

PROJECT 557

Prepared for The Alaska Railroad Corp

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History of Locomotive 557

Baldwin Locomotive Works builders serial number 70480 was built for the United States Army Transportation Corp (USATC) to become their U.S. No. 3523. The equipment power shortage was acute in Alaska as military preparations were being made for the United States entry into World War II. Twelve of these locomotives were diverted to Alaska and No. 3523 arrived in December 1944 to become Alaska Railroad #557.

Upon arrival the standard USATC design was modified for Alaskan service. Larger compound air compressors were mounted on the front pilot. Steam coils were installed in the cabs for heating. Seasonal snow plows were built.



Ken Reuben was in the Army and at Whittier in 1944-45. He was an electrician in the Engineer Utilities Platoon. The weather was generally miserable and come a day when the sun was shining, Ken would go out and do some photography. Here is 2-8-0 number 577 at the head of a work train on the Whittier waterfront.



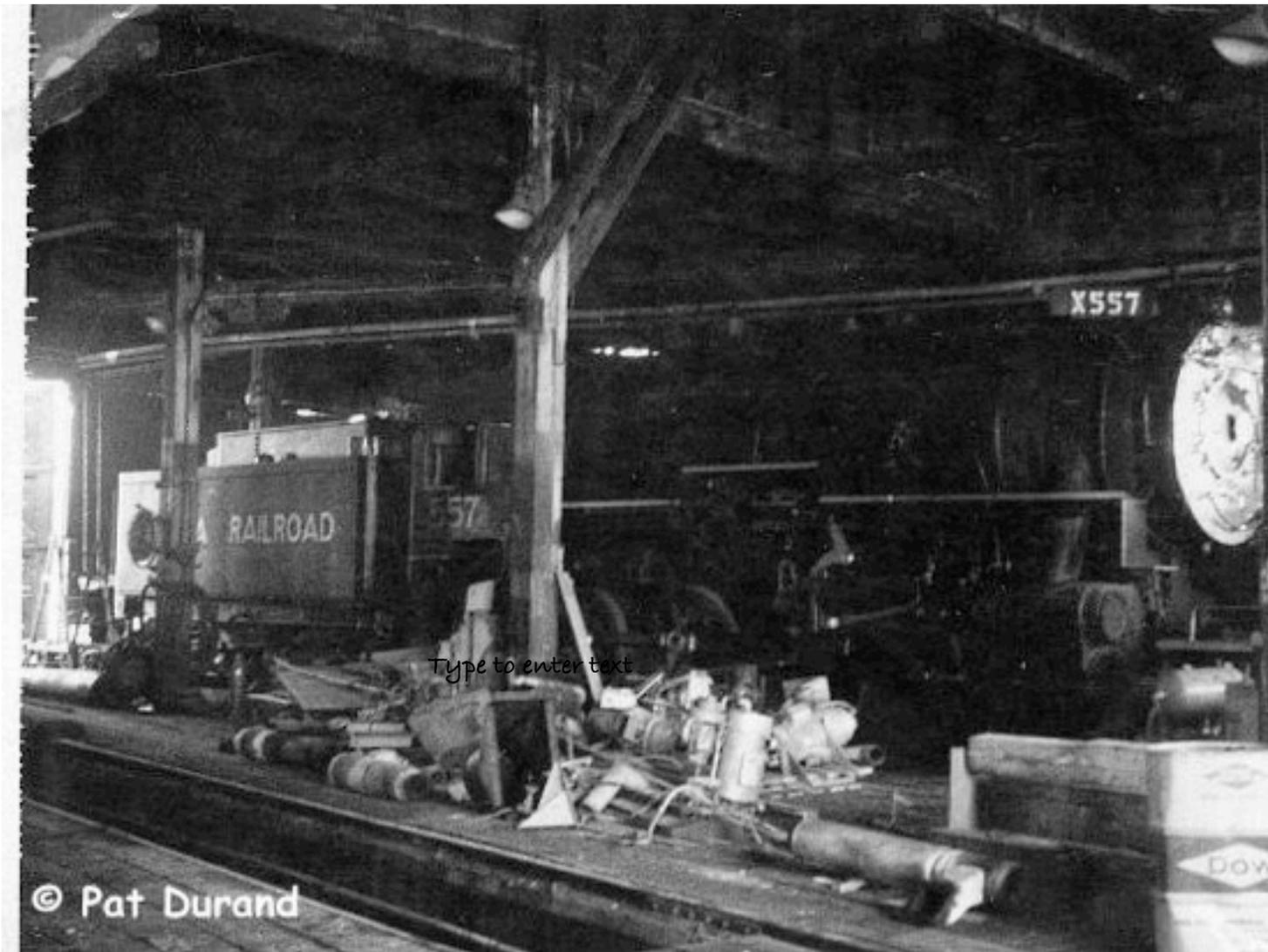
557 is leading up this Seward bound passenger train in 1952 as photographed by James Sava

Alaska Railroad #557 was the last Steam Locomotive in regular service on the railroad. She was kept around to help during high water conditions at Nenana, Alaska where the Tanana and Nenana Rivers regularly flooded the entire town site and the rail yard. Diesel traction motors don't like water and the steamer could easily ford two feet of water over the rails.

557 was converted to oil when the railroad retired their other coal burning steam engines in 1954.

She continued in occasional service for special events such as the annual Fair trains and excursions. The Alaska Railroad post card of the 1957 fair train is a classic.





This is a marginal Polaroid shot but it provides a rare view inside the Anchorage Round house where 557 resided about 1956.

In 1957 the locomotive was being prepared for an excursion when this broadside was take probably by the railroad contract photographer Mr. McClain.



June 13, 1959, Old 557 took sixty-seven members of the California-Nevada Railroad Historical Society on board a special train, Anchorage to Whittier and Return. TAR 891*



In June of 1962 the Tanana River flooded at Nenana and 557 was sent north to shuttle trains through the high water up to the firebox at times. The diesel road power would wait on high ground on both ends while 557 did the work. TAR 915*



As the end of the steam era came to the Alaska Railroad, memories of war time shortages lingered. As a result strategic reserves were part of planning for most organizations.

ARR #561 was under blankets at the edge of the Seward Yard on June 1, 1957.

ARR #554 was still parked near the Anchorage Roundhouse as of February 3, 1957.

Locomotive #556 was under wraps outside the Fairbanks shop.

ARR #557 was tucked into the Whittier engine house as of August. 31 1957.

William A. "Art" Gibson was there and captured them for us on color slides.



John Henderson was an avid photographer of Alaska Railroad equipment and caught this view of 557 about to depart with the Alaska State Fair special.

1964 Monte Holm purchased 557 for scrap. In June of 1965 and it was moved out into the Whittier yard in preparation for shipment. The original USATC Army tender was removed as shown here.





Photo from Anchorage Museum of History and Art BL79.2.6346

June 14, 1965 an oversized tender and Number 557 is loaded aboard the Train ship ALASKA, bound for Everett, Washington.



July of 2001 Alaska Railroad #557 was located at Moses Lake Iron and Metal Co. Where John Combs photographed it during a visit with the owner Monte Holm who was a bit of an NP fan as witnessed by the NP headlight.

As of 2011 the locomotive is still at Moses Lake.