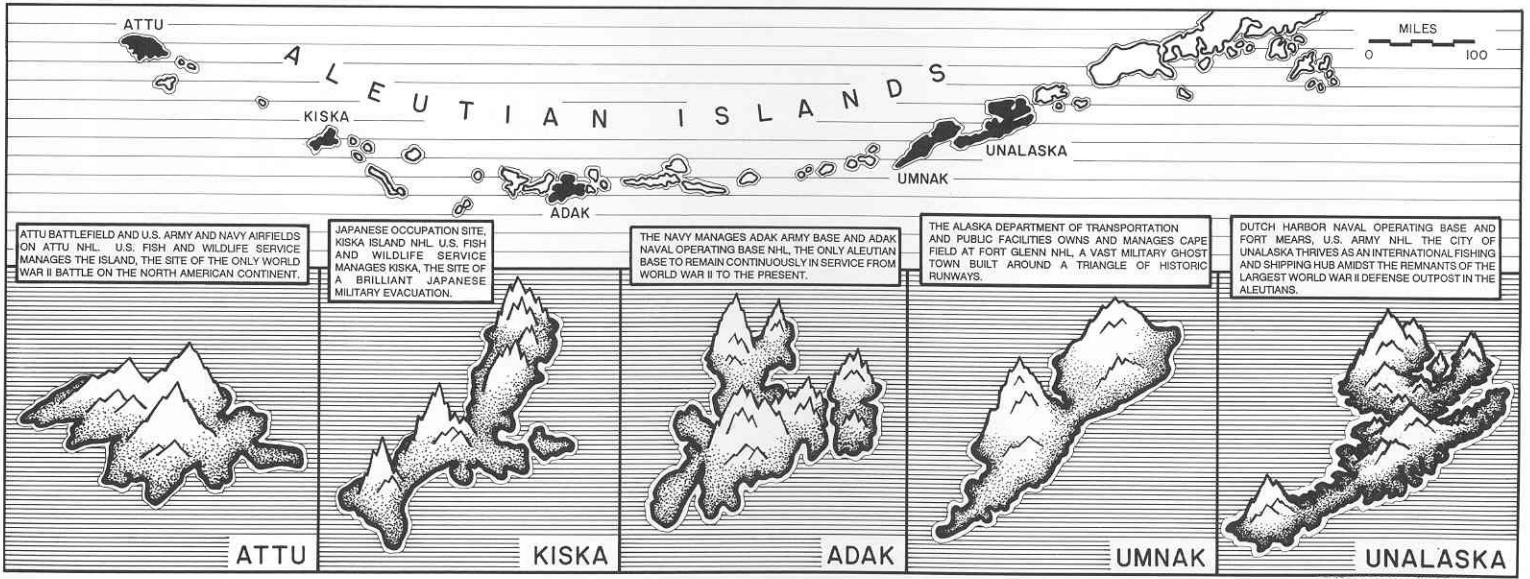
WORLD WAR II NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS:
THE ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN

The Aleutian Islands rise out of the ocean like an oasis of green in a world of gray. Summits of a submerged volcanic mountain range, the treeless islands served as a formidable World War II battleground from 1942 to 1943. Impenetrable fog and wild gusts of wind called "williwaws" were a common enemy of both American and Japanese forces and often determined the success of military maneuvers. The Aleutian campaign involved tens of thousands of U.S. land, sea, and air forces advancing progressively westward along the 1,100 mile Aleutian arc to reach and successfully defeat Japanese troops occupying Attu and Kiska islands. The Japanese, befriended by a protective fog, secretly evacuated Kiska Island prior to the U.S. invasion. Today five National Historic Landmarks commemorate the Aleutian campaign of World War II and the lives and events that forever changed these desolate beautiful islands.



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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS

The National Park Service administers the National Historic Landmarks (NHL) Program for the Secretary of the Interior. The NHL Program focuses attention on historic and archeological resources of exceptional value to the nation as a whole. NHLs are our Nation's most important prehistoric and historic cultural resources. Of the only 1,800 NHLs nationwide, 45 are in Alaska.

NHLs evolve from theme studies or surveys of properties related to an aspect of American culture. The NHLs described in this brochure are part of the World War II theme, under the subtheme, the War in the Pacific 1941-1945. These NHLs are located in the spectacular Aleutian Islands, an 1,100 mile archipelago extending west off the Alaskan Peninsula. Many of these islands and three of the NHLs are part of the Aleutians Unit of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The preservation and protection of NHLs is essential for their survival. Federal law protects NHLs located on federal government land. Selling, receiving or transporting the resources within them is illegal. Damaging property within NHLs may also result in a felony conviction. Penalties from a conviction under 18 USC 641, Theft of Federal Public Property, or 18 USC 1361, Malicious Mischief, include up to $250,000 in fines and/or up to ten years in prison. The Archeological Resource Protection Act (ARPA) of 1979 makes it illegal to excavate, remove or damage archeological sites on federal lands.

You can help protect NHLs by reporting illegal activity within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service at (907) 592-2406 or the National Park Service at 1-800-478-2724.

On August 15, 1943, United States and Canadian invasion troops disembarked at Kiska. It was not until three days later that troops learned the Japanese had deserted the island.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

When, on December 7, 1941 the Japanese first attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, there were only two small navy bases and army posts in all the Alaskan islands. One was on Kodiak Island and the other, known as Dutch Harbor, was on Amaknak Island in Unalaska Bay near Unalaska Island. Although Amaknak had little flat land, the anchorage at Dutch Harbor was the best in the Aleutians. Two outlying sites, Umnak Island to the south and Cold Bay to the north possessed the flat airstrip terrain for Dutch Harbor's aerial defense.

As early as 1939 Congress was aware of the threat of Japanese hostilities in the Pacific and had approved plans for the establishment of seaplane and submarine bases at Dutch Harbor, Kodiak, Midway, and Wake. Navy command contracted the Siems-Drake-Puget Sound Construction Company to build both the navy and army installations at Fort Mears, Dutch Harbor, and on May 8, 1941 the first army troops arrived.

American forces were not caught napping when the Japanese struck at Dutch Harbor on June 3 and 4, 1942. All available planes of the Eleventh Air Force had been rushed to the secret airfields constructed at Fort Glenn on Umnak Island and Fort Randall at Cold Bay. The Japanese, thinking the nearest American airfield was on distant Kodiak, were surprised to be met by American planes.

The Japanese Aleutian Operation, commanded by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya, was intended as a diversionary action. Even if it did not succeed in splitting the American Pacific Fleet and drawing American military forces way from Midway Island, it would result in American agitation and uncertainty. After the Japanese were defeated at Midway, the propaganda value of holding American soil in the Aleutians provided additional incentive for the Japanese invaders. Furthermore, the occupation and fortification of Kiska and Attu would provide patrol bases to protect the eastern extension of the Japanese empire.

Japanese bombs destroyed barracks at Fort Mears during the June 3-4, 1942 attack, which killed 43 U. S. servicemen and wounded as many others. Before the attack, Navy command favored the large composite building designs of Detroit architect, Albert Kahn. After assessing bomb damage, army engineers expanded Fort Mears to Unalaska and Pyramid valleys with smaller 4 to 6 man cabanas, low frame buildings, and underground construction.

Hundreds of Alaska Natives were evacuated from their Aleutian homes on Atka, the Pribilofs, Unalaska, Umnak, and Akutan to the unfamiliar forested coves of Southeast Alaska. Only half of the Aleuts returned to the Aleutians. Of the eight prewar villages, Attu village, and Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin on Unalaska were never resettled.

DUTCH HARBOR NAVAL OPERATING BASE AND FORT MEARS, U.S. ARMY NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Dutch Harbor Naval Operating Base and Fort Mears, U.S. Army NHL was designated in 1985. The NHL is located in the City of Unalaska, one of the most dynamic communities in southcentral Alaska and one of the largest U.S. fishing ports. In 1989 approximately 65,000 visitors passed through Dutch Harbor Airport. The NHL includes the entire Amaknak Island with over 140 contributing structures. Key defense post components of the "Iron Ring" were built into the precarious rock cliffs that crown the grand harbor of Unalaska Bay. The cantilevered concrete post at Ulakta Head is the highest ever built in the United States. Many World War II period buildings have been rehabilitated for commercial and private use. In 1989-90 the National Park Service conducted a review of the NHL boundaries to explore the historic integrity of surrounding sites on Unalaska and Hog islands.

The Ounalashka Corporation privately owns most of the Dutch Harbor NHL. There are a total of three NHLs in Unalaska and the local community has a strong commitment to local history and Aleut culture.

ACCESS: The Unalaska Airport has daily commercial flights to and from Anchorage. The Alaska Marine Highway operates ferry service to Unalaska from Homer from May to September.

At peak operation in 1943, Dutch Harbor included a U.S. Navy base and Forts Mears, Schwatka, Brumback, and Learnard on Hog, Amaknak, and Unalaska islands with total facilities for over 10,000 men. The installations included a submarine base, catapult airstrip, and coastal defenses. ★ On June 3, and again on June 4, 1942, bombers and fighters based on Japanese carriers attacked Dutch Harbor. Weather made it impossible for American planes to destroy the Japanese carriers or their convoying warships, but it also prevented many Japanese planes from completing their mission. ★ After the attack, the U.S. Army and Navy evacuated hundreds of Aleut residents from Unalaska and surrounding villages in the Aleutian and Pribilof islands to southeast Alaska from the Dutch Harbor dock. Many lost their homes and possessions from the U.S. military occupation. In the 1980s Congress awarded reparations to the Aleut for their losses.

From the air, Cape Field runways provided unmistakable landing sites for World War II pilots. Circular revetments and fueling stations channeled air traffic on and off the busy runways. This photo, taken in 1960, shows the Birchwood hanger north of the runways and the density of surrounding construction. On the land between the creek beds hundreds of artillery bunkers stand empty. Snow-covered Mount Tulik in the background erupted in 1944.

CAPE FIELD AT FORT GLENN NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Fort Glenn, on the northeast corner of Umnak Island, is the most intact World War II U.S. Army and Navy air base in the Aleutians. Centered around four historic runways of packed volcanic cinder and steel matting, Cape Field NHL, stretches for miles on the lava flats of the Okmok Volcano caldera. The NHL was designated in 1985. Black sand beaches outline the coastline around Fort Glenn. Nearby Ship Rock was a navigational marker for World War II pilots. Chernofski Harbor, twelve miles to the east on Unalaska Island, was the main supply port for Fort Glenn. Decommissioned in 1947, after several years as a supply and maintenance base, Fort Glenn NHL is a landscape of hundreds of weather-beaten World War II building prototypes. The wood and metal structures and buildings designed to adapt to the Aleutian climate, now compose a ghost town of World War II technology. Fort Glenn was an engineer's dream proving ground for tundra and airstrip construction. A colossal Birchwood-type hangar completed in 1944 stands as a reminder of Fort Glenn's air power. One of the three cinder runways remains in operation. Much of Fort Glenn's acreage is cattle and reindeer grazing land owned by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

ACCESS: Charter flights for the Fort Glenn airstrip on Umnak can be arranged from Unalaska Airport.

Fort Glenn was the first Alaska project commissioned after the United States entered the war in December 1941. Secretly built and disguised as a fish packing plant, Fort Glenn provided aerial defense for Dutch Harbor and was home base for the "Aleutian Tigers" of the Eleventh Air Force who staged the grueling 1,200 mile bombing raids on Kiska until Adak air field was ready. ★ In March 1942, aware that a Japanese attack on the Aleutians was probable, engineers and civilians raced against time to hand-fit 80,000 pieces of pierced steel matting in less than two weeks to construct Cape Field's first runway. Chernofski Harbor received all of Fort Glenn's incoming supplies. Barges shuttled the supplies to Umnak's beaches. ★ On June 3 and 4, 1942, U.S. fighter pilots took off from Cape Field in pursuit of Japanese planes attempting to return to their carriers after the attack on Dutch Harbor.

An American fleet gathered in Kuluk Bay, off Adak, in preparation for the Kiska invasion on August 15, 1943. In the background are the two runways composing Adak's original airfield, Davis Field.

ADAK ARMY BASE AND ADAK NAVAL OPERATING BASE NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Adak Army Base and Adak Navy Base NHL is located within the Aleutians Unit of the Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge and the modern Adak Naval Air Station. During World War II, the army and naval bases on Adak Island served as crucial stepping stones between American bases on Umnak and Unalaska and Japanese occupied Kiska and Attu. Black sand beaches are reminders of the island's ancient volcanos. Adak's precarious geography and maritime climate make it one of the most challenging locations for an active air base. Despite restricted access to the Naval Air Station and thus the NHL, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Refuge Visitor Center on Adak receives over 14,000 visitors a year. The Adak Historical Society manages the Adak Museum.

Adak NHL, designated in 1986, is the historic foot print of the existing naval base and includes the landscapes of Marshall and Davis airfields, Adak Chapel, and Sweeper Cove. The U.S. Navy, in support of the NHL, restored Adak Chapel, and in 1990 initiated the Adak historic marker project.

ACCESS: Military clearance is required to visit Adak Island. For information contact: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Aleutian Islands Unit, Box 5251, NAS PSC-486, FPO, AP 96506-5251. Phone: (907) 592-2406.

Wading through icy surf and battling wild Aleutian winds, on June 30, 1942, American forces unloaded the tremendous amount of equipment and supplies needed to construct an airfield. The men dug holes in the ground for protection against wind, rain, and cold. Engineer troops drained and leveled a tidewater flat and creek bed and installed a runway of steel matting in an incredible twelve days. By September 12, planes were taking off. Two days later the first Liberators flew from Adak to bomb Kiska. The Japanese bombed Adak in retaliation but did little damage. American and Canadian forces continued to bomb and strafe Kiska and Attu from Adak, and later Amchitka, whenever weather permitted, whittling down Japanese air strength as fast as new planes could be brought in.

On May 14, 1943, American soldiers carry a casualty back to the beach. Attu was reclaimed at the cost of 549 American lives and 1,148 wounded. The Japanese lost their entire garrison of approximately 2,350 men, with the exception of twenty-nine men taken prisoners.

ATTU BATTLEFIELD AND U.S. ARMY AND NAVY AIRFIELDS NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Attu Island, administered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the National Wildlife Refuge, is the last island in the arc of the Aleutian Chain. The NHL was designated in 1985. World War II remnants of both the Japanese and American occupation constitute the NHL's historic landscape and are protected by federal law. The historic beach road offers panoramic views of the NHL as it curves around Massacre Bay from Alexai Point to Casco Cove. A war monument in both Japanese and English stands in memory of the many lives lost in 1943.

Attu is world renown for its North American and Asiatic migrating bird populations and is a popular spring destination for many bird watchers. The Aleut village of Attu was destroyed during the war and never reestablished. The U.S. Coast Guard stations twenty-four men on Attu year round to operate a long-range navigation station. There are no transient or maintenance services on the island.

ACCESS: Military clearance is required to visit Attu Island. For information contact: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Aleutian Islands Unit, Box 5251, NAS PSC-486, FPO, AP 96506-5251. Phone: (907) 592-2406.

In June 1942, the Japanese captured all of the forty-three Aleut occupants of the village of Attu along with Mrs. Etta Jones, a teacher for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Mr. Charles Foster Jones, was the only American to be killed during the Japanese invasion of the Western Aleutians. The Japanese shipped the Attuan prisoners and Mrs. Jones to Japan where they were to spend the remainder of the war. ★ American forces landing on Attu on May 11, 1943, met determined resistance. The U. S. Seventh Infantry Division fought a bloody and costly three-week battle against the approximately 2,350 men of the Japanese North Sea Garrison on Attu. A last attempt to aid the Attu garrison by a formation of sixteen Japanese bombers was blocked by Eleventh Air Force fighters. Fighting finally came to an end when the last 750 or so surviving Japanese soldiers charged through American lines in a frenetic banzai attack. The next day, May 30, the Japanese announced the loss of Attu.

In the background of this photo, taken in September 1943, are two Japanese midget "Sydney" type submarines, found by reoccupation troops outside of a battered submarine shed on Kiska. The one-man subs measured just under 80' long and were powered by storage batteries.

JAPANESE OCCUPATION SITE, KISKA ISLAND NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK

Kiska Island, one of the western islands in the Rat Island group, is part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge and administered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Adak. The NHL was designated in 1985.

When the Japanese evacuated the island in 1943 they left behind an entire settlement and naval wreckage accumulated after a year of intense bombings by joint American and Canadian forces. In 1989 the National Park Service, in cooperation with the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and other governmental agencies conducted a three week underwater archeological survey of Kiska Harbor and terrestrial surveys of land-based World War II artifacts. The project received international media attention.

Kiska supports the largest auklet population in the Aleutians. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service conducts regular bird migration surveys on the island. In the 1980s U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service included Kiska in the experimental fox removal project to protect native bird species, especially the Aleutian Canada geese. Today U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that Kiska is fox free.

ACCESS: For information contact: Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge, Aleutian Islands Unit, Box 5251, NAS PSC-486, FPO, AP 96506-5251. Phone: (907) 592-2406.

When on June 6, 1942, Japanese forces landed on Kiska, the only occupants were a ten-man U.S. Navy weather observation team. Within a few days, the Japanese captured all of the men except Aerographer's Mate F/C William Charles House, who held out for fifty days before starvation forced him to surrender. ★ Japanese troops occupied Kiska for more than fourteen months with a peak garrison of more than 8,000 men. Following the loss of Attu, Japanese command realized the precarious position of their Kiska forces. On July 28, 1943, Japanese ships evaded detection and snuck into Kiska Harbor under the cover of fog evacuating all of the approximately 5,100 troops in less than an hour. The fleet sailed away undetected and without a single loss of life. ★ On August 15, 1943, United States and Canadian troops landed on Kiska. Invasion command did not realize until August 18 that the Japanese had fled. In the process of recapturing the deserted island, over 313 American and Canadian soldiers died, some from "friendly fire" and many others from booby traps and mines.

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN

December 7, 1941	Hostilities begin in the Pacific
March 31, 1942	Runway complete at Fort Glenn
June 3, 1942	Japanese attack Dutch Harbor
June 6, 1942	Japanese forces occupy Kiska
June 7, 1942	Japanese forces occupy Attu
August 30, 1942	American forces occupy Adak
September 14, 1942	Planes from Adak begin to bomb Kiska
September 20, 1942	American forces occupy Atka
January 12, 1943	American forces occupy Amchitka
February 21, 1943	Planes from Amchitka begin to bomb Kiska
May 11, 1943	American forces land on Attu
May 29, 1943	Last Japanese attack crushed on Attu
May 30, 1943	Occupation of Attu completed
July 10, 1943	First American raid on Paramushiru
July 28, 1943	Japanese evacuate Kiska
August 15, 1943	Allied forces occupy Kiska

CREDITS

Brochure prepared by Carol Burkhart and Linda Cook of the National Park Service. Cover painting entitled "The Volcano Seen Through the Swirling Fog from the C.P. Near Quisling Cove," by George Earle, courtesy of the 10th Mountain Division Resources Center, The Denver Public Library, Western History Department. The artist served with the U.S. 87th Mountain Infantry Regiment on Kiska in 1943. Inside photos courtesy of Archives and Manuscript Department, University of Alaska, Anchorage, except photo of Cape Air Force Station, courtesy of Alaska Air Command.

Brochure format inspired by the October 1943 publication "The Battle of the Aleutians..." written by Cpls. Dashiell Hammett and Robert Colodny.