

## THE COLD WAR IN ALASKA

Alaska's proximity to the Soviet Union, 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 the Soviet Union. 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.



*Boeing F-13s flying in formation through the Alaska Range. The F-13 was a version of the B-29 that had been modified for photo reconnaissance duties. The aircraft carried five cameras; three K-17Bs, two K-22s, and one K-18.*

## CULTURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AT FORT WAINWRIGHT

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

The section is located within the Environmental Division, Building 3023. Copies of our publications and additional information on the history of Fort Wainwright are available during business hours, Monday through Friday 7:30 am to 4:30 pm or on the website at [www.wainwright.army.mil/env/CR.html](http://www.wainwright.army.mil/env/CR.html).



Directorate of Public Works  
Environmental Division  
ATTN: IMFW-PWE (Cultural Resources Manager)  
1046 Marks Road  
Fort Wainwright, Alaska 99703-4500  
907-361-3002

## FORT WAINWRIGHT'S LADD AIR FORCE BASE COLD WAR HISTORIC DISTRICT



U.S. Army Garrison Fort Wainwright  
Directorate of Public Works  
Environmental Division

## THE 46TH/72ND RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON



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

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.

The 46th/72nd 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.

## FIGHTER INTERCEPT SQUADRONS

The 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.



*Northrop F-89 Scorpions flying in formation over the Alaska Range. A squadron of F-89 Scorpions provided air defense for much of Alaska in the 1950s.*

## LADD AIR FORCE BASE

### COLD WAR HISTORIC DISTRICT



*Boeing B-29 Superfortress*

**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, 7,926 planes were flown from Montana and transferred to the Soviet pilots stationed at Ladd Field.

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

In 2001, due to the significant role Ladd AFB played in the Cold War, the airfield, along with 68 contributing resources were designated the Ladd Air Force Base Cold War Historic District and determined eligible for the National Register.

