

History of Fort Greely



The post's history began in 1942 when a "doughboy," 1st Lt. William L. Brame of the 138th Infantry Regiment, led an advance detail of 15 men to the Big Delta Area to establish an Army Air Corps Base. Brame was post commander.

Brame was part of an organization activated in Seattle that consisted of an infantry platoon, with attached quartermaster, medical, finance and signal detachments. These first Army units set up camp June 30, 1942 at what was to become Station 17, Alaskan Wing, Air Transport Command.

Throughout World War II, the post was a rest/refueling spot for American pilots ferrying aircraft to Ladd Army Airfield (now Fort Wainwright) for the Lend Lease Program.

Fort Greely continued as an Army Air Corps Base until 1945 when it was put on inactive status. For the next two years, the Civil Aeronautics Authority and a skeleton crew of Army personnel maintained the installation.

In April 1947, the War Department designated the base as the site for the first post-war, cold-weather maneuver, "Exercise Yukon," staged during the winter of 1947-1948. The installation was reactivated May 1, 1948, and was officially transferred to the Department of the Army and re-designated as an Army post. Under this directive the post was to be called United States Troops, Big Delta, Alaska.

The post was named as the site for the Arctic Training Center in 1948. It was chosen because it combined the extreme winter conditions of the Alaska interior with a great variety of terrain, including rivers, lakes, swamps, mountains, glaciers and open plains.

Originally the center consisted of three subdivisions in addition to the post headquarters personnel: The Army Arctic Indoctrination School, Army Training Company (School Troops) and the Test Development Section. The school was established to teach living and movement under extreme arctic and sub-arctic conditions to personnel from all branches of the Armed Services.

The post was re-designated the Arctic Training Center on July 1, 1949. Later that month the Arctic Test Branch was established by cadre at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and the transfer of personnel from each of the Army Field Forces Boards.

The post was renamed the Army Arctic Center on September 1, 1952. Construction began on the permanent buildings located a mile from the airfield in 1953. These buildings are referred to as "main post" today, while the original collection of temporary buildings near the airfield is called "old post."

During the same year, the U.S. Army Chemical Corps-Arctic Test Team was established at the post. A major construction program for permanent-type buildings was initiated in 1954. The program included post headquarters, post

engineer facilities, auditorium, fire station, power plant, warehouses, photographic laboratory, maintenance shops, and the Cold Weather and Mountain School facilities.

In addition, 96 sets of quarters; and three, 200-man barracks; a post office; provost marshal facility; dispensary; library; and personnel office were constructed. Barracks space was converted to what is now known as the Composite Building, Building 663.

The post was designated Fort Greely on August 6, 1955, in honor of Maj. Gen. Adolphus W. Greely, arctic explorer and founder of the Alaska Communications System. Greely was responsible for the construction of tens of thousands of miles of telegraph lines throughout the United States, Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Alaska. More than 45,000 miles of telegraph lines were completed in Alaska alone. Congress awarded Greely the Medal of Honor in 1935 for "his life of splendid public service."

During 1955, a combined post exchange/theater building, service club and gymnasium were constructed. The Chemical Corps Arctic Test Team was re-designated a Class II activity in 1956, and in 1957 was renamed the U.S. Army Chemical Corps—Arctic Test Activity.

The Arctic Test Group was renamed the Arctic Test Board, and the Arctic Indoctrination School became the Army Cold Weather and Mountain School when the Mountain Training Center at Fort Carson, Colo. was deactivated.

During the 1960s, 93 additional sets of family quarters, a new chapel, another 200-man barracks and maintenance buildings were built.

The Department of the Army re-designated the Cold Weather and Mountain School as the Northern Warfare Training Center (NWTC) in April 1963. NWTC was then given the mission of training units in the conduct of warfare in northern areas. A year later, the Arctic Test Board was renamed the Arctic Test Center.

Fort Greely became part of the

172nd Infantry Brigade in 1974, after the deactivation of the United States Army Alaska. With the activation of the 6th Infantry Division (Light) and the U.S. Army Garrison Alaska, in March 1986, Fort Greely became one of the three posts of the division's one-installation concept.

In February 1995, Congress voted to realign Fort Greely as part of the Base Realignment and Closure process. Realignment was completed July 13, 2001. The headquarters for the Cold Regions Test Center and Northern Warfare Training Center moved to Fort Wainwright and only a small cadre remained to maintain the facilities. However, soon after BRAC was completed, Congress approved the Ground-based Mid-course Defense System and Fort Greely was selected as the best site for interceptor storage under the Space and Missile Defense Command. Fort Greely is the support base for the missile site located next to the cantonment area. The facility will include a missile assembly building, a missile storage building, five missile silos plus a spare silo, a readiness and control building and various mechanical and utility buildings, as well as interceptor communications facilities.

Current plans do not include the launching of test interceptors from the Fort Greely Testbed, which is due to be operational by September 2004. Access to the fort is limited due to security measures. Only basic services are available, including a commissary, a small shoppette, and the gymnasium.

Operations at both the Northern Warfare Training Center's Black Rapids training site and the Cold Regions Test Center's Bolio Lake site continue although main headquarters for those organizations are currently at Fort Wainwright.



A caravan of U.S. Army Humvees and heavy equipment forms up on a snow-covered road at Fort Greely during Exercise Northern Edge. More than 90,000 Soldiers, sailors, Marines, airmen, Coast Guardsmen and National Guardsmen participate in the exercise annually.
DoD photo



Students at the Northern Warfare Training Center Mountaineering Course climb a rock face at Black Rapids Training Area.
Photo: Sgt. Robyn Baer