



EVERY DEPARTMENT HAS A STORY

THE AMERICAN LEGION OF
ALASKA

Alaska made history as the only place in the United States occupied by foreign forces during World War II. The Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor, Attu and Kiska along the Aleutian chain in 1942. This vast stretch of territory, twice the size of Texas, has been considered a strategic asset from the beginning. Secretary of State William H. Seward cited Alaska's importance in defending the North Pacific when he persuaded Congress to purchase the 586,412-square-mile tract from Russia in 1867. Seven years before the Japanese invasion, Gen. Billy Mitchell warned Congress that Alaska – still a territory – was "the most important strategic place in the world." Mitchell knew the landscape firsthand. He worked stringing telegraph lines in Alaska. A peak in Alaska's Chugach Mountain range bears his name.

Alaska Legionnaires



Drew Dix became the first enlisted member of the U.S. Special Forces to earn the Medal of Honor for heroism in Vietnam. Dix was serving as an adviser to a Vietnamese unit in Chau Phu when it was overrun by Viet Cong forces on Jan. 31, 1968. Over the course of two days, Dix led rescue efforts that saved 14 civilians. He is credited with killing at least 14 Viet Cong, capturing 20 prisoners and 15 weapons. Dix is a member of Ketchikan Post 3.

Nona Johnson, a venerable Alaska veteran who served in the Marine Corps during World War II, became the first commander of the all-women's American Legion Post 21 in Anchorage when it was formed in 1950. Active in the Legion for decades, Johnson returned for a second tour as post commander in 2000 on the 50th anniversary of the post's founding. She died in August 2013.



Jimmie L. Foster served from 2010-2011 as the first American Legion national commander from Alaska. He was a service officer under Leon Bertram, the Legion's top Alaska service officer at the time, as well as adjutant and commander of Spennard Post 28 in Anchorage, Alaska's National Executive Committeeman and a member of many national commissions and committees.



Moose appeal

Alaska moose are the largest members of the deer family and the largest of moose subspecies. These super-sized creatures range from 800 to 1,600 pounds and can stand over six feet tall. Frequently seen across Alaska, occasionally even in the parking lots of American Legion post homes, the moose population climbs as high as 1,000 in Anchorage alone in the winter.

Peggy Huber made three attempts to get into the service before finally gaining enough weight to meet the Army's 100-pound minimum in 1942. By the time she left the Army Nurse Corps in 1948, she had served in North Africa, Italy and the Philippines. She worked at Walter Reed Army Medical Center before arriving in Fairbanks in 1953. She and husband Russ, long-time members of Dorman H. Baker Post 11, helped start Boys State and Girls State and supported the program for decades. Huber presented the American Legion award to outstanding students until she was 95.



Alaska has the highest per-capita veteran population in the United States. Nearly 15 percent of the state's residents served in the Armed Forces.

Six American Legion posts were established before the Territory of Alaska received its permanent charter from the national headquarters of The American Legion. By the time Alaska became a state, it had nearly 30 posts. Today there are more than 35 posts under The American Legion Department of Alaska including posts in Guam, Japan and Taiwan.

The American Legion had nearly 30 posts in the territory that would become the state of Alaska in 1959.

Seventeen of the tallest peaks in North America are in Alaska, including Denali – the tallest peak on the continent at 20,320 feet.

Alaska is simultaneously the northern most state in the U.S., the eastern most state and the western most state.



Legend

- Legion posts with physical addresses
- Alaska Legion Department Headquarters

Attractions in The Last Frontier



The Healing Heart Totem Pole – Erected on Prince of Wales Island in 1995, the totem pole was carved by the late Legionnaire Stan Marsden in honor of his son, who died of a cocaine overdose in 1991. Marsden carved the 46.5-foot-tall totem pole out of a 500-year-old red cedar.

The Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel – Also known as the Whittier Tunnel, it goes through Maynard Mountain south of Anchorage. At 2.5 miles, it is the longest combination highway and railway tunnel in North America. It was constructed at the behest of the Army after it established a port at nearby Whittier during World War II.



Mulcahy Stadium – The turf at the Anchorage stadium was redone in 2009 with money raised by The American Legion

Joint Base Richardson-Elmendorf – Also known as JBER – was formed by the merger of Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Force Base in Anchorage in 2010. Major units stationed here include the headquarters of the Alaska Command, Alaskan NORAD Region (ANR), the Eleventh Air Force, the 673rd Air Base Wing, the 4th Brigade Combat Team of the 25th Infantry Division and others.

Fort Abercrombie State Historical Park – Located on Kodiak Island, Fort Abercrombie offers a military history museum and a large World War II bunker.



1919

1922

1935

1940

1941

1942

1943

A temporary American Legion department is formed in June 1919 with five initial posts in Alaska. The five later draw numbers out of a hat to decide which will become the first officially chartered post in Alaska. Jack Henry Post 1 in Anchorage is the winner.

The Alaska Legionnaire is established as the official monthly publication of the Department of Alaska.



Gen. Billy Mitchell warns Congress that Alaska – then a territory – was "the most important strategic place in the world."

U.S. Navy stations are built on Kodiak Island and at Dutch Harbor in response to concerns about Japan. The U.S. Naval Air Station at Sitka also is expanded. Fort Richardson and Elmendorf Air Field are established near Anchorage.

Fort Wainwright and Eielson Air Force Base are built near Fairbanks.

The Japanese bomb Dutch Harbor June 3-4, then invade the islands of Attu and Kiska, as part of Japan's effort to form a defensive line from Alaska's Aleutian Islands to New Guinea, including Midway.

U.S. forces finally retake the Island of Attu in a brutal 18-day battle. Some 549 Americans are killed and another 1,148 wounded – making it second only to Iwo Jima for Pacific Theater casualties. The Japanese evacuate their troops from Kiska just prior to U.S. and Canadian forces launching an assault to recapture that island.

The first land-based U.S. bomber attack on the Japanese mainland is launched from Attu.



ALASKA Legion Baseball

American Legion Baseball has been a force in Alaska since the mid-1960s. More than two-dozen teams are fielded statewide, making it possible for Anchorage – Alaska's largest city – to have eight high school baseball teams. Now run under the auspices of the Alliance for the Support of American Legion Baseball, the program has produced 10 Major League Baseball draft picks in recent years and three notable pro players including Chad Bentz, Marshall Boze, and Chris Mabeus. American Legion Baseball in Alaska also has included dozens of players who went on to play college ball. That includes Lauren Frost, who played American Legion Baseball in Eagle River and went on to become an infielder on the Stanford University women's softball team.

“If it wasn't for The American Legion, there wouldn't be any high school baseball.”

Russ Baker, Department of Alaska baseball chairman, on the Legion's long-running work to fund high school baseball in Anchorage and keep the bases loaded throughout the summer with a seamless transition for players to Legion ball. Much of the funding comes from grants.



Black soldiers and the Alaska Highway

There might never have been an Alaska-Canadian highway if not for Pearl Harbor and contingents of African-American U.S. soldiers who were pulled from the South and tasked with building the most difficult portion of the wilderness road in bitterly frigid conditions.

Boosters had promoted a highway from northern Canada to Alaska since the 1920s. But it took the Japanese attack in December 1941 to finally persuade Congress to back a 1,500-mile road from Dawson Creek, B.C., to Big Delta, south of Fairbanks. The Aleutian Islands, in southwestern Alaska, were closer to Japan than any other place in North America. But there was no way to reach this far north-territory (statehood was nearly two decades away) by road.

Congress approved the project in February 1942. The

military was given eight months to do the job.

Members of three all-black regiments – the 93rd, 95th and 97th Engineers – built the Alaska section of the road, often considered the most difficult stretch.

More than 10,000 soldiers worked on the Alcan, as the highway is often known, pioneering a road through the wilderness in eight months and 12 days. The cost was \$135 million. That's about \$1.9 billion in today's dollars.

More than an incredible construction feat, more than a Herculean effort to connect Alaska to the rest of North America by road, the highway project helped demonstrate the skills and work ethic of black troops. Historians point to the project as one of the reasons President Harry Truman ordered the desegregation of the military in 1948.

Did you know?

The American Legion awards many scholarships to college-bound Alaskans each year, including the Dick Johnson Memorial Scholarship, named to honor the long-time member of Susitna Valley Post 35 in Wasilla, available to students with 2.0 to 3.0 grade-point averages who would otherwise have a difficulty paying for college. Department scholarships also go to oratorical contestants and Boys State participants.

Post-9/11 AK LEGION

In most places in Alaska, the sense of community is very strong, and the sense of helping others is very strong. At The American Legion, we strive to do that. Anybody who comes to us who has had a life event – we're going to help them out. The Legion does the lion's share of that because you have fewer options up here. You take care of each other a little more.



Blaine Sears, who retired from the U.S. Coast Guard in 2011, a member of American Legion Post 5 in Seward

For Blaine Sears, The American Legion is all about serving the community of Seward, Alaska. Raising money for scholarships and families. Orchestrating the local Toys for Tots program. Supporting a Boy Scouts troop. Leading patriotic ceremonies. Being there when a family loses a loved one. Making sure the veterans who are part of the annual wounded warrior trip to Alaska are well fed, get out on a fishing boat and experience a relaxing adventure.

"In a town of 2,300 people, we generally generate about a \$100,000 a year for donations," Sears says. "And we don't necessarily have a cap on the scholarships. Students write us and tell us about their needs. Anybody who comes to us who has had a life event – we're going to help them out."

Coast Guard friends persuaded Sears to join the Legion more than 20 years ago.

He values the organization and urges other young veterans to join. "The American Legion is a huge advocate for active-duty and retiree benefits," Sears says. "We can help make the country and the armed forces and our retirement better by being a member. And we can make our community better by getting in there and doing whatever we can."

U.S. Sen Dan Sullivan is a member of Spenard Post 28 in Anchorage. Sullivan, who served in the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve, was deployed to Afghanistan in 2013.

Contact The American Legion of Alaska

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Join The American Legion

🌐 www.legion.org/join

1952

The Alaska Air Guard is established, and the federal government recognizes it as a detachment a year later.



1959

Archie Van Winkle receives the Medal of Honor from President Dwight Eisenhower for his heroism during the Korean War. He is the only individual born in Alaska to receive the nation's highest honor for valor.

1967

Alaska's first Boys State is held, and future Lt. Gov. Lauren Leman attends.



1987

The Anchorage Veterans' Memorial is established at Delaney Park to honor Alaskans who have made the ultimate sacrifice since World War II.

1993

Koyukuk Arctic American Legion Post 9 is established in Wiseman. It is the northern most Legion post in North America.

2000

Matt Moon takes second place in The American Legion's National Oratorical Competition.

2015

Kevin Collier, Jack Henry Squadron No. 1 in Anchorage, is elected national commander of the Sons of the American Legion.

2016

Cheyenne Matthews wins third place in The American Legion's National Oratorical Competition.

