

President Proclaims New World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument; Aleutian Refuge Lands Included

World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument was created by Presidential Proclamation signed by President Bush December 5th. Sites on the Aleutian Islands of Attu, Kiska and Atka within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge were included in the monument along with locations in Hawaii and California. Bush said the monument would remind generations of Americans of the sacrifices that Americans made to protect our country and of the transformative effect of freedom.



B-24D Liberator bombers such as this one which crashed due to weather on Atka played a significant role in WWII in the Aleutians. Of the original 20 made, this one and one other are the only B-24Ds known to still be in existence. Removing or harming historic artifacts is against the law. Photo Credit: Steve Hillebrand/USFWS

The three island sites are the crash site of a B-24D Liberator bomber on Atka, the Japanese occupation site on Kiska and the site of the only WWII land battle fought in North America on Attu. Kiska and Attu were both occupied by the Japanese in 1942, the only part of the mainland U.S. to be occupied during WWII.

Kiska retains historic relics of the Japanese occupation including coastal and anti-aircraft defenses, camps, roads, a submarine base and other installations, numerous bomb craters from the Allied aerial campaign, as well as the remains of Allied defenses after the island was retaken.

Attu was the site of the 19 day battle to retake the island, one of the bloodiest battles in the Pacific. The four sites on Attu in the new Monument are the Japanese base at Holtz Bay and the scenes of fierce fighting on Sarana Nose, Fish Hook Ridge and Engineer Hill. It was on Engineer Hill, where engineers from the Seabees and medics held off banzai charges by the Japanese in their final desperate attempt to drive back the American advance. With defeat, many of the Japanese took their own lives leaving less than 30 alive from their original occupying force of 2300.

The Japanese invasion of Attu and Kiska, was intended to divert American troops and ships from the central Pacific theater particularly Midway and strike a psychological blow against the U.S by occupying American soil. It also marked the peak of Japan's military expansion in the Pacific. The occupation of this remote part of the North American continent succeeded in creating alarm among Americans, however briefly, that it was the beginning of an invasion of the United States through Alaska. The American recapture of the island was a morale boost for the nation.

According to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service archeologist, Debbie Corbett, Kiska and Attu because of their isolation and climate, are some of the best preserved WWII battlefields in the world. The remnants of war found at these sites are irreplaceable treasures and removing or harming them is against the law. A management plan will be prepared over the next three years to outline actions to enhance protection, interpretation and public understanding and appreciation of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument and the broader story of WWII in the Pacific. The new monument has a website at <https://pwrCMS.nps.gov/customcf/apps/ww2ip/> . More information about war in the refuge can be found on the refuge's site <http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov/>.