

4. Guard District Seventeen Aids to Navigation Project

BURTON ISLAND embarked an officer and two civilian riggers from the ECV SEVENTEEN (ecv) on 6 August 1977 at Point Barrow. Materials for the four RACON towers, which had been loaded in Long Beach and Oakland, were checked a final time and a number of pieces prefabricated. Two weeks were allotted for this project. While the actual construction progressed very quickly, poor weather conditions often limited boat and helicopter operations. The project was completed in twelve days.

The basic concept of operations which evolved entailed an initial survey of the site by the ecv representative, followed by continuous helo ferry flights of personnel and cargo. A work party of approximately ten shipboard personnel was found to be optimum. After completion of the tower base and guy wire anchors the tower itself was raised by helicopter. Then personnel and equipment were ferried back to the ship as final work was finished. Logistic details such as food, communications and warm clothing became important on occasion.

A resume' of work on each tower follows:

a. Skull Cliff. Commencing on the morning of 8 August, ferry flights were made and work began on the tower site. Delay resulted when reduced visibility prevented flight operations for raising the tower. Although BURTON ISLAND rode at anchor less than two miles from the tower site, flying was not possible until early 9 August. A fresh party was flown ashore later in the day and the project was completed without further incident.

b. Reindeer Island. After two days of adverse weather and waiting at the Drew Point site, BURTON ISLAND steamed to the most easterly point at Reindeer Island. Visibility less than 1,000 yards precluded the possibility of helicopter flights. Transfer of personnel and cargo in the LCVP was attempted on 12 August; however, extremely shallow water around the island, sea conditions and difficulty of navigation in the fog forced abandonment of this method. Clearing late on the 13th enabled commencement of the project. Construction time was much reduced due to the use of 40-lb shaped charges for excavation of the sand anchor holes.

c. Colville River. BURTON ISLAND anchored off the Colville River delta late in the morning of the 14th, and began construction of the third tower in clear, warm weather. Work proceeded expeditiously, aided by the experience gained on the previous towers. 15-lb shaped charges were tried as a means of speeding up the time-consuming task of drilling in the permafrost, and proved most helpful. Additional explosives were obtained from GLACIER the same day for use on the final project.