

Amuri Field Construction

Completed in November 1942 for military purposes during World War II in the Pacific

PURPOSE

Jack Sverdrup, an engineer with the St. Louis-based firm of Sverdrup and Parcel, was contracted to find landing sites throughout the Pacific that would enable establishment of a safe route to skirt the west and southern perimeter of the war zone. Aitutaki and Penrhyn were among six Pacific islands chosen to form this vital link.



Airfield construction team from New Zealand Public Works (1942)

CONSTRUCTION

"We didn't build from plans; we just knew what we wanted, how long and how wide, and we just went in there and built them with what we had. We were building coral surface airstrips before the Seabees were even organised, can you believe that? The base course was made up with large hunks of coral which we ran over with tractors until they came down to size and then we topped it with coral sand. Coral has a lot of lime in it and we kept it wet with sea water so it could pack down. We'd wet it and roll it and wet it and roll it again - it got almost like concrete. Our equipment came down from Honolulu by way of tugs and barges - the stuff started moving about six months after war was declared. The New Zealand public works department provided us with skilled labour and engineers. We hired native labour whenever we could. Once the strips were completed we drew as-built plans. Those were the only plans which ever existed."
- De Witt C. Wolfe.

The dimensions of the two landing strips were 6000 feet by 200 feet and 5000 feet by 200 feet. A large dispersal area was cleared adjacent to the south west corner of the airfield.



First plane (B24 Liberator) to land at Aitutaki, 22 November 1942

AIRFIELD USE

During the war not only military aircraft were used to ferry troops and equipment, but private airlines such as Consairways, Pan American Airways and United Airlines, all took part in supplying the Pacific routes. Air traffic was light, averaging about 12 planes per month.

For more information, visit: www.aitutakiww2.com