

# Life at Ladd Field

The original quarters constructed at the field drew rave reviews. "Nothing I can say can possibly tell you how nice they are for Alaska," the wife of a lieutenant wrote home in early 1941. Later that year, an Army inspector said the barracks for the men "are the best I have ever seen. There is little doubt that morale of troops will be materially improved." After the United States entered the war, the demands on Ladd Field intensified and the base blossomed with Quonset huts, Pacific huts, prefabricated wood frame barracks and other rapidly built structures. "You started out with a new fine set of buildings and then they got in a rush, why they just threw up whatever they could," veteran Bill Stroecker said.



An unidentified soldier at the corner of Cushman Street and 2nd Avenue, a popular site for souvenir photos taken for friends and family "back home." Photo courtesy of June Edwards collection, TYHS.



WACS and their dates at NCO club, 1945. Courtesy Audrey Virden, fourth from left.



Photograph of a soldier sitting on the Six Mile firetruck Engine No. 9. Cecil H. Kornegay Photograph Collection. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, 1999-204-106



Baseball was a favorite pastime played under the Alaskan midnight sun. Photo courtesy of June Edwards collection, TYHS.



There were 184 Pacific huts that served as barracks, which contained bunks and were a place to pass the time, as Stroecker put it. Stan Jurek said the barracks he lived in provided him with a bunk, a place to store his rifle and a shelf for clothes. "Ours was named Pneumonia Gulch, next one as Snake Pit and they were all pretty cold living quarters in the wintertime." The men would chip in and pay someone to keep the fire in the coal stove going at night so they wouldn't freeze.

For entertainment, the men would go to the bars in Fairbanks or just outside the city, drop by the USO on the Chena River, play basketball, baseball and ski on Birch Hill. At times there were shows put on by the likes of Bob Hope and a boxing demonstration at which heavyweight champion Joe Louis acted as the referee.



WACs pose for a summer sleigh ride. 1945. Courtesy Betty Wiker.

**January 1942**  
Construction begins on Otter Point airfield 70 miles south of Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians.

**February 1942**  
Cold Weather Experiment Station renamed Cold Weather Testing Detachment. Sixth Air Depot organized.

President Roosevelt authorizes construction of Alaska Highway.

**March 1942**  
Construction begins on Alaska Highway. Gen. MacArthur leaves Philippines, says "I shall return."

**April 1942**  
Col. James Doolittle, who grew up in Nome, leads raid on Tokyo and other Japanese cities.

People of Japanese ancestry ordered interned. Many from Alaska sent to Washington and then Idaho.

**Memorial Day 1942**  
USO dedicated in downtown Fairbanks.

**June 1942**  
Japanese land on Attu and Kiska islands, bomb Dutch Harbor. Hundreds of Aleuts evacuated from their homes to Southeast Alaska. Evacuations of nearly 900 Aleuts begin.

Cold Weather Test Detachment deactivated.

**July 1942**  
Cold Weather Test Detachment reactivated.

**August 1942**  
Ladd Field prepares to deliver airplanes to Russians. Advance crews arrive. At peak, up to 300 Russians would be stationed in Fairbanks.

**September 1942**  
Lend-Lease deliveries of aircraft begin.  
Ladd hospital opens.

**November 1942**  
Alaska Highway opens, 1,000 trucks dispatched north.

