

Alaska at War

World War II in Alaska and Western Canada

Purpose: This exhibit tells the little-known story of World War II in Alaska and Western Canada. From the neglected territory in 1939, through the buildup of defenses, through the invasion and battle of the Aleutians to the region as a support area for further campaigns elsewhere leading to the end of the war in 1945.

Scope: The time scope of this exhibit are the years 1939 to 1945. The physical scope of this exhibit is the Territory of Alaska and Western Canada north and west of Edmonton, Alberta.

The exhibit includes covers from the U.S. Army Post Office system, the Canadian Army Post Office system, the U.S. Fleet Post Office system, and military mail carried by the civilian post offices of the United States and Canada. The Canadian locations are the sites of U.S. military bases. Exclusively Canadian military bases are not part of the scope of this exhibit.

Significant items in the exhibit are outlined in red.

Historical Perspective: The Second World War in Alaska stretched from the wilds of Western Canada to the mainland of Alaska to the end of the Aleutian Islands. A pitched battle against the enemy, the sea, the wilderness and the weather.

The preparations for war came to Alaska in 1940 as an increasingly wary United States began to build the neglected defenses of the northern territory. Men and material flowed north. Bases were established for Army and Naval forces and plans were made for more construction to defend the territory if war came.

War did come to Alaska on June 3, 1942 when the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor and invaded two of the Aleutian Islands, Attu and Kiska. This was the first foreign invasion of American soil since the War of 1812. From these invasions to the fall of Kiska Island in August 1943 war was waged in Alaska. After Kiska was recaptured, Alaska served as a base for air attacks on northern Japan. It also served as a route for Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union. Some efforts were also made to use Alaska port facilities to supply other theatres of the Pacific War.

Mail Routes: Army Post Office (APO) mail was transported to a Postal Concentration Center in the Contiguous United States. The two centers that served Alaska and Western Canada were in Seattle, Washington and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The majority was processed by the Seattle center. Fleet Post Office (FPO) mail was transported to the Fleet Post Office in San Francisco, California.

Exhibit Plan

- I. Building for War
- II. Fighting the War
- III. Supporting the War
 - a. Northwest Staging Route
 - b. Alaska Highway
- IV. Supplying the War
 - a. Airfields
 - b. Ports
 - c. Requisitioned National Park
- V. Summary