

The Cold War in Alaska

Alaska's proximity to Russia, and the polar navigation routes to Europe and the Middle East, made Alaska's military installations highly strategic locations during the Cold War. When Congress first debated establishing military bases in the territory of Alaska in the 1930s, Brigadier General Billy Mitchell famously said, "I believe in the future, he who holds Alaska will hold the world."

Throughout the Cold War (1947 – 1991) Alaska was considered the front line for any potential invasion from Russia. All the branches of the military were dedicated to the defense of Alaska as well as arctic training and cold weather testing of

equipment and military procedures designed to insure soldiers were prepared for fighting on the arctic front.



Soldier loading bomber

For more information on Fort Wainwright's history call 907-361-9329 or check out our website at : http://www.usarak.army.mil/conservation/CR_links.htm

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U.S. Army Garrison
Fort Wainwright, AK

Fort Wainwright's Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District

Northern Defenders - the Cold War in Alaska



Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District

The 46th/72nd Reconnaissance Squadron

was assigned to Ladd Field following World War II. In addition to conducting reconnaissance operations, the squadron pioneered arctic aviation techniques and perfected the grid navigation system for flying in polar regions.

The squadron's reconnaissance missions included electronic and weather monitoring flights used to track Soviet activities in

the area. The most significant of these missions includes the flight on September 3, 1949 which identified the first evidence of a successful explosion of a nuclear bomb by the USSR.

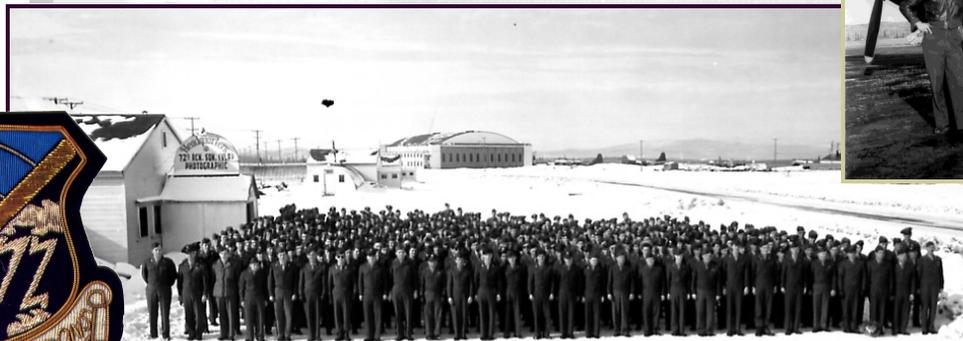
From 1946 until 1949, the squadron was housed in an area of the Post called the 900 Zone, located on the southeastern corner of the airfield.

The 900 Zone was removed in the 1950s to make room for additional hangars and the Ammunition Storage Complex.



46th/72nd flying in formation Circa 1949

Fighter Intercept Squadrons were used during the 1950s, when military strategists started placing increased emphasis on the defense of Alaska. Many people feared that if the Soviets successfully invaded Alaska, they could use it as a base for launching attacks on the rest of the United States. As part of a large defensive network, Forward Operating Bases were established to house Fighter Intercept Squadrons. These squadrons were tasked with monitoring and engaging enemy fighters in case of a Russian invasion. Ladd AFB housed several squadrons and provided support to Forward Operating Bases located throughout Alaska. The squadrons were housed in the newly constructed hangars that replaced the 900 Zone at the southeastern corner of the airfield.



46th/72nd Reconnaissance Squadron in front of their headquarters in the 900 Zone

Fort Wainwright

was established in 1939 as a Cold Weather Test Station designated Ladd Field, under the Army Air Corps. After the start of World War II, Ladd Field served as the transfer point for Lend Lease Operations. As part of the program, nearly 8,000 planes were flown up from Montana and transferred to the Russian pilots stationed at Ladd Field.

Ironically, after the war ended, the Post served as a reconnaissance base and was used to spy on the Russians who had been stationed there only a few months prior. In 1947, the airfield was transferred to the newly created Air Force and was named Ladd Air Force Base (Ladd AFB). The Post was transferred back to the Army on January 1, 1961 and was renamed Fort Jonathan M. Wainwright.



Dog team in front of F-102 fighter jet and Kodiak—T Hangar