USS Juneau, a US Navy landing ship, supported clean-up operations on Elinore and Ingot islands, serving as a base for hundreds of workers

cleaning, moving material,
and choosing beaches and
transportation are shared
by the Coast Guard, Alaska's
Department of Environmental
Conservation, the US Navy,
the Transportation Department,
the Environmental Protection
Agency, and the Department of
the Interior. Exxon, through its
contractor, Veco, controls the
clean-up and co-ordinates the
operation.
To assure seats for personnel
moving in and out of the oper-
ation, Exxon pays for 15 of 50
seats on every ERA Airlines flight
connecting Anchorage with
Valdez. The airline offers any
unclaimed seats to an inevitable
line of standby passengers for
each of its three daily round trips, and Exxon sometimes distributes unneeded tickets from Valdez to military personnel and field workers. " •

' The SS Juneau and SS Ft. McHenry, two Navy troop ships, spent about two months anchored in Prince William Sound as floating clean-up bases. Both of the ships, plus the cutter Rush were equipped with helicop-ter decks and served as remote helipads for workers, managers, supervisors, mili-

A de Havilland Beaver of Rust's Flying Service shuttled observers between Valdez and shore sites such as Elinore Island

tary personnel, journalists, and environ-mental workers travelling to the islands. The aircraft used included Bell 214s, US Marine Corps CH-46s, Coast Guard Aerospatiale Dolphins, de Havilland DHC-2 Beavers, and DHC-6 Twin Otters, the last two usually in floatplane form.
The nearest cleaning operations were from 35 to 100 miles away from Valdez. More distant areas were the responsibility of a second operational centre.

The flightdeck of USS Rush often carried a mixture of civil and military helicopters to support beach cleaning operations

Flights to the numerous areas
where cleaning operations were
under way were co-ordinated by
Exxon personnel via a control
centre at Valdez Airport, about
four miles east of the city centre.
Helicopter crews wore bright
orange Mustang floatation suits
to guard against the slim chance
of an unplanned water landing.
Water temperature in the Sound
remained at a seasonal 3-5°C in
mid May.
Among the most common
emergency airlift missions,
according to a Veco supervisor,
was the rescue of ship workers
who fell into the icy Sound or
suffered injuries from falling on
the slick-covered rocky beaches.
Other missions included taking
wildlife workers close to islands where seals and sealions normally bore their pups. "Aviation out here is what makes dealing with this at all a possibility rather than a frus-tration," says Lt Eldo DeLong, a Coast Guard officer covering public affairs relating to the Valdez incident. "The spill earlier this year in Seattle was much easier to deal with, in part
because of its location," he says, "but out
here, the ability to reach places by air makes
all the difference." Q

A Coast Guard helicopter bound for Cordova at midnight overflies the
Rush in Prince William Sound

If possible, pilots use cleared beaches to drop passengers and supplies. About
900 miles of fouled beaches are spread across some 5,000 square miles

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