

# ADAK

## Historical Guide

Adak Island is of historic significance because of the role it played in World War II. In 1942, the Japanese invaded and occupied the far western Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska. U.S. forces built facilities on Adak Island to support efforts to retake Attu and Kiska and to guard against a possible counter-offensive.

In 1976, markers with brass plaques were erected to identify historic or commemorative sites on-island as a part of Adak's celebration of America's Bicentennial. Almost all of the plaques have since been removed, but most mounts are still in place. These pages provide a guide to the information that was on the plaques; a few changes have been made to correct errors and to reflect the operational closure of the Adak Complex.

The original pamphlet was prepared by the Adak Historical Society. It was revised and updated in 1998 by the U.S. Navy, Engineering Field Activity Northwest, and in 2012 by the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge.



Historic Old Bering Chapel, 2010

c Peter Porco

### Adak Island and the Aleutian Campaign

On June 3 and 4, 1942, the Japanese launched a carrier-based attack on the air installation at Dutch Harbor as part of a two-pronged attack on Alaska and Midway Island. The results of the attack inflicted damage, but did not disable the base. Falling back from this offensive, the Japanese had planned to invade Adak where they mistakenly thought a base had already been established. However, since Adak was still within range of the still serviceable Dutch Harbor airfield, the Japanese forces decided to take the far western Aleutian islands of Attu and Kiska, landing at both on June 7. This occupation created the need for a U.S. military advance base farther west in the Aleutian chain.

The development of Adak began on August 30 when a force of 4,500 men under the command of Brigadier General Eugene M. Landrum waded ashore. The construction of the base was under the direction of Colonel B.B. Talley of the Army Corps of Engineers. The first objective was the construction of an airfield. After survey of Sweeper Cove, it was determined an airfield could be easily constructed on the tidal flats if a dike were built to control tidal flow. After an incredible 10-day construction period, the first air strikes from Adak were launched against the Japanese positions on Attu and Kiska. This mission was the first combined fighter and bomber zero altitude (50 feet above the water) strike of World War II, marking a historic development in military tactics. During the fall of 1942, the Eleventh Air Force flew regular bombing missions against Japanese positions. Heavy losses due to flying missions of 400-860 round-trip miles in nearly constant inclement weather led to the decision to construct a new air base on Amchitka Island, only 65 miles from Kiska. Adak provided air cover during construction in 1943 and afterward assumed a supporting role of repairing planes and forwarding supplies.

On October 2 and 3, 1942, enemy planes strafed the base at Adak with machine gun fire and dropped at least nine bombs on the island. All of the bombs landed in undeveloped areas causing no damage. These raids, however, place Adak Island, along with Pearl Harbor and Dutch Harbor, as one of only a handful of locations in the United States to be the subject of an enemy air raid.

The Navy soon followed the Army in constructing facilities on Adak. In January 1943, it built two hangars and some support facilities at Davis Army Airfield. In the early spring, the Navy began construction of a seaplane base, known as Mitchell Field. The two nearby bodies of water, Andrew Lake and Clam Lagoon, were used for sea-plane operations. In May 1943, the Navy decided to upgrade the base and

began construction of two land-based runways, large wooden hangars and other support facilities. During this same period, the Navy construction force (Seabees) also expanded facilities at Sweeper Cove, building five piers and 108 concrete anchorages in the harbor. Other major types of facilities constructed include ship repair facilities, facilities in support of a PT-Boat squadron, ordnance magazines, communications facilities, post office, barracks and headquarters facilities for the commanders of the North Pacific Force, Alaskan Sector, Fleet Air Wing 4, and Seventeenth Naval District.

The first months of 1943 saw an intensification of activity on Adak as the island became the staging point for the invasion of Attu. By early May, about 27,000 combat troops gathered at Adak ready to support the invasion of Attu. The invasion occurred on May 11, 1943; by May 29, Attu was fully under control of U.S. forces. In response to problems created by improper equipment and training experienced on Attu, the invasion force assembled for Kiska trained on Adak. By July 1943, 37,000 troops had assembled for the operation. On the eve of the invasion, the total force on Adak was approximately 90,000 with more than 100 ships in the harbor. On August 15, the invasion force landed on Kiska only to discover that the Japanese had evacuated the island a few weeks before.

Although the retaking of Attu and Kiska turned out to be the end of the shooting war in the Aleutians, the U.S. forces still had to guard against a possible Japanese counter-offensive. The Army and Navy continued to develop maintenance and supply facilities on Adak to support operations at the newer bases developed further west in the Aleutians as the launching points for raids against the Japanese in the Kurile Islands. Furthermore, some military strategists advocated launching a full invasion of the Kuriles and eventually northern Japan from the Aleutians. Therefore, a huge Army Reserve depot consisting of piers, a breakwater, and three waterfront transit sheds at Sweeper Cove and several large warehouses at Davis Lake were constructed to accommodate a potential force of 50,000 men. Adak became the largest military base in the Aleutian Islands.

With the surrender of Japan in August 1945, the military rapidly began to stand down its forces in Alaska and the Aleutians. While Adak continued in operation, its level of staffing and strategic importance declined. By the early 1950s, Adak was the only major base in the Aleutians and was the major Naval base in the northern Pacific. It soon became strategically important to the Cold War as the location of fleet communication antennas, listening posts, and a support base for anti-submarine patrol aircraft.

Although overshadowed by the larger and more famous battles and campaigns that occurred in the central and south Pacific, the Aleutians played a unique role in the U.S. war effort against Japan. For one, the initial Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor was part of the Battle of Midway, which was strategically very important and represented a turning point in the war. The Japanese occupation of the islands of Attu and Kiska generated the fear of possible further action against other areas of Alaska and even the West Coast of the continental United States. The campaign to remove the Japanese from these islands was the only campaign of the entire war fought on U.S. soil. In addition to the military history, several famous Americans were either stationed here (Dashiell Hammett and Gore Vidal) or visited here (several Hollywood stars, boxing champion Joe Lewis, and President Roosevelt) during the war. Roosevelt's visit to Adak combat troops was his last field visit prior to his death. These factors elevate the military installations established on Adak to a level of national historic importance.

### Reading the Remains

While Adak has few obvious and prominent buildings that clearly relate to the island's World War II era history, numerous structures and smaller buildings as well as the altered landscape itself define Adak's past and offer insight into this critical period of American history. The Army and Navy dredged, filled, rocked, and both leveled and adapted to the topography in an effort to convert the natural setting into one that could meet the needs of a wartime combat base. The remote location combined with the compressed time frame for build up resulted in extensive use of wood frame construction and the even more temporary pre-fabricated Quonset and Pacific Huts. These buildings were not meant to last and most of them are in fact gone. The



Navy fleet anchored in Kuluk Bay, 1945

permanent changes to the landscape remain and therefore represent the most significant evidence of the World War II era. These landscape features form the underlying fabric that ties the scattered structural remains into a cohesive whole.

The various functions required different physical layouts, but all sought to take maximum advantage of the existing environment. The airstrips and hangar areas needed to be located on the flattest topography. In order to quickly provide such an area, a tidal basin was drained and a series of dikes and canals were constructed that are still present. The Navy seaplane base was constructed between two bodies of water, both of which were used as runways. Waterfront storage and supply depots and ship maintenance facilities were located at those areas of the shoreline best suited for ships. Several small-scale anti-aircraft defensive positions were established on the high promontories that overlooked strategic sites such as the harbor entrance or the airfield. However, the absence of large-scale defensive earthworks indicates a military installation predicated on an offensive rather than defensive posture. In contrast, the Japanese occupying Kiska and Attu concentrated their efforts on developing a labyrinth of defensive positions and never completed a runway or port facility.

Development in the key operational areas was compact, but away from these areas, the buildings were placed in widely scattered, internally focused clusters of related functional use. The need for fresh water was met by locating facilities near streams and damming other streams to create reservoirs. The road network followed the topographic contours thereby conserving time and materials, but resulted in the lack of direct connections between the different sections of the base.

World War II Historic Resources

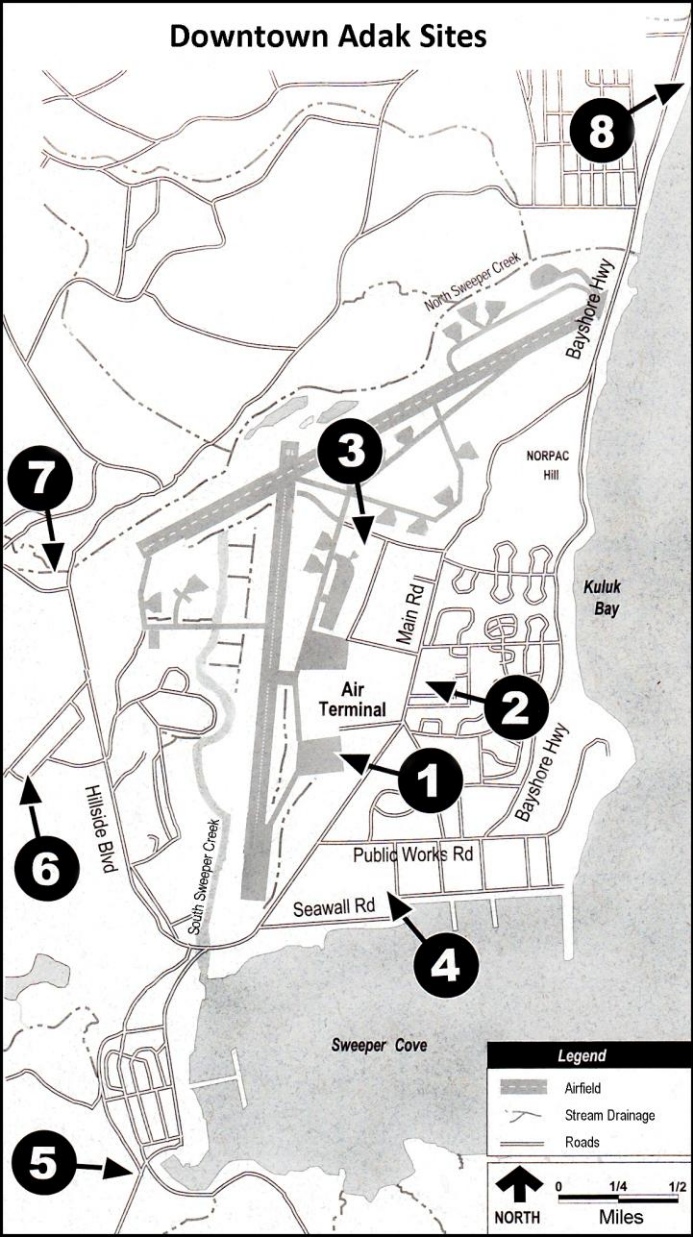
Evaluations of the physical remainders of the facilities and site features related to Adaks's World War II history have determined that the former Adak Naval Complex contains, as follows, three National Register resources:

- Adak Army Base and Adak Naval Operating Base National Historic Landmark. It is considered a historic site with several areas and eight structures listed as contributing elements but has no defined boundary. This resource is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.
- Adak World War II Cultural Landscape Historic District. This resource has a defined boundary and 30 structures (including the 8 on the NHL), plus several man-made landscape features identified as contributing features. This

resource has been determined eligible, but has not been formally submitted for listing in the National Register.

•Old Bering Chapel. This building is considered individually eligible for the National Register.

COMMEMORATIVE SITE MARKERS



**1. The Navy Auxiliary Air Facility**  
*(Marker outside the Air Terminal)*  
In January 1943, two hangars and a number of support facilities were constructed at the south end of Runway "A" of the Davis Army Airfield. These temporary facilities made up the initial Naval aviation contribution to Adak's offensive directed toward Kiska and Attu. The aircraft assigned to this air facility included six Patrol Bomber Seaplanes known as PBYs or Catalinas and a small number of OSU2 observation/reconnaissance aircraft. By May 1943, all of the Naval airplanes were moved to Albert E. Mitchell Field, a newly constructed Naval Air Station and seaplane base (related markers 12 and 13) located at what became the Naval Security Group Activity area.

**2. Armytown**  
*(Marker on west side of Main Davis Road near intersection with Terminal Road)*  
The marker at this site commemorates the establishment of Armytown by the 807th and 108th Army Aviation Engineer Battalions along with the largest contingent of Seabees of any theater in World War II. The small city they built stretched from NORPAC Hill to Sweeper Cove. In only 5 months (September 1942 - January 1943), a settlement of Quonset huts was erected here. It provided shelter and support to the 90,000 troops and 5,000 construction personnel assigned to Adak as the invasion force for the Attu and Kiska Island campaigns.

**3. Longview/Davis Army Air Field**  
*(Marker near intersection of Crash Station Road and Birchwood Road)*  
On August 30, 1942, the date the initial landing force arrived on Adak, the 807th Army Aviation Engineering Battalion set to work constructing a dike and draining the tidal flat between Kuluk Bay and the Sweeper Cove areas to create an airfield. Only ten days later bombing and fighter escort squadrons under the command of Major John S. Chennault took off from the one completed runway for a full bombing raid against Kiska. In October 1942, the initial temporary runway was replaced by a 5,800-foot permanent runway, Runway A, which was adjacent and parallel to the west side of the temporary runway. Construction of a second runway, Runway B, which ran

east to west, was begun immediately after the completion of Runway A. The second runway was initially 6,000 feet long and covered in steel matting; it was then extended to 7,800 feet. Late in 1943, both runways were paved. Runway "A" was used for P-38s and Runway "B" was used for B-17s and other bombers. Although this operational area was initially named "Longview Army Airfield," by early 1943, it was renamed Davis Army Airfield." These runways, though they have been structurally updated, are the same ones that were in continuous use from the end of World War II to the operational closure of Naval Air Station Adak in 1996.



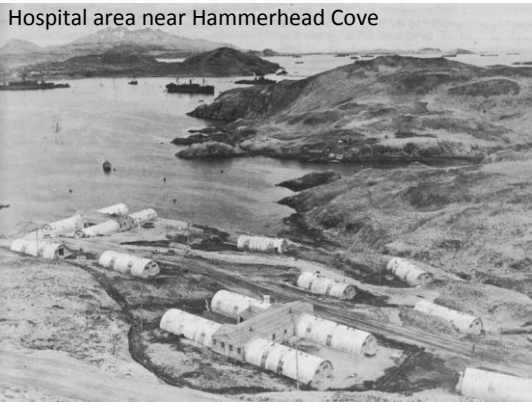
**4. Navytown**  
*(Marker north of Seawall Road)*  
In the area around and where the Navy Administration and Public Works Building, and the Red, White, and Blue Sheds now stand, the Seabees constructed a small Quonset complex housing 1,000 Navy personnel in January 1943. The personnel located here augmented the operations of the Naval Auxiliary Air Facility that was located on the present site of the Pat Kelly Air Terminal until May 1943, and also supported the Navy Operating Base that was located at the Roberts Village Housing area until 1950. The three huge waterfront warehouses in this area as well as the piers and breakwater were all constructed in 1943 and 1944 as part of an Army Reserve Supply depot. The depot was built as a contingency staging area for a possible invasion of Japan from the North Pacific. The original wood siding was replaced by the corrugated metal at an unknown date and the red, white, and blue colors added in 1976 in honor of America's Bicentennial.





5. Navy Operating Base Adak

(Marker near Roberts Village Housing Area)  
This marker denotes the site where the Naval Operating Base (NOB) Adak was established in May 1943. This command directed operations at several widely dispersed areas: the small boat mooring area immediately to the east, Happy Valley and Mitt Lake ordnance areas, the Naval hospital and Tuxedo Park areas in Hammerhead Cove, the PT boat and submarine facilities at Finger Bay and the Navy Auxiliary Landing Field first located at Davis AAF and then at Mitchell Field, constructed in the Naval Security Group Activity area. The NOB mission



was to provide support for vessels, aircraft and their crews including: upkeep, repair and dry-docking, supply of general stores and ammunition, coordination of search and rescue missions and provision of recreational facilities.

6. Bering Chapel

(Marker outside chapel on Bering Hill)  
The chapel was built on a site overlooking the Davis Lake Warehouse area by the Army Engineers in 1944. It was moved to its present location on Bering Hill by the Seabees and civilians of the Navy Public Works Department in September 1953. It was scheduled to be torn down when the new chapel was built and sat deteriorating for several years. In 1990, Navy Legacy funding was combined with volunteer labor from the Adak community to restore the chapel and put it back into use. It was reroofed and repainted just prior to Navy operational closure in 1996. By 2010, lack of upkeep and the ravages of weather were quickly laying claim to the old chapel.

7. Marine Memorial

(Marker near intersection of Tundra Road and Hillside Blvd)  
This marker identifies a small group of trees, a flagpole and a cairn of rocks embedded with a plaque as the Marine Memorial. The plaque is inscribed with three names, but no dates or explanations. The most widely held view is that the site commemorates one crew of Marine pilots killed in a crash on Adak some time after World War II.

8. Kuluk Bay Landing Site

(Marker on east side of Bayshore Hwy, across from NAVFAC complex)  
On August 28, 1942, the U.S. Naval submarines, SS Triton and SS Tuna, surfaced 4 miles due east of this beach and disembarked a 37-man U.S. Army intelligence gathering unit led by Colonel Lawrence V. Castner. The unit was known as "The Alaska Scout," or more affectionately as "Castner's Cutthroats." Their mission was to gather information about

the Japanese troop strength on Adak and to report their findings to the landing force already on its way from Dutch Harbor. No enemy troops were found, and on August 30, a 17-ship landing force with 4,500 men and tons of heavy equipment arrived. Their mission: to build an airstrip and troop staging area in preparation for the retaking of the enemy-occupied Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska.

Remote Adak Sites

9. Adak National Forest

(Marker on Hillside Blvd near Bayshore Hwy intersection)  
The cluster of 33 trees at this site is the most visible remnant of a formal tree planting program undertaken from 1943 through 1945. The project was initiated at the direction of Army General Buckner in an effort to boost morale. The single sign that reads "You are now Entering and Leaving the Adak National Forest" was placed here on a whim by local residents in 1962 or 1963. Two large surviving groves from this World War II era planting program are located in the sheltered ravines of Nurse Creek and Hospital Creek.

10. The Memorial

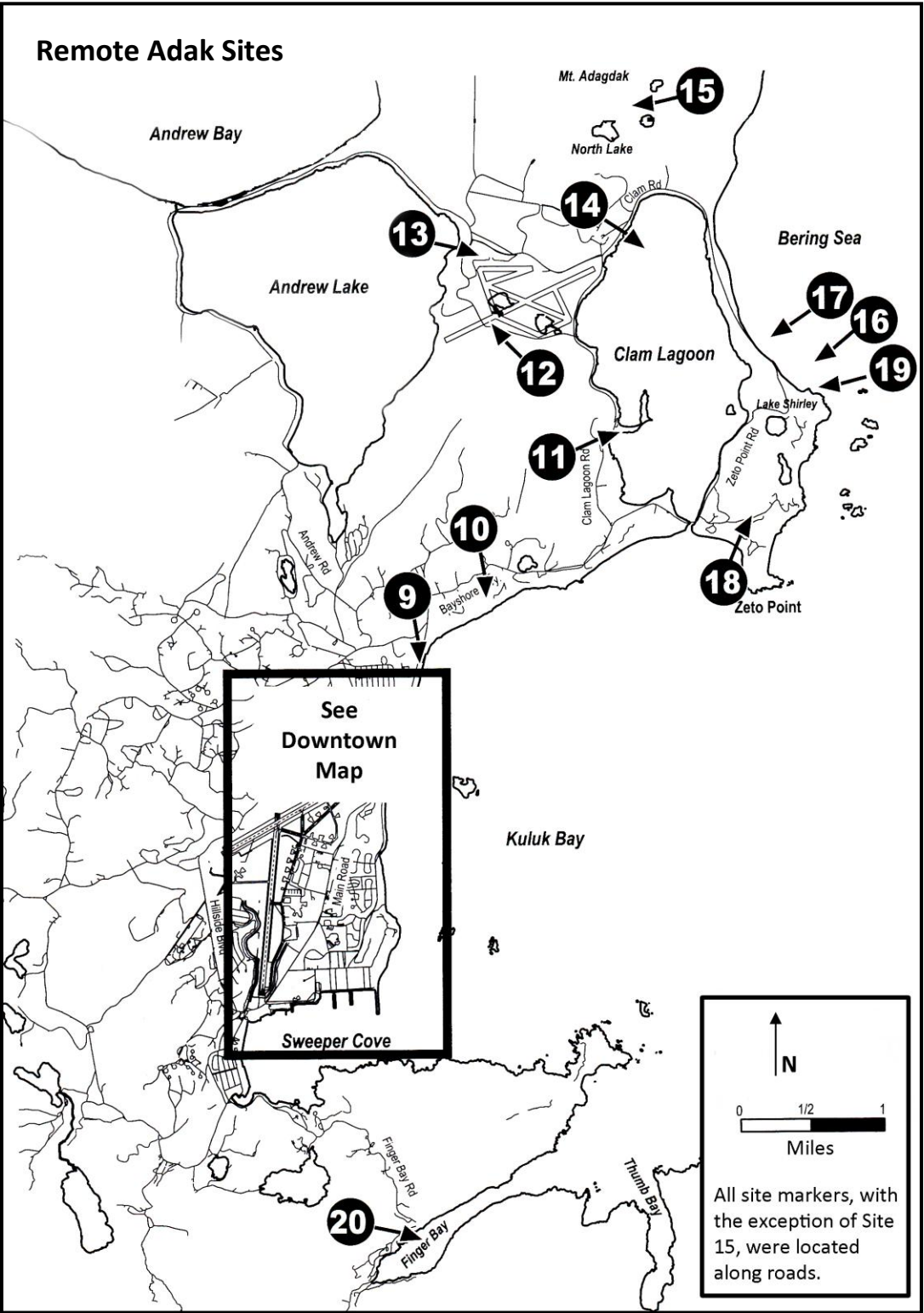
(Marker on south side of Bayshore Hwy, 1/4 mile east of Hillside Rd)  
The flag pole and stone marker with plaque commemorate the memory of those who died defending America in the Aleutians. It was dedicated in May 1988. The memorial marks the site of the cemetery that was located on Adak until all of the bodies were transported to the lower 48 states.



Military funeral on Adak, 19 July 1945

11. Underground Hospital

(Marker on west side of Clam Road, 3/4 mile north of Bayshore Hwy)  
This marker commemorates an underground hospital constructed by the Seabees. The actual site of the facility is approximately one mile to the west (off limits, not safe to enter). Under the most arduous of conditions, a small and devoted staff of Naval doctors and nurses operated this facility through World War II, until the decommissioning of the Naval air base. This facility was one of several critical facilities constructed underground for protection from expected enemy air strikes. The commanders on Adak could only assume that the Japanese with 8,000 men on the island of Kiska would mount an attack after they became aware of the large force stationed on Adak.



## 12. Hangar Ruins

*(Marker on a dirt road connecting NSGA with Lake Andrew)*

In the winters of 1943 and 1944, Lake Andrew froze to a depth of 18 inches. In response to the severe cold, several large wood hangars were built by the 32nd Naval Construction Battalion to make conditions for repairing the aircraft more bearable. The hangar structure at this site was last used as a sand barn and withstood the extremes of both cold and high wind for over fifty years, until the last standing remains were flattened by strong winds during the winter of 1995/6. It is a reminder of how essential the "can do" spirit of the Seabees has been to the continuity of Naval operations.

## 13. Albert E. Mitchell Field

*(Marker along east shore of Lake Andrew)*

In early spring of 1943, the Navy established facilities for the operation of 12 PBV amphibious aircraft at the southeast shore of Lake Andrew. These operations required berthing, messing, and dispensary facilities for 30 officers and 300 enlisted men, including plane crews and ground support personnel. By the summer of 1943, plans for the overall enlargement of the airbase were approved and implemented. Two permanent runways were constructed between Lake Andrew and Clam Lagoon and facilities to support 120 officers and 2,000 enlisted men were erected. "Catalina" and "Kingfisher" seaplanes (PBVs) and "Ventura" PV-1 light Naval bombers made up the complement of aircraft. Approximately 350 men of the 32nd Naval Construction Battalion took part in this construction work. This air station served throughout the war. Upon its decommissioning in January 1950, aircraft operations were relocated to the site of Davis Army Airfield (related marker 3) and the command was joined with the Naval Operating Base at Sweeper Cove and recommissioned as Naval Station Adak.

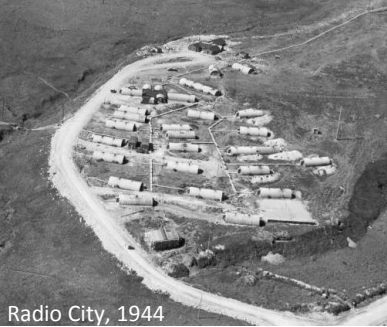


Mitchell Field, August 1945

## 14. Radio City

*(Marker along Clam Road, near Gladding Road)*

In September 1942, the U.S. Navy had established its initial communications station on Adak in a small tent (later a Quonset hut), in Navytown. This operation was conducted by a small detachment of radiomen using two transmitters and several receivers powered by a 7-kilowatt generator. As of September 1943, all communications assets were relocated to Clam Lagoon. These facilities, along with two High Frequency Direction Finding buildings at Zeto Point (see related marker 18), augmented the operations of the newly formed Naval Communications Supplementary Activity, located in the area around this marker. The area was affectionately known as "Radio City" until October



Radio City, 1944

1951, when it was renamed "Naval Communications Station, Adak." It remained as a separate command (recommissioned as Naval Security Group Adak in 1977) until operational closure in 1995.

## 15. World War II-Era Aircraft Wreckage

*(Marker off-road on slope of Mt. Adagdak)*

Strewn over several acres of tundra around this site are the remains of at least three aircraft which met their untimely demise while attempting to clear this ridge of Mount Adagdak. The unforgiving combination of low altitude fog and the high winds of Adak was a nemesis to aviators from the beginning of air operations on this island. The airbases constructed on Adak launched hundreds of sorties against the Japanese occupied islands of Attu and Kiska using the U.S. Army Air Corps' B-17, B-24, B-25, and B-26 bombers and the U.S. Navy's PV-1 and PBV bombers. This marker commemorates the valiant efforts of the aviators and flight crews, who shall be remembered as vital contributors to winning the war in the Aleutians.

## 16. Special Operations/SISS ZULU Site

*(Marker along Clam Road near Lake Shirley)*

In mid-1962 a specially designated detachment of communications technicians from the Naval Communications Station, Adak, augmented an operation within a small hut on this site. This activity became known as "SPECOPS." It was moved to Zeto Point where it was renamed "SISS ZULU." After moving to an improved site on the east side of Clam Lagoon, the operation was known as "Classic Wizard." The last facility complex to house this operation is located due north of this marker at North Lake.

From its initial inception, this operation served to provide extremely valuable support service to the Navy's tactical fleet units in the Northern Pacific Ocean region, as well as national intelligence authorities.

## 17. WW II-Era Seaplane Wing Wreckage

*(Marker along east side of Clam Lagoon)*

During the Spring 1989 "Clam Lagoon Cleanup," wing wreckage of a PBV was unearthed at this location and later removed. Sometimes due to enemy fire, but more often due to the severe weather conditions, many planes never returned from their missions or crash landed on Adak or other islands. Nevertheless, the overall success of the Naval Air Base can never be questioned. This site commemorates the selfless sacrifice and dedication to duty of the many men who served on Adak as U.S. Naval aviators.



PBV wreckage, June 1945

## 18. Initial Radio Direction Finding Site

*(Marker along Zeto Point Road, near Candlestick Bridge)*

In February 1943, Radio Direction Finding operations began in two small buildings near Zeto Point. This marker is situated approximately 500 meters due east of the first building site and 100 meters due south of the second building site. These sites used an AN/GRD-6 high/low band antenna. They were instrumental in the establishment of an extremely valuable source of baseline signals intelligence for both on-island and northern Pacific fleet units.

## 19. Zeto Point

*(Marker along east spur of Zeto Point Rd, near Lake Shirley)*

At the top of the hill above this marker are the remains of a joint Army/Navy Harbor Control Defense Point. During World War II, it consisted of three 155 mm coastal artillery guns on "Panama" mounts (concrete pads with iron rails and pintles). These guns had a range of 17 miles and covered the approaches to Sitkin Sound and Kuluk Bay. The

gun mounts are still in place along with scattered ruins of underground shelters, machine gun bunkers and wooden stairs.



Finger Bay circa 1944

## 20. Patrol Torpedo Boat Docks and Submarine Net

*(Marker along Finger Bay north shoreline)*

At this site on Finger Bay in mid-1943, docking and replenishment facilities were constructed to accommodate several U.S. Navy PT boats and a small number of submarines. Within this safe harbor these operations (under the control of Naval Operating Base Adak) maintained and supported fast attack craft. These boats were the main line of defense against the seemingly imminent encroachment of enemy warships. A few hundred meters to the southwest is a remnant pile of metal anti-submarine netting that stretched across the mouth of Finger Bay.



2011: One of the last remaining Quonset huts on Adak, near Hammerhead Cove (see photo for marker 5)