

WAINWRIGHT SOLDIERS HELP UNALAKLEET

'Everything I Ate Was Eskimo Style - I Never Had Anything Like That Before' One Soldier Remarked



ALL IN THE FAMILY — Some of Unalakleet's children gather in front of E Company's supply tent for a farewell picture. (U.S. Army Photo by SP4 Ken Hamm)



THE OLD — Houses like this were the only shelters the Eskimos had at Unalakleet before the federal government provided materials for new homes. (U.S. Army Photo by SP4 Ken Hamm)



THE NEW — A finished home shows the improvement over the previous housing. (U.S. Army Photo by SP4 Ken Hamm)

FT. WAINWRIGHT, AK. The Army was glad to pitch-in recently when the villagers of Unalakleet asked them for help in finishing their homes. The Eskimo men from the community were off hunting and fishing during the three months of mild summer weather for winter sustenance.

Then women, for the most part, were left at home to complete other village activities. This year, they had to build new homes.

"We were scheduled for Ace Band maneuvers in the area near Unalakleet," said Captain Allen I. Grant of I Company, 49. "So several weeks ago we contacted village officials to see if we could do anything for the town. They suggested that we help construct their homes."

Seventy-five men from I Company laid floor tiles, put in ceilings, erected fire escapes, painted, and placed roofing on 19 homes in this community located on the shore of Norton Sound.

Captain Donald Keller and his assistant, Private First Class Danny Bright, from the Ft. Wainwright Dental Clinic, treated 40 patients while the troops worked on the houses. The men were flown to Unalakleet in three C-130's September 7. They remained until September 12.

The federal program under which these houses were built provided that construction of all homes be concluded before any of them were occupied. The government shipped in the building materials while the natives supplied the manpower.

"With the help we provided," CPT Grant said, "the villagers are much closer to completing their homes. Now, the only thing that remains to be done is the plumbing."

The soldiers were greeted with the customary Eskimo hospitality when they arrived at Unalakleet, and many were invited to eat with the natives.

Sergeant Alfonso Tafuya, who was asked to eat supper by one family, described the food as "altogether different."

"Everything I ate was prepared Eskimo style," SGT Tafuya said, "I never had anything like that before, and all the food was tasty. Their salmon was delicious. I especially enjoyed their seal oil ice cream."

On their time off, many soldiers went fishing on the Unalakleet River. With the aid of villagers, they were guided to the best fishing spots. And none of the soldiers traveling up the silt-laden river were waiting for a warm cup of coffee.

"We were always being waved to the river bank. The Eskimos living upriver had heard what we were doing in Unalakleet and wanted to show us their gratitude," SGT Tafuya said.

While the soldiers were camped in the village, there was an interesting exchange of cultures after duty hours. Once several native children sat mesmerized in First Sergeant George Nishimura's tent.

The first sergeant was admittedly eating C-rations with chopsticks. However, after several lessons on how to make and use chopsticks, the kids were digging into extra C-rations with oriental dexterity.

At another time, Specialist 4 Ismael De la Rosa and Private First Class Jose Gaud taught 15 Eskimo children "La Bamba" and "Pecosa". The kids, for their part, sang native songs to the two children.

"The whole atmosphere was great," Specialist 4 William Alston said. "I'd like to see the more Army civic programs like this. I had a fantastic time helping out. In fact, the kids referred to me as the Black Santa Claus. There was no racial thing, no problems. Just everyone giving each other a hand and being real friendly."



ANOTHER STEP ON THE LADDER — Privates First Class George Spicer and Albert Bergeron finish setting ladder runs on a fire escape. (U.S. Army Photo by SP4 Ken Hamm)