

UNCLE SAM'S FOOTPRINT



The U.S. military fortified Kodiak Island as soon as Alaska was threatened, creating lasting impressions.

Builders and Soldiers and Sailors!

A swell of soldiers, sailors, and construction workers swept over Kodiak utterly changing its physical character and culture. First came civilian contractors with Siems-Drake Puget Sound, then Navy Seabees, then soldiers and additional sailors poured onto Kodiak. The area's population rapidly grew from only a few hundred to thousands.



Above: The S.S. Abertwestern, a Siems-Drake Puget Sound construction ship, arrived in 1941 to continue construction on Kodiak. It served as barracks for the civilian crew who built military housing.

Photo courtesy of Alaska State Library, AKL 9733 0333.
Alaska Historical Project Collection, 03-1380-1369, AKL PCA-233

Wartime Construction

Military construction on the island began as a slow trickle in 1939 and quickly became a flood of activity. By 1941, a large naval operating base and an army fort with many satellite posts were rapidly taking shape. Large swaths of old growth forest were cleared for space and timber while the beaches were exploited as sources of gravel and sand. The military left nothing untouched.



Evidence of mass clearing of old growth forests on Kodiak Island
Photo courtesy of the Kodiak Military Museum, Erik Collection



Military tents on Kodiak Island
Photo courtesy of the Kodiak Military Museum, Underwood Collection



Left: Frank Lafayette, a civilian file clerk with a talent for caricature, was asked to create a "Disney type" insignia for the Navy's Construction Battalion (CB). The bee was chosen because it won't bother you unless you bother him, but will sting if provoked.
Photo courtesy of Seabee Museum

Withdrawing Forces

Once the tide of war receded and the U.S. armed forces were reassigned to other fronts, a slower pace of life resumed. However, many soldiers and sailors returned after the war, and others never left the island. Many of Kodiak's defense installations were repurposed and others, though gutted, still stand. World War II left a lasting impression on Kodiak.



Distant Electrical Control (DEC) shelter at Miller Point
Photo courtesy of Dana Reed

