

Cold War in Alaska

The end of World War II brought cutbacks to defense spending throughout the United States and raised questions about Ladd Field's future, but rising tensions with the Soviet Union led to major new investments in Alaskan installations, including Ladd Field.

In 1935, Gen. Billy Mitchell had famously predicted, "I believe that in the future, he who holds Alaska will hold the world." It was during the Cold War that U.S. strategic planners recognized that Alaska had become the first line of defense against any potential invasion or attack by Soviet bombers.

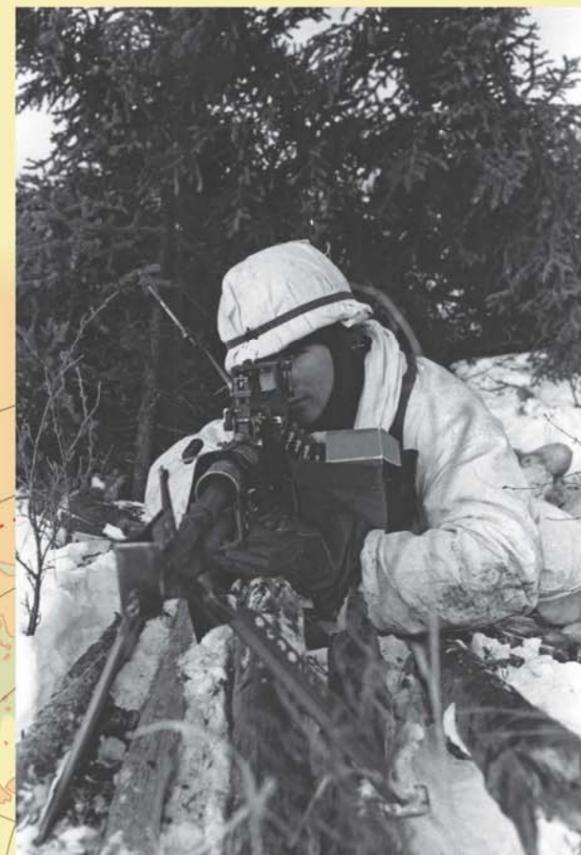
Ladd Air Force Base became an important air defense site with an emphasis on squadrons of fighter-interceptors and anti-aircraft batteries ready to repel any invaders. Ladd AFB was the Alaska Air Command headquarters for all the territory north of the Alaska Range. Its mission was to identify and destroy any enemy attackers. The Air Defense Control Center at Ladd coordinated defense operations and training exercises within the region.



Early in the Cold War, the 46th/72nd Reconnaissance Squadron conducted long-range flights to gather information about the potential Soviet threat to the United States.

As weapons technology changed, Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles replaced bombers as the greatest threat, leading to cutbacks in military spending in Alaska in the 1960s and 1970s. After the Army took over Ladd Air Force Base and rededicated it as Fort Wainwright in 1961, a series of new missions developed. Aviation, infantry and artillery units defended Alaska and supported a variety of Arctic training exercises.

By the time the Cold War ended in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fort Wainwright's mission had changed to supporting rapid worldwide deployments of troops, a mission that continues today.



Infantry and artillery units from Fort Wainwright train in all conditions.



Reconnaissance of the potential Soviet threat led to the stationing of the 46th/72nd Reconnaissance Squadron at Ladd Field early in the Cold War. In addition to long-range surveillance flights, the 46th/72nd helped to improve navigation in the polar region and develop techniques for flying in what had been uncharted territory. The knowledge gained by the 46th/72nd allowed commercial carriers to make polar flights routine.



The crew from the F-13 christened "Bucket of Bolts" checks out maps for a long-distance flight across the Arctic.



Nike missiles at five sites near Fairbanks provided a ground-based anti-aircraft missile defense in the 1960s.

