



## NHL Executive Summary



**Name of Property:** Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL (update)

**City, State:** Sitka, Alaska

**Period of Significance:** 1939-1944

**NHL Criteria:** 1

**NHL Theme:**

- IV. Shaping the Political Landscape
- 3. military institutions and activities

**Previous Recognition:** 1986 National Historic Landmark designation

**National Historic Context:**

- World War II in the Pacific
- C. Alaska and the Aleutians



### **NHL Significance:**

- Sitka Naval Operating Base was the U.S. Navy's first air station in Alaska, playing a key role in the defense of North America at the outset of World War II. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 the naval base at Sitka was the only major military base on the west coast of Alaska.
- Established as an Advanced Seaplane Base in 1937, the base's designation changed as it expanded and included other missions. In 1938, it was designated a Fleet Air Base, then a Naval Air Station in 1939, and a Naval Operating Base in 1942. To provide for defense of the strategic base, the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses were established, which included construction of the causeway to connecting islands and Fort Rousseau on Makhnati Island.
- After the attack on Pearl Harbor, when it was not known where the enemy might strike next, planes from Sitka Naval Operating Base patrolled all of southeast Alaska and far out into the Gulf of Alaska. With the establishment of naval air stations farther west, at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, Sitka became an intermediate point between them and Navy Yard Puget Sound, the primary repair yard for battle-damaged ships of the Pacific Fleet during World War II.
- When the Japanese Imperial Fleet sailed east, attacked Dutch Harbor and entrenched in the Aleutians in June 1942, the Sitka base was on high alert for a potential attack on the Alaskan mainland. Aircraft deployed from Sitka to Kodiak and the Aleutians on a rotating basis, conducting patrols, search and rescue missions, and bombing raids on Japanese ships. In addition to its role as a forward airbase in the Aleutian campaign, Sitka Naval Operating Base and the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses played a critical role in the defense of shipping in the Gulf of Alaska.
- This update to the NHL nomination for the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL provides more information about the significant role that the naval base and coastal defenses played in protecting Alaska during World War II.

### **Integrity:**

- Each of the two discontinuous areas of the Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses NHL retain an exceptional degree of integrity. Continued use of the Sitka Naval Operating Base area of the NHL as a public boarding high school has meant that these buildings have been well maintained and historic materials replaced in-kind when required.
- A few changes have occurred within the Sitka Naval Operating Base since NHL designation in 1986. Infill construction has been kept to a minimum with only three new buildings constructed within the NHL since its designation. All these buildings are low-profile buildings, and one incorporated design features of a World War II building located at the site to make it more compatible with the landmark. Three buildings have been demolished since the 1986 NHL designation: a married officers' quarters, the power plant, and the heating plant shop. The open spaces of the airfield and officers' housing have been maintained.
- The structures of the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses remain intact and, along with building foundations left when the temporary buildings were removed by the military for use elsewhere at the end of World War II, convey a feeling of an army coastal defense network. This update to the NHL nomination provides detailed description of the surviving elements of the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses, adding to a more complete picture of the military's presence on the islands.
- No new construction has occurred on the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses area of the NHL, and the State of Alaska and a local nonprofit began removing trash, clearing brush from around contributing buildings



and structures, and rehabilitating the causeway in 2014. The State of Alaska has adopted a twenty-year plan to stabilize and rehabilitate parts of the U.S. Army Coastal Defenses which will continue to enhance and improve its integrity.

**Owner of Property:**

State of Alaska, City of Sitka, SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium

**Acreage of Property:** 150 acres

**Origins of Nomination:**

National Park Service, Alaska Regional Office

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

High. Revision of NHL nomination is supported by owners and interested parties.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

None is known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of December 21, 2023):**

- Maegan Bosak, Lands and Property Management Manager, SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium (via email)
- Rebecca Poulson, Board Member, for the Board and Director, Sitka Maritime Heritage Society Inc.

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

The Landmarks Committee had no substantive comments on the content of the nomination update.

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:**

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the NHL updated documentation for Sitka Naval Operating Base and U.S. Army Coastal Defenses National Historic Landmark in Sitka, Alaska, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:**