experiment with compressed air was made. "The theory was that a tremendously large head of compressed air, forced through small holes in steel pipe placed on the ocean floor at mouth of the harbor, would create a rising column of air and water sufficiently great to counteract the horizontal [sic] motion of waves moving into the harbor."³⁴ The method did not succeed, thus ending the only scientific experiment that took place on Shemya during the war.

On July 21 and 22, 1944, a storm considerably hampered construction work, and several hundred feet of breakwater number one "settled" to sea level.³⁵ Compared to the storm of

³⁰ "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," Chapter VII, Logistics, p. 1.

³¹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 1.

³² "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 2.

³³ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 2.

³⁴ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 2.

³⁵ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 1.

November 13 and 14, 1944, that storm was just a minor squall. In November, constant pounding and raging surf leveled the entire east jetty of the breakwater, and 2,500 feet of the west jetty was washed away. The ship's dock was completely destroyed, and only 1,000 feet of the crib dock remained.³⁶ This damage proved an almost disastrous loss to an island wholly dependent upon shipping for its provisions. As a result of the storm, the responsibility of maintaining an open supply route fell to the Air Transport Section. Shuttle runs between Attu and Shemya were made by three aircraft and an average of twenty-one flights per day were made.³⁷

The damage was so severe that by the end of December, reconstruction of the breakwater was unstarted. Some work had been done on the crib dock, and this permitted its use for barges only. In addition, construction had begun on a barge docking facility on Shoots Island which was directly off the south shore.³⁸ This project met with considerable difficulties because of frequent high tides.³⁹

By March, with the arrival of the necessary construction materials, sufficient repair work had been done to the ship docks to allow only barges to anchor. Also, a temporary shipping dock had been started off the west breakwater. By the end of the month, the docking facilities at Shoots Island were completed and were of great assistance. The use of barges was still a risky operation, as it had been when the island was first occupied, due to the long stretches of rough seas between Attu and Shemya. These could easily capsize a small boat.⁴⁰

In April 1945, plans were approved for the erection of a new type of steel pier. Sixty foot circular steel piles were driven into the bed of the harbor, and then were filled with cement. This pier was extended approximately 350 feet, with the additional hope

³⁶ "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 1.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 1

³⁹ "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 1.

⁴⁰ "Histories of Shemya: March 1945," p. 1.

that "the use of circular piles should considerably cut down on the pressure of the ocean." By the end of the month, the harbor system reached the following percentage of completion: "Dock Number One (old ship's dock) complete and in use; Dock Number Three, 90 per cent complete; Dock Number Four, (on west side of Shoots Island) complete and in use; Dock Number Five (on east side of Shoots Island) 75 per cent complete."⁴¹ Finally, on July 27, 1945, the American seaplane tender Teal drew alongside, marking itself as the first boat to dock at the reconstructed pier. This new dock extended 780 feet into ten to twenty-three feet of water, and was sixty feet wide.⁴²

In April 1945, approval was received for two submerged pipelines to supply aviation gasoline and diesel fuel. These lines enabled the tankers to off-load cargo without coming into the harbor. By June 1945, this project had been completed and traffic in the inner harbor was greatly reduced.⁴³

Major General H. H. Arnold, Chief, Army Air Corps, in October 1940 had pointed out that in Alaska, with the exception of sand, gravel and timber, everything had to be imported from the United States.⁴⁴ On Shemya, even the latter was not available. The diary of the 18th Engineers Regiment for June 3, 1943, points out that the experience gained in the Yukon was the determining factor in the assignment of work. General Arnold explained these methods in the following manner:

We found, on inspecting the cold weather station at Fairbanks, that our construction engineers were learning rapidly; they have astonished old settlers who told them airports could not be built in winter. They scraped the snow, thawed the ice, and peeled the tundra in midwinter. So rapidly have they worked that by mid-July we

⁴¹ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 1.

⁴² "Histories of Shemya: August 1945," p. 1

⁴³ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," pp. 1-2;" Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 2

⁴⁴ General Henry H. Arnold. "Our Air Frontier in Alaska," National Geographic Magazine (October 1940). As quoted in forward to "11th Air Force History to 1942."

found technical buildings, hangars and runways nearing completion.⁴⁵

Maps of Shemya were absent and all preliminary construction studies were based on photographs.⁴⁶ In a letter on May 10, 1943, from the Commanding General, 11th Air Force, approval was given for the airdrome layout and construction priorities as suggested by Colonel Charles A. Bassett, Air Base Commander.⁴⁷ The runway and harbor system have already been discussed. The area to the south of the main runway, between it and the beach, was reserved for the original Air Base facilities and freight depot.⁴⁸

Most of the construction work on Shemya was carried on by Army Engineer personnel. However, the Air Corps housing and base facilities were erected by Air Corps personnel.⁴⁹ Experience had shown that cutting the Aleutian tundra or disturbing the natural moss surface brought about a serious mud condition. Therefore, all Shemya layout plans provided for cutting in sand or gravel, and filling in all tundra sections where a sand base was not found to be within eighteen inches of the surface. The only exception to this method was in constructing the revetted aircraft standings. Here a dragline, or large power shovel, could remove the tundra and use the material for the walls of the standing, while sand was placed as backfilling for the area. Sand on the runway, taxiway, and standings required the use of steel runway matting until these could be hard surfaced.⁵⁰

A large amount of work was completed between October 1943 and February 1944. In October, only 39 huts were available for living quarters, and 328 pyramidal tents were being occupied. On March 1, 1944, 218 huts were completed and only 85 tents

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

were still being occupied for living quarters.⁵¹ Both tents and permanent buildings were erected in ground depressions to protect them from the blowing winds.⁵²

The following types of shelter were erected on Shemya:

1. Winterized Tents were the first type of shelter used on Shemya. They had wooden floors and a light skeleton framework for the standard 18 by 18 foot Army pyramid tent.

2. The Jamesway Hut was constructed with wooden floors and laminated wooden hoops as the framework. It was covered by a rubberized canvas tent, cylindrical in appearance, and resembled a Pacific Hut.

3. The Stout House was built of prefabricated wood composition panels, 12 feet by 16 feet. It had a box-like design and required very little effort to construct. In addition, it had the advantage of being readily transportable by air.

4. The Pacific Huts were built in greater quantity than any other shelter on Shemya, as well as in the rest of the theater. It proved to be the most satisfactory of all types of housing, since it used only seven per cent of war critical material. They were built on the west coast and the building firm could produce about 700 units per month.

This sectional hut, 16 feet by 36 feet, was built of plywood with arched sides and roof. Its compactness for shipment, light weight, along with its ease in erection led to its wide use. It was water and wind proof, and extremely inexpensive.

5. The Yakatat Hut, which received its name since it was first erected on Yakatat, was a simple wooded hut, 16 feet by 16 feet. It was prefabricated, and because of its easy erecting, was selected for use on new construction projects. Later, these huts were used for drying rooms and shelter for power plants and pumps.

6. The Quonset Hut was a prefabricated, corrugated sheet-iron shelter. It came in two sizes: 16 feet by 36 feet and 24 feet by

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵² "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," p. 4.

60 feet, the latter being discontinued as the war progressed. Its manufacture required almost complete use of war critical metal, which led to the adopting of the Pacific Hut.⁵³

The official wartime History of the Alaskan Department lists the following factors for use of the above pre-fabricated huts as the best choice for shelter on Shemya:

1. Virtually 100 percent use of non-critical materials.
2. Production in the Northwest on tidewater for direct shipment by water to Alaska and the Aleutians.
3. Adaptability to straight line production to save manpower.
4. Adaptability of production to standard sizes of lumber and other products available.
5. Adaptability to farming out of parts making the pre-cutting.
6. Production requirements to minimize need of critical or intricate tools.
7. Lowest possible crated ready-for-shipment cubic footage.
8. Foolproof crating and packaging to resist damaging in transit.
9. Weight per package held to approximately 600 pounds maximum to permit easy handling in field.
10. Minimum number of packages, with all parts included.
11. Shelter must be insulated against sub-zero tempera-and also be able to withstand high velocity winds against sides.
12. Design to cast minimum shadows, aid camouflage.

⁵³ "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," pp. 343-347.

13. Joints, connections, flashing and ventilators storm resistant even in driving rains.
14. Provision for adequate ventilation during total blackout.
15. Elimination of through metal to insure against cold weather and interior condensation.
16. Insulation in walls protected by vapor barrier, but ventilation in walls to prevent dead air space.
17. Roof strength to allow for heavy snow load, side walls strong enough to withstand earth fill pressure.
18. Simple erection easily understood by inexperienced men, and easily erected in the dark.
19. Produced so materials and insulation would not be damaged if exposed to rain or snow during erection.
20. Designed to compensate for swelling, shrinking or warping of sections prior to erection.
21. No part of section, uncrated, to weigh more than 175 pounds in order that two men might handle any part.

In March 1944, construction was begun on a new steel warehouse, 40 feet by 80 feet for Air Corps Supply.⁵⁴ In June, a second warehouse of the same type was completed after a concrete floor was poured. This left nine more to complete, to reach a total of eleven as called for in the base construction plan.⁵⁵ Also, during this month, the Air Corps bulk storage system was completed and put into operation. This system was composed of sixty-four 500-gallon barrel tanks and 23,550 feet of pipeline. With it, it was possible to pump fuel directly from a tanker to the collection area, and repeated handling of drums was eliminated.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "Histories of Shemya: March 1944," p. 1.

⁵⁵ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The supply complex was completed in June 1945 with the completion of the Issue/Receiving Warehouse and offices, located on the north side of runway "A" just south of the new Transport Dock. This building consisted of two 60 foot by 200 foot structures in an "L" shape design. Also included was living quarters for those personnel on twenty-four hour duty, along with the necessary bins and shelving.⁵⁷

In March 1944, the pouring of concrete piers for a fighter hangar was also completed. After digging the drainage ditches and laying the drainage pipe, all work had to stop until the required lumber from Attu arrived in the last week of March.⁵⁸ By the end of May, this hangar was complete and in operation. In addition to the fighter hangar, Shemya was also authorized one Kodiak "T" hangar and fourteen Birchwood hangars. The first Birchwood Hangar was erected on the north side of the main runway, 2,500 feet from the west end. But only six of the fourteen hangars had been completed by the end of the war. Hangar Number One was for the Navy; Number Two was for the Base Engineer; the 344th Fighter Squadron used Hangar Number Three, while the 11th Fighter Squadron had Number Four. The last two, Numbers Five and Six, were utilized by the two other combat flying squadrons on Shemya - the 15th Tow Target Squadron and the 404th Bombardment Squadron.⁵⁹

On May 19, 1944, authorization was finally received and ground broken for the new Post Office. It took one year, but the base was finally provided with a postal facility.⁶⁰ During May, the new Army Theater was completed and on May 29, the first anniversary of the island's occupation, it officially opened with the showing of the motion picture "Madame Curie."⁶¹

⁵⁷ "Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 3.

⁵⁸ "Histories of Shemya: March 1944," p. 1.

⁵⁹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 12; "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," pp. 2-3; "Histories of Shemya: July 1945." p. 2.

⁶⁰ "Daily Diary of Adjutant Section, 19 May 1944."

⁶¹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 8.

Work continued at a tremendous rate. In June 1944, the third echelon Maintenance Shop was opened. This building, 42 feet by 120 feet, finally provided adequate shop space for repair of base assigned vehicles. The base motor pool continued to perform second echelon maintenance in a temporary 24 foot by 32 foot building.⁶² Authorization was finally received for a 132 foot by 42 foot building.

In September completion of the central Concrete Batching Plant located on Cross Island Road was achieved. Concrete was dry-mixed at this plant and then transported to various construction sites throughout the island.⁶³ Grading was begun in October 1944 for the erection of a combined Air Freight, Operation, Airways and Air Communication Service (AACCS), and Weather Building, located approximately 1,000 feet from the west end of runway, "A" on the north side.⁶⁴ This complex was completed on April 20, 1945, and all departments moved into this modern building. However, the island was on alert, which added to the confusion. The personnel not only had to move all office equipment and supplies, but had to carry rifles, helmets, ammunition and gas masks as well. This alert necessitated the men remaining in the building over night, with the result that the building was conducting business as usual the next day.⁶⁵ The Parachute Shop, complete with drying towers and packing tables, was completed during December 1944.⁶⁶

The construction of additional buildings was held to an absolute minimum beginning in August 1944, due to the pending relocation of the Air Base Headquarters. This was necessary in order to obtain the sand that the old headquarters was built on for construction purposes.⁶⁷ By March 1945, the relocating plan was finally approved, and the site chosen was north of runway "A", next to the 32nd Air Service Squadron. A "T"- shaped structure

⁶² "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 2.

⁶³ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 2.

⁶⁴ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 2

⁶⁵ "Daily Diary of Base Operations, 20 April 1945."

⁶⁶ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 3.

⁶⁷ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 2.

consisting of two 30 foot by 100 foot buildings was designed for the new headquarters, which by the end of the month, was approximately 50 per cent complete. Also during this time, the new Air Base Telephone and Signal Exchange was completed, along with 80 per cent of the new Air Base Dispensary.⁶⁸

On Monday, June 11, 1945, the new Air Base Headquarters was officially opened, and it proved to be far superior to the collection of Pacific Huts which had been used before. The compactness of the various departments, correct lighting facilities, and new cream-painted offices greatly improved the working conditions and the morale of the men. At the same time, the new Air Base Dispensary was put into operation. The phrase "just like the States" became common concerning this new area.⁶⁹

The month of June 1945 also saw the beginning of construction of the Decontamination building, which was to be used by the base Chemical Warfare Service personnel. It was located approximately 200 feet north west of the new base headquarters, a location which put it in a central place for all emergencies. When completed, this building included steam baths, clothing decontamination rooms, and isolated rooms for contaminated clothing and equipment.⁷⁰ At the same time, a Hydrogen Generation Building was under construction between the middle and lower lakes, for the Base Weather balloons. The manufacture of hydrogen on the island eliminated the need for shipping the gas from the states.⁷¹

The arrival of a large amount of paint, white and olive-drab, permitted the painting of many unpainted buildings, and huts on the base. This task was completed during the spring of 1945, and the work was done during off-duty hours by the men living in the huts.⁷² Previously, many buildings had become available when civilian construction companies left the island. These were used

⁶⁸ "Histories of Shemya: March 1945," pp. 2-3.

⁶⁹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 1.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁷² "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," p. 7.

by the Ordnance Section. after Air and Technical Section had approved their transfer.⁷³

An Excellent example of one day's work follows:

The carpenter shop has another portable latrine under construction & 1 desk is completed. The sheet metal shop completed 1 lamp shade and 1 urinal. The welding shop welded an electric light bracket for alert crew and drew supplies. The paint shop lettered a chart for base motor pool; varnished 2 in and out boxes; File box varnished; 4 boxes varnished for Base Post Office; and 1 lamp shade painted. Two men are painting the interior of the 11th Flight Control. The Warehouse made 13 issues. The stove mechanics made 3 service calls and inspections. The electricians wired the base motor pool shop and had one trouble call. The Salvage and Maintenance Crew drew lumber from the Post Utilities; Policed area and straightened barrels along the road. 7 requisitions were made out for materials. The Generators are in operation 24 hrs a day; PX Generator men are on a 12-hour shift; the 400th generator men are on an eight-hour shift; Oil changed at PX generator.⁷⁴

By August 1945, with the war's end, no new construction was deemed necessary. All future work was concerned mainly with maintenance and repair.⁷⁵

The final area of base construction was concerned with the water and sewer system. The Shemya water system was always one area that had a sufficient supply. Besides the lakes, one shallow well provided water for all the Air Base organizations. The water was pumped into a 7,500-gallon tank and from there delivered to the 400th Bomb Squadron Mess Hall by pipe. During the early development of the base, tank trucks were used to deliver the water to the other base areas. The plans for a permanent water system called for over thirty miles of pipe to be laid under the supervision of the Resident Engineer. The contract

⁷³ "Daily Diary of Air Inspection Office, 9 February 1945.

⁷⁴ "Daily Diary of Base Utilities, 23 May 1944.

⁷⁵ "Histories of Shemya: August 1945," p. 1.

for this project was awarded to the firm of Guy F. Atkinson and Company.⁷⁶ By July 1944, in addition to the 400th Mess Hall, pipes had been laid to the civilian areas in order to furnish sufficient water for personnel and construction requirements. This water was purified with chlorine before distribution.⁷⁷ Five more pump houses were completed during October 1944 to bring the total to eight.⁷⁸ One year later, the water system was 98 per cent complete, and even included a plant to convert sea water into fresh water, which was utilized by the post Laundry.⁷⁹

The sewer system, on the other hand, proved to be a major problem. As late as June 1944, the island lacked this vital system.⁸⁰ The sewage was burned periodically in oil drums, and then disposed of in the Post Dump.⁸¹ The latrines were housed in tents and were completely inadequate during the first several years of the base's operation. The same was true of the bathhouses, which were constructed of scrap materials and heated with various improvised heating devices.⁸²

Fuel oil was generally used for heating since it contained approximately twice the heat content of coal per pound and was easier to handle. The oil that was finally developed for this frigid Aleutian theater had a pouring point of -40°F and a cloud point of -30 F. Three different types of oil heating equipment were developed: central heating system for large permanent buildings; small atomizing type oil burners for hot water, cooking, and heating mobilization type barracks; and finally, domestic type burners for heating huts. Only the latter caused any unusual operating problems.

⁷⁶ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 9.

⁷⁷ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 13.

⁷⁸ "Monthly Report for October 1944," paragraph 6di.

⁷⁹ "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 7; "Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 8.

⁸⁰ "Monthly Report, June 1944, Engineer," paragraph 6d3.

⁸¹ "Monthly Report, June 1944, Surgeon," paragraph 7a2.

⁸² "Weekly Report, 7 May 1944," p. 10; "Monthly Report June 1944, Surgeon," paragraph 7a2.

These stoves were designed for light stove oil, while the use of the new type oil resulted in a 30 per cent reduction in heat. This reduction, coupled with the extreme cold led to soldiers tampering with the carburetor mechanism. Flare-ups and flue fires were the result. In addition, high gusty winds of the Aleutians, acting on the low flues of the huts that had been dug down into the tundra, caused numerous problems.⁸³

In October 1944, only a total of three miles of sewer pipe had been laid, although the base plan called for approximately forty miles of pipe.⁸⁴ In September 1945, this project was also 98 per cent complete.⁸⁵

⁸³ "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," pp. 348-349.

⁸⁴ "Monthly Report for October 1944," paragraph 6d3.

⁸⁵ "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 7.

CHAPTER III

PERSONNEL

Brigadier General John E. Copeland, Commander of Shemya from its founding, was relieved on November 27, 1943, by Brigadier General Maxwell A. O'Brien. He in turn commanded until January 2, 1944, when he was relieved by Brigadier General J. A. Daugherty.¹ These men commanded all Army Corps units on Shemya, such as Artillery, Engineers, Infantry and Air Corps.

Colonel George A. Bassett, who was a member of the original scouting party that landed on Shemya, became the first Air Corps commander of Shemya Army Air Force Base. He reported directly to Headquarters 11th Air Force, Elmendorf Army Air Force Base for operational and logistical support of the Air Corps field. The colonel developed the basic physical plans for the facilities and directed their installation during the most critical period. On July 5, 1944, Colonel George R. Bienfang succeeded Colonel Bassett.² His leadership was essential during Shemya's development as the largest offensive base in the Western Aleutians. On December 11, 1945, he was relieved by Colonel Frank G. Jamison.³

On May 30, 1943, the 18th Engineer Regiment (C)* arrived on Shemya. This troop unit, under the command of Colonel F. M. S. Johnson, Army Corps of Engineers, consisted of A Company, E Company, parts of B and C Companies, Regimental Headquarters, the Medical Detachment, equipment operators from all companies, a Harbor Craft Detachment, Air Transport Service (ATS) Detachment and an Airways Communication Squadron (ACS) Detachment.⁴

*(C) is the abbreviation for combat.

¹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944,"

² "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 5.

³ "Histories of Shemya: December 1945," p. 3.

⁴ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 23. p. 18.

The 372nd Service Squadron, 337th Service Group, arrived on Shemya on June 20, 1943, and consisted of a forward echelon of four officers and forty-seven enlisted men. By the twenty-fifth of June the complete squadron was in place. In addition, detachments from Chemical Warfare Service, Finance, Airway Communications, Ordnance, Quartermaster, Weather, and Signal Corps arrived on June 20, 1943. Three days later, the first contingent of the 344th Fighter Squadron, 343rd Fighter Group arrived from Unmak, (Fort Glenn). Major Robert L. Rocklehurst, Air Corps, Commander, was accompanied by ten enlisted men.⁵ The activity on Shemya further grew with the arrival of the 32nd Service Squadron on July 31, 1943 from a tour of duty on Adak.⁶

July also saw the arrival of the first contingent of four officers and thirty-eight enlisted men of the 21st Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group. LST 461 brought them from Amchitka on July 17, 1943. The 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron composed of twenty-two officers and 227 men also arrived that day. They had been stationed at Fort Randall, Alaska, and were transported to Shemya by the S. S. Delarof.⁷

By the first of October 1943, the following units were established at Shemya Air Base: 372nd Service Squadron; 1740th Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company, Avn.;* 896th Engineer Company, Avn.; 344th Fighter Squadron; 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron; 1910th Quartermaster Company; Truck, Avn.; 11th Air Force Squadron, Weather; 11th Airway Communication Squadron; 1128th Quartermaster Company; 23rd Service Group; 1084th Signal Service Company, Avn.; 1018th Service Company, Avn. A total of 1,086 enlisted men and 113 officers occupied Shemya Air Base at that time.⁸

As a direct result of the Japanese air raid on Attu on October 13, 1943, the 54th Fighter Squadron, flying P-38's arrived on

*Avn. is the abbreviation for aviation.

⁵ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 19-20.

⁶ "History of the Army Air Base, Adak, Alaska," p. 46.

⁷ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 20.

⁸ Ibid., p. 21.

Shemya from Amchitka.⁹ Another transfer for base defense purposes was the bringing of thirty-one dogs and seven handlers to Shemya in October, 1943.¹⁰

The removal from Adak and transfer to Shemya of the Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron, XI Bomber Command on January 8, 1944, attested to the importance of Shemya for bombing operations. Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron of the 28th Bombardment Group, Composite, was ordered to Shemya from Adak on January 10th. On the eleventh, the 404th Bombardment Squadron (H)* was ordered from Adak to Shemya. The Headquarters, XI Bomber Command officially opened on February 28, 1944. By the close of the month the average strength of the base had reached 126 officers and 1,216 enlisted men.¹¹

On June 22, 1944, the 15th Tow Target Squadron Headquarters was also transferred from Adak to Shemya with a strength of 27 officers and 160 enlisted men. This organization provided targets for gunnery practice of the air combat units and anti-aircraft batteries based on Shemya.¹²

A detachment of the 890th Chemical Company (Air Operations) was established at Shemya on August 23, 1944. This organization worked in conjunction with the Chemical Section, 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron to perform this vital task.¹³

An advance command post, 11th Air Force, with no Personnel or Supply Sections, was established on Shemya on November 21, 1944. It was entirely a tactical organization with Brigadier General Harry H. Johnson, Deputy Commander for Operations, commanding. On December 12th, General Johnson assumed command

* (H) is the abbreviation for heavy.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ "Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944," p. 310.

¹¹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 22-23.

¹² "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 6.

¹³ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 10. June 1940

of Provisional XI Strategic Air Forces.¹⁴ On this same date Headquarters Detachment, D Fighter Wing and Headquarters Detachment, F Fighter Wing were activated. These organizations were composed of nine officers including the General and twenty-four enlisted men.¹⁵

On April 15, 1945, an Army Air Base Service Unit was formed on Shemya. This unit consisted of the First Photo Flight (L);* Detachment 11th Flight Control Squadron; Base Medical Detachments; three officers of a detachment from the 861st Signal Service Company (Avn.); two officers of a detachment of the 2055th Ordnance Company Avn. (SV); and five enlisted men of the 11th Air Force Finance Detachment (at large). It had a total strength of fourteen officers and thirty-seven enlisted men upon activation.¹⁶

A detachment of the 397th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron was formed on Shemya, September 15, 1944. Thirteen Base Officers were transferred from the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron to form this organization. On November 15, 1945, this detachment was deactivated, but the 387th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron was transferred to Shemya from Attu. This deactivation was accomplished by orders transferring eighteen officers and seventy-one enlisted men from Detachment 397 to the 397th.¹⁷

In August 1945 the 11th Fighter Squadron transferred from APO's 980 (Adak AAF Base) and 986 (Kiska AAF Base) to Shemya, and caused extremely heavy cross-country traffic for several days. Traffic on August 10 exceeded any in the records of Flight Control.¹⁸

* (L) is the abbreviation for light.

¹⁴ "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," pp. 366 and 368.

¹⁵ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 5.

¹⁶ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 5.

¹⁷ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 7; "Histories of Shemya: November 1945," p. 4.

¹⁸ "Letter: Summary of Activities, August 1945, to S-2 (Intelligence) Office, Air Base 729, 7 September 1945," p. 1.

The first women to be assigned to Shemya arrived on January 17, 1944. These were five nurses and they were assigned to the 329th Station Hospital.¹⁹ In September, Miss Elizabeth Bates, of the American Red Cross, became the first civilian female to serve on Shemya.²⁰ A message from Headquarters 11th Air Force, number 242216, received the day before Christmas, 1944, requested a list of all enlisted personnel who could be replaced by female civilian employees.²¹ Civilization had finally arrived on Shemya! The only other members of the opposite sex to be seen on Shemya had been those of the various USO shows.

The movement of troops in the opposite direction was just as prevalent as the transfer of organizations to Shemya. On September 18, 1943, personnel of the 21st Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group left Shemya for reassignment to the United States.²² On November 20, 1943, the 54th Fighter Squadron, minus one flight, * was transferred to Attu. This left the 344th Fighter Squadron flying P-40's remaining on Shemya with one flight operating from Attu. On the 18th of December, the remaining flight of the 54th was ordered to Alexai Point, Attu.²³

November also saw the reassignment of the 372nd Service Squadron to the United States. It was replaced by the 32nd Service Squadron which arrived on December 1, 1943. This latter unit consisted of thirty officers and 200 enlisted men.²⁴

As part of the plan to reduce the strength of the entire Service Command, Provisional Unit Number Six, whose personnel were formerly with the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron, received orders on September 15, 1944, to return to

*A squadron is composed of several or more flights.

¹⁹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p.

²⁰ "Daily Diary of Base Historian, 7 September 1944," p. 1.

²¹ "Daily Diary of Base Personnel, 24 December 1944."

²² "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 21.

²³ Ibid., p. 22.

²⁴ Ibid.

the United States, to be stationed at McChord Field, Washington. This unit was composed of thirty-six officers and 224 enlisted men, and its departure on October 14, 1944, proved to be an outstanding morale builder. Personnel housing conditions were much eased after this unit's departure.²⁵

On December 19, 1944, Detachment 896, Engineer Company Avn. was deactivated. Its enlisted personnel were transferred to Casual Detachment A, Group 2, activated at Shemya on the same date. The personnel left for Attu by air, and then to the United States via water transportation.²⁶

In September 1945 the 11th Air Force Advance Command Post was disbanded. General Johnson became Commanding Officer of Fort Richardson, Anchorage, Alaska.²⁷ The Provost Marshal patrols were discontinued, effective September 15, 1945.²⁸ This office had maintained a permanent guard consisting of seven guards, a Corporal of the Guard and a Sergeant of the Guard. These men regulated traffic near the runway and guarded all transient aircraft. They were not used to guard any base equipment or aircraft in the revetments, but were on call for emergencies.²⁹ In the beginning of October 1945, the Provost Marshal Office was notified by Base S-1 (Personnel) that it would be discontinued on October 5, 1945. The next day all property was turned in, the building released to Base S-4 (Supply and Maintenance) and so ended the history of the Provost Marshal Section at APO 729.³⁰

The same month saw the issuing of General Order Number 24, Headquarters, 444th Signal Heavy Construction Battalion (Avn.),

²⁵ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 6; "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," pp. 7 and 9; "Monthly Report, October 1944," paragraph 1a.

²⁶ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 5.

²⁷ "Daily Diary of Base Operations, 21 September 1945."

²⁸ "Daily Diary of Provost Marshal, 15 September 1945."

²⁹ "Monthly Report: A-2 (Security) June 1944," paragraph 2.

³⁰ "Daily Diary of Provost Marshal, 4 October 1945 and 5 October, 1945."

Note: Located in "Histories of Shemya: September 1945."

Adak, and this deactivated the 444th Detachment located at Shemya.³¹ It should be noted that over a year before, there were twenty-three organizations on Shemya, compared to sixteen in November 1945. However, despite the ending of the war, the demobilization program and the deactivation of the various organizations, the combined strength of the base only dropped eight officers and 263 enlisted men.³² A definite trend was found in the consolidation of the various base organizations and departments. For example, December 30, 1945 saw the deactivation of the 1740th Ordnance Supply and Maintenance Company (Avn). This was done by transferring one officer and sixty enlisted men of the 1740th to the 397th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron.³³

Captain Eugene W. Huddleston opened the Base Recruiting program and a drive on September 14, 1945. By the close of the month, nineteen men had reenlisted in the Regular Army.³⁴ During October, this program was the most active on any of the base's numerous functions. Forty-two more men reenlisted during this month, with fifteen reenlisting for three years and the remainder for one year. Twelve chose the European Theater, two the Caribbean Defense Command and one the Alaskan Department. Statistics are not available concerning the other men's assignments. All these men left for the United States on the first available water transportation.³⁵ Twenty-four men reenlisted in the Regular Army during November, but in December, the program took a decided 'slump' with only four men signing up.³⁶

The final area that was of vital interest to all personnel, except those who had reenlisted, was the Demobilization policy. The first actual demobilization to occur on Shemya Army Air Force

³¹ "Histories of Shemya: October 1945," p. 6.

³² "Histories of Shemya: November 1945," pp. 5-6.

³³ "Histories of Shemya: December 1945," pp. 4-5.

³⁴ "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 5.

³⁵ "Histories of Shemya: October 1945," p. 1.

³⁶ "Histories of Shemya: November 1945," p. 1; "Histories of Shemya: December 1945," p. 1.

Base came following the fall of Germany. Five men departed the island on May 20, 1945, under the provisions of the War Department Readjustment Program.³⁷ Under this program, any married female member of the Army, upon application, could be immediately separated from the Armed Services if her husband had already been discharged. However, in all other categories, the requirements of military came first. After this consideration, a point system was established based upon length of service after September 16, 1940, overseas service, combat service and parenthood. This system was entitled the Adjusted Service Rating (ASR) Score. For officers, the ASR was also utilized, but military need was the controlling factor.³⁸

The original number of points required for discharge was eighty-five, but during November 1945, the War Department announced the lowering of this score to seventy points or fifty-one months service for officers and fifty-five points or four years service for enlisted men. The impact on Shemya of these new criteria was that eight officers and seventy-four enlisted men became eligible for "return to 'Uncle Sugar' for discharge."³⁹

³⁷ "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," p. 6.

³⁸ Frank Wesley Craven and James Lea Cate (eds), *Service Around the World* (Vol. VII of *The Army Air Forces in World War II*. 7 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 552 -553.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 568, foot note; "Histories of Shemya: November 1945," p.5.

CHAPTER IV

LIFE ON SHEMYA

In Field Order Number One, Annex Number Five, the Air Base Commander stated that a base such as Shemya was "particularly vulnerable to commando type of raids, possibly suicidal in nature, designed to destroy the air base facilities, and disrupt the operation of it." These attacks would "probably be made at night, when dense fog prevailed and the water was calm," with the troops coming ashore in rubber rafts or skiffs from a submarine. The Commander further pointed out that raids "could very easily be launched without preliminary warning from AV'S or beach patrols, and would stand a good chance of success due to the element of surprise."¹

December 1944 saw a change in the Air Base Defense Plan in which Air Corps personnel were assigned to six 37mm antitank guns. On January 24, 1945, training classes were started for twenty-four men in the care and maintenance of these guns.² The Defense Plan was changed again in April 1945, and Air Corps personnel had the additional responsibility for .30 cal guns that were located in their sector. Once again, personnel who were assigned to these positions were trained in the care, maintenance and use of the .30 cal weapons.³

Individual foxholes were dug as part of the defense plan, and all personnel were assigned positions. Base defense had been the responsibility of the 4th Infantry stationed on Shemya. In November 1943, they left and the Air Corps assumed their mission of defending the Air Base.⁴ All personnel were trained in the use of small arms. When a road had to be constructed through the old Air Base Rifle and Pistol Range in August 1944, a new area had to

¹ "Annex Number Five to Field Order Number One, 9 August 1944," paragraphs 1a, b, c.

² "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 4.

³ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 4.

⁴ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 32.

be built. A bank about fifteen feet high was built by removing the sand and digging out the area, and this placed the range twenty feet between the butts and the road. New targets and butts were constructed, and the total number of rifle targets and positions were increased to fifty.⁵ At the same time, a skeet range was prepared. Both these ranges were constantly used until October 1944, when a sandstorm buried the target lines, and prevented area use for about ten days.⁶

To complete the Air Base Defense Training Program, a bayonet course was constructed by the 32nd Service Squadron in September 1944.⁷ In October 1944, a typical military directive was published requiring that "all men who have not qualified with their principal weapon will do so before 24 December 1944. Enlisted personnel who are armed with a bayonet will be required to qualify with the same on the Base Bayonet Course."⁸ This directive did not state how personnel who were incapable of qualifying should accomplish this task.

Once again, in 1945, it was determined that a new rifle and skeet range had to be constructed. By May, this project was well under way and it was officially opened in June. All base organizations were scheduled to fire during July for training and record. At the same time, a course in the use and maintenance of weapons was given. The tactical organizations used the new skeet range for the training of combat crews while the class for the 37mm and .30 cal gun crews continued.⁹

As a result of the war's end, the Air Base Commander ordered the closing of the Rifle Range. The personnel who were assigned to this activity were transferred, and the equipment turned over to Base Ordnance. The range was still available to all organizations. The necessary equipment and ammunitions were

⁵ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 4.

⁶ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 6.

⁷ "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 4.

⁸ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 4.

⁹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," p. 4; "Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 3; "Histories of Shemya: July 1945," p. 3.

drawn from Ordnance and the firing supervised by a unit officer. The Base Skeet Range was assigned to Base Operation and its use had to be approved by the officer in charge.

In addition to base defense requirements, physical fitness was also stressed for both physical and psychological reasons. In June 1944 the Base Special Services Officer assumed responsibility for the physical fitness program, and his new program called for at least three hours of exercise for all personnel per week. Weather conditions sometimes hampered this program, but in general, it was carried out through extended hikes, softball games and volleyball. Interest in the softball league was extremely great, and forty-two teams were formed on the island. The team that won the Island championship participated in the play-offs for the Alaskan Theater championship.¹¹

As the weather grew colder, winter sports were added to the program, and of these ping pong became the most popular. Once again tournaments were sponsored by various organizations which resulted in much competition.¹² After the Air Base gymnasium was completed, a more formal program was begun on March 4, 1945. Physical training classes were held once a day for officers and twice a day for enlisted personnel. All Air Corps personnel were required to attend three of these classes per week.¹³

Five education programs were established on Shemya. The first of these was the standard Army Air Force Orientation courses that were given weekly under the direction of the Base S-3, (Plans and Training) office. The standard Army orientation films which showed the various activities of the U. S. Forces and their allies were shown to all personnel. After these showings, discussions helped to increase the interest of the soldiers on current topics. One example of this was a lecture on inter-racial unity which took place at 1530 hours, December 9, 1944. In addition, daily news sheets, along with weekly news summaries, were distributed to

¹⁰ "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 3.

¹¹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 10.

¹² "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," pp. 7-8.

¹³ "Histories of Shemya: February 1945," p. 10

keep the soldiers in contact with events of the world and home. The only problem in this program was the lack of a source of supplies.

Major Aubrey C. Halsell, the base chaplain, organized the second major education program in May 1944. Three air base enlisted men, and two post enlisted men plus one civilian employee enrolled in the Aleutian Seminary. The following subjects were taught: Bible Discussion, Pastoral Problems, Theology, Christian Ethics, Psychology, Church Policy, Christian Education, Church Finance, Evangelism, and Missions. In addition, each student preached to his fellow soldiers and the civilians in his respective area. The civilian employees of the various construction companies, in an effort to show their appreciation, organized the Aleutian Seminary Loan Fund. Mr. Roy Engstrom of the Puget Sound Macco Construction Company was elected chairman of the Board of Directors. A goal of \$5,000 was established and the first collection taken on August 20, 1944, amounted to \$143. The purpose of this fund was to enable any student to complete his theological training upon release from the Army.¹⁵

The third educational program was the Armed Forces Institute, which is still in existence today. Considerable official counseling was done for this program that granted college credit for certain courses. In May 1944, textbooks were received from the Eleventh Air Force Service Command, but the language program had to wait for the 'linguaphone records and machine.'¹⁶ By June, only 130 men had enrolled. The lack of participation was

¹⁴ "Histories of Shemya- November 1944," p. 7; "Daily Diary of Base Engineering, 9 December 1944, "; "Letter to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 5 March 1945, Personnel Services Report," paragraph 1.

¹⁵ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," pp. 12-13.

¹⁶ "Letter to Commanding General, 11 Air Force Service Command, 6 May 1944, Weekly Report," paragraph 6c.

because of a controversy over a possible loss of entitlement under the GI Bill of Rights. Once clarification was received, enrollment increased.¹⁷

All officers were required to attend the fourth educational program, a course in Russian. The reports from Shemya do not state the reason for this requirement. However, Shemya was utilized by Russian pilots under the lend-lease program. The Russian language program began on January 22, 1945, and classes were held three times a week in the Base Officers Club. The new chaplain, Joseph A. M. Kmiecik was the instructor.¹⁸

The final program was established in September 1945, under the direction of the Post Information and Education Office. Williwaw * Tech, as the local school was named, originally offered sixteen courses taught by eighteen experienced teachers. The program was later expanded to thirty-five subjects ranging from typing to philosophy. Originally 530 students enrolled, but with a rise in the numbers of troops awaiting transportation home, the enrollment grew to 643.¹⁹ During October, the college went to an "on duty" schedule which helped to increase the enrollment. Both high school and college courses were available to the men during duty hours, and this proved to be quite an incentive.²⁰

The Air Force Library also was a source of enlightenment for the men's minds. In December 1944, there were over three thousand cloth-bound volumes on hand, with nearly fifteen hundred checked out monthly. A shortage of personnel required the hours to be changed from eight and one half hours daily to only two and

* Eskimo word meaning a violent gust of wind that comes up suddenly and then calms down.

¹⁷ "Monthly Special Service Report for June, 6 July 1944," paragraph 1d1. Note: All monthly Special Service Reports are contained in the Histories for that month, and not the month they were written.

¹⁸ "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 8.

¹⁹ "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," p. 7; "Histories of Shemya: August 1945," p. 7.

²⁰ "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 8.

one half hours of operation each evening.²¹ This change had a direct effect on the utilization of this facility, and only 660 books were checked out in January 1945. The hours were increased to three a night, but this had little effect.²² On February 15, 1945, the library began to operate on an honor system with the books taken and returned to the shelves by the men. As a result of this system, the monthly circulation increased to about 1,500 books a month.²³ This honor system continued until March 20, 1945, when enough personnel were assigned to the Base Personnel Services Office to provide a full-time librarian. The library continued to operate this way until the end of the war.²⁴

The Base Personnel Services Office provided many other services to the Air Base besides managing the library. Of all the activities offered by this section, the Base Photo-Hobby Shop provided the most enjoyment for off-duty hours. In May 1944, over 40,000 prints were made, and this is an excellent indication of its popularity.²⁵ One year later, appointments were being made months in advance for both the Base Photo-Hobby Shop and the Personnel Services darkrooms. The best of equipment was available in both these areas and all work was done under the supervision of experienced personnel.²⁶

In addition to the Photo-Hobby Shop, many other recreational activities were available to the personnel of Shemya. In July 1944, a new Pacific Hut was built and it housed both the office for Personnel Services and the Hobby Craft Shop. This shop offered ivory carving, woodcraft, weaving, plating, leather-craft and

²¹ "Letter, Monthly Service Report to Commanding General, 11 Air Force for December 1944," paragraph 4d.

²² "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 8.

²³ "Daily Diary of Base Personnel Services, 15 February 1945," paragraph d; "Histories of Shemya: February 1945," p. 11.

²⁴ Letter, "Personnel Services Report for March 1945 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 10 April 1945," paragraph 4a.

²⁵ Letter, "Weekly Report to Commanding General, 11 Air Force Service Command, 27 May 1944," paragraph 6c3.

²⁶ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 8.

plexi-glass work.²⁷ By August 1944, personnel were being turned away from this activity--space for working was full.²⁸

Of all the activities offered by Base Personnel Services, the most appreciated by the men was the procurement and distribution of supplies and merchandise ordered by individuals. The Personnel Service Officer purchased items that were not available on Shemya through the Post Exchange at Fort Richardson, Anchorage, Alaska.²⁹ With the opening of a new and larger post exchange in February 1945, the Base Commander saw no further need for this service and discontinued it.³⁰

This office also bought and sold items at cost. For example, in July 1944, fifty 17-jewel, shockproof watches were received and rationed out to the various organizations. Sixty-two ivory bracelets were also received and resold at wholesale prices. This section also kept the various radios on the base in serviceable condition. During the same month, two hundred and fifty radio tubes were received and the Base Radio Repair shop repaired twenty-four radios.³¹

For Christmas 1944, approximately \$4,000 was spent on such items as hot plates, Silexes, Christmas decorations, special food for Christmas dinner, and athletic equipment, to mention a few. It took two plane trips to bring all the items to Shemya before the Christmas deadline. Christmas trees were also flown to Shemya by Special Services, and trimmed accordingly.³²

²⁷ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 14.

²⁸ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 14.

²⁹ Letter: "Personnel Service Report for January 1945 to Commanding General, Headquarters 11 Air Force, 6 February 1945," paragraph 4i.

³⁰ Letter: "Personnel Service Report for February 1945 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 5 March 1945," paragraph 4J.

³¹ Letter: "Monthly Special Service Report for August 1944 to Commanding General, Field Headquarters, 11 Air Force APO 980, USA, 3 August 1944," paragraph 4c.

³² Letter: "Monthly Service Report for December 1944 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, APO 980, n.d.," paragraph 1D2; "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 10.

When warm weather came, Special Services arranged fishing trips for the men each alternate Saturday.³³ Movies also continued to provide a major source of entertainment throughout the history of Shemya.³⁴

In May 1945, Shemya Air Base finally received a new Post Service Club which helped to fill the need for recreation facilities on the island. This building proved to be one of the finest in the Aleutians and Alaska. A new library was placed in one side of the club.³⁵

Needless to say, when the island was first occupied, there were no recreational facilities nor the time to utilize them. For long periods of time the officers and men of the Air Corps subsisted on canned and prepared food. Fresh meats and vegetables were non-existent. Men lived in tents hardly adequate for the Aleutians and used crude latrines, sometimes at their own peril. The requirements of the job and the weather determined the hours of work. The men, because of the continual possibility of attack, were hampered by the need to carry arms and field equipment. In addition, they were called upon for alerts and patrol duty. Shemya was truly a lonely and desolate spot. However, the performance of the personnel was of the highest caliber, and for some unaccountable reason, their morale remained high. The answer possibly lay in the island's proximity to an active theater, with the occupation of Adak still in progress. Perhaps it was because of the island's newness and pioneering spirit.³⁶ As time progressed, morale did drop. It never became a major problem, but various factors caused it to lose its earlier high standard.

There were inadequate shower facilities until January 1945, and when the weather became warmer the need became greater.³⁷

³³ Letter: "Special Service Report for July 1945 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 9 August 1945," paragraph 4A.

³⁴ Letter: "Weekly Report ending 6 May 1944 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 6 May 1944."

³⁵ "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," p. 9.

³⁶ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 24-25.

³⁷ "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 7.

As late as May 1944, there was a conspicuous absence of running water throughout the base.³⁸ For example, there were no shower facilities at all in the 344th Fighter Squadron area, while there were only three in the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron areas.³⁹ The personnel housing was extremely over-crowded and uncomfortable. Not until September 1944, did the phrase "slightly overcrowded but adequate" begin to appear.⁴⁰

Inconsistencies in the furlough policy were another contributing factor in the lowering morale. The original rotation plan required two years service in the Alaskan Theater before orders for reassignment could be issued. However, the real problem was that a furlough could be issued in lieu of a reassignment.⁴¹ In May 1944, the Air Base Commander indicated that the personnel would be better oriented if there were a free working furlough and rotation plan. "Eighteen and twenty-four months in the Aleutian area is not particularly conducive to high morale especially when the present rotation plan is so dependent on inadequate transportation."⁴² In simpler words of the Daily Diary for Base Operations, May 22, 1944: "Furloughs to states to start as soon as transportation becomes available, very depressing." The adjutant's section outlined the leave procedures at this time which restricted leave to one per cent of the total base population, or approximately eighteen men. However, it was pointed out that "Our only problem is when will we be able to take advantage of a leave or furlough."⁴³ The Daily Diary of the Base Quartermaster for May 24, 1944, gives an excellent example of how the enlisted troops felt about the furlough policy. "When T/5 Good was notified of his being the fortunate one to receive a furlough, it was the most difficult condition anyone ever encountered, explain /sic/ to him that he really did have a furlough, /sic/ boy these G.I.'s won't believe a thing anymore."

38 "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 10.

39 "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 31.

40 "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 10.

41 "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 22.

42 "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 9.

43 "Daily Diary of Adjutant Section, 22 May 1944.

Another example appears in the Daily Diary of the Air Base Dispensary for May 24, 1944. "Cpl Alexander Cohen is still suffering from the illusion that he will be recalled to APO 942 (Fort Richardson) within the next three months. His firm belief cannot be shaken. One year from now he will begin to doubt." In June 1944, a more liberal furlough policy was established and seven officers and seventy-three enlisted men were selected for fifteen-day leaves. It was this new fifteen-day leave policy that the commander felt was the prime factor in stabilizing the morale.⁴⁴ In the month of January 1945, the leave policy was once again liberalized, and each organization was permitted to have five per cent of its total strength absent at one time.⁴⁵ However, in June 1945, word was received that both the rotation and furlough policies had been suspended, and only recuperative furloughs would be granted to key personnel. By August 1945, the Air Base Commander reported that for the first time morale was only "fair" and attributed this directly to the suspension of the rotation policy along with no announcement of a new or lower critical score for discharge. At this time there were 863 enlisted men and officers who had over twenty-four months in this theater without a leave or transfer. In addition, he pointed out the problem of lack of promotions.⁴⁶

The latter problem too was a constant difficulty in keeping morale high. Few promotions were ever received, and for a time an actual ban on them was established. However, on October 18, 1944, this ban was lifted and on November 23, 1944, "The long lull in promotion of enlisted men at Shemya Air Base was finally broken . . . with the promotion of 49 enlisted men of the 32nd Service Squadron." But the enlisted men of the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron were still unable to receive even one promotion.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 5; "Histories of Shemya, July 1944," p. 15.

⁴⁵ "Histories of Shemya: January 1945," p. 6.

⁴⁶ "Histories of Shemya: August 1945," p. 8; Letter: "Special Service Report for July 1945 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 9 August 1945"; paragraph 5A; Letter: "Special Service Report for July 1945 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 10 July 1945," paragraph 5A.

⁴⁷ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 7; "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 6.

Many other little policies caused much dissension. For example, the Daily Diary of the Adjutant Section for May 28, 1944, asked, "Just what is the deal on this new War Bond Drive that is making the rounds this way? Some of the men feel that they cannot afford it and still others feel that they are being imposed upon."

On the other hand it took little to please the GI's. On May 28, 1944, the first delivery of ice cream was made to the mess halls.⁴⁸ A week or so before, this "symbol of American luxury and refinement" had been put on sale at the Base Exchange. In addition, May also saw the arrival of diversified food supplies to brighten the menus. The old mess kits were replaced with trays at the 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron Mess Hall, and more civilization had come to Shemya.⁴⁹

The men used their own ingenuity to improve their living conditions. Sergeant Coy C. Collins and Corporal John Files, Jr., received a letter of recognition from Colonel C. A. Bassett, the Air Base Commander, for having devised a better method of making coffee, "the Shemya Dripolator."⁵⁰ The operation of the Dripolator was as follows:

Consists of two twenty-gallon boilers with spigots, the cover from a thirty-two gallon "GI" can and a wire screen. A hole, ten inches in diameter, was made in the lid. One boiler, full of boiling water, is placed on the edge of the stove. The empty boiler is placed on the floor and the "GI" can cover, with the wire screen inside it is put on top of the empty boiler. Five pounds of coffee is placed on the screen and the spigot in the top boiler is turned on, releasing the boiling water at a slow, steady flow. By this process, all the flavor and aroma of the coffee is retained and wastage is virtually eliminated . . . Through the utilization of this coffee maker, an estimated saving of 20% of the Mess Hall coffee ration has been effected and the palatableness of the resultant has been greatly improved.⁵¹

⁴⁸ "Daily Diary of Adjutant Section, 28 May 1944."

⁴⁹ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 7.

⁵⁰ "Histories of Shemya: #June 1944," pp. 7-8.

⁵¹ Letter: "Monthly report for June 1944, 1 July 1945," paragraph 15.

Besides the programs offered by Special Services, many other areas of entertainment existed for the men. The 344th Fighter Squadron had a small radio station which supplemented the regular one.⁵² Individual radios in the personnel living quarters were of prime importance in providing entertainment. In addition to the island's radio station, the proximity to Japan made Tokyo radio a source of amusement to the men.⁵³ The Daily Diary of Base Personnel of May 26, 1944, recorded that "Tokyo Rose said that if we're not off this place by the 31st, we will be pushed off. Sorry Rosie, only five percent can leave at any one time."

Another source of entertainment for the troops was the 122nd Army Ground Forces Band. This unit rotated throughout the various base organizations giving numerous concerts.⁵⁴ In addition to the Army Band, USO shows and various entertainers like Yehudi Menuhin provided additional musical entertainment. Non-musical celebrities also entertained the men. The most famous of these to visit Shemya were Eddie Rickenbacker, Errol Flynn, Martha O'Driscoll and Olivia De Haviland.

On October 11, 1943, the Quartermaster Mobile Laundry service was instituted. The original number of pieces accepted was six from each soldier, but when monthly service followed, the quota was revised upward.⁵⁵

The Air Base Exchange provided another area of morale building for the men. The original Exchange and Barber Shop was opened during the week of August 14, 1943.⁵⁶ This exchange, at approximately 1800 hours on December 13, 1944, burst into flame. It was extinguished in twelve minutes after the alarm was sounded, but not before fifteen hundred dollars worth of property

⁵² Letter: "Monthly Service Report for December 1944 to Commanding General, 11 Air Force, 5 January 1945," paragraph 1D10.

⁵³ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 8.

⁵⁴ "Histories of Shemya: October 1944," p. 10.

⁵⁵ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 25.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

was destroyed.⁵⁷ The new exchange, when completed, was a vast improvement over the original. Another facility that the men found invaluable was the Shoe Repair Shop, which opened in July 1944.⁵⁸

The 400th area took on the looks of a zoological gardens in May 1944, with the arrival of "Flipper." The men came from all over the island to see this seal. He or she had first snapped at anyone who came near, but as time passed, the seal would cuddle her little flippers around a man and want to be babied. Its diet consisted of fish and milk.⁵⁹

In addition to the activities already mentioned, formation of discussion groups, a regular classical music program, games, sports, card playing, games of chance, up-to-date magazines, plus many other activities helped entertain the troops.⁶⁰

Even with the bond drive, Post Exchange, and Special Service center programs, the men still saved large amounts of money. Their savings were reflected by post office receipts for stamps and money orders. The first seven days in June 1944, for example, saw over \$40,000 pass over the counter at the post office. This saving might be considered one advantage to the absence of stores, restaurants, banks and the other luxuries of civilian life.⁶¹ However, some things money could not buy. In August 1944, shoe laces were issued for the first time in six months,⁶² while in May 1944, toilet paper became so critical that the Base Quartermaster had to make arrangements to have some flown in from APO 980.⁶³

⁵⁷ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 3.

⁵⁸ Letter: "Monthly Report for July 1944, Quartermaster, 1 August 1944," paragraph 9C.

⁵⁹ "Daily Diary of Adjutant Section, 31 May 1944."

⁶⁰ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 27-28.

⁶¹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 9.

⁶² Letter: "Monthly Report for- August 1944, Quartermaster, 1 September 1944," Paragraph 9d.

⁶³ "Daily Diary of Base Quartermaster, 28 May 1944."

"THEY'VE FOUND US." On April 26, 1944, the security surrounding the island was finally lifted. An Associated Press release gave a brief history of the island occupation, mission and organization.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ "Histories of Shemya: April 1944," p. 1.

CHAPTER V

MATERIEL

After the disastrous storm of November 13 and 14, 1944, Air Transportation assumed the responsibility of maintaining an open supply route. Two C-47 aircraft were permanently assigned to act as base shuttlecraft and they averaged five to seven trips a day to Attu for supplies.¹ The efficiency of Air Transportation was demonstrated during the early construction and developmental stages of the Air Base at Shemya. Since there was no harbor, and high winds and bad weather made water transportation unusually difficult, the majority of the critical items necessary for housing and functioning of the bomber and fighter command units were transported by air. Both cargo and bomber aircraft were used for this purpose. By October 1, 1943, over 48,000 tons of supplies for Shemya were backlogged at the Attu sorting areas. By November, the situation was critical. Over 255,000 pounds of priority supplies were air transported to Shemya, with the result that many probable work stoppages were averted.² Things were so bad that over 5,000 ground personnel had to be transferred during this month from the various Army and Navy outfits on Shemya due to lack of supplies. Truly, air transportation saved the day.³ By January, much of the supply problem was ended.⁴

Air transportation was also used to move troop and supplies from Shemya. When the 18th Engineer Regiment (C) received orders to return to the United States, many of the troops were airlifted to Attu because of the storm damage to the Shemya harbor facilities. There they received water transportation back to the United States.⁵

¹ "Histories of Shemya: December 1944," p. 1; "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 1

² "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 17

³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵ "Histories of Shemya: November 1944," p. 6.

The Air Transportation Dock was the heart of this operation. The personnel worked on twenty-four hour shifts and all cargo laden aircraft were quickly and efficiently unloaded and reloaded. A statistical summary of this operation appears in Table III. In April 1945, with the completion of the new harbor facilities, the two C-47 aircraft were transferred.⁶

Except for these two periods, water transportation was the lifeline of Shemya. Transshipment yards were established at Attu, forty miles away, where supplies bound for Shemya were unloaded. Then barges, and later ships, were used to transport supplies to the island. At first, this was a slow and dangerous process, since cargo craft had to be anchored in the open Bering Sea while the supplies were transferred to smaller landing vessels. When the S. S. Cadaretta tied up at the new dock at 0840, June 8, 1944, it marked the passing of this dangerous operation. No longer was the barging of supplies and equipment from Attu or making transfers of cargo at sea necessary.⁷

Many shortages of supplies existed on Shemya, but due to the exceptional job of air transportation, they were never items critical to the base's operation. Besides toilet paper and shoelaces already mentioned, shortages of stationery and office supplies appeared most often in the various sections' daily diaries. For example, in October 1944, only Underwood parts were available for typewriter repairs. If a section had an L. C. Smith or Royal typewriter, not a part existed on the island to repair the machines.⁸ The only entry made in the Daily Diary of the Base Quartermaster for May 29, 1944, was, "Toilet paper has not as yet arrived." At this particular time, chances were that the supply officer did not have a friend on the island.

⁶ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 2; "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 2.

⁷ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 1; "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941 –1946," p. 5.

⁸ "Monthly Report for October, 1 November 1944," paragraph 9e.

Shemya always had more than enough vehicles to meet requirements. On July 13, 1944, for example, 525 vehicles served the air base.⁹ The motor pool installed a Steam Jenny and each vehicle was cleaned thoroughly once a week.¹⁰ The only unique item concerning vehicles was that the popular jeep lost its original appearance, and was turned into a sedan. Because of the weather, they were provided with improvised enclosed bodies and resembled custom-built automobiles.¹¹

⁹ "Daily Diary of Base Historian, 13 July 1944."

¹⁰ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 5.

¹¹ "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," p. 4.

CHAPTER VI

OPERATIONS

After the fall of Attu, Shemya Army Air Force Base's mission was the reduction of Kiska, the last Japanese-occupied island in the American owned Aleutian Chain. Both bomber aircraft and long range fighter aircraft located on Shemya, Attu, and Amchitka, coupled with naval bombardment, were utilized for this purpose. So successful were these raids that the Japanese secretly abandoned Kiska on July 28, 1943. Two cruisers and six destroyers were used to return 5,183 Japanese troops to Paramushiru.

After securing Kiska, the American fighter planes assumed the dual mission of air defense of the Aleutians. The bomber aircraft had a slightly more exciting existence raiding various locations in the Japanese Kuril group of islands.¹

A B-24, piloted by Captain I. L. Wadlington, was the first heavy aircraft to land on Shemya. On August 13, the captain led a flight of six B-24's from Adak to Shemya, and had to circle the field several times waiting for heavy equipment to be moved off the runway.² The first tactical missions flown from Shemya were against Kiska on August 14, 1943, by the 344th Fighter Squadron and 21st Bombardment Squadron.³

On March 16, 1944, one of the longest overwater flights of the war left from Shemya and its mission was to take pictures of Onnekotan and to bomb this island, located southwest of Paramushiru.

¹ Samuel Eliot Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshals: June 1942 - April 1944 (Vol. VII of History of United States Naval Operations in World War II. 15 vols.; Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951), pp. 58-59.

² "11th Air Force War Activities Continued," p. 284.

³ "Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," p. 21.

This was the deepest penetration as of that date made into the Japanese homeland since the Doolittle-Halsey raid on Tokyo in April 1942.⁴ Over one year later, on May 10, 1945, one of the longest reconnaissance missions departed Shemya. Twelve B-24 aircraft of the 404th Bombardment Squadron (H), with an objective of Paramushiru, one the Kuril group of islands, divided into two groups of six each upon arrival over the target. One group photographed the western section while the other photographed the eastern section, and a total of over 1,300 negatives were taken. Personnel of the First Photo Flight (L) developed them, and made 8,000 prints in less than forty-eight hours.⁵

The next day the most successful bombing raid in the history of the 404th took place. A twelve-plane flight, led by Captain Robert Wechman and Lieutenant Charles Weniger, found a clear sky and a shipping aisle. Several direct hits were scored on a destroyer escort and much damage was done to the harbor of Katsoka Naval Base.⁶

Another one of the longest overwater combat missions flown anywhere in the world until then took place on June 19, 1945. Lieutenants David Long and Paul Chinhaenbeard, of the 404th, flew 2,700 miles on a photo reconnaissance mission over the island of Uruppu in the Kuriles. They were aloft 15 hours and 30 minutes.⁷

From January to August 1945 a total of 393 tons of bombs was dropped by the 404th. Of this tonnage, 56.3 per cent were by planes utilizing the airborne radar system. May and June were the busiest months of the year with approximately eighty-eight tons being dropped. The primary targets were Katakaka Naval Base on the island of Shimishiru. In addition, in the Kuriles, Paramushiru and Shinush were attacked; the military and naval installations, along with the canneries which furnished much of Japan's food, were the priority targets on these islands.⁸ A complete

⁴ "Histories of Shemya: March 1944," p. 3.

⁵ "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," pp. 3-4.

⁶ "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941 -1946," p. 5

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 5 and 8.

statistical analysis of the 404th is contained in Table V. There were also some bright spots in the 404th history. The ground forces had a laugh on the Air Corps when a submarine was spotted and reported sunk. A dead whale was found in the vicinity a few hours later.⁹

The first flight of P-40's arrived on July 23, 1943, and ten P-38 aircraft of the 54th Fighter Squadron, 343rd Fighter Group, arrived on August 10 from Amchitka, Alaska.¹⁰ After the fall of Attu, they were mainly involved in raids on Kiska, protection for the island, and standing alert for air defense. After a long period of no-combat action, the 343rd pilots again had a chance to test their aim with bullets from P-38's. The Japanese had planned to attack the United States with long range balloons loaded with bombs. Twelve of these were sighted over the Aleutians, on April 13, 1945, and nine of them were downed by the 343rd.¹¹ Once again, a complete statistical analysis of the 343rd Fighter Squadron is contained in Table VI.

The 343rd did have the distinction of appearing again and again in the Daily Diary of Base Operations. On April 30, 1945, the diary stated that:

The month was ended up in true style--another accident. A P-38, piloted by Lt. Showler, had one engine catch fire and came in for an emergency landing on Charlie runway. As the plane neared the runway the other engine also conked out. The aircraft made a belly landing and the pilot was uninjured.

The following quote appears on March 1, 1945:

The month was started out in great shape with a P-38 accident. Lt. Showler who was on a local flight had trouble with his right engine which caught fire. The pilot feathered the propeller of that engine and prepared for an emergency landing on runway ten, but before the pilot could lower the landing gear the engine also cut out and the aircraft was forced to land on its belly. The

⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰ "History of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944," pp. 20-21.

¹¹ "Shemya History: The Black Pearl: 1941-1946," pp. 5-6.

preliminary investigation revealed that an extremely heavy backfire was the cause of the left engine failure. The pilot, luckily, was uninjured.

Both these combat organizations received direct benefit from the efforts of Major George M. Hoster, Special Services Officer of the 11th Air Force. After receiving the approval of higher headquarters and priority boards, the Major was successful in obtaining the financial assistance of the American Red Cross and other organizations like the "Jump Off Club." Two complete sets of alert hut furniture and equipment were bought in June 1944, and arrived on Shemya in July. These packages included the following items: snack bar, showers, laboratory, pool tables, gymnasium, movie projector, bar, glassware, silverware, lamps, hot plates, mixers, chairs, tables and radios. The first hut was given to the 404th while the second one was assigned to the 344th Fighter Squadron. In addition, the Major also obtained red leather chairs, davenports, tables, chairs, radios, etc. for the enlisted men's day rooms.¹²

The base flying safety and training programs were constantly improved. Besides the Bartow Lighting and Approach Systems, a "YM" Beacon Radar, which was an aerial navigation aid, was installed on May 22, 1944. All crews received training on "BABS" or "Blind Approach Beacon System."¹³ The same month saw the installation of teletalk equipment. This system connected the control tower, operations, alert crew area, weather and AACS. The installation of a teletype circuit to Attu through the AACS, provided better communications and permitted relay of weather information.¹⁴ Also, 550 feet of cable was laid for a ceiling light projector. Authorization was received to cut red tape and send messages on weather to Attu without any classification. In the words of the Daily Diary of Base Weather, this system was "Very important for tactical purposes."¹⁵

In August 1944, a bombing and gunnery range was established at the northeast tip of Agattu Island, under the direct control

¹² "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," pp. 14-15.

¹³ "Histories of Shemya: May 1944," p. 2.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ "Daily Diary of Base Weather, 26 May 1944."

of the Commanding General, 11th Air Force. An area within 3,500 yards of Krugloi Point was declared a danger area.¹⁶ The aircraft machine guns, the second major part of the weapon system, were able to be tested on the ground beginning in April 1945, when two ranges were built that enabled the aircraft crew to site in and fire its guns without flying. These ranges were located on taxiways "J" and "G", adjacent to runways "B" and "C".¹⁷

Also during this month the installation of the Ground Control Approach System was completed on the main runway. This system proved to be exceedingly valuable in helping pilots land during blind flying conditions.¹⁸ This equipment supplemented the Aerophare, which began service on July 16, 1944. The Aerophare system was located 3,600 feet off the east end of the main runway and transmitted the identification signal "U" on a frequency of 201 Kilocycles.¹⁹

Three specially equipped B-17G aircraft were transferred to Shemya in June 1945, and they arrived in July after their crews had completed Instrument Training School at APO 942, Elmendorf Army Air Force Base, Anchorage, Alaska. They were the latest in sea-rescue aircraft, and proved to be of great value in insuring maximum safety of the aircrews in the Aleutian Theater. Each aircraft was equipped with a twenty-seven foot wooden boat, which was dropped by three forty-eight foot parachutes. Each one of these boats had two inboard motors, a sail, and various types of emergency rations and supplies.²⁰ This aircraft supplemented the Army version of a Navy PBY, an OA-10, that had arrived on Shemya the year before and was manned by three officers and five enlisted men.²¹ Besides rescue, the aircraft was used to drop

¹⁶ "Histories of Shemya: August 1944," p. 6.

¹⁷ "Histories of Shemya: April 1945," p. 3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁹ "Histories of Shemya: July 1944," p. 4.

²⁰ "Histories of Shemya: June 1945," p. 7. Note: Both Elmendorf Army Air Force Base and Fort Richardson used same APO.

²¹ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 3.

supplies at Buldir, a weather detachment outpost.²² The final area of crew training was the placing of an old salvaged B-24 fuselage in one of the many lakes. This was used for training aircrews in proper ditching procedures.²³

Much excitement occurred when the first B-29 aircraft landed at Shemya on May 11, 1945. This aircraft was assigned to the Cold Weather Test Facility at Ladd Field and came down the Aleutian Chain on a "morale flight." The giant Superfortress landed at 10:27, five minutes before it was scheduled. On a cloudless day, the B-29 and its escort of six P-38's made a picturesque sight as they buzzed the field. The pilot later said that he was "doing a cool 310 miles per hour." A "smoother" landing could not have been made, and the aircraft used only 5,000 feet of runway. The B-29 remained overnight and left on May 12, 1945.²⁴

Other B-29's were not seen until September 16, 1945, when four of them landed after a non-stop flight from Iwo Jima in the Central Pacific. Their mission was to act as one of a series of rescue planes that were posted along a route between Mizutani Airfield on Hokkaido and Washington, D.C. An attempt was made to fly a B-29 non-stop, but it fell short of its goal and on September 20, 1945, landed in Chicago to refuel. Bad weather and strong head winds prevented the giant bomber from setting this record.²⁵

In October 1945, an attempt at flying the same distance was planned, and two B-29's landed on Shemya from Tinian to act once again as sea rescue planes. On November 2, 1945, they picked up the distance flight of B-29's and escorted them as far as St. George Island in the Pribilof Group. On November 6, 1945, the Superfortresses returned to their home base.²⁶

²² "Daily Diary of Base Operations, 31 January 1945."

²³ "Daily Diary of Base Engineering, 3 August 1945."

²⁴ "Histories of Shemya: May 1945," pp. 2-3; "Daily Diary Operations, 11 May 1945."

²⁵ "Daily Diary of Base Operations, 20 September 1945, "Histories of Shemya: September 1945," p. 2.

²⁶ "Histories of Shemya: November 1945," p. 2.

The final entry from the Daily Diary of Base Operations of March 24, 1945, shows that not all was work. "Lt. Vorhee's handlebar mustache is coming along nicely--he's been coaxing it along for months now. All he needs now is a tandem, a striped jersey and a lunch basket."

On May 20, 1944, the 2nd Photo Charting Squadron arrived on Shemya for temporary duty. This unit, with its fourteen officers and fifty enlisted men, flew classified missions over enemy territory. On September 27, they departed the Alaskan Department for their home station of Buckley Field, Colorado.

The month after the arrival of the 2nd Photo Charting Squadron, the first civilian piloted planes landed on Shemya. They flew for Northwest Airlines under an Army contract with the Air Transport Command.²⁸

Shemya was one of numerous bases utilized by the Russian pilots under the lend-lease program. From September 1942 to August 1945, 7,983 aircraft were transferred through the Alaskan theater to Russia. The majority of these aircraft were A-20's, B-25's, P-38's, P-63's and C-47's.²⁹

The only other flying accomplished on Shemya other than with assigned aircraft was that of the Navy. In June 1943, construction of a temporary facility was begun by a Naval Construction Battalion to accommodate one squadron of patrol planes. Lieutenant Commander Ben F. Hardin, USNR, arrived on June 28, 1943, and the following day the facility was commissioned. This

²⁷ "Daily Diary of Base Personnel, 20 May 1944,"; "Histories of Shemya: September 1944," p. 8.

²⁸ "Histories of Shemya: June 1944," p. 4.

²⁹ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate (eds), Services Around the World. (Vol. VII of The Army Air Forces in World War II. 7 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 159 and 165.

construction battalion remained until August 31, 1943, when it completed the construction and returned to Adak.³⁰ On July 25, 1945, thirteen more Navy Privateer aircraft arrived.³¹

³⁰ “Official History of the Alaskan Department: June 1940 to June 1944,” p. 435; “Histories of Shemya: May 1943 to February 1944,” p. 20.

³¹ “Daily Diary of Base Operation, 25 July 1945.”

CONCLUSION

From a military point of view, Shemya was important for various reasons. It provided a base for offensive operations against the Kuriles, and was utilized as a transit base by Russian pilots flying planes and material under the Lend Lease program. In addition, it provided weather stations for the U. S. Army and Navy. Finally, it denied the Japanese the following: a base for attacks against the United States; easy access to excellent fishing areas, thus depriving Japan of badly needed food; freedom of naval movement in the Northern Pacific; and finally, Japanese troops were committed to watching Shemya against a possible thrust by the United States from the Aleutians.

Of great significance were the engineering and logistical problems that were encountered and the ways in which they were overcome. The procedure of clearing Aleutian tundra, along with positioning and constructing facilities to counteract best the severe Aleutian weather were the foundations of the vast construction program that took place in the early 1950's with the development of the Alaskan DEW (Distant Early Warning) System. This radar complex extended down the Aleutian Chain and is still in existence today. Building materials were non-existent in Alaska in 1943, and all supplies had to be imported from the United States. This necessitated exacting planning to insure no wasting of war critical material and at the same time make certain that sufficient materials were available to meet the war objective of the base. When the priorities of the other major war theaters are considered, a realization of the truly outstanding efforts of the Eleventh Air Force planners and Shemya personnel become evident.

The conquest over the severe weather conditions is noteworthy. Extreme cold, mud and the constant fog were met and conquered. The environmental condition led to the development of special flying techniques, and the pilots' conquest over the weather is now legendary. The old Army Air Corps saying of "Never take a chance" was changed to "Never miss a break." In addition, having an en route station at Shemya led to the utilization of the now-famous "Great Circle Route" by Super Constellations after the war.

At the war's end, General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, Air Force Chief of Staff announced the abandonment of Shemya except for a

stand-by force. The Korean conflict brought extensive use by the Military Air Transport Service (MATs) for the logistical support of Korea and Japan. Its strategic location drastically shortened the air route to the orient.

In 1955, Shemya was leased to Northwest Orient Airline. This company operated the field until 1958, when the Air Force reclaimed the island and established an Air Force Station. Its mission continued to expand with the Cold War, and in 1968, due to the Viet Nam conflict and increased threat from Red China, it became again an Air Force Base. Today it supports Army, Navy and Air Force activities, with most of its mission classified as Secret.

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APPENDIX

ORIGINAL STYLE

The following quotations are included as an example of the humor and writing techniques that appeared throughout all the original source material used in this thesis. It would be a great injustice to those times not to record this writing style.

Air Corps Supply started off in a tent. At first this was adequate, though inconvenient. It served primarily as an exchange center. Parts to Engineering, and parts from Engineering. Incoming supplies from depots were negligible. Most of its stock consisted of parts reclaimed from cracked ships that had managed to make it back to the base before collapsing. Badly needed parts that could not be locally furnished were flown in by air and this became another function of Supply located in another tent, Air Transport. Later shipments of Air Corps supplies did not assume prominence until later, and then periodically. They became overwhelming. Belly tanks, for instance, were an item that left their mark, had words and a bad taste in the mouths of those concerned. They came flooding in, more belly tanks than had ever been seen and no place to store them. Details were called out to pile them here and pile them there wherever they were put they got in tile way or something else and had to be moved again. So outstanding did these articles become in the minds of tile base personnel that the Air Corps Supply officer wound up with the nickname of "Belly-tank" Elliott. Possibly there was some slight physical resemblance as well. Ringlet, "History of tile Army Air Base, Adak, Alaska," p. 37.

Six pyramidal tents at one end of the runway made up the hospital. Every time that aircraft either took off or landed the hospital almost blew down. The floors were only tile familiar dirt ones; the tents were heated by coal stoves. When the patients were sent to this medical station, they were told to bring their gas masks with them. The men complained about it, not knowing that instead of using them in case of gas attack, they would wear them daily in defense against the hospital firemen. - Gas Masks Were Handy Gadgets - The fireman would make his first round early in the morning, and, with the banging of the

coal buckets and the clanking of coal oil cans, have all the patients awake and wide-eyed in short order. The fire always went out during the night, and the keeper of the coal began all over each morning. He would shake the stove vigorously, getting a few ashes for his bucket but the majority of them into sufficiently small particles that could float in the air. Then he would fill the stove with coal and douse it with several dripping cupfuls of coal oil. As there was no wood for kindling, he would set fire to pieces of paper and throw them around the coal. The stove would begin to belch out smoke, and the fireman, pleased at the fine results, would walk away from the ruins, leaving the convalescing patients to their own amusements, of which they had one, the gas mask. "History of the Eleventh Fighter Squadron; January 1941 to 31 December 1943," p. 36.

COPY

THE ALEUTIAN SEMINARY

APO 729

Major Aubrey C. Halsell
Chaplain Army Air Forces
Founder & President

"War brings everything" certainly is true. But perhaps one of the results of war which one would least expect and need most would be a seminary. Yes a school of the prophets in the true sense. Never did I dream when I was ordered by the War Dept. to duty on this desolate, dreary, and distant island that God had planned here for a school of preachers.

Soon after my arrival there was discovered a young man who was stationed here in the hospital, Cpl. Thos. Mitchell of Louisville, Ky. who felt called to the ministry. Thos. grew up under the shadows of the great Baptist Seminary, located at Louisville, knew the faculty and many former students and had received his college degree from the University of Louisville before his entry into the army. At the close of the war he plans to enter the Louisville Seminary. The next student was sent by God and the army all the way from Medford, Mass. - Cpl. Abbott Whitmarsh who had prepared himself at Gordon College of Theology and Missions and now anticipates the hour of his seminary work, probably at the Louisville Seminary.

Mysterious as it may seem the Lord sent, through military channels, a Sgt. Grover Taylor all the way from Texarkana, Ark. and my name was given to him to seek out immediately after his arrival. This fellow statesman enrolled as our third student since God had called him into the Baptist ministry. Grover plans to enter Ouachita College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas after the war.

Through various contacts with those on sick call a medical attendant was met. Cpl. Aaron Spinks, this fine Christian leader, attended one of our services and acknowledged his call to the Baptist ministry. Aaron will enter Mercer University of Georgia following his army discharge. The fifth member of our student body is Sgt. Columbus Duvall of Louisville, Ky. This young man has no distinct denominational connections; however he was converted in the services of the Church of God. The future schooling has not as yet been fully decided upon - except that Columbus will be in college somewhere after the armistice.

Each one of these men have preached to their fellow soldiers and several have directed many services. Bible discussions, pastoral problems, theology, Christian ethics, psychology, church polity, Christian education, church finance, evangelism, and missions are among the subjects taught and discussed. Souls have been saved, lives have been re-dedicated and much Christian joy has resulted from this God-ordained fellowship which we have chosen to call the Aleutian Seminary.

God has now provided a camp of civilian men where these ministerial students can serve. Two services weekly offer great thrills to the civilians, experience fox- the boys, and souls for His Kingdom. Only Eternity will reveal the full fruits.

My permanent address is 604 Garland Avenue, Hot Springs, Arkansas, phone 3282 M, for those desiring further information about these men and their ministry.

COPY

HQ XI AIR FORCE SERVICE COMMAND
APO #942, Seattle, Washington

May 26, 1943

SUBJECT: Movement of Troops

TO: Commanding Officer, 400th Base Headquarters and Air Base Squadron, APO #944,
Seattle, Washington

1. Pursuant to authority contained in First Indorsement to Secret Letter, Hq, XI AFSC, to Commanding General, Alaska Defense Command, dated Mar 24, 1943, Subject: Authority to Issue Movement Orders, the following named organization will proceed in the manner and with the equipment as shown and at strengths indicated from and to stations named, via U. S. Army Transport and/or commercial vessel for permanent change of station:

a. 400th Base Hq & AB Sq, Less Detachments "A" & "B":

<u>SHIPMENT NO.</u>	<u>STRENGTH</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>
7888-A	T/O Strength, less strength of detachments "A" and "B" and pertinent personnel of other arms and services as specifically designated by this Headquarters.	Fort Randall	Voluble

b. Detachment "A":

<u>SHIPMENT NO.</u>	<u>STRENGTH</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>
7888-B	(1) Total of four (4) off. and fifty (50) men, Air Corps, one (1) off. and seven (7) men, Medical.	400 th Base Hq & AB Sq Ft Randall	Jackboot via Adak Air Base for staging.

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|
| (2) Total of associated arms and services as follows:
CWS, 1 Off, 5 men; Ord,
1 Off, 10 men; QM, 5 men;
Signal, 1 Off, 5 men. | 372 nd
Serv. Sq
Adak | Jackboot |
|--|---------------------------------------|----------|

c. Detachment "B":

<u>SHIPMENT</u> <u>NO.</u>	<u>STRENGTH</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>TO</u>
7888-C	(1) Total of four (4) Off and fifty (50) men, Air Corps; one (1) Off and seven (7) men, Medical.	400th Base Hq & AB Sq Ft Randall	Jackboot, via Adak Air Base for staging.
	(2) Total of associated arms and services as follows: CWS, 1 Off, 5 men; Ord, 1 Off, 10 men; QM, 5 men; Signal, 1 Off, 5 men.	372 nd Serv. Sq Adak	Jackboot

2. Only Personal and Light TBA Equipment will be taken on this movement by the 400th Base Hq & AB Sq. Housekeeping" equipment will include tentage and kitchen equipment for 350 men at each detachment airdrome. Heavy TBA equipment, motor vehicles and other OEL equipment is being procured by this Headquarters from other sources and furnished directly to new stations. A list of this equipment will be furnished to the organization as soon as completed.

3. The Personnel of Detachments "A" and "B" will be selected and balanced so far as practicable, as to qualifications, rank and grades by the Organization Commander.

4. In connection with this Movement, the following information is furnished the Organization Commander:

a. The 400th Base Hq & AB Sq will be replaced at Cold Bay by the 398th Base Hq & AB Sq (rs) now located at Nome. The arrival of the replacement unit at Cold Bay will precede, as far as possible, the date of departure of the 400th Base Hq & AB Sq, less detachments "A" and "B".

b. The departure of detachments "A" and "B" from Cold Bay for staging at Adak, in accordance with the further instructions contained in this order, will precede date of departure, of the remainder of the 400th Base Hq & AB Sq.

c. Personnel for Weather Detachments and Communications Detachments will be provided for by this Headquarters. Associated Services mentioned in Paragraph 1 b (2) and 1 c (2) will be provided for from personnel now attached to 372nd Service Squadron staging at Adak.

5. In Further Preparation for this Movement, the following will be necessary:

a. The preparation of a detailed logistical plan covering both the movement of personnel of above organization and detachments, to include light TBA equipment and personal equipment. This plan when prepared will be furnished without delay directly to the Transportation Officer, XI AFSC, who is charged with arranging for the transportation.

6. The Transportation Officer of the XI AFSC will inform the Commanding Officer of the 400th Base Hq & AB Sq of dates of availability of water transportation, of loading requirements thereof, and will otherwise comply with pertinent and applicable instructions contained in AR Series No. 55.

7. Supplies and Equipment, less heavy TBA or organizational equipment, provided for and as listed in Circulars Nos. 3, 20, 41, and 52, current series, Hq. ADC, and Circular No. 8, Hq. Eleventh AF, May 21, 1943, except in the matter of rations, will accompany the organization. Rations will be as follows:

- 2 days "C" rations (to be carried in rucksack)
- 1 days "D" rations (to be carried in rucksack)
- 90 days "B" rations (to be shipped with organization and detachment property)
- 5 days "C" rations (to be shipped with organization and detachment property)
- 2 days "D" rations (to be shipped with organization and detachment property)

8. The Arming of the 400th Base Hq & AB Sq will be in accordance with TBA No. 1, dated July, 1942.

9. The Senior Officer Accompanying Each Movement of Troops aboard ship is designated as the Commanding Officer of Troops, in event that no regular Commanding Officer of Troops has been previously designated.

10. Reports of Change, Necessary reports of change will be forwarded by organization and detachment commanders concerned to Machine Records Unit Fort Lewis, Washington, and to the 99th Machine Records Unit, Fort Richardson, Alaska, through Post Commander by Base Commanders concerned, upon departure and arrival of units.

11. Enlisted Men will be Limited to Individual Equipment and to two (2) barrack bags marked properly "A" and "B" respectively. (For proper marking of barrack bags see AR 850-5). Barrack Bag "A" will travel with the unit, preferably in the hands of the owner. Barrack Bag "B" will not be accessible during the voyage. Enlisted men will not take trunk lockers. Comforters should be packed in the "A" Bag.

12. Secrecy:

a. All officers involved in this movement will be cautioned that they are personally responsible that information concerning the movement is not discussed with or allowed to reach persons whose duties do not require a specific knowledge of the movement.

b. The shipping numbers, in lieu of the unit designation, will be used on all Organizational, detachment and individual property and in all conversations and correspondence concerning the movement. Shipping numbers will be furnished separately as soon as assigned.

13. Removal of Insignia and Other Identifying Marks:

a. The organization commander will cause to be removed or effectively obliterated before departure all group, regimental, separate battalion, squadron, or company and similar unit organizational designations, markings, insignia, badges, etc., (including shoulder patches) from all classes of individual and organizational uniforms, clothing, baggage, property, and equipment. Painting over of designations of insignia is not effectual obliteration.

b. Private diaries and other personal memoranda will be disposed of prior to departure from station as provided for in Circular No. 42, Hq., ADC, March 8, 1943.

14. All officers and warrant officers will have in their possession an "Identification Card" (WD AGO Form 65-1) completed. These cards will not contain the military designation of the unit or make any reference to the organization of the person who countersigned the card.

15. Prior to Departure, all enlisted men will have in their possession WD AGO Form 28 (Soldiers Individual Pay Record) currently completed.

16. Pertinent Provisions of Bulletin No. 48, Hq., ADC, August 14, 1942, as amended by Bulletin No. 72, Hq., ADC, Nov. 8, 1942, will be complied with.

17. In Further Preparing the Above Unit for Movement, Commanding Officer concerned will be guided by War Department document dated, February 1, 1943, titled; Preparation for Overseas Movement, File AG, 370.5 (1-16-43), and Instruction, Hq., Eleventh Air Force, March 12, 1943, titled: Uniform Procedure for Organization Preparing for Movement.

18. As Provided For in WD AGO Memorandum W 615-24-43, dated February 23, 1943, no enlisted man of the above unit, who has applied for discharge under the provisions of Section II, Circular No. 39, WD, 1943, pertaining to the discharge of men thirty-eight (38) years of age or over, will accompany this movement. Arrange to place such personnel on detached service with Hq & Hq Squadron, XI AFSC, prior to departure from station of embarkation.

19. All Personnel of the Above Organization will be immunized against the following diseases: smallpox, typhoid, tetanus, and typhus and will otherwise be medically processed as required in Memorandum 25-1, Headquarters, Eleventh Air Force, March 20, 1943.

20. Service Records Pay Cards and other Company administrative and personnel records will be carefully checked and currently completed and will accompany the Headquarters of the organization. Such records should preferably remain in the personal custody of the Senior Officer or Senior Non-commissioned

Officer of the organization or detachment. Upon arrival at destination, necessary records will be turned over to the proper commander for processing in the Unit Personnel Section.

21. Immediately Prior to Embarkation or while en route, organization or detachment commander will arrange to notify the Base Commander at point of debarkation, by radio, of estimated time or arrival of his unit at its destination.

22. Upon Arrival at Destination, organization or detachment commander will notify this Headquarters, by priority radio marked for the attention of A-1, A-3, and AG, stating the following:

- a. Date and hour of departure from last station.
- b. Date and hour of arrival at destination.
- c. Brief summary conditions of units.
- d. Recommendations on any matter requiring immediate action this Headquarters.

23. In Preparing to Embark, the organization and detachment commanders should also insure the following:

- a. That troops are assigned to ship's bunks with assignments beginning with those on the far side from the hatch through which they enter.
- b. That troops place their personal equipment only upon bunks to which assigned.
- c. That since mess aboard ship will be at their own expense and personal checks are unacceptable, officers are advised to arrange for and carry with them sufficient funds to defray their mess expense.

24. Passenger Lists made out in accordance with Paragraph 2, and other instructions contained in AR 55-385 will be prepared by the Commanding Officers of the organization and detachments, listing separately in alphabetical order the officers, non-commissioned officers of first three grades, and personnel of last four grades. Necessary copies of this Passenger List will be delivered to the Superintendent, Army Transport Service, at point of embarkation at least forty-eight (48) hours prior to departure

and one copy each will be forwarded by airmail direct to the Commanding General, Alaska Defense Command, and Troop Locator Section, SPOE, Seattle, Washington. One (1) copy of the Passenger List will be furnished directly to the Adjutant General, XI AFSC, and one (1) copy will be furnished directly to CO 99th Machine Records Unit, Fort Richardson, Als.

25. Mailing Address: The Commanding Officer of this organization will obtain the new APO numbers from the local APO representative and arrange with him for the forwarding of mail to the new APO. All personnel will be advised to notify their correspondents of this change of address. Notice, however, of this change will not be given until shortly before actual movement.

26. Procurement Authority: Procurement Authorities involved in this movement are as follows:

FD 33 P 433-02, 433-03, 433-05, 433-08, A 0425-23.

By command of Brigadier General IGNICO:

L. H. DUNLAP
Colonel, A. C.,
Chief of Staff.

OFFICIAL:

EDGAR T. NOYES,
Colonel, A. C.,
AC of S, A-3.

DISTRIBUTION:

(See following page)

Captain James L. Ross was born and educated at East Rockaway, New York. In 1960, he entered New England College, Henniker, New Hampshire. Originally enrolled in the teacher training program, he later transferred to a liberal arts program majoring in history. In 1963, he graduated cum laude and enlisted in the United States Air Force.

On March 31, 1964, he received his commission as a second lieutenant after completing Officer Training School, Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. He then proceeded to Amarillo Air Force Base, Texas, where he was enrolled in the Basic Supply Officer Course. Upon graduation in June 1964, he was reassigned to Dow Air Force Base, Bangor, Maine.

While stationed at Dow, Lieutenant Ross held four different positions, the last two being field grade officer authorizations. He had the honor of being the only first lieutenant in the Strategic Air Command to fill the lieutenant colonel position of Base Supply Officer. As the BASO at Dow, he had over two hundred and fifty military and civilian personnel assigned to him, over \$2 million of local purchase funds to control, and in excess of \$15 million worth of property in the warehouses. Captain Ross was awarded the Air Force Commendation Medal for his consistent display "of superior professional skill, leadership and initiative in the performance of his duty."

While stationed at Dow, he began a Master of Arts Degree program in history at the University of Maine. At present, Captain Ross serves with Headquarters, Alaskan Air Command in the Directorate of Materiel's Command Equipment Management Office.