

History of Fort Babcock

In the 1930s the U.S. War Department developed *Plan Orange* in response to the possibility of war in the Pacific. Alaska was recognized as part of a strategic defense triangle which included Hawaii and Panama. Wartime construction began in Southeast Alaska with the establishment of the Sitka Naval Air Station in 1939. After the bombings of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and Dutch Harbor on June 3 and 4, 1942, military activity and construction in the Sitka area increased substantially. On July 20, 1942, the Sitka Naval Air Station was upgraded to a Naval Operating Base.

The construction of Fort Babcock at Shoals Point, 11 miles west of Sitka, Alaska, began in 1942 (Figure 1). It originally consisted of a temporary battery of two 6-inch Naval guns. This battery was operated by the 266th Coastal Artillery, who referred to it as "Battery Allen" in their 1942 Christmas Dinner Menu. In addition to the 266th Coastal Artillery, Fort Babcock was home to the 22nd Naval Construction Battalion, who were responsible for building the permanent battery, Battery 290, and associated infrastructure. Construction of Battery 290 continued until August 15, 1944, when the Sitka Naval Operating Base was decommissioned due to shifting military occupation further west to the Aleutian Islands to meet the Japanese threat in the Kurile Islands and enemy actions in other theaters.

of war. Battery 290 was never fully operational; it was only 88 % complete at the time of its decommissioning.

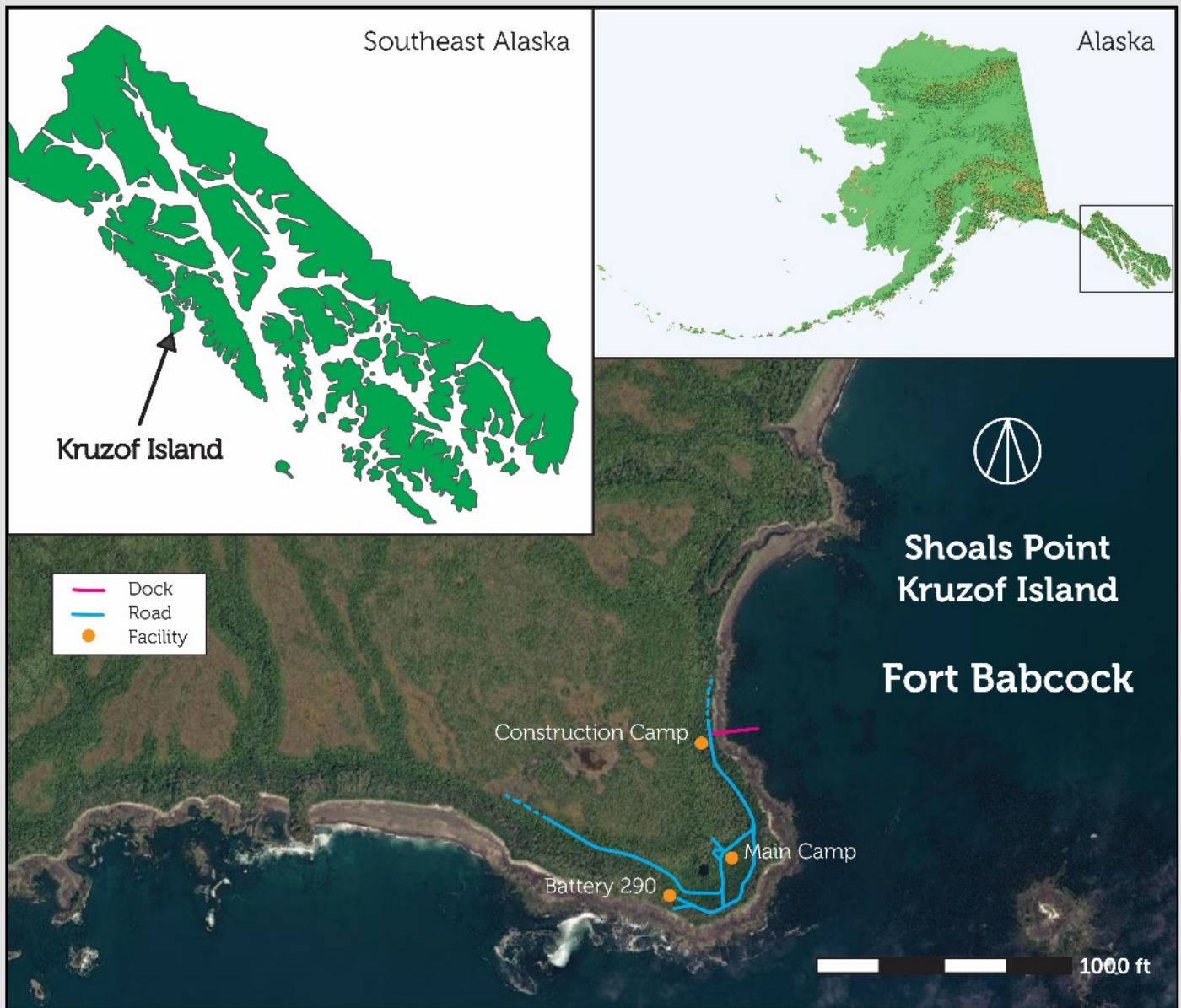


Figure 1. Location of Fort Babcock on Kruzof Island.

During its construction and limited operation, Fort Babcock was separated into three facility areas: a Construction Camp, Main Camp, and Battery 290.

Construction Camp

The Construction Camp was built and inhabited by the 22nd Naval Construction Battalion “Seabees” who were charged with building Battery 290 and its associated infrastructure. The camp was located approximately 1,800 feet northwest of the Main Camp, next to the only marine dock at Fort Babcock. The camp consisted of a combined quarters-

mess hall-latrine, a shed, an office, a motor repair hut, warehouse, ammunition storage, and a command post. A dam and associated pump house were constructed for water supply, and three fuel tanks were located near the dock (Figure 2). Structures consisted of either Quonset huts or Theater-of-Operation wood-frame buildings.

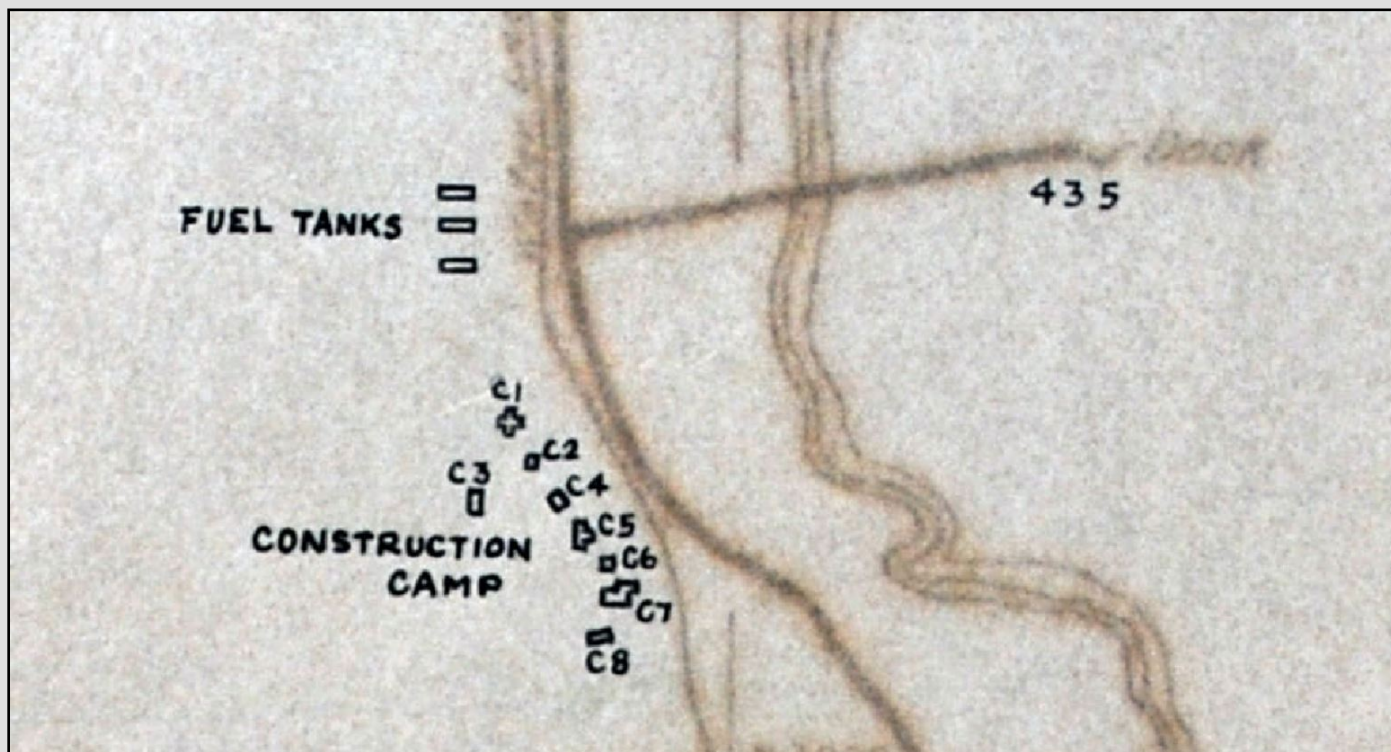


Figure 2. Construction Camp layout from 1944 Location Map.

Main Camp

The Main Camp consisted of 36 structures including barracks, storage, mess halls, a latrine, recreation halls, an infirmary, power plant, and ammunition storage (Figures 3 and 4). A 35 foot-diameter woodstave above-ground storage tank was used for water supply.

Battery 290

Battery 290 was an artillery battery that was intended to consist of two 6-inch Naval guns. The gun emplacements built for these 6-inch guns bracketed the Command Post Bunker, which was located 1,300 feet east of the Main Camp. In addition to the generators, the bunker contained two powder rooms, a plotting room, spotting room, shell storage rooms, and a latrine. Although Fort Babcock had temporary 6-inch guns however, the intended 6-inch permanent guns were never emplaced.

Power and Fuel

During World War II, there were two primary power systems at Fort Babcock. Power was supplied to Battery 290 by three diesel engines located within the Command Post Bunker, supplied by two 3,500-gallon fuel tanks. Power was supplied to the Main Camp and Construction Camp by one powerhouse running overhead primary and secondary lines (Figure 5). Utility poles and trees were used to support the powerlines, which were strung overhead. Almost every structure at the main camp was rigged with electricity with the exception of two sheds and one ammunition storage Quonset hut. The 1944 Power Plan indicates that powerlines were strung a distance of 1,800 feet running northeast from the powerhouse at the Main Camp to the Construction Camp.

BUILDING SCHEDULE					
BLDG NO.	USE	TYPE	SIZE	CONSTR PLAN NO	REMARKS
401	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
402	PLOTTING ROOM	QH	16'X36'		
403	ADMINISTRATION (BATTERY)	QH	16'X36'		
404	LOG CABIN		18'X22'		
405	OFFICERS QUARTERS	QH	16'-8"X73'-6"		
406	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
407	POST EXCHANGE	QH	16'X36'		
408	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	17'X74'-3"		
409	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'X36'		
410	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'-8"X73'-5"		
411	MESS HALL	M	16'-8"X108'-8"		
412	STORE HOUSE	QH	16'X36'		
413	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
414	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'X36'		
415	LATRINE	L	16'-8"X73'-6"		
416	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
417	RECREATION	QH	16'X36'		
418	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
419	SUPPLY ROOM	QH	17'-5"X36'-3"		
420	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
421	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'X36'		
422	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'X36'		
423	RECREATION		20'-3"X73'-6"		
424	INFIRMARY		20'-5"X80'-4"		
425	POWER PLANT		20'X22'		
426	WATER TANK		DIA 36'		
427	RECREATION		15'X19'		
428	MESS HALL		15'X21'		
429	BARRACKS-ENLISTED MEN	QH	16'X36'		
430	BARRACKS " "	QH	16'X36'		
404A	SHED		8'X10'		
404B	"		12'X16'		
431	"		12'X16'		
432	SEARCHLIGHT SHED		12'X24'		
436	AMMO. STORAGE		24'X24'		
437	"		12'X12'		
438	LOOKOUT		20'X20'		

Figure 3. List of Main Camp buildings from 1944 Power Plan.

Main Powerhouse

The Main Powerhouse for Fort Babcock was also known as the Power Plant and Building No. 425. It provided power for both the Construction Camp and the Main Camp. According to the 1944 as-builts, it consisted of Quonset hut construction on a concrete foundation and held two generators. Today, the remains of the powerhouse are located at the southeast end of the Main Camp (Figure 6). The 20 x 22 foot concrete foundation with its built-in generator pedestals are all that remains (Figure 7). Concrete generator pedestals were a standard construction practice for World War II powerhouses. The entrance into the powerhouse was located on the south side of the structure. Electrical conduit was laid into the floor of the powerhouse, connecting to the powerlines outside of the building during its operation.

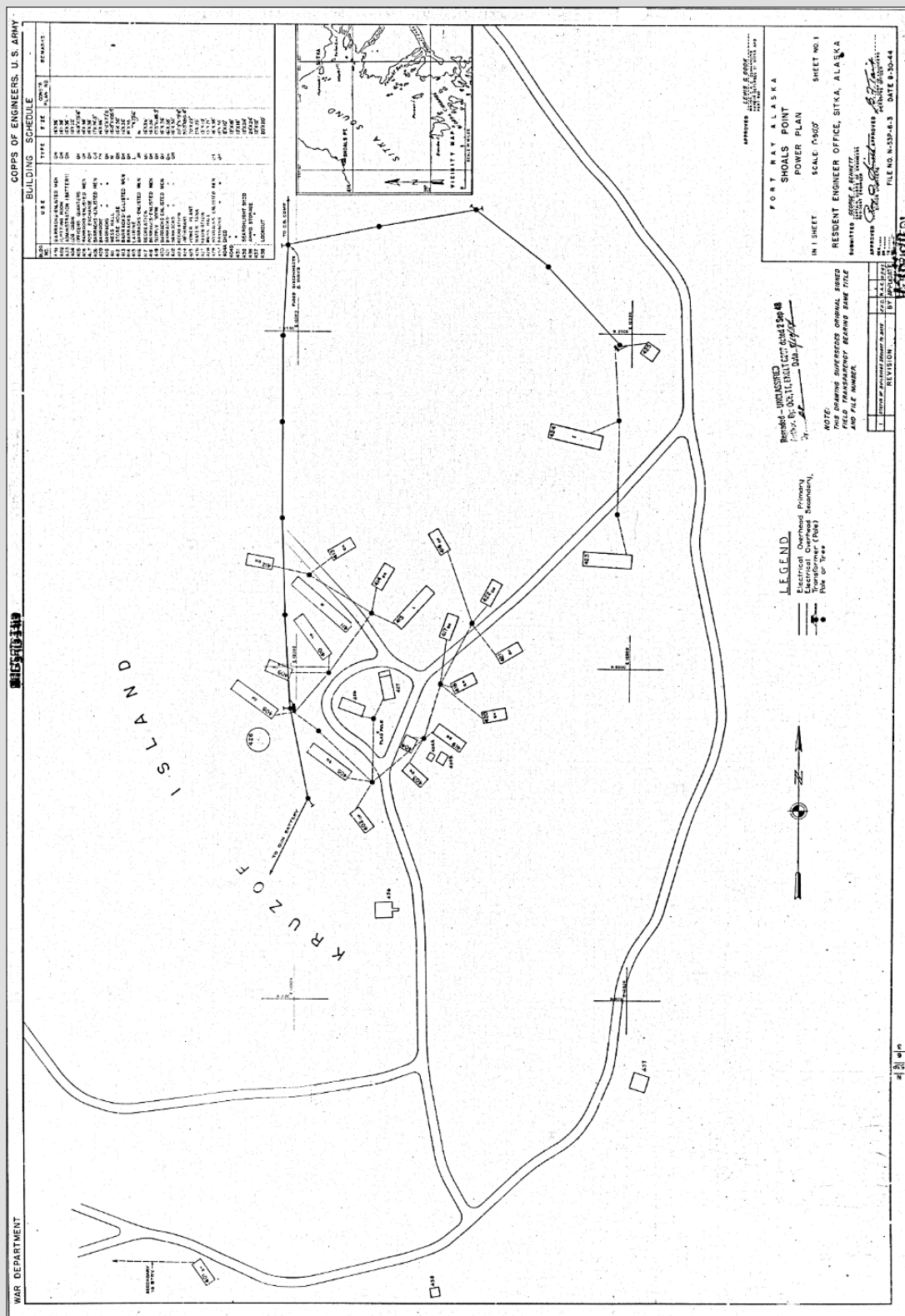


Figure 4. Main Camp Power Plan dated August 1944.

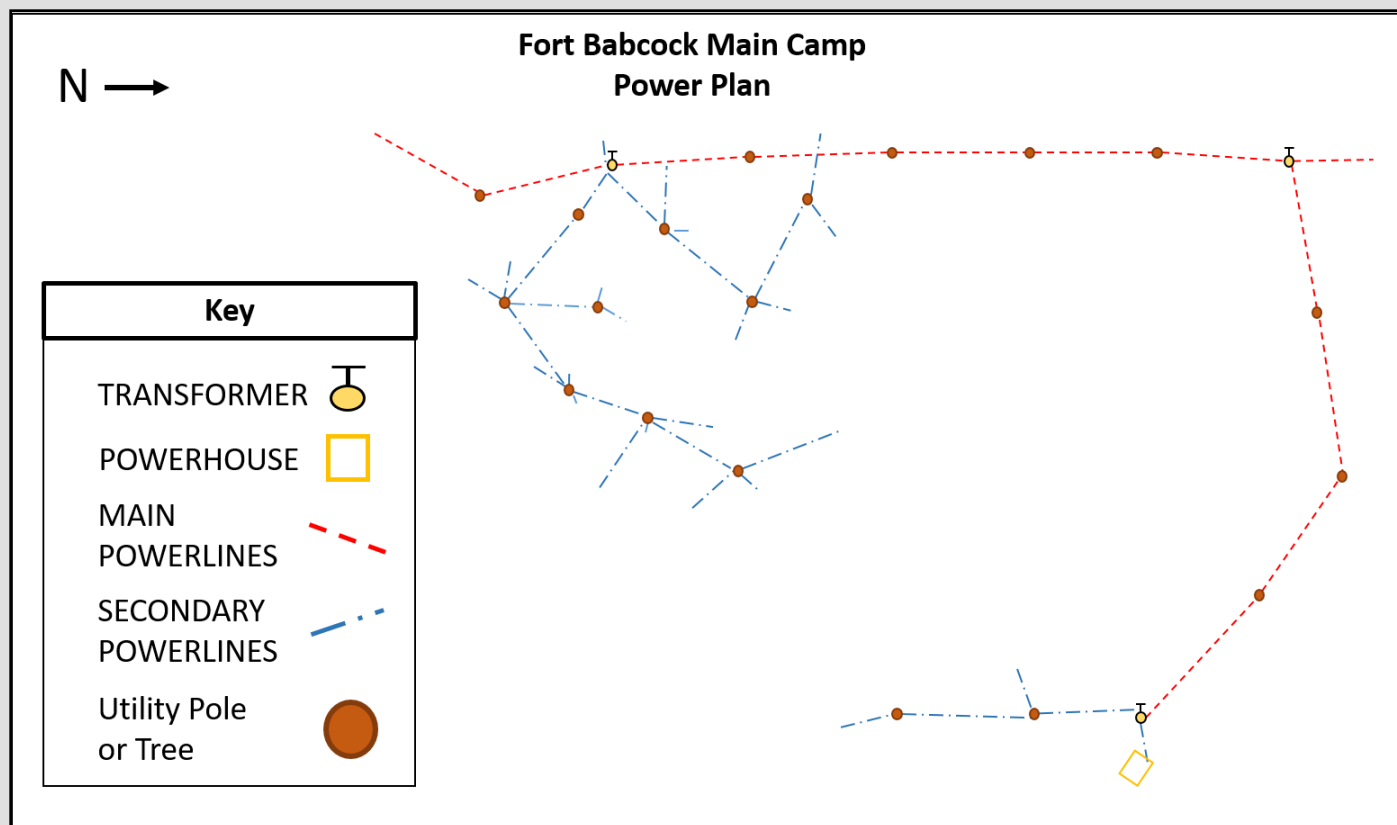


Figure 5. Fort Babcock Main Camp power plan (*after* 1944 Power Plan).

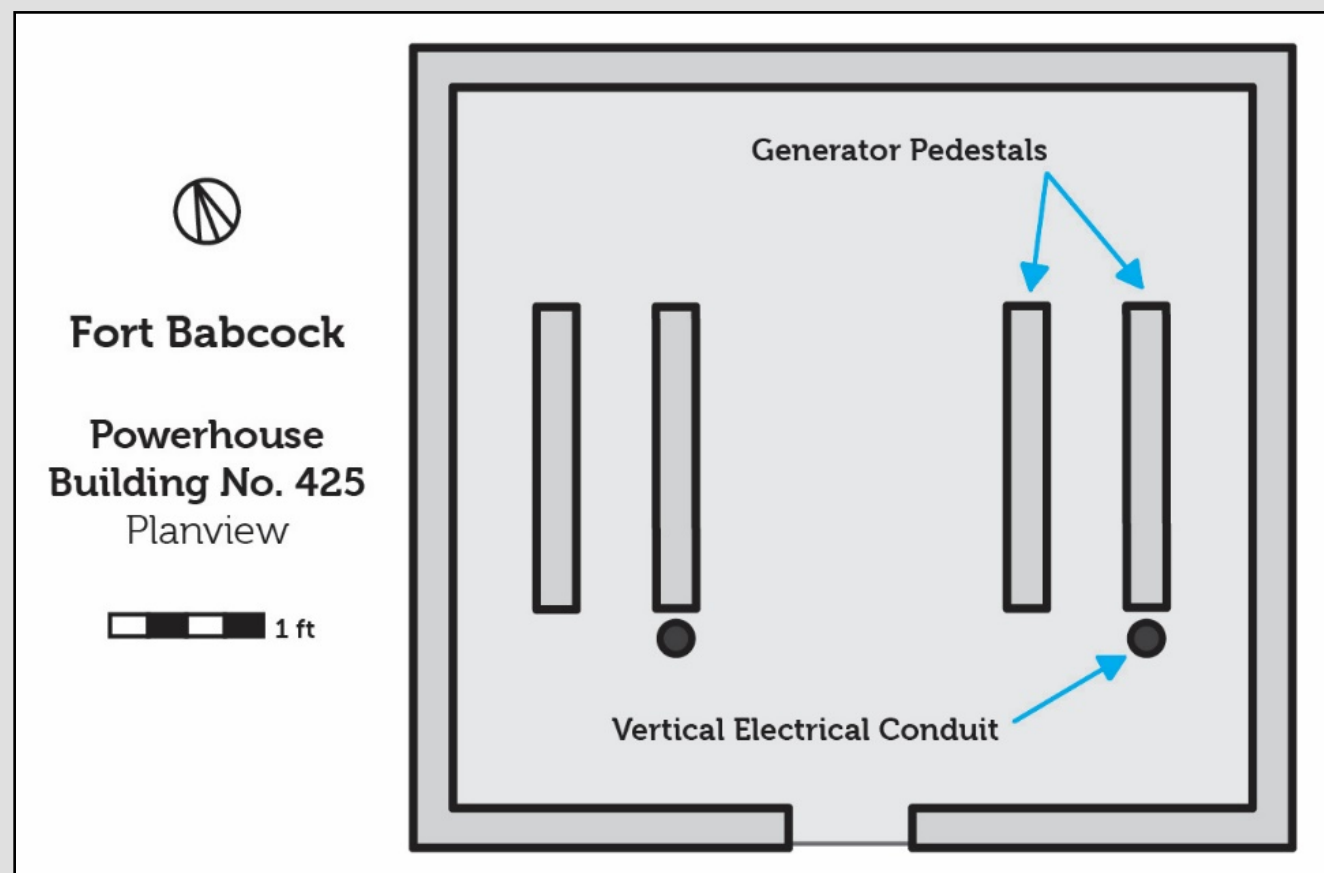


Figure 6. Main Powerhouse layout per 2013 field sketch.



Figure 7. Photograph of the Main Powerhouse foundation in 2013.

Fort Babcock Today

At the time military construction was stopped, Fort Babcock was 88% complete. Materials left at the site include construction material, an empty concrete Command Post Bunker, and support facilities including collapsed Quonset huts, collapsed wood-frame buildings, concrete building footprints, fuel tanks, and a degrading Corduroy road. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Alaska District is engaged in environmental remediation activities at Fort Babcock. Remediation work includes removal of contamination related to the historic fuel and power infrastructure of the site.

Recommended Reading

Chandonnet, Fern

1995 *Alaska at War 1941-1945 The Forgotten War Remembered*. Papers from the Alaska at War Symposium Anchorage, Alaska, November 11-13, 1993. Alaska at War Committee, Anchorage, AK.

Woodman, Lyman

1996 *Duty Station Northwest: The U.S. Army in Alaska and Western Canada, 1867-1987. Volumes I, II, & III*. Alaska Historical Society, Anchorage, AK.