

WINTER NIGHT CONTINUED

McMurdo's winter jobs were twofold. One crew bundled packets and pallets for airdrop while the remaining men worked to construct an airstrip on bay ice.

They had to build a 6,000-foot airstrip capable of landing 90-ton wheeled aircraft and they had to have it ready by October 15, 1956 when the first plane was due from New Zealand.

Weekly soundings of the bay-ice depth had been made. When the bay ice reached safe depth tractors began a process of leveling and crews began to flood the strip with sea water to give it a glazed smoothness. This flooding was experimental—and the experiment didn't work. Planners realized as late as January 19 that they were compounding their problems by flooding far, while the ice froze on top, it remained slushy below creating a veritable deathtrap for Navy B51's and Air Force Globemasters.

So, with countless man-hours wasted, the flooded strip was abandoned and every available man was assigned to one of two 12-hour shifts to scrape loose snow off the 12-foot-thick bay ice of what had formerly been classed as an auxiliary airstrip.

Working in minus 50-degree temperatures fanned by almost constant winds, crews could stand but 20 minutes' exposure before they required relief. Surgical face masks permitted men to work up to 56 minutes but they were in short supply.

Just when daylight was in sight—the 225 by 6,000-foot strip scraped bare down to blue sea ice—a blizzard dumped 8 feet of snow onto the strip. But 100,000 man-hours later, the strip was ready for the first plane.

MORALE UP THERE

Throughout the winter night morale remained high, due principally to the hard work schedule and recreational aids.

Every man had an opportunity to talk to Stateside relatives by amateur radio. Movies were shown regularly. Parties at each base gave men a chance to get a new grip on life. Chaplains held regular services.

Medical problems were few: a broken finger or leg here, a case of frostbite there, but almost no colds were treated during the winter after the ships left.

CHAPLAIN JOHN C. CONDT LECTURES TO REGULAR STUDY GROUP IN LIBRARY AT WILLIAMS AIRFOFFAC.

