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The Bureau of Indian Affairs ship North Star III sidled up to craggy Little Diomede in the Bering Strait between Siberia and Alaska last month and the, skilled crew worked for 43 straight hours --helped by the fact that there are now only about four hours of darkness a day on the tiny island to upload more than 400 tons of building material under conditions that would have challenged the Navy Seabees.

The material is now being assembled so that nineteen Eskimo families will light their seal oil lamps in snug new homes when the daylight there narrows to a few hours in the- Artic winter, Marvin L. Franklin, Assistant to the Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs, announced today.

This is a unique building project so difficult to get underway that many said it couldn't be done," Franklin pointed out.

Eskimos on a sister island to Little Diomede --about three miles away that were a part of Russia --were moved off by the Soviet government some time ago. But the United States Eskimos told Bureau of Indian Affairs officials that they wished to remain on their island. The housing, however, was as dilapidated as to approximate packing cases in poor repair. Could something be done about it, they asked the Bureau.

Little Diomede is about a mile and a half long and perhaps three quarters of a mile wide. It is entirely granite rock that slopes in a 45 degree angle to the ocean's surface.

The Eskimos said they wanted improved housing, but they still wanted to live in it in an Eskimo way. So the Bureau of Indian Affairs housing people went to work to give them a one-room dwelling, open-space, with p1'ovisions for a bathroom. The design takes into account that seal oil will be used for both fuel and light, again at the request of the future inhabitants.

When the North Star III was at anchor alongside Little Diomede, the stevedores unloaded polyurethane panels that have a core sandwiched by two plastic walls. These have the high insulating ability needed to stave off the Arctic cold. They are to be the basic building material for the new houses.

They also unloaded lumber for piers and pilings, since there is no wood on the island. Wood is set on top of the solid boulders that are the island, as the foundations for the new Eskimo houses. Some houses have a corner or side on pilings ten to 15 feet high because of the severe slope.

Then they also unloaded cable -- since lengths of it, from three to 6,000 feet: will help keep the houses in place on their rocky perches.

Materials for water and waste disposal that were supplied by the Indian Health Service of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare also came off the North Star III in the hazardous landing operation,

Eighteen Eskimo men, the entire labor force of Little Diomede, are now building the homes that will shelter nearly 100 under a Bureau Housing Improvement Program. (HIP). The cost of each unit will be

$16, 500.

Two technical people that represent the supplier of the basic building material are instructing them, and the housing officer of the Nome office of the Bureau of Indian .Affairs acts as the construction superintendent.

These non-Eskimos will leave Little Diomede via Umiat -- the walrus skin boat of the island inhabitants -- when their work is done. The North Star III can reach the island only a few months of the year.

Then the Eskimos will resume their daily activities -- hunting walrus, seal, and duck eggs on their island and on an uninhabited neighboring is land, and carving ivory --- their only source of cash income. They will frequent their handful of public buildings -- school, church, store, public health center, and armory -- and perhaps hark back to the day when each person on the island got a new home.
