

Biddle docks at Port of Anchorage Tuesday to take on fuel and provisions.

'Vacuum cleaner' ship clearing Inlet shoal

Crew members of the Biddle paused in their efforts to dredge one million cubic yards of gravel from a shoal blocking the entrance to the Port of Anchorage Tuesday to welcome members of the community aboard.

Media, military and civic representatives were hosted to a lunch by Capt. Jim Nation and officers who explained the operation of the dredge.

Based in Portland, Ore., the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge arrived off Anchorage Aug. 15 to begin clearing away the shoal, which posed a potentially serious obstacle to shipping traffic.

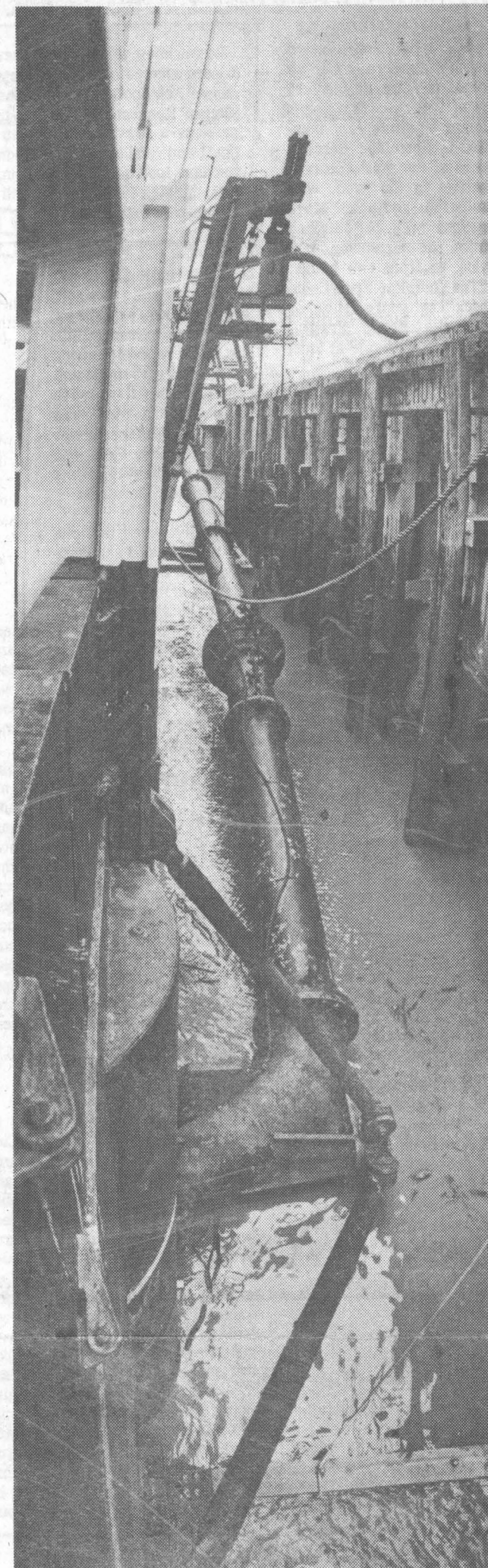
In 20 days the dredge has cleared 600,000 cubic yards of gravel from the shoal and dumped it in deeper water elsewhere in the inlet. Engineers originally expected the ship to take 30 days to dredge one million cubic yards but said the project is ahead of schedule.

The dredge operates like a vacuum cleaner, sucking gravel and silt from the bottom through a long tube extending from the ship's side. The 351-foot long ship, the largest of three dredges operated by the Corps' Portland district, has a capacity of 3,060 cubic yards of fill. Each year it spends about five months maintaining the entrance of the Columbia River, about four months maintaining the entrance to San

Francisco Bay and about two months maintaining other major harbor entrances on the Oregon and Washington coastline.

The shoal blocking the Anchorage port just west of Pt. Campbell was discovered by a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship last summer. It was formed by tidal action in the inlet and was getting bigger each year, and its presence was restricting traffic to periods of high tide.

The Biddle will dredge the area to a depth of 30 feet beneath mean lower low water. The \$1 million project was authorized by Congress and will be paid for out of Corps of Engineer funds.

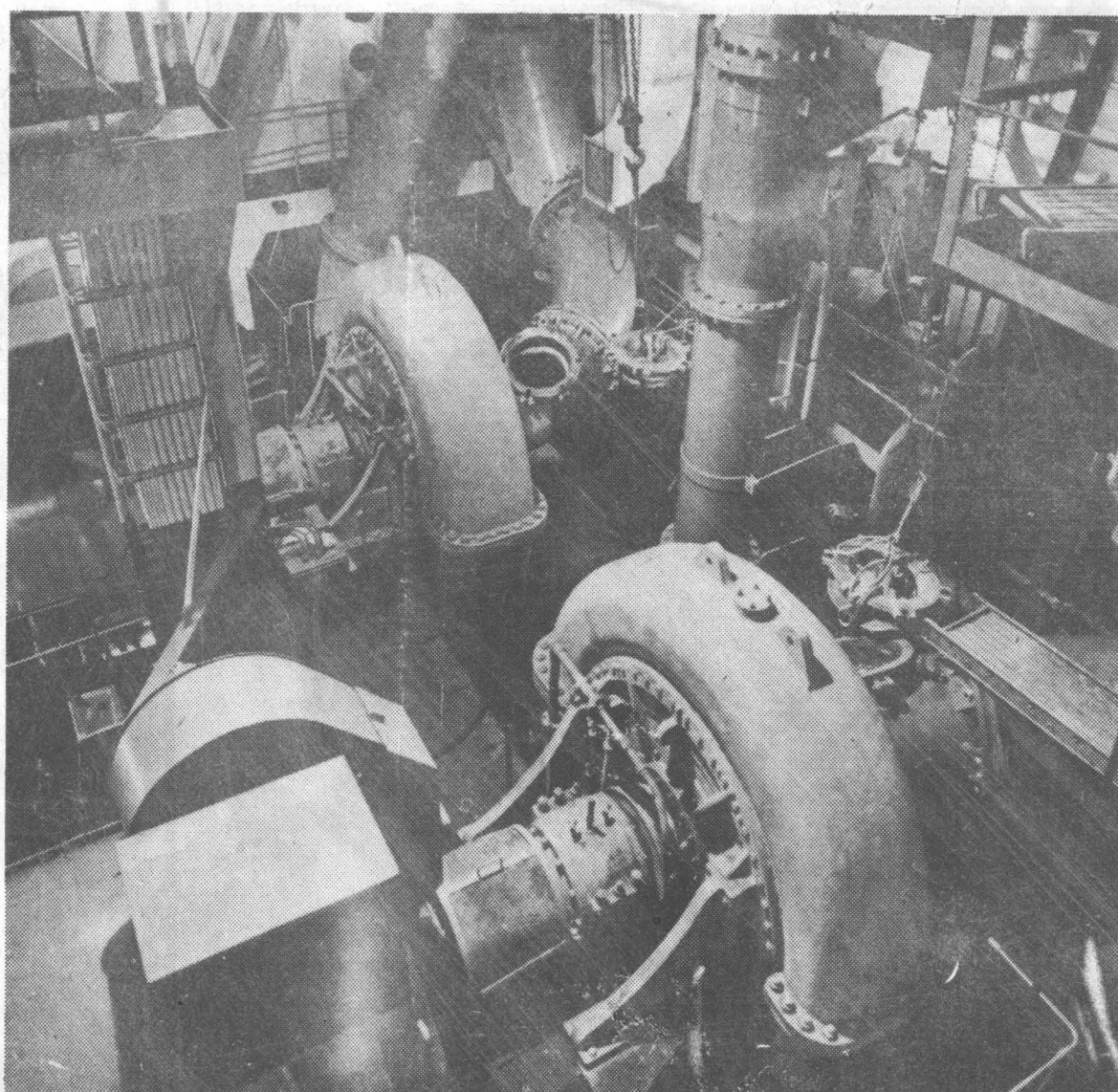


Workman repair drag pipe.

*Daily News Photos
by Neal Menschel*



The drag pipe, capable of reaching 75 feet into Cook Inlet waters to clear shoal.



Two 1150 horsepower motors which power Biddle's drag pipes.