

Aleutian World War II Visitor Center

Ounalashka Corporation
National Park Service Alaska Affiliated Area



The Aerology Building in the summer of 2001. National Park Service Photo.



*Ounalashka Corporation shareholders at the June 2002 opening of the Aleutian World War II Visitor Center.
Courtesy Ounalashka Corporation.*

The Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Visitor Center in Unalaska is dedicated to the history of the Unangan (Aleut) people and the role of the Aleutians during World War II. In 1996 Congress created the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area to educate the public on this little known part of American history. In 2002, the Visitor Center opened with exhibits, a theater, and a World War II-era radio room. The Center interprets both the military events of the Campaign and the relocation and overwhelming hardships faced by the Native residents of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. Visitors to the center can read newspaper articles on the war from the 1940s, look over maps and flight charts, view a Russian Orthodox icon, and watch films on the Aleut Evacuation and the War in the Pacific.

Known to historians as the “Forgotten War,” the Aleutian Campaign began on June 3rd, 1942 when Japanese planes bombed Unalaska and Amaknak Islands. Tens of thousands of troops mobilized to the Aleutians to defend the backdoor to the United States as the Japanese Northern Garrison occupied the western islands of Attu and Kiska. The 1943 Battle of Attu reclaimed the island; however, its residents would never reclaim their homeland. Captured by the Japanese and held prisoners of war for three years, the Attuans survived horrific conditions. The Unangan from nine other villages were relocated to sub-standard cannery and mining buildings in Southeast Alaska by the federal government, their homes and villages vandalized by U.S. troops, their beloved churches neglected, and their archeological sites looted for recreation. Of the 880 Unangan who were removed or captured, nearly 100 died.

Aleutian World War II Visitor Center

P.O. Box 149, Unalaska, AK, 99685



Exhibit in the historic Aerology Building. The restored terrazzo floor is visible in the foreground. Courtesy Archgraphics.



The Visitor Center gift shop has many books and items relating to the war. Courtesy Roger Lockwood.



The radio room upstairs in the Aerology building, which has been reconstructed from 1940s photographs to look as it did during World War II. Courtesy Archgraphics.



The 1940s-style theatre. Courtesy Ounalashka Corporation.

The Aleutian World War II Visitor Center is located at the Unalaska airport, within walking distance of both the cruise ship dock and the Grand Aleutian Hotel. It is owned and operated by the Ounalashka Corporation and affiliated to the National Park Service.

The center is located in the Aerology Building built in 1943 by the Navy. In June 1943 a soldier stashed a copy of LOOK Magazine inside a wall of the building. Fifty-seven years later carpenters discovered this magazine when they began the renovation of the Aerology Building as a visitor center.

The Aerology Building is one of the most intact and architecturally significant World War II buildings in the Aleutian Islands. The rare 1943 Loxstave frame building is nationally significant as a contributing feature to the Dutch Harbor Naval Operating Base and US Defenses National Historic Landmark (NHL) designated in 1985. Loxstave is an early form of prefabricated construction.

During the war years, the building served as the central station from which the unpredictable and harsh weather of the Aleutians was monitored. World War II pilots relied on the data gathered at the station to complete air missions to and from Dutch Harbor.

The unique 1940s terrazzo flooring with the insignia of the Naval Air Transport Service was designed by Armand Rizan, a Seabee and artisan from New Orleans whose family had a long tradition in this art form. He used all local

materials and labor and also designed the other terrazzo currently on display at the Museum of the Aleutians. In the 1990s, his son came back to the Aleutians to see his father's work.

Many of the objects, quotes, and information in the Center came directly from Aleutian residents and World War II veterans who have shepherded this project along from the beginning.

The Visitor Center regularly shows World War II-era films in its 1940s-style theatre, including "Report from the Aleutians" and "Alaska at War."

Walking Map & Contact Information

Hours:	11am-8pm daily (summer) 11am-6pm Tues. - Sat. (winter)
Contact:	WWII Visitor Center Manager (907) 581-WWII (9944)
Website:	www.nps.gov/aleu
Email:	aerology@arctic.net

