



## Military in Alaska, 1867-2000

The civilian-military bond in Alaska has been a close one. It is best described by Robert Atwood, former owner and publisher of *The Anchorage Times* and pioneer Alaskan, as that of a frontier community growing up around a military outpost. Each is dependent on the other. Alaska, in many ways, can still be considered a frontier. It is an isolated, sparsely-populated state, strategically located and adjacent to former enemies, Japan and the Soviet Union. Historically, Alaskans have sought to retain a strong military presence in Alaska.

The military's presence since the United States purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867 falls roughly into seven periods:

1867-1877: Occupation and administration by the U.S. Army following purchase.

1877-1897: Withdrawal of U.S. Army, de facto civil rule by U.S. Navy and U.S. Revenue Service (forerunner of U.S. Coast Guard) until 1884 when Alaska's first civilian governor was appointed, and exploration of interior Alaska.

1897-1920: Return of U.S. Army to provide law and order during Gold Rush, further exploration and development of transportation and communications.

1920-1940: Decline of military presence and recognition of Alaska's strategic importance.

1940-1945: Buildup of forces and World War II.

1945-1990: Cold War defense of Alaska, Arctic training and humanitarian services.

1990-current: Strategic importance for force basing, increased emphasis on joint training and humanitarian services.

Defense of Alaska, arctic training and humanitarian services.

"If we would provide an adequate defense for the United States, we must have...Alaska to dominate the North Pacific." With these words, Secretary of State William Seward argued with a reluctant Congress for the purchase of Alaska. On 30 June 1867, the United States signed a treaty with Russia to purchase the vast and largely unexplored land for \$7,200,000.

The official transfer ceremonies took place at 3:30 PM, 18 October 1867, when the Russians lowered their flag on Castle Hill, Sitka, Alaska, and Brig Gen Lowell H. Rousseau formally accepted the new U.S. possession on behalf of President Andrew Johnson.

The American flag was raised amid the thundering of cannons. The event was observed by an honor guard from the 9th Infantry and 2nd Artillery Regiments, U.S. Army, and a small contingency of U.S. Navy seamen and Marines from the U.S. ships anchored in Sitka Harbor.

On 29 October, Brig Gen Jefferson C. Davis took command of the Military District of Alaska (later Department of Alaska), with headquarters at Sitka. In the absence of any form of civil authority, the Army assumed the role of governing and providing protection to the inhabitants and their property. In addition to Sitka, garrisons were established at Fort Tongass and Wrangell in southeast Alaska and on Kodiak Island and the Kenai Peninsula.

The Army remained the sole U.S. government in Alaska for the next ten years. During this period, the Army (in its civil-military role) was confronted with tensions between the native and white inhabitants. The Army in turn was resented by both and, in the absence of any clear guidance from the federal government, experienced difficulties in carrying out its duties. Despite these problems, the Army was able to prevent any serious problems from developing and facilitated the development of trade and commerce.

Because of needs elsewhere, the Army began withdrawing its units during the 1870s, and preparations were made to turn over their responsibilities to custom agents of the Treasury Department. The last units departed Sitka on 14 June 1877.

Their departure left Alaska virtually without a government. To complicate the situation, the collector of customs (the sole federal authority in Alaska) at Sitka departed shortly afterwards. The situation grew worse; and, in early 1879, the white citizens of Sitka, fearful of a native uprising, petitioned Washington D.C. for protection. When no immediate reply came, as might be expected in those days of slow communications, they turned to a British military post on Vancouver Island for help. The British promptly dispatched the HMS Osprey, which sailed into Sitka Harbor on 1 March 1879.

Shortly afterwards, the U.S. Revenue Service cutter, Oliver Walcott, arrived. On 3 April, the two ships were joined by the USS Alaska, and the Osprey departed. With the arrival of the Alaska, the U.S. Navy, along with the U.S. Revenue Cutter Service, assumed responsibility for governing Alaska for the next five years. In many respects, the Navy and Revenue Service proved ideal caretakers since most of Alaska's inhabitants lived along the coast line, on islands, or along navigable rivers.

The mobility of the Navy and Revenue Cutter Service allowed them easy access to the communities.

The U.S. Marine Corps also established a barracks at Sitka. It remained there from 1897 to 1912. A corps detachment was later formed at Sitka in 1939, and Marines served afloat and ashore during the Aleutian Campaign. Although limited in numbers, the Marines have continued a presence in Alaska and have contributed to its defense. The activation of the Company E, 4th Reconnaissance Battalion, a reserve unit, on 1 July 1985, underscored their commitment.

Navy and Revenue Cutter Service presence in Alaska did not solve the basic problems caused by a lack of civil government. Finally, in May 1884, President Chester A. Arthur signed into law the Organic Act. This act gave Alaska a district status, with a civil and judicial system, and it authorized a governor. Alaska's population at the time was 33,426.

Even after appointment of a civilian governor, Navy and Revenue Cutter Service vessels continued to patrol the waters off the Alaskan coast and in the Bering Sea. The ships protected commerce, enforced treaties, and provided humanitarian services. In addition to larger vessels that cruised Alaskan waters each summer, the Navy kept USS *Pinta* at Sitka until 1897. Revenue cutters such as the long-serving *Bear* established a proud and continuous tradition of service in Alaskan waters that is continued today by the Juneau-based Coast Guard District 17.

During this period, the Army sent a number of expeditions into Alaska's interior to explore and develop new routes of communications. Notable expeditions included those led by Lt Frederick Schwatka, 1883; Lt Henry Allen, 1884; Capt William Abercombie, 1898; Lt Joseph Castner, 1898-99; Lt Joseph Herron, 1899, and Lt Percival Lowe, 1898. The Navy and Revenue Cutter Service also sent Lt George Stoney and Lt John L. Cantwell to explore the Kobuk River area during 1884-87.

The Klondike gold strike in 1897 brought the Army back in force. Thousands of prospectors, many poorly equipped and unready for the rigors of the Northland, entered Alaska by way of Dyea and Skagway in the southeast, and Saint Michael at the mouth of the Yukon River during 1897-98. When gold was discovered on the beaches of Nome, some 15,000 to 20,000 people flooded into the small Bering Sea coastal community to seek their fortunes.

Large numbers of the prospectors soon found themselves destitute and stranded. Crime became a problem, and local residents feared for their safety. The United States government responded by providing relief funding and ordering the Army north to assist the Alaska district government in maintaining law and order.

The Army established forts at the entries to the gold fields and along the main transportation routes. Fort Seward was built at Haines and Fort Liscum at Valdez. Fort Davis was constructed at Nome. Fort Saint Michael, built near the village of the same name at the mouth of the Yukon River, served as the headquarters for the Department of Alaska. The headquarters was later moved to Fort Seward. Two forts were built along the Yukon River--Fort Gibbon near Tanana and Fort Egbert at Eagle.

To link the widely scattered and isolated forts together, the Army Signal Corps built the Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) between 1900 and 1904. It was a considerable undertaking and the largest construction project of its time in Alaska. It involved the stringing of telegraph lines across 1,497 miles of trackless wilderness and the laying of 2,128 miles of submarine cable. Additionally, a 107-mile radio link, one of the first of its kind, was established between Fort Saint Michael and Port Safety on the Seward Peninsula.

When the WAMCATS was completed, it linked Alaska with the rest of the nation. Its impact is amply described by Brig Gen Billy Mitchell in his book, "The Opening of Alaska." General Mitchell, as a young Army Signal Corps lieutenant, supervised the stringing of the telegraph line between Valdez and Eagle.

The Army, and later the United States Air Force (the responsibility was turned over to the Air Force in 1961), continued to provide long-line communications until 1971 when the Air Force sold the Alaska Communication System, the successor to WAMCATS, to the RCA Corporation.

In 1905, Congress created the Alaska Road Commission with Brig Gen Wilds P. Richardson as its head. The commission was tasked with the responsibility of building a road network which would open interior Alaska to commerce and settlement. A number of roads were subsequently built, notable of which was the Richardson Highway between Valdez and Fairbanks. Congress, in 1914, also created the Alaska Engineering Commission, the predecessor of the Alaskan Railroad.

With the ending of the Gold Rush and the United States entry into World War I, the Army began withdrawing its forces from Alaska. By now, Alaska had achieved a territorial status with the passage of the Alaska Home Rule Bill in 1912. The so-called second Organic Act, in addition to a governor and judicial system, provided for a two-house territorial legislature. By now, Alaska's population had grown to 64,356. However, with the advent of World War I, many who left did not return. By 1920, the population declined to 55,036.

Between 1921 and 1925, all the forts except Fort Seward (renamed Chilkoot Barracks) were closed. All that remained of the Army presence in Alaska, until the outbreak of

World War II, were two infantry companies at Chilkoot Barracks, two Signal Corps companies that maintained and operated the Alaskan Communications System, and a small number of U.S. Army Corps of Engineer personnel who managed various construction projects.

The Navy's presence during this time was even less. They maintained a system of navigation and radio stations along the coast, and in 1937 established a small seaplane base at Sitka, the first military air facility built in Alaska. During this period, the Navy conducted a number of survey flights and fleet exercises in the North Pacific and Aleutian Islands region.

The strategic importance of Alaska, as well as the importance of aviation to it, was graphically recognized during the summer of 1920 when Captain St. Claire Streett led a flight of four DeHavilland DH-4s on a round-trip flight from Mitchell Field, New York, to Nome. It proved that the territory could be reached by air and opened up the possibilities of aviation to Alaskans.

The flight had been conceived by the visionary Brig Gen Billy Mitchell, who would later testify during 1935 Congressional hearings that "Alaska is the most strategic place in the world."

Other military flights involving Alaska followed, notable of which was a flight of ten Martin B-10 bombers led by a protégé of General Mitchell, Lt Col Henry "Hap" Arnold, who would later command the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II.

One of the purposes of the flight, conducted during the summer of 1934 from Bolling Field outside of Washington D.C., was to locate possible military airfield sites in Alaska. Two of the areas that Colonel Arnold and his men examined would later become the Fort Richardson-Elmendorf and the Fort Wainwright-Eielson complexes.

The Arnold Flight was part of an overall effort by the War Department to upgrade the defenses of the nation's overseas locations. The Wilcox Bill, introduced in 1935, proposed construction of air bases in six strategic locations, including Alaska. It incorporated a bill introduced by Alaska's vote less delegate, Anthony Dimond, calling for the construction of a cold-weather test facility near Fairbanks. A number of high-ranking military officials, including General Mitchell, testified on its behalf. The Wilcox Bill passed, but the funds for Alaska bases were deleted. They were restored in early 1939, and preliminary construction of Ladd Field (now Fort Wainwright) was started that summer.

Nineteen-forty marked the beginning of what one historian would refer to as the "military Alaska." Another contemporary author would comment that while the Gold Rush gave Alaska its mystique, the military put it on the map.

Because of the growing Japanese threat, the U.S. military rapidly built up the Alaskan defenses. Construction of naval stations at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor was begun, the Naval Air Station at Sitka was expanded, and work was started in June 1940 on building Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Field.

The first Army troops, the 4th Infantry Regiment, arrived in late June and the first Air Corps unit, the 18th Pursuit Squadron, arrived in February 1941. The almost static population of 72,524 in 1940 increased to 128,643 by 1950.

Army engineers under the direction of Col B. B. Talley built a complex of airfields and bases throughout the territory. They were required to support the war in the North Pacific and the Lend-Lease delivery of aircraft to Russia.

The Navy also greatly expanded their facilities. Other construction efforts were directed at the building of roads and port facilities. The Alaskan Highway (built in six months) is an example of the first, and the Port of Whittier is an example of the latter. The Alaska Railroad and its rolling stock was vastly upgraded to meet the requirements of the military.

The Alaska National Guard was also formed during this period. Originally conceived by Governor John Strong in 1917 as a home guard to protect local communities, it was formally organized when the 1st Battalion, 297th Infantry, formed during 1940-41, was federally recognized 15 September 1941.

Governor Gruening, concerned about the pending loss of the battalion, requested assistance from the Alaskan Defense Command to form a territorial guard. As a result, Maj Marvin "Muktuk" Marston and Capt Carl Scheibner were detailed in 1942 to assist in recruiting and organizing the Alaska Territorial Guard which, along with the 297th, formed the basis for the current Alaska National Guard.

The Alaska Air Guard was formed in 1952, and federally recognized on 1 July 1953. It and the Army Guard make up today's Alaska National Guard.

Alaska became a theater of war in 1942 when the Japanese bombed Dutch Harbor on 3 and 4 June and occupied Kiska and Attu shortly afterwards as part of an overall effort to seize Midway Island and establish a defensive line that would run from the western Aleutians to New Guinea. The Japanese lost the Battle of Midway and, with it, their initiative in the Pacific. From that point on, they were on the defensive.

However, the United States and its Canadian allies were left with the problem of expelling the Japanese garrisons from Kiska and Attu. Although there were some who questioned the wisdom of retaking the two islands, which could just as easily be isolated from their support bases in the northern Kurile Islands, others pressed for their

recapture. It was the first time since 1812 that North American soil had been occupied by a foreign nation.

The Aleutian Campaign, fought between June 1942 and August 1943, was primarily an air war and secondarily a naval war. American forces advanced westward down the Aleutian Chain from Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island and Fort Glenn and Cape Field on Umnak Island. Adak Island was occupied 31 August 1942 and Amchitka was occupied 13 January 1943.

Eleventh Air Force bombers and fighters, joined by Royal Canadian Air Force fighters based on the two islands, flew air raids against the Japanese garrisons on Kiska and Attu, while U.S. naval ships bombarded Kiska. The Japanese were soon isolated on the two islands. On 11 May, soldiers from the 7th Infantry Division landed on Attu. What was expected to be a three-day operation turned into an eighteen-day ordeal.

United States intelligence had failed to ascertain the true Japanese strength on the island or gain a clear picture of the weather and terrain. The infantrymen who went ashore on Attu were unprepared for what they encountered.

The 2350 Japanese soldiers on Attu had established fortified positions along the slopes of the mountains. Although hopelessly outnumbered and cut off from resupply, they fought bravely and with tenacity to the very end. Only 29 survived the battle as prisoners. For the Americans, it meant one small engagement after another under appalling conditions as they pushed the Japanese slowly back. The end came during the early morning hours of 29 May when the Japanese made one last desperate suicidal attack to break out of their encirclement.

More than 15,000 Americans were committed to the bitter battle. It cost them 549 dead, 1148 wounded, and 2100 taken out of action by disease and non-battle injuries. Most of the latter were the result of the terrible climate and terrain and inadequate clothing. The price of victory was very high. In terms of numbers engaged, Attu ranks as one of the most costly assaults in the Pacific, second only to Iwo Jima. Seventy-one Americans died or were injured for every 100 Japanese killed.

On 15 August 1943, a combined U.S.-Canadian force of 32,000 stormed ashore at Kiska to find that the Japanese had skillfully evacuated their forces by surface ships on 28 July. Overall, 8500 Japanese on Kiska and Attu tied down almost 144,000 allied troops. The Eleventh Air Force lost 40 aircraft to combat and 174 to other causes, notably to weather and inadequate facilities. Samuel Eliot Morison, the definitive naval historian, labeled the Aleutian operation as an exercise in futility, stating the Aleutians should have been left to the Aleuts.

He was echoing a feeling felt by some who believed that the campaign had been unnecessary and poorly managed. Additionally, the divided and fragmented command arrangement under which the Aleutian Campaign was fought left much to be desired. While the Army under Lt Gen Simon B. Buckner retained responsibility for the defense of mainland Alaska, the naval forces (first commanded by Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald and later Vice Admiral Thomas Kincaid) were responsible for the defense of the Aleutian Islands. The arrangement violated the basic principle of war--unity of command. The command arrangement problem was not corrected until after the war, when the Alaskan Command was established as one of the first unified commands.

Following the retaking of Kiska, the Aleutians became the "Forgotten Front." Forces were drastically reduced. Those that remained on the islands were committed to defending the Aleutians against a highly unlikely Japanese attack and conducting bombing and reconnaissance raids against Japanese garrisons in the northern Kurile Islands.

The first land-based bomber attack against the Japanese mainland had in fact been launched from the Aleutians. On 10 July 1943, eight Adak-based B-25s--staging through Attu--bombed targets in the northern Kurile Islands. No enemy opposition was encountered. In addition to being the first land-based raid, it was also the second air strike against the home islands of the war. The first was the Doolittle Raid on 18 April 1942, also flown by B-25s.

For a brief period, planners in Washington, D.C. considered using the Aleutians as a staging base for an invasion of northern Japan. The planners also considered basing B-29s on Shemya and Amchitka and ordered the construction of a long runway and a series of large hangars. However, the ideas were dropped, and the Aleutians were relegated to the backwaters of the war. Elsewhere in Alaska, Ladd Field was developed into a cold-weather test facility for Army equipment and material and as a transfer point for Lend-Lease aircraft destined for Russia. American crews delivered a total of 7925 aircraft, mostly P-39s, P-63s, B-25s, and C-47s, to the Russians at Ladd Field. The Russians then flew them across Alaska and Siberia to the Eastern Front.

The immediate post-war era was marked by organizational changes and redirection of defense efforts. The Eleventh Air Force was redesignated the Alaskan Air Command (AAC) on 18 December 1945, and the World War II Alaskan Department was redesignated United States Army, Alaska (USARAL) on 5 November 1947. The naval component, the Alaskan Sea Frontier (ALSEFRON) had been established on Adak Island 15 April 1944.

The most significant organizational change occurred on 1 January 1947, when the Alaskan Command (ALCOM) was established as one of the first of three unified commands to be created to provide unity of command. Its establishment resulted partly

from the lessons learned during World War II. In addition, Alaska's strategic location for offensive and defensive operations, its widespread population centers, and its inadequate communications dictated the establishment of an organization for centralized planning and coordination of training and operations. The three components were: AAC, USARAL, and ALSEAFRON.

Lieutenant General Howard A. Craig, U.S. Army Air Forces, served as the first Commander in Chief, ALCOM (CINCAL). With the establishment of the U.S. Air Force as a separate service on 18 September 1947, senior military leadership in Alaska passed to the Air Force, where it has remained ever since. General Craig was replaced by Lt Gen Nathan F. Twining in October 1947. General Twining would later become Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The mission of ALCOM at the time of its establishment was to provide for the defense of Alaska and protect the North American continent from attacks across the polar regions. Another and more visible mission was humanitarian support. Time and again, the military would come to the aid of its civilian neighbors during times of need ranging from the 1964 Good Friday earthquake to routine search and rescue missions.

With the end of World War II, defenses were reoriented from defending Alaska against the Japanese threat to meeting the threat of Soviet bomber attacks across the polar regions. Forces were withdrawn from the Aleutians and all the bases but Adak Naval Station and Shemya AFB were closed during the late 1940s. The military embarked on a massive construction program during the 1950s to build up an air defense system and bases for the ground and sea defense of Alaska. Temporary World War II facilities gave way to permanent facilities.

The Army relinquished the old Fort Richardson to Air Force control and built a new, permanent post nearby. The Navy expanded their facilities on Adak and at Kodiak to counter the Soviet submarine threat in the North Pacific. The Air Force constructed a series of 18 aircraft control and warning (AC&W) radar sites throughout Alaska and a distant early warning (DEW) radar system across northern Alaska and Canada, and into the Aleutians, and then linked them with the White Alice long line communications system.

The construction projects and the influx of personnel to man the defense had a significant impact on Alaska's economy and social structure, similar to that the discovery and development of oil would later have.

By 1960, Alaska's population had grown to 226,167, up from the 128,643 in 1950. Many of the military who served in the Great Land elected to remain or later returned to retire.

The military helped provide the foundation upon which statehood was developed. When President Eisenhower signed the proclamation declaring Alaska a state on 3 January 1959, the military had already started a decline that would not be reversed until the 1980s. The decline was driven by changes in technology and the war in Southeast Asia.

The Soviets developed and placed emphasis on their ICBM forces during the late 1950s. With a diminished bomber force, there was no longer a need for the U.S. to maintain a large air defense system. As a result, AAC's AC&W radar sites were reduced to 13 and the Aleutian DEW Line was closed. Five of its six fighter interceptor squadrons were inactivated. Ladd Air Force Base was transferred to the Army in 1960, which renamed it Fort Wainwright.

By 1960, AAC's assigned strength had dropped to 13,049 from 20,687 in 1957. The figures would continue to decline throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

The command assumed more of a role of supporting other commands, particularly the Military Airlift Command which began using Elmendorf AFB as a stopover point for its C-141 and C-5 flights to and from Southeast Asia. Beginning in December 1967, the C-141 landings at Elmendorf AFB had grown to 1000 to 1200 per month by 1969.

When the Combat Pacer flights ceased in mid-1973, approximately 46,000 C-141s had landed and taken off from Elmendorf en route to and from the war zone. The flights underscored the importance of Alaska's strategic position on the "Air Crossroads of the World" as recognized by General Mitchell and others.

The Army and Navy in Alaska likewise suffered from the need to support the Southeast Asian conflict. Units were taken from Alaska and sent to Vietnam and never returned. Personnel strengths declined and readiness suffered because of more pressing needs elsewhere.

Maintenance suffered because of a lack of funds, as did new construction. The only major construction project during the 1960s was the building of the ballistic missile early warning site at Clear AFS to provide early warning against Soviet ICBM attacks and the construction of a pipeline from Whittier to Anchorage to support the Combat Pacer requirements.

The decline continued into the post Vietnam era with its emphasis on economies and the reduction of headquarters and headquarters manning. Both USARAL and ALSEAFRON were disestablished in the early 1970s and, on 1 July 1975, ALCOM was disestablished. In its place, Joint Task Force-Alaska was created as a provisional command that could be activated by the JCS to provide a joint command during war or an emergency.

However, the various disestablishment actions left a command relations problem very similar to that of World War II. The defense of Alaska was again split between the Army and Air Force who had the responsibility for mainland Alaska on one hand and the Navy who had responsibility for the Aleutians on the other.

The disestablishment of ALCOM also marked another turning point. The position of Commander, AAC, was upgraded from a major general to a lieutenant general and he was designated Commander, Joint Task Force-Alaska, and senior military official in Alaska.

During this same period, AAC embarked on a program to modernize its AC&W radar system. The result was the construction of the Alaskan Region Operations Control Center which became operational in 1983, and the replacement of the site radars with the new, state-of-the-art AN/FPS-117 minimally attended radar during 1984-85.

The F-4Es, which had served in Alaska since 1970, were replaced with F-15s and A-10s during 1982. The latter aircraft gave AAC an increased capability to support ground forces in Alaska. The Alaskan Air Command also gained two Boeing E-3 airborne warning and control aircraft in 1986. The E-3s, new fighters and radars coupled with the refueling capabilities provided by the Eielson AFB based KC-135s greatly increased the air sovereignty capabilities. The number of intercepts of Soviet aircraft near Alaska increased substantially, reaching a high of 33 in 1987.

In 1986, the Army activated the 6th Infantry Division (Light) at Fort Richardson. The division's mission was to be prepared to deploy rapidly in support of contingency operations and Pacific Command objectives, and to defend Alaska. Division elements were located at Fort Richardson and at Fort Wainwright, near Fairbanks. In May 1990, division headquarters relocated to Fort Wainwright. At the end of the 1980s, the long-standing issue of unity of command in Alaska was resolved with the decision to reestablish the Alaskan Command (ALCOM) as a subunified command of the United States Pacific Command.

On 7 July 1989, ALCOM was reestablished with the mission of conducting unified defense (less aerospace defense) of the land and territorial waters (out to 12 nautical miles) of the State of Alaska, including the Aleutian Islands, and other missions as directed by the Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command.

The Alaskan Command components included U.S. Air Forces Alaska, U.S. Army Forces Alaska, and U.S. Navy Forces Alaska. These forces were provided by Commander, Alaskan Air Command; Commander, 6th Infantry Division (Light); and Commander, 17th Coast Guard District in his capacity as Commander, Maritime Defense Zone Sector Alaska. The Alaskan Air Command was redesignated as the 11th Air Force on 9 August 1990, reporting to the Pacific Air Forces.

The 1990s were a period of organizational changes caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War and the reduction of military forces. The threat posed by Russian bombers and reconnaissance aircraft lessened as reflected in the number of intercepts made. From a high of thirty-one in 1987, they had declined to two in 1994.

The reduction of tensions was also reflected in the number of Russian military visits to Alaska. The first occurred in August 1989 when two MIG-29s and a support transport stopped at Elmendorf AFB to refuel while en route to an air show in Canada. Since then, refueling stops became common and high ranking Russian visits to military bases in Alaska routine.

Relationships between the two former adversaries were strengthened with a joint search and rescue exercise in April 1993 near Tiksi, a Soviet Arctic military base. A similar but much larger exercise was held near Eielson AFB in March 1994 followed by another near Cold Lake Canadian Forces Base, Canada in 1995 followed by subsequent search and rescue exercises, or SAREXs, as they became commonly known as, alternating between the three countries.

Because of the Cold War, the primary military mission shifted from defending Alaska to planning and conducting joint training for rapid, long range deployment. Additionally, the Alaskan Command was responsible for supporting federal and state authorities with disaster relief, providing for defense of Alaska against attacks and acts of terrorism, and supporting counter narcotics operations.

There were a number of organizational changes resulting from the end of the Cold War and the need to reduce military strength. The 6th Infantry Division (Light) was inactivated on 6 July 1994. The Army headquarters was moved from Fort Wainwright to Fort Richardson and United States Army, Alaska was established. The flag on Fort Greely was lowered for the last time on 13 July 2001. While the flag was coming down, plans were being made to use the reservation as a test bed of the National Missile Defense system.

Additionally, the Air Force had withdrawn from Galena on 1 October 1993 and King Salmon on 26 August 1994. Contractors assumed responsibility for maintaining the forward operating locations as weather and emergency alternates and for exercise deployments. Eareckson AFS was redesignated an air station and turned over to a contractor to operate and maintain on 1 April 1995.

All military personnel were withdrawn. Shemya AFB, had been renamed in honor of Col William O. Eareckson, an Aleutian Campaign hero, during ceremonies held there in May 1993.

The Navy also closed its anti-submarine warfare base on Adak Island on 31 March 1997. The lowering of the flag for the last time marked the ending of an era that began with the landing of military forces there on 30 August 1942 to develop a forward base for operations against the Japanese garrisons on Kiska and Attu Islands. The Army turned the base over to the Navy following the war. By the 1980s, there were over 6,000 Navy personnel on Adak which boasted a McDonalds among its many amenities. The figure had dropped to 500 at the time of closure and Adak had gone from a naval air station to a naval air facility.

The Navy's relocateable over-the-horizon backscatter radar on Amchitka Island in the Aleutians was also closed in 1993. The Air Force had planned to build a fixed over-the-horizon radar in the Copper Valley area. However, with the advent end of the Cold War, those plans were canceled in early 1991.

Other major changes were reflected in the assumption by the Alaska Air National Guard of several duties performed by the active Air Force in Alaska. The functions included search and rescue and air refueling support. The Alaska Air National Guard's 210th Air Rescue Squadron, activated 4 April 1990, took over the search and rescue responsibility from the active Air Force. On 1 July 1994, the Air Force transferred responsibilities for the Rescue Coordination Center to the Alaska Air National Guard. On 31 August 1992, the 168th Refueling Wing took over the KC-135 support from the Strategic Air Command's Alaska Tanker Force. The gaining command for the Guard was transferred from the Air Mobility Command to the Pacific Command on 1 June 1992.

The reduction of Cold War activities was offset by Alaska's strategic location for deployment and the training opportunities offered by large, sparsely populated areas. The military training areas were greatly expanded during the 1990s. Exercise and training deployments became routine. Joint training was greatly improved through exercises and training activities. With the closure of Clark AB in the Philippines, the Cope Thunder exercise series was transferred to Eielson AFB, during the early 1990s, and the historic 3rd Wing was reassigned to Elmendorf AFB on 19 December 1991 without personnel and equipment, replacing the 21st Wing, which was inactivated.

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 found the military in Alaska ready to respond as events unfolded. Lieutenant General Norton Schwartz, Commander, Alaskan Command, ordered the skies over Alaska cleared of all aircraft except those on military missions in response to the attacks.

When a Korean Air Lines Boeing 747 inadvertently flew into Alaska airspace, Alaskan NORAD Region F-15 pilots intercepted it and escorted it to a safe landing in Whitehorse, Canada.

Shortly after 11 September 2001, the Joint Rear Area Coordinator-Alaska (JRAC-AK) was activated to coordinate homeland defense in Alaska. It was replaced on 13 February 2003 Task Force-Alaska (JTF-AK), activate to support the Northern Command's homeland security mission.

President George W. Bush in a 1 May 2001 speech at the National Defense University announced plans to reduce the nuclear arsenal and increase missile defense by building a land-based system that could intercept missiles in mid-course. Alaska's location made it a good candidate for basing anti-ballistic missiles. Shortly afterward, the Missile Defense Agency issued a record decision clearing the way to construct six silos and support facilities on Fort Greely to test the anti-ballistic missiles.

On 15 June 2002, the Site Activation Command (Alaska), U.S. Missile Defense Agency held a ground-breaking ceremony on Fort Greely for the construction of the Ground Based Midcourse Defense Test Bed. President Bush announced on 17 December 2002 plans to have a limited National Missile Defense system by 2004. The Department of Defense announced shortly afterward that a total of 16 missiles would be based on Fort Greely by the end of 2005, with six installed and operational on 30 September 2004. In addition to the six missiles, four silos were planned for Vandenberg AFB, CA, providing an initial defense capability for the United States.

## **Emblem Significance**

### **Color Emblem**

<b>Cable Numbers</b>	<b>Color Name</b>	<b>PMS Number</b>
67103	Air Force Yellow	116
67101	White	---
67118	Ultramarine Blue	Reflex Blue
67111	Scarlet	200
67124	Flag Blue	282
67137	Silver Grey	422
67129	Green	
67147	Bronze	
67121	Teal Blue	
67194	Gold Brown	471

## Subdued Emblem

Cable Numbers	Color Name	PMS Number
67130	Spruce Green	357
67158	Garnet	209
67133	Olive Drab	455
67138	Black	K
67124	Flag Blue	282

## Motto

"Keystone of the North" 1 Jan 1947 - 1 Jul 1975

"Guardians of the North" 7 Jul 1989

## Approved

2 February 1956

## Lineage

Established as Alaskan Command on 1 January 1947. It was among the first unified commands established under the Joints Chiefs of Staff.

Disestablished on 30 June 1975.

Reestablished as a subordinate unified command under Pacific Command on 7 July 1989 and Northern Command on 1 October 2014.

## Description

On a shield azure, a polar bear rampant proper, rising above a polar region in base proper; the bear superimposed over three lightning bolts or radiating from sinister chief, all within a diminished bordure of the last.

## Significance

The heraldic shield of Alaskan Command portrays the massive polar bear in a pose assumed by mammals of his species when sensing danger and preparatory to taking action. The character of the displayed terrain, which is generally mountainous and snow-covered, rising precipitously from the sea, typifies the territory of Alaska as does the midnight blue background of the Arctic night, which prevails for long periods throughout the area. The sky, land, and sea are representative of the basic responsibilities of the three services, which together comprise the subordinate unified command; while the three lighting bolts portray the awesome and instantaneous striking power of the weaponry within the three component commands.

## Stations

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska