

Dear Pat~

On November 16th I made yet another pilgrimage to the Engine 557 Restoration facility in Wasilla to examine the progress on the restoration of the No.557 U.S. Army steam locomotive. My keen interest in this artifact is due in part to its association with the World War Two history of the Whittier Army Port. The No. 557 S-160 steam locomotive was offloaded at the docks in Whittier in November of 1944. The locomotive played a role in the World War Two events of the battles in the Aleutians and the Lend Lease program benefiting the Russian war effort. It also gave long service with the civilian Alaska Railroad in the waning years of territorial Alaska. Making her way back intact to Alaska after being in Outside storage for 50 years is yet another miracle in the chapters of this vintage engine's life.

So here we are.....this precious historical locomotive has been in the hands of a dedicated, skilled and very talented group of volunteers. They've disassembled this complex artifact down to the last bolt, refurbished, replaced or remade every last element of the locomotive and have painstakingly rebuilt this massive locomotive back to better than new condition. So far they've given 10 years of their individual lives in saving this exciting and rare piece of Alaskan history. Having been involved or aware of restoration projects of historical Alaskan buildings, aircraft, vehicles and boats over the last 45 years, my opinion is that the 557 Project is the greatest restoration effort in Alaska's history. And the fact that the work was accomplished by a handful of Alaska citizen volunteers is all the more amazing

and noteworthy. I had the opportunity to meet with this illustrious group of men and it was an honor. Their work and vision, technical knowhow is almost beyond belief. One can only wonder what brought all these talented men together to render forth this glorious complex artifact of Alaska rail heritage.

The glory of it all will be when someday soon, this 1944 locomotive will come chugging down Alaskan rail tracks belching steam and the haunting '43 sound of her whistle. My thanks to Pat Durand, my friend of many decades for his hosting and tour of the project and his kind introduction of the volunteer restoration crew.