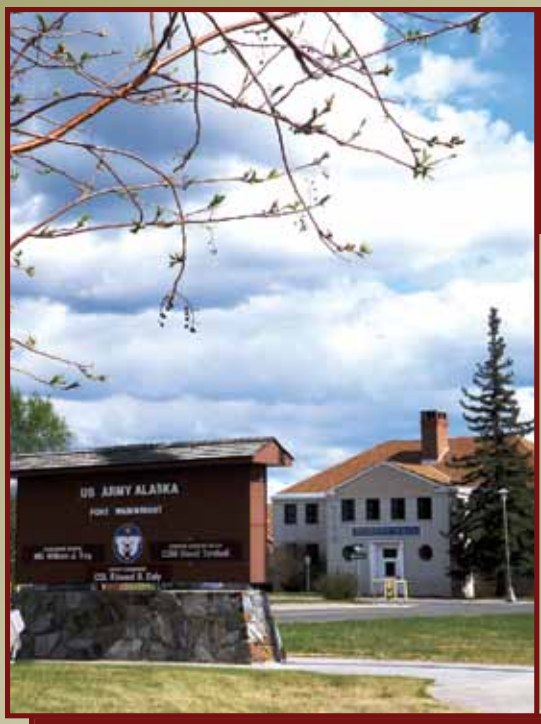
U.S. ARMY
GARRISON
FORT WAINWRIGHT

Guide to the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark and Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District



Welcome to Fort Wainwright

Entering the Installation

Fort Wainwright is an active military installation. All visitors to the post are required to stop at the Visitor's Center located outside the Main Gate. To get a visitor's pass onto the post, visitors must show their driver's license, vehicle registration and insurance paperwork. For those driving a rental car, the rental packet will serve as the required insurance and registration paperwork.

How to Use this Driving Tour

Fort Wainwright is a large installation, with over 40 historic properties within the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark and the Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District, in addition to a number of individual historic properties. This tour highlights some of the most significant. While it is possible to walk the tour during the summer, it is designed to be driven. There are several interpretive panels on the post and visitors are encouraged to stop and read them. The locations of the panels and adjacent parking are noted throughout this booklet.

Directions for the tour and points of interest are provided throughout this publication in the red information boxes.

Driving Safety

Please obey all posted traffic laws and pay special attention to these regulations:

- Cell phone use is prohibited while driving.
- There is a 10 MPH speed limit when passing Soldiers.
- Please be careful at intersections as they can be icy during much of the year.

Weather

Fort Wainwright is located in Interior Alaska, and the weather varies dramatically throughout the year. Temperatures can vary from 90° F in the summer to –60° F in the winter with extended periods of darkness. During the spring and fall, the weather is more temperate, but conditions can change quickly. Please be sure to check the current weather conditions on Fort Wainwright before visiting and dress appropriately.

Taking Photos

Fort Wainwright is an active military installation so photography is restricted to authorized personnel only. If you would like photos to commemorate your visit to Fort Wainwright, please stop by the Cultural Resources Office in the Environmental Division, Building 3023, at the corner of Neely Road and Engineer Place for complimentary photos of the post.

The History of Fort Wainwright

Ladd Army Airfield - Cold Weather Testing Detachment

Fort Wainwright was established as the Ladd Field Cold Weather Test Detachment. Construction began in August 1939, just weeks before Germany invaded Poland, initiating World War II.

The location near Fairbanks was chosen because of its strategic position. As Brigadier General Billy Mitchell famously said "I believe that in the future he who holds Alaska will hold the world."

The original purpose of the Test Detachment was to ensure all Army planes and equipment could function at –60° F. If the U.S. was drawn into the war in Europe, it would need aircraft that could function in extreme cold.

Hangar 1, circa 1941

Construction of Ladd Field

The Test Detachment at Ladd Field was designed as a small, self-contained installation. The facilities envisioned for the installation were complex, multi-purpose structures that took several years to complete. The original workforce was drawn primarily from the local population of gold miners who were familiar with the challenges of building in the subarctic climate.

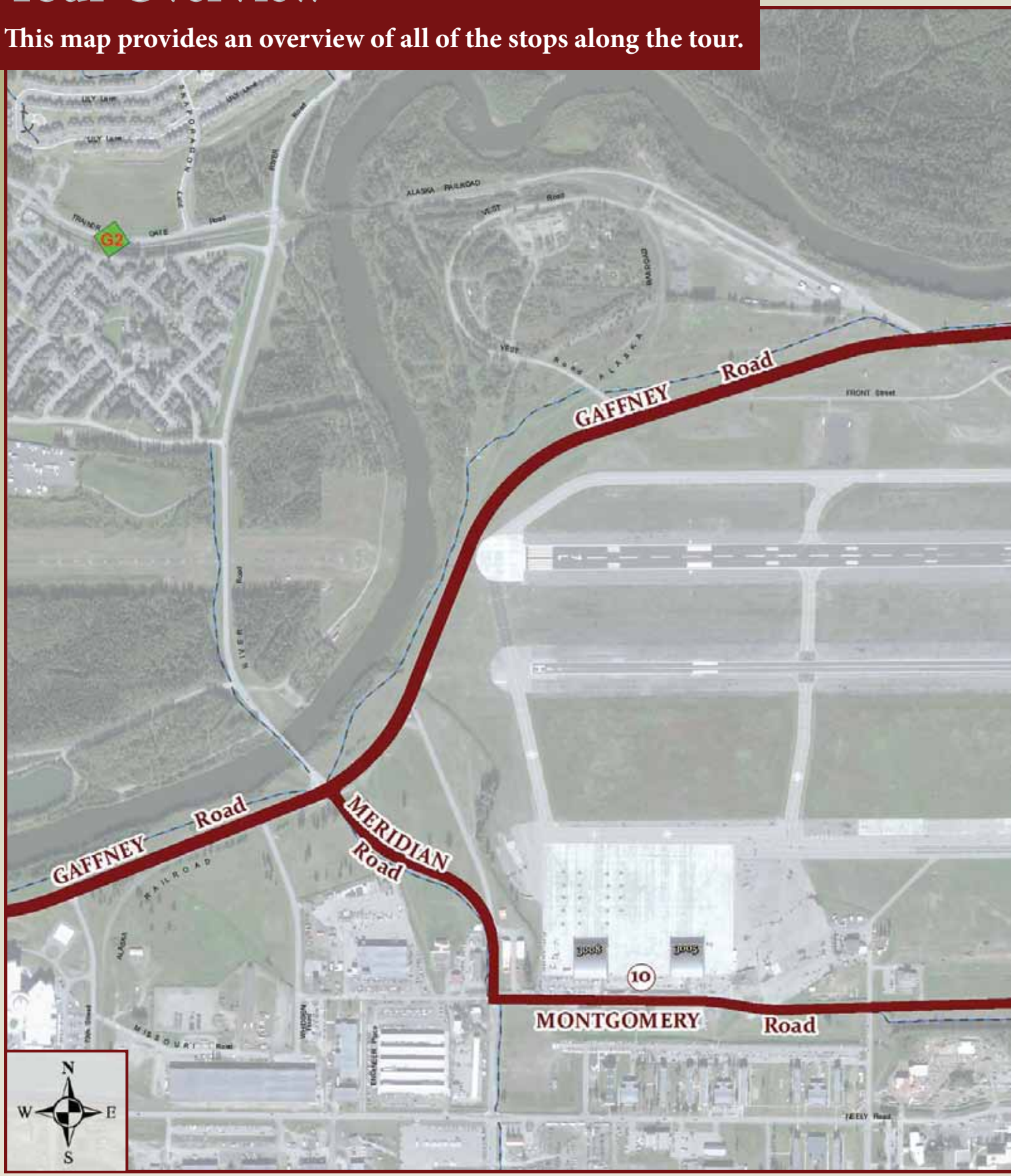
Ladd Field under construction, circa 1940

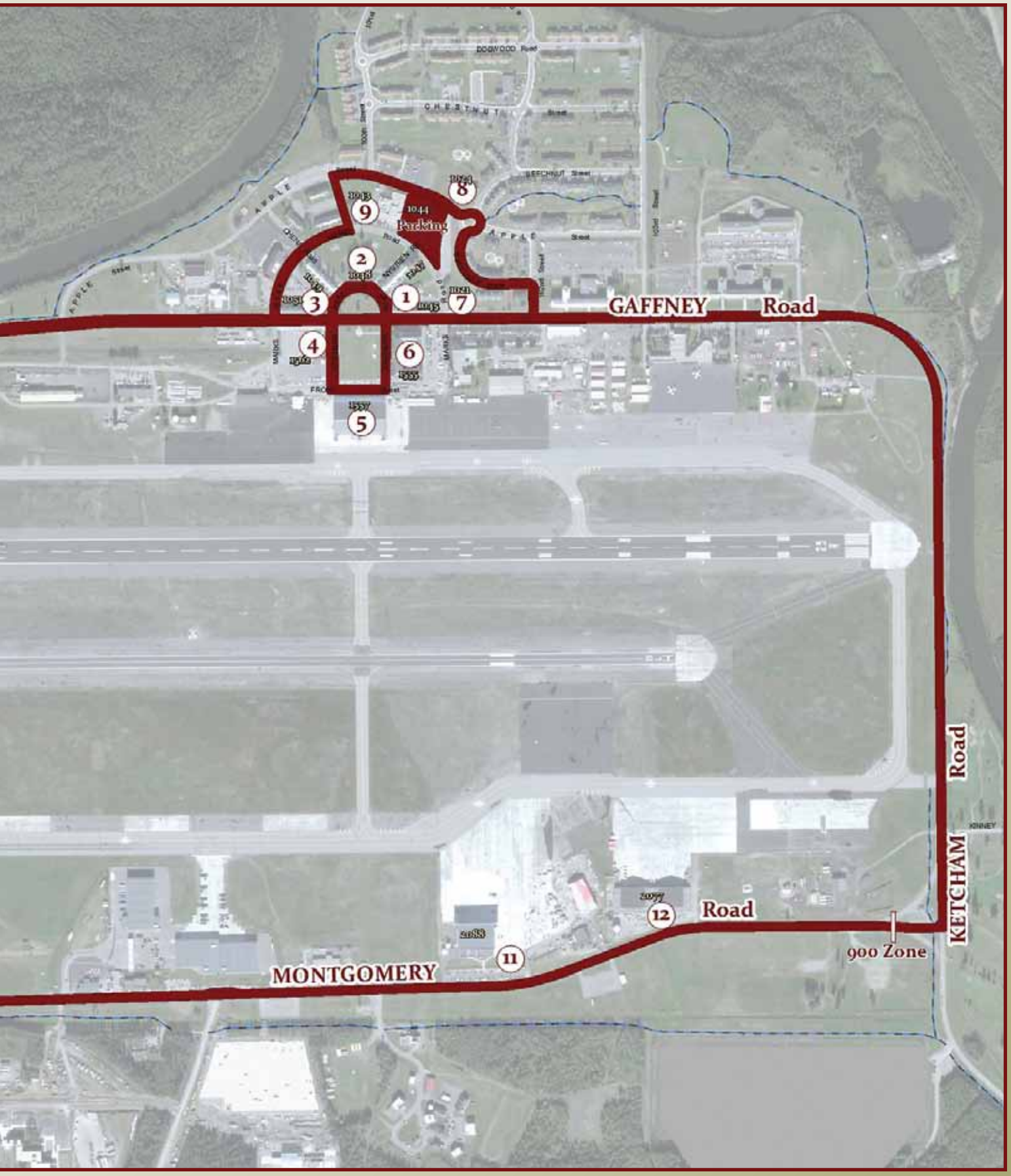
The construction of the installation was far from easy. With war looming, the construction continued year-round. The work continued until temperatures fell below –30° F. Brigadier General Bruce Staser (retired) worked on the construction of the installation and described his job as "chipping ice out of recesses in the basement wall of the hospital-to-be." General Staser recalled that another worker at the installation, Arnold Holm, "would hold the rivet gun under one arm and hang onto the steel with the other, barehanded. He was one tough man."

When the installation was dedicated in September 1940, the runway and the Commander's Quarters were the only completed facilities. It was not until 1942 that all of the original facilities were completed. However, by that time, the war had necessitated the construction of another runway, six additional hangars, and numerous temporary structures across the installation.

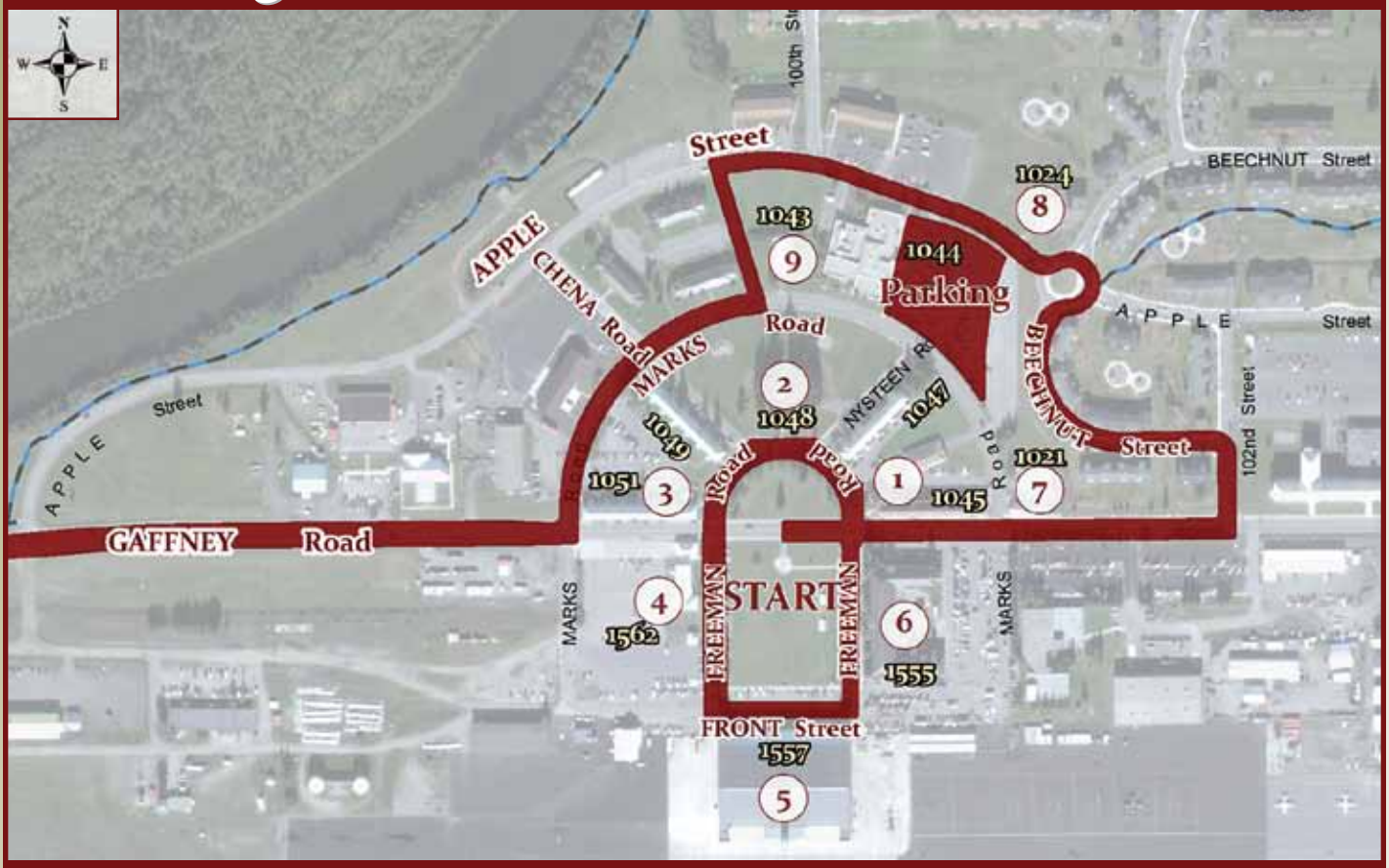
Tour Overview

This map provides an overview of all of the stops along the tour.




Parking
GAFFNEY Road
KETCHAM Road
Road
900 Zone
MONTGOMERY
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
11
12

Starting the Tour



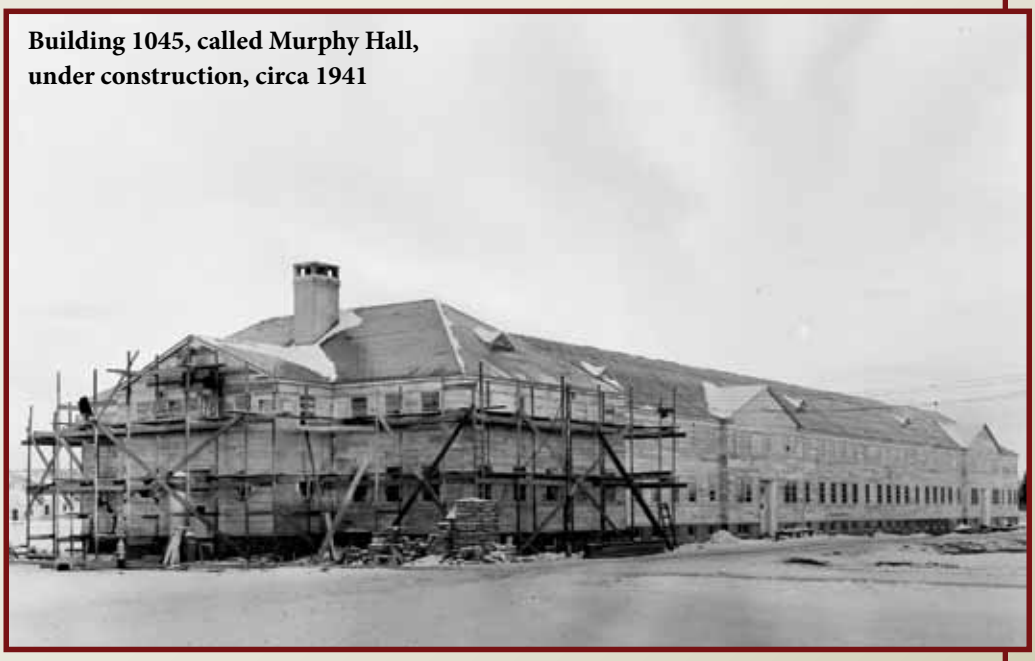
After passing through the Main Gate, proceed along Gaffney Road to Freeman Road. Three interpretive panels are located just north of Gaffney Road, and parking is available along Freeman Road.
To start the tour, turn left at the second intersection with Freeman Road and continue around the northern portion of the Horseshoe. Make a loop around Freeman Road; it is a one-way street and can be very busy, please proceed with caution.

The Horseshoe: Stops 1–6

Welcome to the heart of historic Fort Wainwright. This area is called the Horseshoe and is the original portion of the installation. Ladd Field was designed as a small, self-sufficient unit, and the buildings surrounding the Horseshoe include almost all of the buildings originally planned for the installation. The enclosed design was intended to protect the buildings from the weather and create a sheltered interior parade ground.

The Horseshoe, June 2010

Stop 1: Buildings 1045 and 1047



Building 1045, called Murphy Hall, under construction, circa 1941

Building 1045, called Murphy Hall, and Building 1047 were designed to serve as housing for officers and their families. The housing on the installation was of high standard, especially for the Alaskan territory. Phyllis Walseth, wife of the Post Adjutant, wrote to her family describing the facilities, "Nothing I can say can possibly tell you how nice they are for Alaska." The apartments had hardwood floors, a living and dining room, a kitchen, three bedrooms, and two baths. The Walseths considered themselves very fortunate to have an apartment as there were only seven for the sixteen married officers. The other nine families had to find housing in Fairbanks.

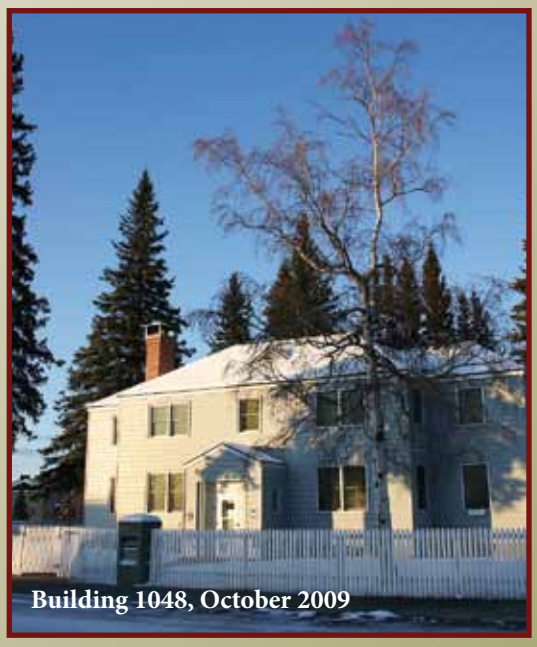
The families did not get to enjoy the housing for long. After the start of World War II, all military dependants were required to return to the U.S. for safety reasons. During the war, the buildings were used to house officers, nurses, and visitors to the installation.

Additional information on the post is available in the Public Affairs Office located in Unit 1 of Building 1047. To continue the tour, follow the loop around Freeman Road to Building 1048, the Commander's Quarters.

Stop 2: Building 1048— The Commander's Quarters

Building 1048, known as Quarters 1, originally served as housing for the commander of the Cold Weather Test Detachment, and today houses the Deputy Commanding Officer of US Army Alaska. It was one of the first facilities completed on the installation.

It was in Quarters 1 that on December 7, 1941, local radio operator August Hiebert woke up then Colonel Dale Gaffney, the Commander of the Cold Weather Test Detachment, with some interesting news. "I got him out of bed and I asked him, 'did you know there was a war on, Dale?' And he said 'no,' he said, 'you've got to be kidding.'"



Building 1048, October 2009

World War II at Ladd Field

With the start of World War II, Ladd Field was tasked with new missions and underwent a dramatic transformation. While cold weather testing continued, wartime concerns took precedence and the Cold Weather Test Detachment became a tenant organization under the auspices of the Army's Air Transportation Command. Ladd Field served as the headquarters for Air Transport Command in the region, and all military supplies flown into the territory of Alaska passed through Ladd Field. As an air transport depot, Ladd Field served a support function for all missions in Alaska, including the Aleutian Islands Campaign.

The most significant of the new missions at Ladd Field, however, was the Lend-Lease Operations. As part of the war effort, the United States provided supplies and equipment to its allies, including Russia. Lend-Lease supplies to Russia were sent along several routes, but it was the air corridor through Alaska that proved to be the most secure; over half of the planes sent to Russia were sent along this route. The corridor was called the Northwest Staging Route, and it consisted of a series of airfields starting from Gore Field and Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Montana, through Canada to Ladd Field, which was designated as the transfer point for the route. Overall, nearly 8,000 planes and several thousand tons of supplies were flown up the Northwest Staging Route and transferred to Russian pilots for the rest of the journey across Siberia to the frontlines of the war against Germany. At the height of the Lend-Lease Operations, there were 300 Russian personnel permanently stationed at Ladd Field in addition to the transient pilots.

The Lend-Lease Program is an example of extraordinary cooperation between wartime allies, and it was only with the cooperation of the American, Russian, and Canadian governments that the undertaking was a success.

From top to bottom:
American, Canadian and Russian officers from the Lend-Lease Program; a Soldier unloading supplies; and the Cold Weather Test Detachment working on a P-51

Additional information on the World War II heritage of Fort Wainwright can be found in our publications. Please stop by the Cultural Resources Office for free copies of any of these publications.

Stop 3: Buildings 1049 and 1051

During World War II, several facilities were given over to the Russians for their sole use. Building 1049 was one of the buildings assigned to Russian personnel. It housed Russian enlisted Soldiers and mechanics who worked to prepare the planes for the flight to Siberia.

Building 1051 was also used for Lend-Lease Operations, but instead of Russians, it housed the American pilots who had ferried the planes to Ladd Field using the Northwest Staging Route.

Buildings 1049 and 1051, circa 1944

Continue south on Freeman Road, cross Gaffney Road and drive toward the airfield.

Stop 4: Building 1562—Quartermaster's Building

Like all of the non-residential structures built for the original installation, Building 1562 served multiple functions. In addition to housing the Quartermaster's offices and warehouse, Building 1562 also served as the fire station, finance office, freight office, commissary, laundry, signal office, guard station, and stockade.

Building 1562, circa 1945

Utilidors

Beneath its streets the post has a unique feature, the utilidors. Utilidors (Utility Corridors) were one way the installation was designed to withstand the subarctic climate. The utilidors are underground tunnels that house the installation's utilities, protecting them from freezing during Alaska's long winters. The utilidors linked all the original buildings on the Horseshoe and were later connected to the facilities built during the early Cold War. In order to avoid the extreme cold during the winter, personnel used the corridors as walkways. As one visitor jokingly put it, at Ladd Field "you do everything underground, and don't come out except to fly."

Just past Building 1562, Freeman Road ends. Turn left on Front Street.

Stop 5: Building 1557—Hangar 1

Hangar 1 is one of the most significant historic buildings on Fort Wainwright. It was designed to serve as the primary hangar and headquarters for the Cold Weather Test Detachment. It was the largest building on Ladd Field, and its six-story flight control tower is still the tallest structure on the installation. During World War II, Hangar 1 housed the headquarters and administration facilities, the weather office, the Test Detachment, and Russian mechanics working on Lend-Lease aircraft. The maintenance bay in Hangar 1 is divided by a set of internal hangar bay doors; Russian mechanics used the western half of the hangar bay while the Test Detachment operated out of the eastern portion.

Hangar 1, October 2009

International Cooperation

One of the most interesting aspects of the Lend-Lease Operations at Ladd Field was the extent of cooperation between the Soviet Union and the United States. Russian planes always had priority for takeoff. There was a Russian-speaking air traffic controller in the flight tower, and Russian personnel had access to the recreational facilities in Fairbanks in addition to the facilities on Ladd Field. Many visitors to the installation were surprised by the extent of the Russian presence. Captain Richard Neuberger who visited Ladd Field remembered being surprised after passing a sentry patrolling outside of the west half of Hangar 1.

"Suddenly I turned and looked at the sentry again. He was not an American soldier, as we had presumed. He was a soldier of the Red Army, and he was guarding a hangar where Soviet mechanics . . . were swarming over planes which soon would be winging across Siberia on their way to the battlefront in Europe."

A Soldier painting the Soviet red star on a plane in preparation for transfer

Lend-Lease planes on the apron of Hangar 1, circa 1944, including A-20s and P-39s

There are two interpretive panels located in the center of the parade ground with information on World War II missions of the installation. Please feel free to park here and look at the panels.

The Cold Weather Test Detachment

During the first winter, testing was limited. The Test Detachment had only five planes, and one of the planes was damaged shortly after its arrival. Despite the difficulties, the Test Detachment accomplished its mission by identifying some of the major problems affecting arctic aviation and developing standard procedures for cold weather operations.

After two winters with limited resources, the Test Detachment started receiving all of the equipment and supplies it requested, including two of every plane in production. Representatives from many of the major manufacturers including Boeing, Pratt & Whitney, and General Electric came to Ladd Field to participate in the cold weather testing. Equipment developed by the Test Detachment included retractable skis for landing in snowy conditions, emergency ration packs for arctic environments, and improvements to aircraft design.

Russian pilots preparing for take-off

A B-34 that was used by the detachment for experiments

Continue on Front Street, then turn left onto Freeman Road.

Stop 6: Building 1555

Building 1555, circa 1945

Today, Building 1555 serves as garrison headquarters, but when it was originally constructed, it had a number of uses. The original installation hospital was located in the north wing, while the southern wing included a 250-man barracks that housed enlisted members of the Cold Weather Test Detachment and new arrivals to the installation. Building 1555 also served as the post exchange and theater.

After passing Building 1555, turn right onto Gaffney Road. Building 1021 will be on the left.

Stop 7: Building 1021

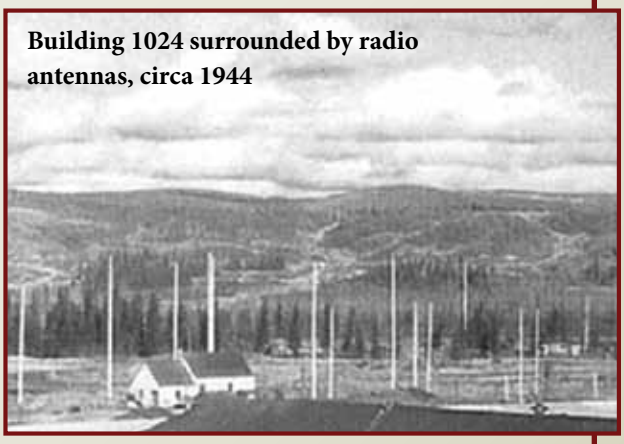
With the start of World War II, Ladd Field became a very busy airfield. The installation was originally intended to house only a 500-man detachment, but by the end of the war, it was home to more than 5,000 American and Russian personnel. Many new facilities were constructed, including Building 1021, which was built to provide additional housing for officers and nurses.

Building 1021, February 2011

After passing Building 1021, turn left onto 102nd Street and then take the first left onto Beechnut Street. Go through the roundabout and then turn onto Apple Street. Building 1024 will be on the right. There is an interpretive panel available for viewing here.

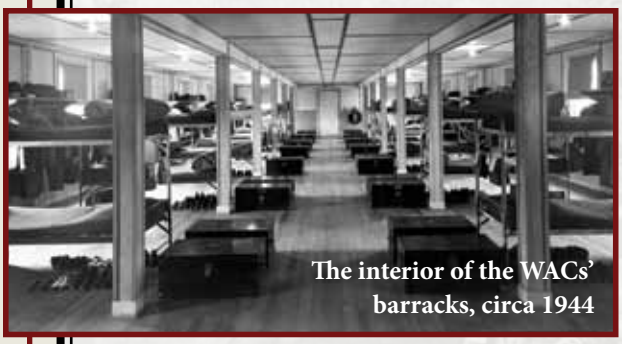
Stop 8: Building 1024—the MARS Building

Communication is vital during any war, but at the start of World War II, Alaska's military installations were only loosely connected by an incomplete communications system. After Pearl Harbor, communications became increasingly vital and new facilities were constructed to house the more technologically-advanced equipment. Building 1024 served as the radio transmitter building during World War II. It was located in an open field surrounded on all sides by radio antennas. Today, the building is known as the MARS Building after the Military Auxiliary Radio System (MARS) which operated out of the building during the Cold War.



Building 1024 surrounded by radio antennas, circa 1944

Women's Army Corps—WACs



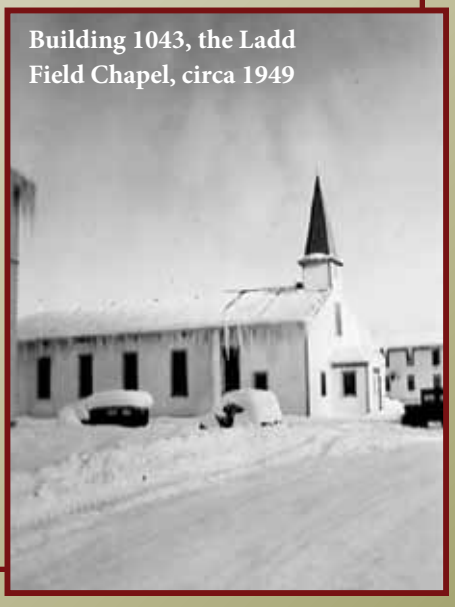
The interior of the WACs' barracks, circa 1944

Women played an active and important role in World War II throughout the military. WACs at Ladd Field served in a diverse number of functions including radio operators, mechanics, nurses, air support, and base operations staff. The WACs arrived at Ladd Field in June 1944 and served through the end of the war. The WACs' barracks was located on the current site of the Last Frontier Community Activity Center.

To walk to the Chapel, park at the Last Frontier Community Activity Center and walk south to Marks Road. Turn right and the Chapel is the next building on the right. To continue driving, proceed down Apple Street and turn left on the unnamed street adjacent to the Chapel on the left.

Stop 9: Building 1043—the Ladd Field Chapel

During the early years of Ladd Field, religious services were held in various buildings on the installation because there was no formally designated chapel. As the installation boomed in size from 520 people in 1941 to over 5,000 in 1945, a permanent facility was needed. The size and speed at which growth occurred throughout the armed forces necessitated the development of new standards for construction. While Ladd's original buildings took years to complete, the facilities built during World War II could be constructed in less than a week. In 1944, the Ladd Field Chapel was completed. Building 1043 is a standard design facility that was modified to serve as a chapel with the addition of a steeple. It is an example of the diverse forms that World War II era construction could take from Quonset huts to New England-style chapels.



Building 1043, the Ladd Field Chapel, circa 1949

The Cold War in Alaska

Hangar 1, circa 1948, photo by John Mentz

Alaska's proximity to both Russia and the polar navigation routes to Europe and the Middle East made it and its military installations exceptionally strategic. American and Russian military planners developed what has been called the "Polar Concept," which envisioned the Arctic as the next frontline for a military engagement. As U.S. Air Force General Carl Spatz instructed his commanders, "the development of the Arctic front is our primary operational objective."

Over the course of the Cold War, Alaska would serve many roles as the U.S. prepared for a potential conflict with Russia and its allies. Alaska was used as a laboratory for experiments on all aspects of life in the Arctic. It served as the frontline of defense, a store house, and a listening post. As one journalist would describe it, Alaska was "our northernmost sentry . . . [the] guardian of our continent." In some ways it is ironic that Ladd Field, where only months before the Americans and the Russians had been working side-by-side, would serve as the headquarters for the units flying some of the first missions of the Cold War. Ladd Field was renamed Ladd Air Force Base after the creation of the Air Force in 1947 and served as the Alaska Air Command Headquarters for all the territory north of the Alaska Range. Its mission was to identify, locate, and destroy any enemy fighters within American territory. The Air Defense Control Center (ADCC), located on Ladd Air Force Base, coordinated all defense operations and training exercises in the region. The ADCC was described as the "nerve center for north of the range defense." It oversaw operations at subsector centers like Murphy Dome and coordinated battle efforts with Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage.

Interior of the ADCC, circa 1952

Ladd Air Force Base would host reconnaissance units, fighter intercept squadrons, arctic training exercises, and the Arctic Aeromedical Laboratory.

Dog team in front of F-102 and Kodiak T hangar, circa 1956

Continue on Marks Road until it ends at Gaffney Road and turn right. Drive along Gaffney Road until it intersects with Meridian Road and turn left. There will be a traffic signal at the intersection. Continue south on Meridian Road and turn left onto Montgomery Road. Hangars 2 and 3 will be on the left.

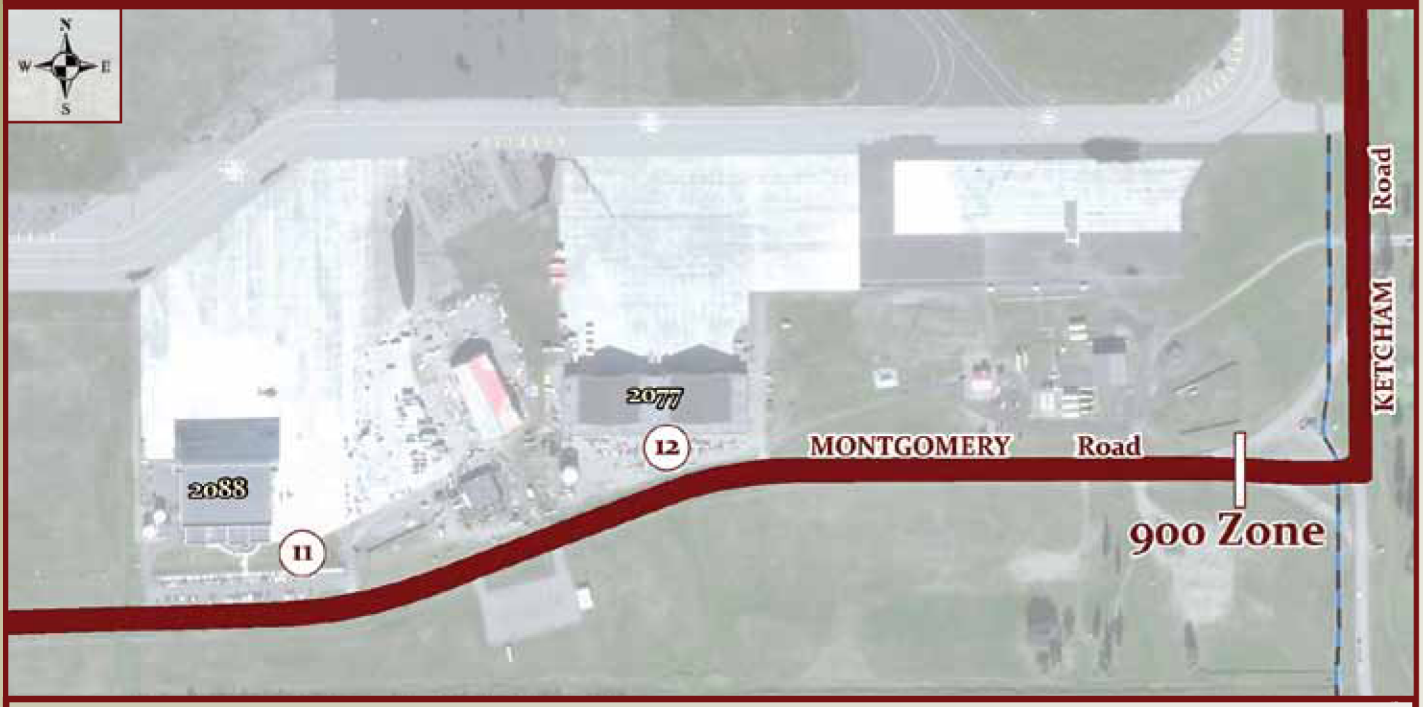
Stop 10: Buildings 3008 and 3005—Hangars 2 and 3

Hangar 3 with a F-82 sitting on the apron

Hangars 2 and 3 are a set of twin Birchwood hangars constructed in 1943 as part of the World War II build-up of Ladd Field. Hangars 2 and 3 are wooden hangars with barreled roofs and are among the most distinctive historic buildings on Fort Wainwright. Both Hangars 2 and 3 were used by the Alaska Air Transport Command as passenger terminals for the pilots and staff arriving from the Northwest Staging Route. Hangar 2 was also used as a maintenance hangar for the Lend-Lease Operations.

Early in the Cold War, the hangars were used to house fighter intercept squadrons. As part of the Polar Concept, it was believed that Alaska would be the frontline if war were to break out. Fighter intercept squadrons were based throughout Alaska and tasked with intercepting and engaging any potential invasion. Several fighter intercept squadrons were based at Ladd Air Force Base during the 1950s, including the F-82 twin mustangs pictured.

Interior of Birchwood Hangar 3 with an F-82 undergoing maintenance



Stop 11: Building 2088—the Modern Hangar 6

Today's Hangar 6 stands on the site of the original Hangar 6, a sister hangar to the Birchwood Hangars 2 and 3. Originally four Birchwood hangars were constructed on Ladd Field, but one, Hangar 5, was lost to fire during World War II. Hangar 6 served an important role in the early missions of the Cold War and housed the 46th/72nd Reconnaissance Squadron from 1946-1949. Sadly, Hangar 6 was lost to fire in 2004. Today, the modern Hangar 6 houses one of the Army's aviation units.

Hangar 7 and 8 with the original Hangar 6 in the background, circa 1961

Stop 12: Building 2077—Hangar 7 and 8

In the 1950s, the Air Force began a major construction campaign to build permanent facilities to replace the temporary facilities left from World War II. One of the new facilities constructed was a Combat Alert Cell (CAC). CACs were self-contained facilities for fighter intercept squadrons and were generally built at the more remote Forward Operating Bases. CACs included all the maintenance, housing and billeting facilities within one structure called a ready hangar, as the squadrons stationed there were to be ready to respond at a moment's notice. On Ladd Air Force Base, the CAC was expanded to include the ready hangar, two conjoined hangars, additional training facilities, and an ammunition storage complex. Today, Hangar 7 and 8, the ammunition storage point, and several of the support facilities remain. The ready hangar was moved to Eielson Air Force Base after Ladd Air Force Base was transferred back to the Army in 1961.

The 900 Zone

The 900 Zone, 1945

The Chena Bend Golf Course is located on the site of what was the 900 Zone, a maintenance and temporary housing area that served Hangars 5 and 6, Birchwood hangars located at the southeast corner of the airfield. The area was comprised of a mix of Quonset huts and temporary warehouse structures, and was used for basic maintenance activities. The Noncommissioned Officer's Club was also located in the area.

During the early years of the Cold War, 1946-1949, the area was used by the 46th/72nd Aerial Reconnaissance Squadron. The squadron was tasked with conducting electronic, photographic, and weather reconnaissance to monitor the Russian government's activities in the polar region.

In 1949, the squadron was moved to Eielson Air Force Base and the 900 Zone was transferred to the fighter intercept squadrons that were assigned to Ladd Air Force Base. Parts of the 900 Zone were removed for the construction of the southern ammunition storage point, Hangar 7 and 8, and associated support features in the mid-1950s.

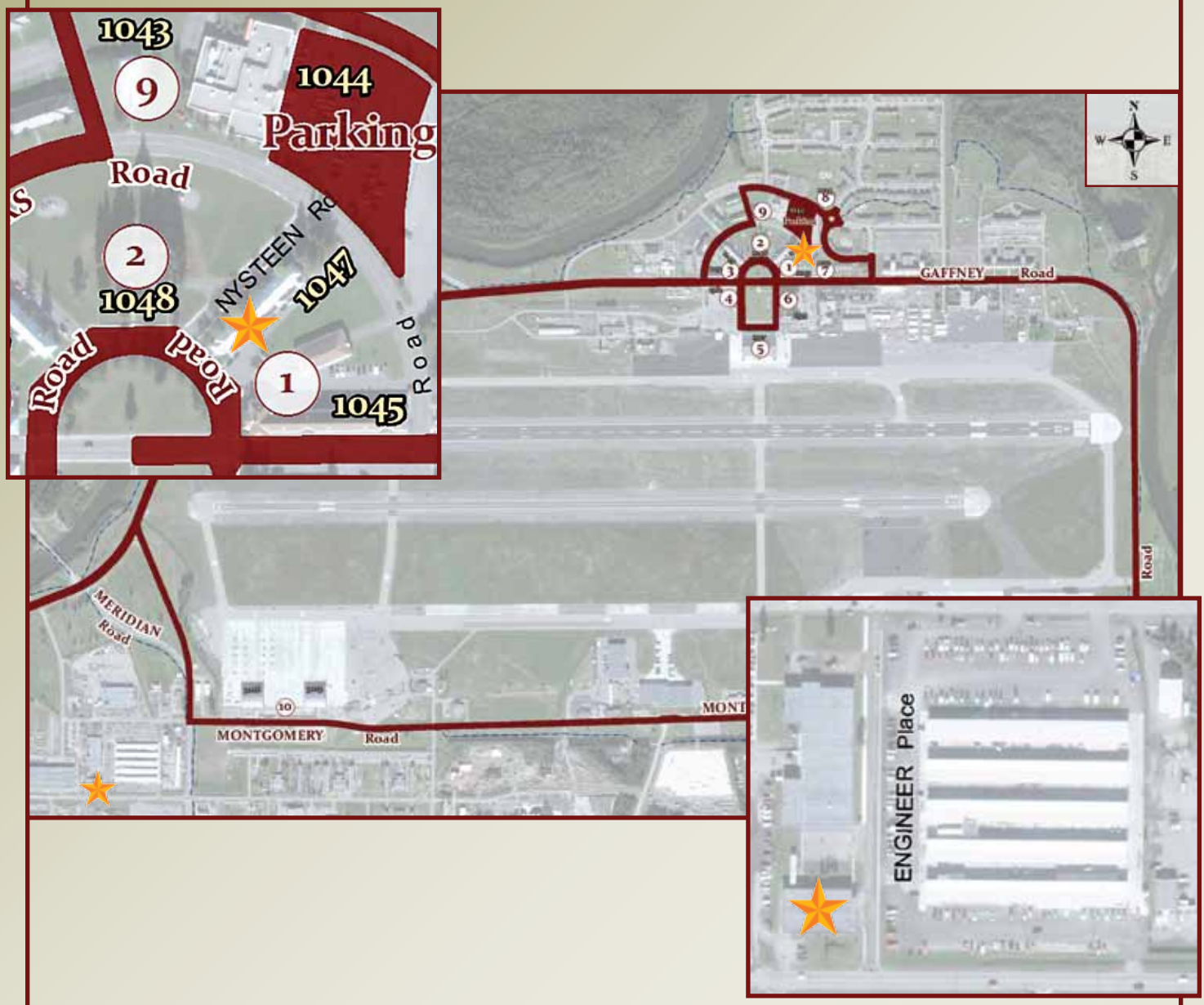
This completes the tour of historic Fort Wainwright. To leave the installation, turn left onto Ketcham Road and follow it until it becomes Gaffney Road. Continue on Gaffney Road until it exits through the Main Gate. If you would like additional information on the history of the installation, copies of our free publications, or information on recreational opportunities, please feel free to stop by the Public Affairs Office or the Environmental Division. Maps showing the locations of the Public Affairs Office and the Environmental Division are shown on the next page.

U.S. Army Garrison Fort Wainwright —1961 to present

On January 1, 1961, Ladd Air Force Base was transferred back to the Army and rededicated as Fort Jonathan M. Wainwright. The Army provided support to the Air Force throughout the Cold War and continued the tradition of cold weather training and experimentation that is the installation's foundation. While changes in military strategy and deployment during the late 1960s and 1970s would greatly decrease the installation's population, Fort Wainwright continued to provide ground defense for the Interior. In 1986, Fort Wainwright was given a new mission to support world-wide deployment. Once again, Fort Wainwright's strategic location on the polar navigation routes allows for the rapid deployment of Soldiers throughout the world.

Public Affairs Office — Building 1047, Unit 1

The Public Affairs Office is located in Unit 1 of Building 1047 on the Horseshoe. Building 1047 is located at the corner of Freeman Road and Nysteen Road. To get to Building 1047, continue on Gaffney Road until it intersects Freeman Road and turn right. Nysteen Road will be the first road on the right. Parking is available along the street or at the Frontier Club at the end of the road.



Cultural Resources — Building 3023

The Cultural Resources Office is located within the Environmental Division, Building 3023. Building 3023 is located at the corner of Neely Road and Engineer Place. To get to Building 3023, continue on Gaffney Road until it intersects Meridian Road and turn left at the light. Continue on Meridian Road through the first intersection and then turn right on Neely Road. Engineer Place is the first street on the right. Building 3023 will be the first building on the left.

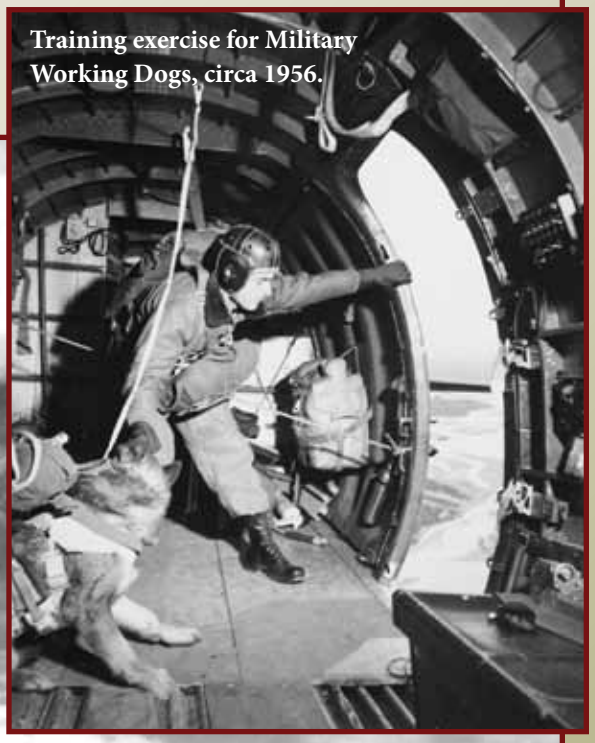
Copies of our publications , additional information on the history of Fort Wainwright, and historic photos of the installation are available upon request.

Available Publications:

- The World War II Heritage of Ladd Field, Fairbanks, Alaska — 2004
- Northern Defenders: Cold War Context of Ladd Air Force Base, Fairbanks, Alaska — 2001
- Early Mining History, Fort Wainwright and Fort Greely, Alaska — 2001
- Early Transportation Routes, Fort Wainwright, Alaska — 2002
- Homesteads on Fort Wainwright, Alaska — 2002
- The Haines-Fairbanks Pipeline — 2003
- Tracking the Unthinkable: The Donnelly Flats Midas Ground Station and the Early Development of Space Warning Systems, 1959-1967 — 2006

Photographs

Available photographs include both historic and recent photos of the installation.



Training exercise for Military Working Dogs, circa 1956.

Hangar 1, July 2010

Copies of our publications can also be downloaded from our website:
http://www.wainwright.army.mil/env

U.S. Army Garrison
Fort Wainwright,
AK

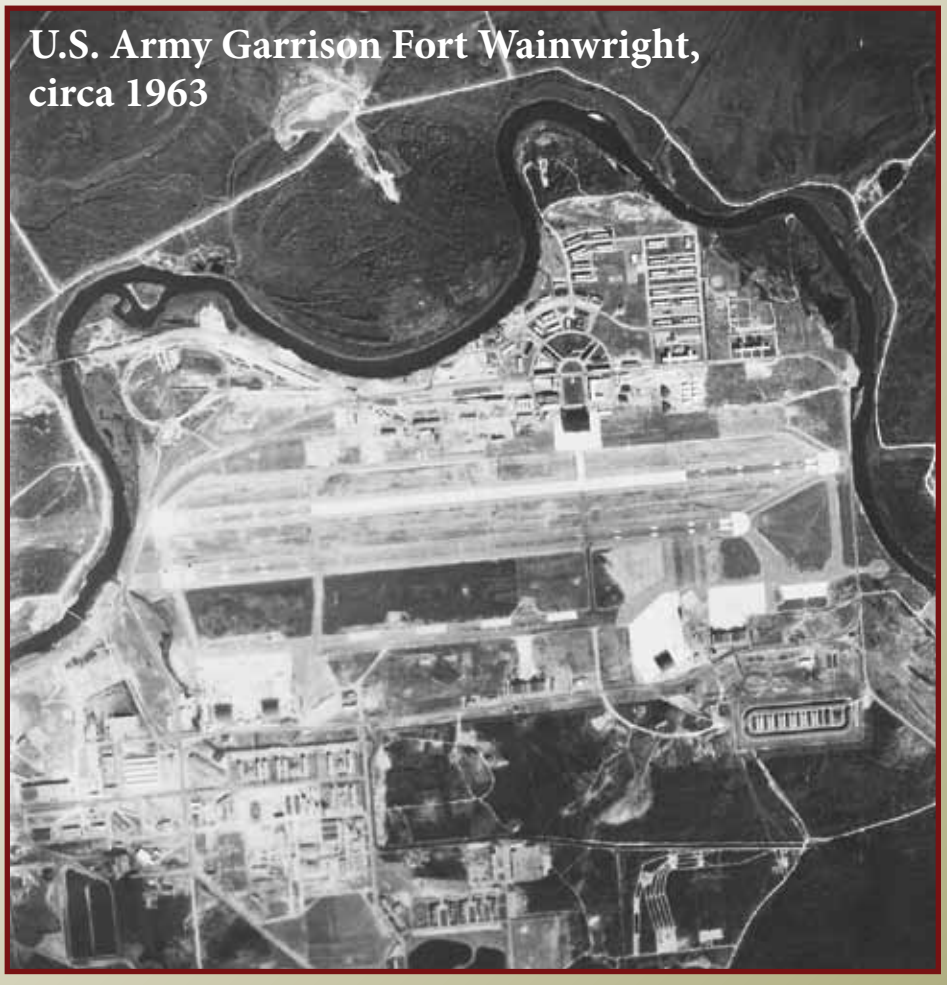
Directorate of Public Works
Environmental Division
Cultural Resources Program

Fort Wainwright Cultural Resources Program

U.S. Army Garrison Fort Wainwright was founded in the summer of 1939, just weeks prior to the start of World War II. It has remained an active military installation ever since. The Ladd Field National Historic Landmark was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1984, and the Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District was determined eligible for the National Register in 2001.

The Cultural Resources Program supports the Army's mission by inventorying and managing cultural resources in a manner that complies with federal law, minimizes impacts on the mission, supports sustainability of resources and infrastructure, and provides sound stewardship of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

For more information on Fort Wainwright's history, call 907-361-3002 or view the website at http://www.wainwright.army.mil/env



U.S. Army Garrison Fort Wainwright, circa 1963

Correspondence to:
Directorate of Public Works
Attn: IMPC-FWA-PWE (Cultural)
1060 Gaffney Rd. #4500
Fort Wainwright, AK 99703