

A UH-60 Black Hawk crew prepares for lift-off during Northern Edge 2003, Alaska's premier joint training exercise. The crew is from the 4th Battalion, 123rd Aviation Regiment out of Fort Wainwright.



Photo: Spc. James-Denton Wylie

History of Fort Wainwright

Many political and military leaders advocated building military bases in Alaska several years prior to World War II. Finally, when war threatened in 1939, Congress granted \$4 million to construct an Army cold-weather experimental station at Fairbanks.

The purpose of the station, named Ladd Field, was to test aircraft operations in arctic conditions. However, when war broke out with Japan in late 1941, Ladd Field became a critical link in the Alaska-Siberia Lend Lease route. From 1942 until the fall of 1945, American crews flew almost 8,000 aircraft to Ladd Field, where the planes were turned over to Soviet aircrews for the continued flight to the East. The planes were eventually used by the Soviets against Germany.

Eielson Air Force Base was built shortly after the Army Air Corps separated from the Army and became the U.S. Air Force by act of Congress in 1947. At that time, Ladd Field was also under Air Force control. Eielson today is home to the 354th Fighter Wing, which supports USARAK with close air support, theater airlift, reconnaissance missions and weather analysis.

On January 1, 1961, the Army reassumed control of Ladd Field and renamed the installation Fort Wainwright, after General Jonathon M. Wainwright. General Wainwright

General
Jonathan
Wainwright



and his men conducted a gallant defense of the Bataan Peninsula and Corrigador Island in the Philippines during the early months of World War II.

Fort Wainwright has been home to several units, including the 171st Infantry Brigade (Mechanized), a Nike-Hercules battalion, the 172nd Infantry Brigade, and the 6th Infantry Division (Light). The 6th ID (L) was inactivated in July 1994 and replaced by the U.S. Army Alaska, with headquarters moving to Fort Richardson.

The major unit at Fort Wainwright today is the 172nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team. Subordinate commands include the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry Regiment; 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry Regiment; 4th Battalion, 11th Field Artillery; 172nd Brigade Support Battalion; and the 4th Squadron, 14th Cavalry Regiment.

The 4th Battalion, 123rd Aviation

Regiment is headquartered at Fort Wainwright and the fort is also home to Medical Activity-Alaska and Dental Activity-Alaska and to Bassett Army Community Hospital. The hospital is named for Captain John Bassett, a doctor killed while trying to evacuate wounded Soldiers during the Battle of Attu during World War II.

Fort Wainwright has a commitment to excellence in efforts to make the post a better place to live and work. With the move of 6th ID (L) headquarters to Fort Wainwright in 1990, many new sets of family quarters were built, as well as a PX/Commissary mall, physical fitness center and maintenance facilities. Older family quarters, barracks and offices were renovated. USARPAC unanimously selected Fort Wainwright to go forward to Department of the Army competition in 1994 as a medium-sized Community of Excellence.

The fort has 4,490 Soldiers and approximately 5,600 family members. The fort employs about 1,200 Army and DOD civilian employees.

The annual military payroll for the fort in fiscal year 2002 was \$180 million, the civilian payroll was \$52 million, and other expenditures were \$200 million, for a total of more than \$433 million contributed to the local economy.