



## Remembering Our Heritage



**29 Mar 1867:** US Secretary of State William Seward and Russian Minister Edouard deStoeckl met in Washington DC and signed an agreement to purchase Alaska, then known as Russian America, for \$7,200,000. Joseph Driscoll, in his 1943 book, *War Discovers Alaska*, quoted an article from an 1867 *Harpers* magazine, which stated: "The advantage of obtaining a large territory with a population of Esquimaux is certainly not very striking, even with the added control of fishing and fur trade. Under the auspices of Mr. Steward, the US is about to enter upon a colonial system. At a time when we are heavily loaded with debt, we are to pay more than seven million dollars in gold for a remote and barbarous region, which, under ordinary human conditions, will never be largely peopled except by savages, and for the annual government of which the expenses will be enormous. The advantages are either a huge job or it is a political device. In the present situation of this country, win an unbroken line upon both oceans and across the continent, territory expansion is wholly undesirable. It is a source of weakness and not of strength; and whoever advocates it must show the advantages with irresistible force. There may be immense advantages in the acquisition of this Russian desert; but they are not suspected by the country, and they are thus carefully concealed by the government." (Joseph Driscoll, *War Discovers Alaska*, Lippincott, Philadelphia, PA, 1943, pp. 338-339; Jonathan M. Nielson, *Armed Forces on a Northern Frontier, the Military in Alaska's History, 1867-1987*, Greenwood Press, New York, 1988, p. 9.)



**29 Mar 1927:** Carl Ben Eielson and Sir Hubert Wilkins took off from Point Barrow in *Detroit News No 1* with the intent of flying 550 miles out over the Arctic Ocean, landing and taking scientific sounding of the ocean bottom, collecting water samples, making temperature recordings and meteorological observations, before returning to Point Barrow. They also wanted to prove the feasibility of landing and taking off with their ski-equipped biplane. Eielson, after experiencing engine problems, landed on the ice. While he made repairs, Wilkins completed the planned scientific work. They continued to experience engine problems on the way back, ran out of gas, and landed on the ice. Wilkins calculated their position at approximately 100 miles northeast of Point Barrow on the drifting ice. They decided to walk out and finally on 15 April, reached trading post of the Arctic shore. Eielson suffered frostbite, resulting in the amputation of the ends of several of his fingers. After making several more flights with Graham as pilot, Wilkins ended the *Detroit News-Wilkins Arctic Expedition*. The party arrived in Seattle on 18 June, where Wilkins paid them their wages. (Stevens, *Alaskan Aviation History*, pp .350-358.)

**31 Mar 1937:** President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 7596, temporarily withdrawing 3,840 acres of land near Fairbanks for War Department use. (Memo, Adjutant General, War Department to Col. John C.H. Lee, Corps of Engineers, subj: Survey of Facilities in Alaska, 31 May 1939; Woodman, *Duty Station Northwest*, Vol II, 1996, p. 55.)

**1 Apr 1940:** *The Anchorage Daily Times* carried a front page article, "First Group for Constructing Ladd on Way," that announced Maj. Edward George, Construction Quarter Master Corps, and three other officers and 15 enlisted men with tons of equipment had cleared the Golden Gate Bridge and were en-route from San Francisco by ship (Army troop transport *St. Mihiel*) for Alaska to begin construction of Ladd Field. The article quoted Major George as stating that construction would reach its peak during the summer of 1940 with around 1000 men employed. The equipment included tractors, scrapers, power shovels and working machines. ("First Group for Constructing Ladd on the Way," *Anchorage Daily Times*, Apr 2, 1940.)



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**1 Apr 1941:** Construction began on the Army Air Corps headquarters building on Elmendorf Field. It was completed 14 February 1942. (Fleischer, Hist, Elmendorf Field, p. 27.)

**27 Mar 1942:** The 3rd Bombardment Group unofficially acquired 24 North American B-25Cs scheduled for transfer to the Netherlands East Indies Air Force. The brand new B-25 aircraft were parked at Batchelor Field, near Melbourne, Australia, at the time. The B-25 Mitchells, were assigned to the 13th and 90th Squadrons. The squadrons welcomed the new aircraft despite the fact that almost no one had any training on the new planes. (Hist, Third Bombardment Group (Light), 1 January 1942 to 31 March 1944, pp. 97-98, *The Grim Reapers*, pp. 11-13)



**31 Mar 1942:** Work had progressed on the runway at Otter Point, Umnak Island, to the point where the first aircraft could land. A C-53, piloted by Colonel Parks with Brig Gen William O. Butler, Commander, Eleventh Air Force, Colonel Wilson and Lt Col George W. Nold, staff engineer on the Alaska Defense Command, made the first landing. The runway at the time was 3800 feet long by 100 feet wide. Only transports used the runway until May. (Cutler, Hist, Ft. Glenn, p. 6.)



**1 Apr 1942:** Lieutenant Robert Ruegg, who had replaced Capt Rogers because of illness, led the first 3rd Bombardment Group mission of the war against the Japanese. His group of five serviceable A-24s attacked the airfield at Salamaua, an alternate target to Lae, which was obscured by clouds. Only minimum damage was inflicted on the target and all planes returned safely to base. Lieutenant Ruegg, later a lieutenant general, served as Commander-in-Chief, Alaskan Command, from August 1969 to August 1972. (Hist, Third Bombardment Group (Light), 1 January 1942 to 31 March 1944, pp. 7-8, *The Grim Reapers*, pp. 17-18)

**30 Mar 1943:** The Eleventh Air Force dispatched six missions against Kiska and Attu from Adak and Amchitka. Six B-24s and six B-25s with four P-38s attempted a strike against Japanese positions on Kiska at noon but were turned back by weather. Four B-24 crews along with four P-38s bombed the runway on Attu while two F-5 pilots took aerial photographs. Next, five B-24s and four P-38s struck the Main Camp on Kiska with one B-24D, 41-63752, 21st Bombardment Squadron, shot down due to intense anti-aircraft fire. Four P-38s from Amchitka then attacked positions of Little Kiska. In the final mission of the day, four P-38s dropped bombs through the overcast followed by six B-25s, which bombed and strafed radar and radio installations in the Main Camp area plus the runway under construction. (Carter and Mueller, *Combat Chronology*, p. 114.)



**1 Apr 1944:** The Eleventh Air Force inactivated the XI Bombardment Command and the XI Fighter Command. It took the action due to the fact that only two bomber squadrons remained in the Eleventh Air Force and the need to reduce the number of personnel. The 28th Bombardment Group on Shemya and the 343rd Fighter Group at Alexai Point, Attu, assumed the responsibilities of the two commands. The 404th Bombardment Squadron was responsible for conducting night reconnaissance missions over the Kuriles and flying a daily weather reconnaissance flights. The 77th Bombardment Squadron was held in readiness to repel a sea borne invasion and the fighter squadrons provided air defense. (HQ 11AF GO 9, 25 Feb 1944; Ransohoff, Hist, 11AF, p. 300.)

Source: Office of History, Elmendorf AFB



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**27-28 Mar 1945:** The XXI Bombardment Command committed almost 100 B-29s from bases in the Mariana Islands on a mission to drop mines in the Shimonoseki Strait. The purpose of the mission was to block shipping between the islands of Honshu and Kyushu. It was the first of succeeding mission flown to establish a blockade around the Home Islands. (Haulman, *One Hundred Years of Flight*, p. 58.)

**26 Mar 1948:** Elmendorf Army Air Base (AAB) was redesignated Elmendorf Air Force Base (AFB). The Air Force also redesignated the following World War II Army Air Bases as Air Force Bases: Amchitka, Cape, Marks, Naknek (later renamed King Salmon), Shemya and Thornbrough. (Mueller, *Air Force Bases*, Vol. I, p. 157; DAF GO 10, 26 Mar 1948.)



**1 Apr 1950:** The Air Force extended the tour lengths of personnel assigned to Elmendorf AFB and Ladd AFB from 18 to 24 months. (Hist, 1804th Comm Gp, Jan-Jun 1950, p. 3.)

**1 Apr 1950:** The 3rd Bombardment Wing moved to Johnson AB near Yakota AB. (Charles A. Ravenstein, *Air Force Combat Wings, Lineage and Honors Histories, 1947-1977*, GPO, Washington DC, 1984, p. 10)



**31 Mar 1951:** The 3rd Bombardment Wing flew 847 sorties. Sorties by squadron were 8th, 289; 13th, 300; and 731st, 258. The wing reported the lost eight crewmembers, five B-26s destroyed and one damaged. Two B-26s were reported missing in action and one crashed in the sea near Iwakuni. The pilot reported he was out of gas, a fairly common problem experienced by B-26 crews returning from a mission. Missing in action aircraft was an all too common occurrence. (Hist, 3BG, Jan 51, Ch 2, p. 17; Summary of Events, 3BG, Jun 50-Mar 51)

**31 Mar 1952:** The 3rd Bombardment Wing flew 768 sorties. Sorties by squadron were: 8th, 252; 13th, 254; and 90th, 262. The wing claimed 173 rail cuts, 17 locomotives, 150 rail cars and 383 vehicles destroyed. Six crewmembers and two B-26s were reported missing. Included in the number were the crew of a 13th Bombardment Squadron B-26, which failed to return from a mission, launched the last night of the month. The crew included: Major Robert R. Newton, pilot; Captain Gene W. Gould, navigator, and Private First Class Thomas H. Beacham, gunner. Major Newton served as the 3rd Bombardment Wing's communications officer. (Hist, 3BG, Mar 52, pp. 3 and 18)

**31 Mar 1953:** The 3rd Bombardment Wing flew 948 sorties and claimed the destruction of 823 vehicles, 9 locomotives, 73 railcars and 4 bridges and 156 road and 30 rail cuts. Also claimed were 52 buildings destroyed and 39 roadblocks established. The group reported the loss of four crewmen and one B-26 from the 90th Bombardment Squadron scheduled for night mission, 31 March-1 April. (Hist, 3BW, Jan-Jun 53, pp. 16 and 21)





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**26 Mar 1953:** General Acheson, in a letter to Gen Nathan Twining, Vice Chief of Staff, USAF, noted that: "I have run into a good many problems since my arrival, some of them pretty bad." He envisioned the defense of Alaska being centered around the Fairbanks-Anchorage-Kodiak axis. He believed that the radar station network had been built too far forward and that the air control and warning system was too large and unwieldy. He stated to General Twining that the most desirable system was one "predicated on the basis of defense of our critical areas rather than the defense of Alaska." He was also concerned about the un-readiness of aircraft control and warning system due the slow construction of the radar stations. (Chart, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1953, pp. 2-4.)

**1 Apr 1954:** The Air Force renamed Galena II (F-8) the aircraft warning and control site near Galena Campion (F-8) in honor of 1/Lt Alan J. Campion, an F-94 radar operator who had been killed during an attempted landing at Galena in November 1950. The station had been referred to as Galena II, resulting in some confusion. The named change while honoring Lieutenant Campion, solved the confusions of having two same named stations. (Chart, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1954, p. 32.)

**27 Mar 1957:** Capt Burton P. Jenkins succeeded in landing his C-47 on an ice island in the Arctic Ocean after being delayed at Point Barrow by weather. A WB-50 crew from the 58th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron had located the island 500 nautical miles north of Point Barrow. Major Richard E. Freeman, the Ice Skate project manager and designated camp commander and his party took measurements and left behind several barrels to serve as radar reflectors before departing for the trip back to Point Barrow. They intended to return and establish a camp in support of the 1957 Geophysical Year, but were unable to relocate the island on the second trip back. (Miller, Hist, AAC, Jan-Jun 1957, pp. 65-67.)



**31 Mar 1959:** The Aleutian DEW Line Segment achieved a fully operational capability. (Hist, ALCOM, 1959, p. 105.)

**27 Mar 1964:** The Good Friday Earthquake measuring 8.6 on the Richter scale struck south central Alaska at around 1736 local time, killing 115 people and causing property damage in excess of \$750 million. The major shaking lasted two to three minutes. The Alaskan Air Command had no specific plan to deal with the earthquake since its focus had been on war planning. The war planning, however, prepared it for dealing with the natural disaster. The earthquake severely damaged Anchorage International Airport and destroyed its control tower and left only 3,000 feet of usable runway. Operations were shifted to Elmendorf AFB, whose control tower was also destroyed. Major structural damages were sustained to the following Elmendorf AFB buildings and facilities: three AAC headquarters buildings, three airmen dormitories, telephone and telegraph buildings, and the base hospital. Base operations and passenger terminal, bowling alley, alert hangar, field house, auto hobby shop, commissary warehouse, central heat and power plant, POL tanks and lines and base roads also received damage. The estimated repair damages came to \$12,346,000. The water, sewage, electrical, communications and heating infrastructure received considerable damages. Cost of selected buildings and facilities receiving major damages is shown as follows: warehouses, \$4,582,000; hospital, \$2,560,000; control tower replacement including radar approach control,, \$1,567,000; utilities systems, \$1,282,000; support facilities, \$265,000;



Source: Office of History, Elmendorf AFB



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dormitories, \$673,000; headquarters buildings, \$403,000; family housing, \$136,000; and hangars and shops, \$417,000. The remaining total cost was spread among the other buildings. The multi-storied Elmendorf Hospital received major damages that required the immediate evacuation of the patients. The violent swaying of the tall structure resulted in cracking of the walls and the upsetting of equipment and furniture. Hospital personnel evacuated the patients within 18 minutes without any injuries to a nearby dormitory. According to the AAC historian at the time, hospital personnel wrote "colorful personal accounts," which became part of the hospital's permanent records. Fifty-eight of the patients were air evacuated to medical facilities in the Lower 48. Others were sent to the hospital in Anchorage. The earthquake damaged 14 F-102As. Most of the damage resulted from light fixtures falling from the roof of hangars onto the aircraft causing skin damages. Other aircraft were similarly damaged. Maintenance personnel were able to remove all 26 aircraft that were parked in the hangars by 1800. No fires occurred despite the fact that fuel was on the hangar floors and the light fixtures that fell were still hot. The Alaskan Air Command established a Disaster Relief Center by 1810. Its first action was to arrange for emergency housing and food for displace Air Force members and within two hours accommodations were arranged for and a field kitchen for 1,500 personnel set up. The first shelter began operations at 1900. Approximately 1,365 displaced persons received shelter and food and by the next morning everyone was accounted for.



There were no fatalities or serious injuries. The Alaskan Air Command along with other military provided humanitarian support under Project Helping Hand. Help was immediately provided to Anchorage, the closest and largest community. Food, bedding and other supplies were provided. Heavy equipment was used to clear away debris and open up roads. Safe Haven supplies at Seward were opened up and distributed to the community. Some 244,000 gallons of diesel fuel was provided to local distributors to keep generators running and the Alaska Native Hospital was given enough for 36 hours of operation. By 5 April, \$174,246 in resources had been distributed by AAC that also included medical supplies. Ambulances were provided and water purifying equipment loaned to the city. Elmendorf AFB security policemen helped patrol Anchorage. The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff later

praised Lt. Gen. Raymond J. Reeves, Commander-in-Chief, Alaskan Command, for the military's response and support of the recovery effort from the Good Friday Earthquake. (Report, ALCOM, "Operation Helping Hand, the Armed Forces React to Earthquake Disaster," not dated.)

**1 Apr 1966:** The Military Airlift Command formally established Elmendorf AFB as a channel en-route support stop for airlift supporting the Southeast Asia requirements. Initially referred to as Fly Fast, the operational name was changed in 1967 to Combat Pacer. The Military Airlift Command also used Eielson AFB, Shemya AFS and King Salmon and Galena as stops for its aircraft. In addition to MAC aircraft, C-130s also initially used Elmendorf AFB as a stopover base for Southeast Asia operations. On 1 October 1967, the Air Force switched C-130s to the Central Pacific route. The 602nd Military Airlift Squadron (MAC) supported Combat Pacer operations. (Weidman, Hist, AAC, Jul-Dec 1967, p. 44.)



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**1 Apr 1968:** Four F-100s, 90th Tactical Flying Squadron, flying escort for defoliation aircraft retaliated against an enemy concentration 43 miles southwest of Saigon, which was firing on the unarmed UC-123 formation. The pilots succeeded in suppressing two of the automatic weapons positions. Five of the six defoliation aircraft took hits, but all returned to Bien Hoa safely. Pilots destroyed 11 military fortifications, damaged 16, and destroyed 10 bunkers. (Hist, 3 TFW, Apr-Jun 68, p. 35)



**31 Mar 1970:** The HH-21B flew its last mission to Fire Island, ending a 15 year re-supply operations to the radar station there. (Photo Caption, *Sourdough Sentinel*, 10 Apr 1970.)

**31 Mar 1971:** Major General Joseph A. Cunningham, Commander, AAC, began an "Action Line," which could be used by callers to voice their concerns and questions directly to the command section. It was not intended to replace the established chain of command and inspector general system, but to provide another outlet. The names of callers were kept confidential and the questions and answers having broad implications were published in the base newspapers. The automatic recording services could be reached 24-hours a day. (AAC Press Release No. 71S-3-71, "Action Line Special," 22 Apr 1971.)

**29 Mar 1974:** Doctor Terry Akins, the Elmendorf AFB veterinarian finished 19 in a field 29 dog teams that completed the 1,000-mile Iditarod Trail Race from Anchorage to Nome. The race had begun 2 March. He was the only racer to complete with all his original dogs. Captain Akins had also competed in the annual Fur Rendezvous dog sled race the previous month. (Hales, Hist, AAC, Jul 1972-Jun 1974, p. 422.)

**31 Mar 1974:** The Air Force established a Women in the Air Force (WAF) squadron on Eielson AFB with Capt Carol Prismon as the first commander. (Hales, Hist, AAC, Jul 1972-Jun 1974, p. xxxiv.)



**29 Mar 1975:** The Alaskan Air Command sent a message to the Air Force Military Personnel Center, Randolph AFB, TX, asking the personnel being assigned to Alaska be warned of the critical shortage of housing. The construction of the Trans Alaska Pipeline had put a considerable pressure on housing, especially in the Fairbanks area. During 1974, there were about 2,200 housing unit construction starts, far less than the anticipated needed to handle the estimated 15,000 population increase in Anchorage. Vacancy rates in Anchorage declined from 6.4 to 3.9 percent and it became a seller's market as land lords increased rental rates. The problem was worse in Fairbanks, center of the pipeline construction activity. The Alaskan Air Command message stated in part, "Housing on the civilian economy extremely limited and expensive. It is expected it will become practically non-existent in the near future. Total on-base housing units can accommodate only 46 percent of eligible assigned personnel." (Cloe, Hist, AAC, Jul 1974-Jun 1975, pp. 104-.)

**31 Mar 1975:** The 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron was transferred from AAC to the Military Airlift Command. The Alaskan Air Command retained operational control. The squadron began converting to C-130Es. It had flown C-130As, ski-wheel equipped C-130D and C-130D-6s from which the skis had been removed. The Alaska Air National Guard also began converting from C-123Js to C-130Es. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, Jul 1974-Jun 1975, pp. 33-34.)



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**27 Mar 1986:** Elmendorf AFB personnel took precautionary measures against ash following the eruption of Mount St. Augustine at the south end of Cook Inlet. The volcano spewed a 25,000-foot high cloud of ash into the sky, which began drifting directly towards Anchorage. As many planes as possible were towed into hangars and the rest flown to Eielson AFB. All incoming aircraft to Elmendorf AFB were re-routed elsewhere. All outdoor activity was curtailed. Computers were shut down and covered. The ash fall did not occur as expected and the base returned to normal activities the following day. (Cloe, Hist, AAC, 1986, pp. 279-281.)

**1 Apr 1992:** The 17th Tactical Airlift Squadron was reassigned from the Military Airlift Command to PACAF and redesignated the 517th Airlift Squadron and further assigned it to the 3rd Operations Group. (HQ PACAF SO GA-57, 23 Apr 1992)



**31 Mar 1994:** The 3rd Wing earned the Commander-in-Chief's Installation Excellence Award for the best Air Force Base in DOD. (Hist, 11 AF, 1994, p. 24.)

**31 Mar 1997:** The Navy closed Adak Naval Air Facility. The lowering of the flag for the last time ended an era that began on 31 August 1942, when U.S. forces landed on the Aleutian Island and established an advance base there for operations against the Japanese on Kiska and Attu Islands. Following the war, the Army turned Adak over to the Navy who established anti-submarine warfare base there. By the 1980s there were over 6,000 Navy personnel on the islands. The figure had dropped to 500 by the time of the closing. The Navy left behind a contingent of 30 Navy personnel and 200 civilian contractors to maintain facilities, keep the runway open and begin an environmental cleanup. (TSgt James Frank, Hist, Alaskan Command, 1997, pp. 15-16.)



**1 Apr 1999:** The Arctic Warrior Center officially opened when General Patrick K. Gamble, PACAF Commander, and Colonel Scott Gration, 3 WG Commander, teamed up for a ceremonial ribbon cutting ceremony. The center was a new and more efficient era in processing newly arriving personnel, cutting processing time from three months to three weeks. (Hist, 3 WG, 1999, p. 63)

**27 Mar 2003:** Colonel Robert Tirevold, Commander, 3rd Mission Support Squadron, announced that the 3rd Service Squadron had won the Air Force level Hennessy Trophy for the third time since 2000. The squadron had been honored best in the Air Force in 2000, 2001 and 2003. The Air Force awarded the John L. Hennessy once a year to the single and multiple-facilities. The award was based on the entire scope of an installation's food support, food quality, employee and customer relations, resource conservation, training and safety. The Iditarod won the award for 2003 in the single category. (Email, Commander, 3rd Mission Support Group to 3rd Wing Staff, "AF Hennessy Winners," 27 Mar 2003; AIC Amy Christopher, "Food Services is Best in Air Force," *Sourdough Sentinel*, 4 Apr 2003.)