

Alaska State Library
Historical Collections

Guide to Collection

U.S. Army, 172d Infantry Brigade, 1975

The Army in Alaska since 1867, 1867-1975

PCA 008

40 slides : b&w, col. ; 2 x 2 in. + narrative

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Introduction

The 172d Infantry Brigade, U.S. Army, stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, presented a program commemorating 108 years of military service in Alaska. The program was presented during the Army's 200th birthday.

The collection includes the 40 black & white and color transparencies (2"x2") presented with the narrative. The slides include maps, historical photographs, and current scenes from the program.

Inventory

SLIDE 1 - THE ARMY BIRTHDAY LOGO

The United States Army celebrates its 200th birthday on June 14, 1975 it is appropriate to look at the Army's heritage in Alaska. The 172d Infantry Brigade (Alaska) proudly presents this program covering 108 years of service in the great land.

SLIDE 2 - USS OSSIPPEE

The steam sloop *OSSIPPEE* brought officials to Sitka for the transfer of Russian America to the United States on October 18, 1867. During the ceremony, as the Russian flag was being lowered, this ship began the firing of a 21-gun salute which was answered by the Russian shore batteries.

(SLIDE 3 - BRIGADIER GENERAL ROUSSEAU

Brigadier General, Lovell H. Rousseau accepted the newly acquired territory on behalf of the United States. As his 15-year old son raised the stars and stripes to the head of the staff, the Russian guns began the salute and the *OSSIPPEE* answered. Russian America became Alaska and American soil. At a cost of \$7,200,000 - it was a great bargain.

SLIDE 4 - MAJOR GENERAL DAVIS

Brevet Major General Jefferson C. Davis was the first commander of the military district of Alaska, serving from 1867 - 1870. He took charge of the newly acquired government property, supported the U.S. Collector of Customs and maintained law and order in Alaska.

SLIDE 5 - ARMY HQ - SITKA

A Russian-made building served as the commanding general's headquarters from 1867 to 1877. Alaska was under the U.S. Treasury Department for the next two years, and then was governed by the Navy from 1879 to 1884 from the same structure.

SLIDE 6 - FORT WRANGELL

During 1868 and 1869, the Army headquarters at Sitka established additional posts at the strategic sites of Wrangell, Tongass, Kodiak and Kenay. Fort Wrangell was situated on an island of the same name near the mouth of the Stikine (Stikeen) River in southeast Alaska.

SLIDE 7 - KODIAK

The historic town of Kodiak as it was in 1888. It was the first permanent Russian settlement in the new world, a dominant location in the North Pacific. The U.S. Army established Fort Kodiak here on June 6, 1868. It supported the U.S. Collector of Customs in the Pribilof Islands. The fort was closed in 1870.

SLIDE 8 - FORT KENAY

The first attempt by the Army to establish Fort Kenay ended in shipwreck. Survivors were quartered at Fort Kodiak. The following year, Battery F, of the Second Artillery established a post at the old Russian site of Fort St. Nicholas, the present location of Kenai, on April 17, 1869.

SLIDE 9 - RUSSIAN BLOCKHOUSE

An old Russian blockhouse was on the site of the American Fort St. Michael. Toward the end of the 19th century and during the early years of this century, the Army was mainly concerned with the exploration of the vast interior of Alaska, maintaining law and order in the gold rush camps, giving aid to starving stampedes and building trails and telegraph lines.

SLIDE 10 - FORT ST. MICHAEL

Fort St. Michael originally served the Army as a weather observatory. The Fort was established in 1897. It was the headquarters of the department of Alaska from January 1900 to September 1901.

SLIDE 11 - GENERAL RICHARDSON

Lieutenant Wilds P. Richardson was instrumental in restoring law and order during the gold rush and importing reindeer to Alaska to feed starving miners. He built Fort William H. Seward, which later became Chilkoot Barracks, surveyed the Richardson trail from Valdez to Fairbanks, and headed the Alaska Road Commission. He retired as a Brigadier General in 1920.

SLIDE 12 - MAP - WAMCATS

The Washington-Alaska Military Cable and Telegraph System (WAMCATS) was a highly significant factor in the early development of Alaska. It was a vast undertaking, which connected the military posts in Alaska with the United States. It also functioned as a commercial telegraph and cable connection to the States.

SLIDE 13 - VALDEZ - SIGNAL CORPS

The WAMCAT telegraph station in Valdez-[the center building]-as it looked in 1915 when Valdez was the coastal terminus of both the telegraph line and the Richardson Trail.

SLIDE 14 - CORDOVA - CABLE OFFICE

The Cordova Cable Office in 1908. Cordova was a fishing center and the headquarters of the Copper River and Northwestern Railroad serving the vast Kennicott copper interests.

SLIDE 15 - FORT EGBERT

Fort Egbert, at Eagle - near the Canadian border, was the eastern terminus of the telegraph line and an important mining, trading and customs center. It was manned by members of Company L, 7th Infantry, in June 1899.

SLIDE 16 - FORT EGBERT

The men of Company L, 7th Infantry mustered in front of a new log building at Fort Egbert on March 31, 1900.

SLIDE 17 - "BILLY" MITCHELL

Lieutenant William "Billy" Mitchell, U.S. Army Signal Corps, supervised construction of the northern section of the telegraph line. He went on to become a noted military strategist and proponent of air power. He said Alaska was the key to the North Pacific. Controversy lost him the rank of Brigadier General and suspension from the service. In 1942 the United States Senate raised him posthumously to Major General.

SLIDE 18 - TELEGRAPH LINE

Alternate freezing and thawing cause conventional telegraph poles to lean and fall. Tripods were typical of the WAMCATS line in the tundra country between Broad Pass and Fairbanks in 1948.

SLIDE 19 - WIRELESS TERMINAL - PORT SAFETY

A submarine cable across Norton sound did not survive the ice movement. An improvised wireless link connected Fort St. Michael with Port Safety, where the land line continued 24 miles to Nome. [This sign commemorates this very early success with wireless in 1903.]

SLIDE 20 - FORT DAVIS

This is the farthest west and farthest north point of the telegraph line - Fort Davis near Nome in 1905.

SLIDE 21 - FORT GIBBON

Fort Gibbon at Tanana (pronounced ta-na-naw) was the midpoint of the telegraph line between Eagle and Nome. It was also in the center of an important trading area. At the administration building are a team of reindeer, which were used to haul supplies.

SLIDE 22 - CABLE SHIP *BURNSIDE*

When the land lines of the WAMCATS were completed in 1903, the system was connected via Canada to the United States. This did not prove satisfactory, so a submarine cable system was developed connecting the Alaskan land lines to Seattle and serving the towns of south central and southeastern Alaska. The cable ship, *BURNSIDE*, laid the cable and repaired the line over a period of 18 years.

SLIDE 23 - LINE INSPECTION

The dependable old Army mule had been replaced by the automobile in 1927 when a Signal Corps team made a telegraph line inspection along the Richardson Trail.

SLIDE 24 - ANCHORAGE - WORLD WAR I

World War I called many young Alaskans to the colors, and only a few soldiers guarded docks and bridges in Alaska. Among these was Company B, 21st Infantry, which arrived in Anchorage on board the steamship, *ADMIRAL WATSON*, on November 15, 1919.

SLIDE 25 - BLACK WOLF SQUADRON

The first world war brought the airplane into full flower. Following the war, the Army sent out expeditions to demonstrate the range and utility of aircraft developed beyond World War I standards. The famed Black Wolf Squadron flew from New York to Fort Davis, near Nome, Alaska. This flight and the return trip took from July 15 to October 20, 1920.

SLIDE 26 - CHILKOOT BARRACKS

Between the world wars, Chilkoot Barracks was the only Army post in Alaska. Situated near Haines, Alaska, it was originally name Fort William H. Seward, but was renamed in 1922. It was manned by 11 officers and 300 men equipped with Springfield rifles.

SLIDE 27 - EARLY FORT RICHARDSON

World war II brought drastic and far-reaching changes to Alaska. Fort Richardson was established in 1940 on the site now known as Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage.

SLIDE 28 - NENANA

Supplying defense forces in Alaska was an operation that included ocean, rail, truck, air and river arteries. The 878th Port Company at Nenana ran a barge transport of critical fuel down the Tanana and Yukon Rivers to Galena, the site of an air transport command airfield in 1944.

SLIDE 29 - MAP - ALEUTIAN ISLANDS

But it was the Aleutian Islands, which became the focus of military action in Alaska during World War II.

SLIDE 30 - OBSERVATION POINT - KODIAK

From a bleak headland, near Fort Abercrombie, on Spruce Point of Kodiak Island, American observers searched sea and sky for the approach of the foe.

SLIDE 31 - ALASKA HIGHWAY

As Alaska was being armed to repel the invaders in the distant Aleutian Islands, the Alaska Highway was being pushed through in a single summer. A vital supply route, it was the first land connection between Alaska and the United States. [here we see the right of way being slashed in 1942]

SLIDE 32 - ALASKA HIGHWAY

Troops from a combat engineer regiment layed a corduroy section of the Alaska Highway in 1942. The road was officially opened November 20, 1942.

(SLIDE 33 - BRIGADIER GENERAL BUCKNER - AMCHITKA

[Mg] Simon Bolivar Buckner, was commanding general of the Alaska Defense Command when war broke out at air base headquarters on Amchitka Island in May 1944. General Buckner first commanded the Alaska Defense Command as a colonel in July 1940. That fall he was promoted to Brigadier General. He was killed on Okinawa in 1945 after achieving the rank of lieutenant general.

SLIDE 34 - ACTION - ATTU

American soldiers "in the thick of it" on Attu Ridge in May 1943. By the end of the month the battle of Attu ended with American victory and the invader was driven from American soil.

SLIDE 35 - JAPANESE PRISONERS - ATTU

Only a few Japanese prisoners were captured during the fighting at Massacre Bay, Attu. For these the war was over. The rest were either evacuated before the battle or were killed in the fierce fighting.

SLIDE 36 - KISKA LANDING

American and Canadian troops had by-passed the island of Kiska as they pressed on to Attu Island where the decisive action of the war in the Aleutians took place. Returning to take Kiska after the Battle of Attu they found that the Japanese forces had evacuated the island under the cover of fog.

SLIDE 37 - SOLDIERS ON GUARD - EARTHQUAKE - 1964

Following the war, U.S. Army forces in Alaska were primarily concerned with training. However, they rendered many services to the public in fighting forest fires, in search and rescue and medical aid. Soldiers from Fort Richardson guarded property damaged in the great Good Friday Earthquake of March 27, 1964.

(SLIDE 38 - 172D INFANTRY BRIGADE (ALASKA) PATCH

The shoulder patch of the 172d Infantry Brigade. The colors represent the three basic combat branches. The bayonet alludes to the infantry and symbolizes good neighbors who are ever ready to protect the state.

SLIDE 39 - GUARDIANS OF THE NORTH

Rigorous training, skill, loyalty, pride and devotion to duty make these soldiers truly the guardians of the north.