

Dredging ship returns to clean up Cook Inlet



The U.S. Corps of Engineers' hopper dredge Biddle, due in Anchorage tonight, sits at the Anchorage port on an earlier working visit in 1975

by Sean Hanlon
Times Writer

The U.S. Army is sending a dredging ship to Anchorage to clean up a major buildup of debris in Cook Inlet.

The Biddle, which also unclogged channels after the Mount St. Helens eruption, will vacuum a build-up of silt in Cook Inlet that could pose a hazard to shipping this winter, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said Friday.

This is the second dredging operation this year and is needed because of excessive shoaling in the inlet, according to a corps spokesman.

The corps said 750,000 cubic yards need to be dredged this year, compared to the normal 250,000 cubic yards. A second contractor, A.H. Powers, will work with the Biddle until the work is completed, probably in early October.

The Biddle will suck up the silt from the floor of Knik Arm, hold the material in two hopper bins with a total capacity of 3,060 cubic yards, and then dump the debris in deep water.

Although the cause of this buildup is not known for certain, an official with the Port of Anchorage said Friday that it probably has something to do with the great amount of rain which plagued Southcentral Alaska this summer.

The rain eroded the banks of streams which feed the inlet. The streams pushed the silt out to sea and deposited it in the inlet, where it poses a hazard to sea-going vessels. If the material isn't removed before winter, ships entering the Port of Anchorage could become grounded.

The Biddle, which can suck up 50,000 cubic yards of silt a day, left Portland, Ore., on Sept. 15 and is expected to arrive in Anchorage tonight.

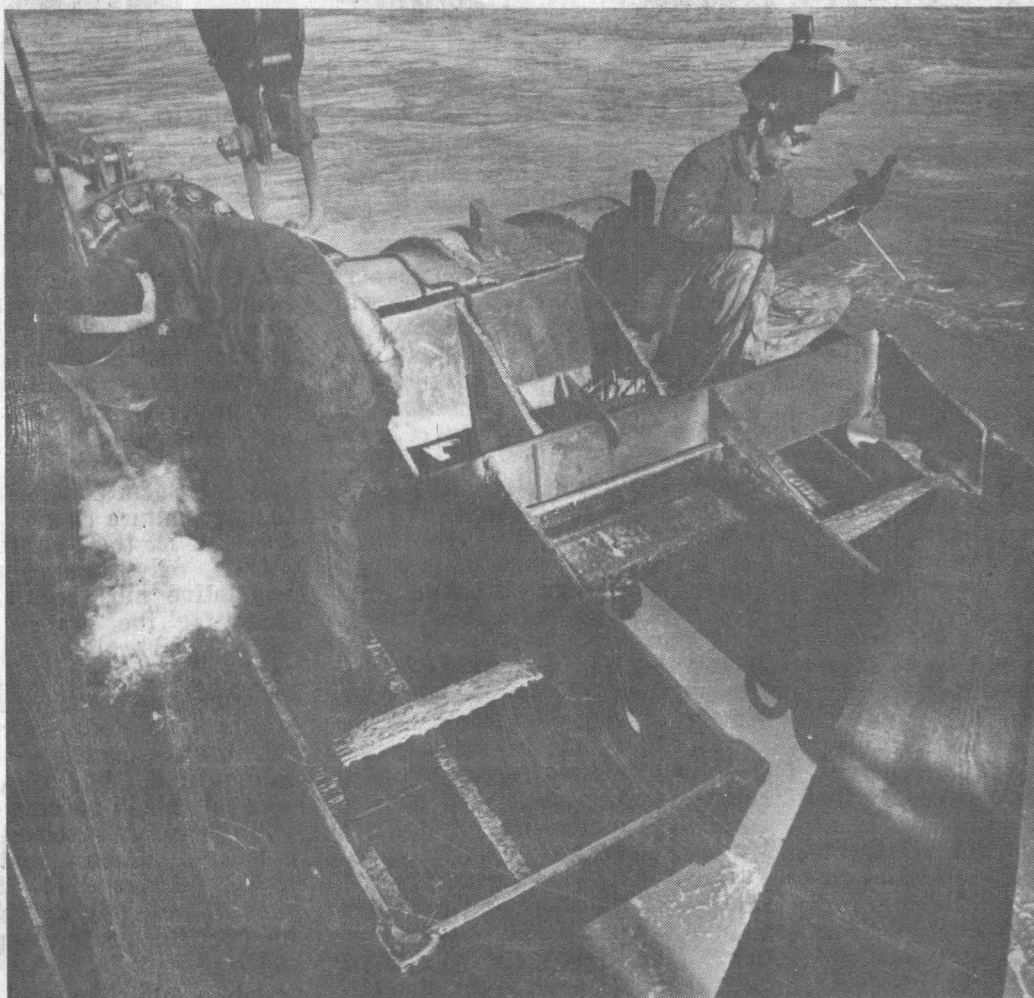
The ship was used extensively in the Columbia River following the eruption of Mount St. Helens, which forced huge amounts of debris into the river channel.

This is the second time the Biddle has been summoned to Anchorage to remove silt from the inlet. In 1975, the dredge vacuumed a million cubic yards of material from a shoal west of Point Woronzof. This project was authorized by Congress to make way for the shipping of material for construction of the trans-Alaska oil pipeline.

The Biddle is the largest of three hopper dredges operated by the Portland District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. It was designed by the Corps and built in 1947. It was named after Major General John Biddle, superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1916-17.

Anchorage Daily News Wednesday, September 23, 1981

Dredge circles endlessly as it sucks silt



Bob "Frenchie" Koskela and Marcy Cave weld rakes onto the drag head.

By ROBERTA GRAHAM
Daily News reporter

Life is a drag for a dredge. Since Monday, the hopper dredge Biddle has been traveling 3,000 feet from one end of the Port of Anchorage to the other, dragging thousands of cubic feet of glacial silt from the Cook Inlet.

One could say it's a thankless job, but that somebody has to do it.

But what remains is that if not for dredging out the silt, docking at the Port of Anchorage would be drudgery for hundreds of mariners.

The Army Corps of Engineers says this summer's heavy rains caused a record amount of glacial silt to filter into the inlet. An estimated 750,000 cubic yards needed to be dredged from the inlet this year instead of the normal 250,000.

Mike Evans, Corps spokesman, said there was more silt present in August than when a private contractor started dredging operations in June. "If we didn't get it out, docking would have been nearly impossible this winter."

The normal inlet depth needed for docking is 35 feet, he said. On Aug. 8, the depth was 28 feet.

To make sure the dredging of the inlet was complete be-

fore winter ice buildup, the Biddle, the largest Army Corps dredge, was called from its base in Portland to help out here.

The dredger works basically like a vacuum cleaner. Two 75-foot dredgers extend from either side of the ship and are dragged along to suck up silt.

The silt is emptied into two hopper bins and when filled, with a total of roughly 3,000 cubic yards, the Biddle travels across the inlet to Knik and dumps its load.

Capt. James Kimokeo said Alaska waters present some new challenges for the crew — a dubious distinction for those responsible for cleaning out the Columbia River after Mount St. Helens erupted.

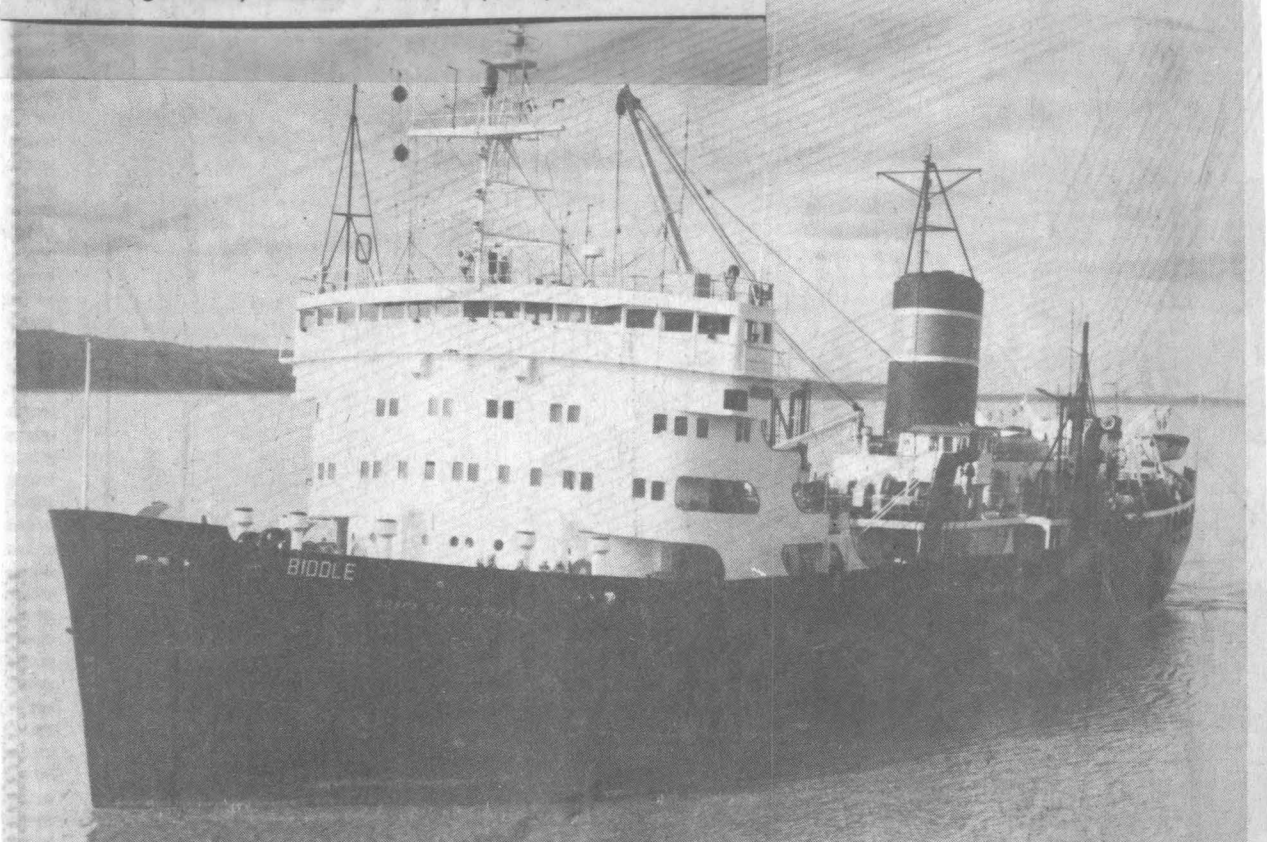
In Alaska, he said, the silt is so fine and so heavy that special rakes had to be welded onto the ship's dredgers.

"Right now, we're only getting between 3,000 and 5,000 cubic yards instead of the normal 50,000 we usually take in a day," he said.

"Sometimes the job gets boring just going in circles all day. But actually, this job is a lot roomier than some we've had in the past," he said.

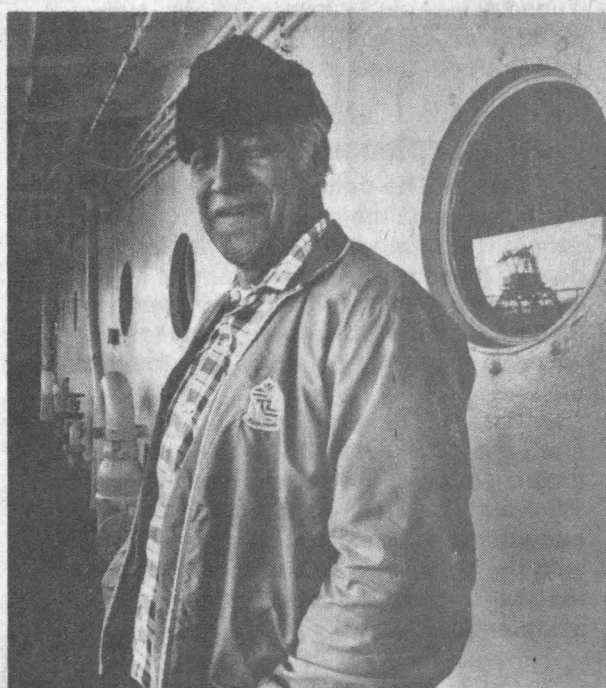
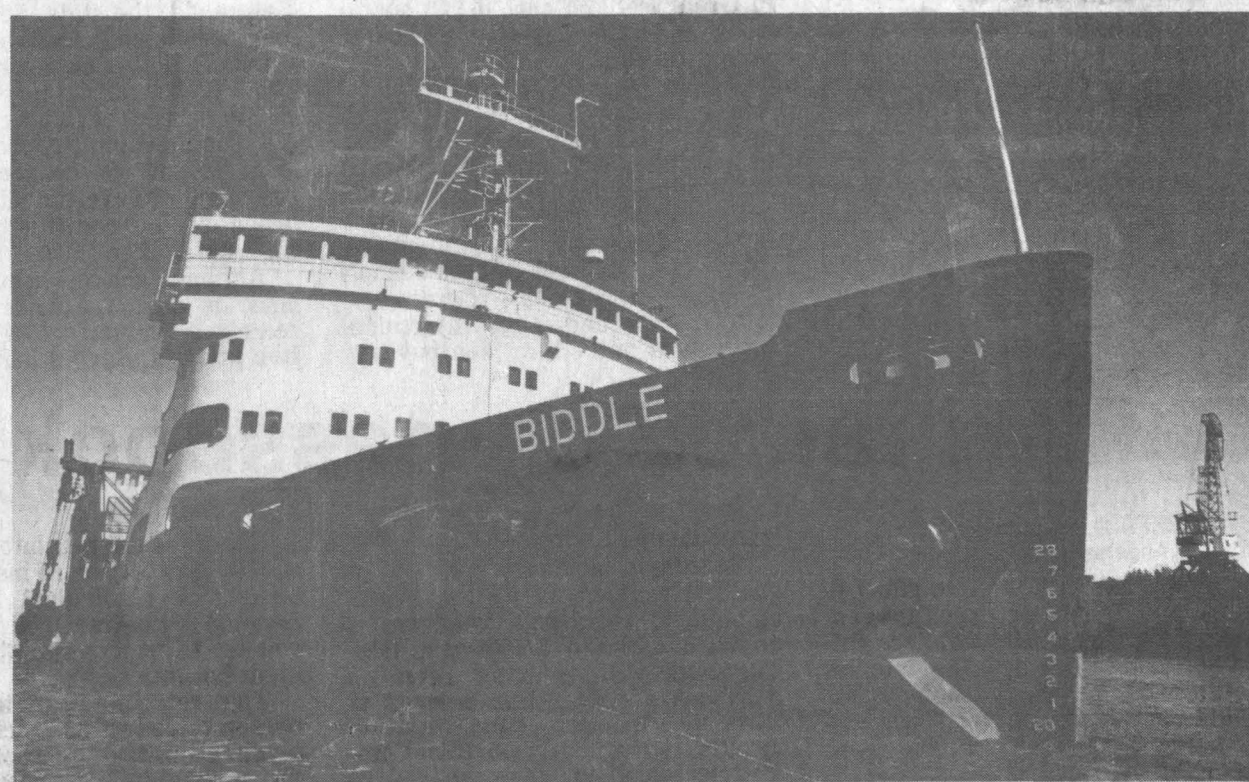
The Biddle is expected to remain dredging in the port until the middle of October.

Anchorage Daily News Saturday, September 19, 1981



Clean-up ship

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dredge, The Biddle, is due in Anchorage from its base in Portland, Ore., this weekend to begin dredging operations in Anchorage's harbor. The Biddle was summoned after the Corps discovered excessive sediment in the harbor, which could cause some larger ships to run aground.



Capt. James Kimokeo and the Biddle, a Corps of Engineers dredging ship.