not for publication

code

220

#### **United States Department of the Interior** National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms Type all entries—complete applicable sections

# 1. Name

historic Sitka Naval Operating Base & U.S. Army Coastal Defenses, Sitka

and or common Sitka; the Causeway; Mt. Edgecumbe School

# 2. Location

street & number

city, town

\_X\_ vicinity of

county

Sitka

Sitka District

state	Alaska	code
3.	Classification	1

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
_X district building(s)	_X_ public private both	X_ occupied unoccupied work in progress	agriculture commercial educational	museum park private residence
site object	Public Acquisition	Accessible X yes: restricted	entertainment government	religious
·	being considered	yes: unrestricted	industrial	transportation

# 4. Owner of Property

Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDI, Juneau Area Office, PO Box 3-8000, Juneau, AK 99802 and Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Juneau, AK 99811

02

street & number

city, town	vicinity of	state
5. Location of L	.egal Description	
courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.	Alaska State Office, Bureau of Lan	nd Management, USDI
street & number	555 Cordova Street, Anchorage, A and State Magistrate Alaska, Sitka,	-
city, town		state
6. Representat	ion in Existing Sur	rveys
title	has this property l	been determined eligible?yesX no
date		federal state county loca
depository for survey records		
city, town		state

For NPS use only

received

date entered

# 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
`excellent _X_ good	deteriorated _X_ ruins	unaltered X_ altered	_X original site moved date	
fair	unexposed			

#### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Naval Operating Base. Located on Japonski Island, 220 acres, immediately in front of the City of Sitka, the Sitka Naval Operating Base began as a naval air station in 1939, although some seaplane facilities had been developed two years earlier. In 1946, the Navy transferred the property to the Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDI, which opened Mt. Edgecumbe School for Native Alaskan children in 1947. This school closed in 1983. The majority of the permanent naval structures, located on the northeast side of the island, have been retained. The school used many in their original functions, e.g., a gymnasium; while others were put to adaptive uses, e.g., a hangar became vocational shops. Through the years, the structures were "brought up to code" many times. But the exteriors of these permanent buildings and the general setting are remarkably true to their World War II appearance. Future use for this area has not been decided.

Elsewhere on Japonski Island several changes have occurred since the war. Nearly all of the navy's wartime temporary structures have disappeared. The U.S. Coast Guard has erected a modern station at the northwest end of the island. On high ground southwest of the naval hangars, U.S. Public Health Service operates a large, concrete, five-story hospital, constructed in 1950. (A small ell to the rear was originally a naval medical facility.) On the west side of Japonski, a runway has been carved out of rock and muskeg to serve Sitka's community airport. During the war, transportation between the naval base and Sitka was by ferry. In 1972, a steel bridge joined the two.

Japonski Island was set aside as a naval reservation in the 19th century. In 1902, the navy established a coaling station on it, of which one large coal storage building still stands, having been modified on both its interior and exterior. Construction of the naval air station proper began in 1939, first by a contractor, but completed by Seabees.

Designed primarily for seaplanes, air facilities consist of a large, concrete aircraft parking area-runway next to the water's edge and facing on Sitka Harbor. Two concrete ramps (50 by 270 feet and 50 by 310 feet) lead into the water. The parking area still has numerous steel rings for tying down aircraft. Inland are two large metal hangars side by side, each measuring 254 by 186 feet. The northern hangar has a control tower extending above the roof line. Two walls of the operations room within this tower have large murals of Southern and Southeast Alaska; but it is not known if they date from the war or were added later when the Federal Aviation Authority operated there. The school used the northern hangar as vocational training workshops, while a fieldhouse-gymnasium was housed in the southern one.

There having been no level area on Japonski suited for a land runway, a system of arresting gear and catapults was placed on the parking area in front of the hangars which allowed carrier-type aircraft to land on a 1,555- by 98-foot strip--similar to an aircraft carrier's. No trace of this equipment remains. According to Seabee records, a third hangar was constructed during the war, possibly in a large open area south of the existing ones. Set into a

# 8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899 X 1900–	Areas of SignificanceC archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture architecture art commerce communications	· ·
Specific dates	1939-1943	Builder Architect

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Sitka Naval Operating Base had the Navy's first air station in Alaska for the defense of that strategically located land as the world plunged into war in 1939. Its patrol planes covered the entire Southeast Alaska and far out into the Gulf of Alaska. Soon joined by naval air stations farther west, at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, it became an intermediate point between them and Puget Sound. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, when it was not known where the enemy might strike next, Sitka's preparedness was crucial. Again, when the Imperial Fleet sailed east in June 1942, Sitka was alert for a potential assault on the Alaskan mainland. The Army's coastal defenses at Sitka, with their headquarters and key installations on Makhnati, stood ready through those tense months to defend the naval base against attack.

#### The Build-up

In the 1930s, the War Department, considering the possibility of war in the Pacific, developed Plan Orange that recognized the strategic triangle of Alaska, Hawaii, and Panama as America's main line of defense. Ironically, at that time Alaska had no land, sea, or air defenses, only a small peacetime garrison at Chilkoot Barracks near Haines. Then, in 1937, the Navy secured a small appropriation to establish some facilities at Sitka for servicing its PBY Catalinas. One year later, a naval board urged the construction of naval air stations at Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor, all in Alaska. Congress appropriated funds in 1939 and the Navy employed a civilian contractor, Siems Drake Puget Sound, to begin construction.

The Navy had long had an interest in Sitka where it had acquired a reservation on Japonski Island when the United States purchased Alaska. From 1879 to 1884, the U.S. Navy had the responsibility for maintaining law and order in the Territory, where lawlessness ruled. In 1902, it established a coaling station on Japonski and, later, a wireless station. When the contractor arrived in the fall of 1939, he found that the island had two coaling sheds, already converted to other uses, a handfull of small buildings, and a great deal of muskeg and Even as the attractive, permanent buildings began to take shape, the forest. Navy formally commissioned the Sitka Naval Air Station on October 1, 1939, the first such installation in Alaska to become operational. Operations on Japonski soon expanded to include a radio station, naval section base, Marine barracks, and subordinate naval shore activities. Although the scope of its operations did not grow as large as those at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor, Sitka was redesignated as a naval operating base on July 20, 1942.

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data		
Acreage of nominated property 510 acres Quadrangle name Sitka UTM References	Qua	adrangle scale 1:250,000
A 0 8 4 7 8 4 0 0 6 3 2 4 1 0 0 Zone Easting Northing	B 0 9  4 7 9 8  Zone Easting	0,0 6,3 2,2 1,0,0 Northing
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Verbal boundary description and justification		
See continuation sheet.	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
List all states and counties for properties overlapp state code	county	code
		· · · · · · · · ·
state code	county	code
<b>11. Form Prepared By</b>		
name/title Erwin N. Thompson, Historian		
organization Denver Service Center, National Park Se	ervice date Apri	13, 1984
street & number 755 Parfet Street	telephone	(303) 234-4509
city or town Denver	state	Colorado 80225
<b>12. State Historic Preser</b>	vation Office	r Certification
The evaluated significance of this property within the state	e is:	
national state	local	
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for to 665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the N according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the N State Historic Preservation Officer signature	ational Register and certify t	
	·	date
For NPS use only		
I hereby certify that this property is included in the N	-	
Keeper of the National Register	·····	date
Attest:		date
Chief of Registration		Multo

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retaining wall to the rear of the hangars is a series of small, stoutly constructed nitches that served as ready magazines. The seaplane runways were in Sitka Harbor (Channel) and in nearby Jamestown Bay.

Southeast of the air station, the navy constructed two piers, of which the main, T-shaped one is in an advanced state of deterioration today. Inland from these piers, stretching along the south end of the island, is the base's industrial area. Among the more prominent structures in this area are the former coaling building (above), shop buildings, and bombproof power plant.

On higher ground behind the hangars stands the administrative area: at the south end is a two-story, concrete administration building. Near its center, a third story juts up which was a communications center. On its top is a The school, too, used this structure as an observation deck (crow's nest). administrative center, with offices and classrooms. In front of the building is a grassy area containing a flagstaff and a Russian-manufactured field piece, the history of which is unknown. (Sitka was Alaska's capital until 1900.) Also facing the cannon, at right-angles to the administration building, is the concrete naval recreation center that contained a gymnasium-800-seat theater, soda fountain, and bowling alleys. The school used the structure for much the same functions, including girls' gymnasium and school library. In a row and adjacent to this building are three other permanent structures--two large, twoand three-story barracks and a concrete mess hall. All four buildings are joined by closed-in corridors. In school days the barracks, divided into rooms, served as students' sleeping quarters. The mess hall and kitchen (galley) continued to function as such. A large, comfortable lounge served through But the naval brig, which is within the complex, was converted to both eras. a laundrette for students.

Between the hangar area and the northwest end of the island was officers' country. Here stands a large, three-story, bachelor officers' quarters, since converted to apartments; six duplexes for junior married officers (families were removed soon after Pearl Harbor); four larger sets of quarters for senior officers; and an officers' club (now named the Totem Club). These several structures were occupied by staff personnel during the school period.

Beginning as a neat-and-tidy naval air station and growing into a naval operating base (air station, radio station, naval sector base, Marine barracks, and subordinate naval shore activities), the installation readily adapted to a post-war role as a boarding school. Back in 1943, a newly-arrived Seabee wrote:

<sup>1.</sup> The power plant is similar to ones at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor. This is not surprising as the same contractor constructed all three at the same time.

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It was a feeling of disbelief when we walked into a three story, steam heated barracks complete with tile heads and showers, lounge, double decked steel bunks, eight inch thick mattresses, steel lockers, and a magnificient view from every window. . . . We were amazed when we walked into the mess hall. The interior was white, stainless steel steam tables and coffee urns, tile deck, clean linoleum topped tables, and a radio-victrola combination. The library possessed practically everything one would want to read . . . . The recreation building housed the theater, canteen, basketball court, bowling alleys, billiard tables, exercise rooms, heads and showers.

#### Coastal Defenses

The specific historical resource is Fort Rousseau on Makhnati Island and its Causeway islands. But to provide a historical setting, the army's coastal defense role is described in general. Once the naval air station was under construction, planning began for the installation of harbor defenses to protect the base. The navy's contractor began work on army housing in January 1941. The initial garrison arrived from Chilkoot Barracks in May. Little room being left on Japonski Island, the army selected two small islands to the south, Charcoal and Alice. Named Fort Ray in September 1941, the two islands are not considered to be historically significant but are mentioned here because the name Fort Ray is generally applied to all army installations at Sitka.<sup>3</sup> From 1941 to 1943, Fort Ray was recognized as the army's headquarters at Sitka. In 1943, a reorganization resulted in Fort Ray being attached to the Harbor Defenses, which now had their headquarters on Makhnati Island.

Sitka's harbor defenses were meager throughout 1941. Not until five days after Pearl Harbor did the army announce that Sitka would acquire three 6-inch gun batteries. Meanwhile, authority was given to construct a causeway from Japonski to connect a string of islands out into Sitka Sound and terminating at Makhnati Island where fortifications would be placed.

<sup>2.</sup> extract of CBMU 512 - Alaska and the Phlippines, From an June 1943 - August 1945, pp. 31-32, History Files, Sitka National Historical Park.

<sup>3.</sup> Fort Ray was named in honor of Brig. Gen. Patrick H. Ray who was stationed at Sitka as a lieutenant in 1897 registering food supplies of would-be gold seekers.

Makhnati

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Construction of the 8,100-foot, rock-fill causeway proved most difficult. The water varied in depth from 12 to 60 feet. Strong currents, angry waves, and fierce storms required the causeway to be armored with rocks weighting up to 40 tons. The causeway was continually breached, resulting in seemingly endless repairs. The islands themselves were rocky knobs that had to be levelled. Costing over \$2 million, the causeway was completed, apparently, in the summer of 1942. Non-fortification facilities included:

Japonski to Nevski. No structures on Nevski
Nevski to Reshimosti Island. Ration storehouse on Reshimosti
Reshimosti to Virublennoi Island. Ration storehouse on Virublennoi
Virublennoi to Gold Island. Fuse house on Gold
Gold to Sasedni Island. Three motor sheds, two officers' quarters, two storehouses, eight barracks, two dayrooms, and two mess halls on Sasedni
Sasedni to Kirushkin Island. Eight barracks, two mess halls, two day rooms, three storehouses, and a dispensary on Kirushkin
Kirushkin to Mogilnoi Island. No structures on Mogilnoi
Mogilnoi to Makhnati Island. No known non-fortification structures of

None of these structures remain standing, but concrete slabs and other remnants testify to their former presence.

In July 1943, Makhnati (including the causeway) was declared to be the headquarters post of the Harbor Defenses of Sitka and was named Fort Rousseau, in honor of Maj. Gen. Lowell H. Rousseau. Defense structures were erected on four islands, with the principal works being on Makhnati. Still standing on Virublennoi are three reinforced-concrete, igloo-type ammunition magazines and an earth-covered, concrete "bunker" of unknown function. Moving out to the next island, Sasedni, one finds four reinforced-concrete emplacements. These were for four of fourteen 20mm antiaircraft weapons that the navy gave the army in July 1942. Near each emplacement is a reinforced-concrete structure that appears to be a personnel shelter.

<sup>4.</sup> Records state that the causeway reached Mogilnoi Island in March 1942, with 800 feet to go, but they fail to mention a completion date. Col. John Copeland, Fort Ray, to Gen. S.B. Buckner, Mar. 19, 1942, in Correspondence of Maj. Gen. S.B. Buckner, Record Group 338, Alaska Defense Command, Washington National Records Center, MD.

<sup>5.</sup> Detailed plans of Alaska's World War II fortifications are said to be filed at the Corps of Engineers Alaska District. But efforts to examine these drawings ended in failure.

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#### **United States Department of the Interior** National Park Service

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On island, Kirushkin, reinforced-concrete the next an elaborate and mortared-stone complex of rooms is concealed in a narrow cleft. Stamped into the concrete over a doorway is "1942." This is a "temporary" Harbor Defense Command Post (HDCP) that the army constructed early in 1942 to coordinate the harbor defenses for Sitka. The complex is anything but "temporary"; it will last for centuries. What the army seems to have had in mind was that the permanent location of a HDCP would be elsewhere when the defenses were That was the case; the HDCP for Sitka was eventually established on complete. Makhnati Island.

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Makhnati Island was not only the headquarters for Sitka's Harbor Defenses, it had a fixed battery of two 6-inch guns, flanked on either side by a 155mm gun emplacement (Panama mounts). These defense works are impressive. To the rear of a rocky hill are two large splinterproof, reinforced-concrete magazines. Camouflage in the form of chicken wire and strips of burlap still festoon their Forward of the hill is the 6-inch battery. The weapons were mounted fronts. in barbette emplacements. Behind them is a complex, casemated structure that housed ammunition magazines and administrative areas that housed the Harbor Defense Command Post, Harbor Entrance Control Post, and headquarters for Harbor Defenses. Deep underground are three rooms whose function is unknown (local tradition holds they served as a hospital or dispensary). Even the Coast Artillery was impressed; the commanding officer wrote the Alaskan Department, "You should see it, a typical Coast Artillery Fortress."

Makhnati and its Causeway, portions of which have been damaged by storms, are now cut off from Japonski Island by a modern jet runway. The airport management, however, makes arrangements for visitors to cross the runway at scheduled times. The Causeway and its islands are owned by the State of Alaska.

Other coastal defenses at Sitka included an unfinished, fixed 6-inch gun battery at Shoals Point, Kruzof Island, eleven miles west of Sitka, and called Fort Babcock. Shoals Point also had a temporary battery of two 6-inch naval guns. A similar, incomplete battery was constructed on Biorka Island twenty miles south of Sitka (Fort Pierce). Three 75mm guns at Olga Point covered the

<sup>6.</sup> The 155mm battery was completed by March 1942. It guarded the harbor while the permanent, 6-inch battery was being constructed.

<sup>7.</sup> Col. J.E. Copeland, Fort Ray, to Maj. Gen. S.B. Buckner, March 19, 1942, in Correspondence of Maj. Gen. S.B. Buckner, Alaska Department, Record Group 338, Washington National Records Center, Suitland MD.

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northern inside passage to Sitka. And two, two-gun 90mm batteries were placed on Watson Point outside the town and on nearby Whale Island. Scattered on several islands near Sitka were reinforced-concrete fire control stations, radars, and coastal searchlight shelters. Many of these structures still exist.

Sitka Naval Operating Base: The historically significant features within the proposed boundaries are: two aircraft hangars, metal clad, 186 feet by 254 feet each, and a control tower mounted on the north hangar; the concrete parking area-runway in front of the hangars; two concrete seaplane ramps; ready ammunition magazines behind the hangars; coal storage building; bombproof power plant; shops buildings; administration building; flagstaff; recreation center; two adjoining barracks, one three-story and one two-story; concrete-walled mess hall; bachelor officers' quarters, three-stories; six duplex officers' quarters; four officers' quarters for senior officers; and the officers' club (Totem Club).

Excluded from the potential national historical landmark on Japonski Island and outside the proposed boundaries are: a residential complex; the U.S. Coast Guard Station; Sitka airport; and the bridge from Japonski Island to the City of Sitka.

Fort Rousseau and Causeway: The historically significant features within the proposed boundaries are:

Causeway, 8,100 feet in length, rock-fill Nevski Island Reshimosti Island Virublennoi Island: three reinforced-concrete, igloo-type ammunition magazines; and an earth-covered concrete bunker Gold Island Sasedni Island: four reinforced-concrete antiaircraft gun emplacements, and four reinforced-concrete personnel shelters Kirushkin Island: reinforced-concrete harbor defense command post (temporary) Mogilnoi Island Makhnati Island (Fort Rousseau): two 6-inch coastal gun emplacements; two 155mm gun emplacements; two reinforced-concrete ammunition magazines; reinforced-concrete complex containing magazines, harbor defense headquarters, harbor defense command post, and harbor entrance control post.

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB No. 1024-0018

When Japan attacked Oahu and destroyed its naval and army air forces as well as the battleships, Sitka, like other places on the Pacific Coast, became the front line for a time. The threat of invasion remained quite real until the defeat of the Japanese fleet at the Battle of Midway in June 1942. The simultaneous landing of Japanese forces in the western Aleutians increased the state of alertness of Sitka. Its flying boats patrolled the Gulf of Alaska, tracked down reported submarine activity, and scoured the harbors and fiords of Southeast Alaska for enemy activity.

As preparations grew for an American counterattack in the Aleutians, military activity moved westward in Alaska and on the Chain. Gradually, Sitka's role lessened, but the naval base continued to serve as the intermediate base between the United States and Kodiak. The western Aleutians were recaptured in the summer of 1943 and the Pacific War moved farther away. Finally, on August 15, 1944, Sitka Naval Operating Base was decommissioned and placed on a housekeeping basis. It experienced neither a brief, bloody battle, such as Midway, nor served as a base for actively assaulting the enemy, such as Adak. But in the first months of World War 11 it was one of the few installations prepared to protect the North Pacific.

The U.S. Army had long had the mission to defend American's harbors and naval bases against an enemy invasion. Sitka was no exception. Coast Artillery troops arrived in March 1941 to man coastal guns, antiaircraft guns, searchlights, and radar. Siems Drake Puget Sound and, later, Seabees rushed to complete temporary and permanent batteries. By Pearl Harbor, 155mm and 3-inch guns, and 37mm and .50 caliber antiaircraft weapons were in position; the causeway to Makhnati Island was under construction, and planning was underway for construction of three permanent 6-inch gun batteries.

Seabees were still at work on these three batteries when the Japanese were driven from the western Aleutians in 1943. With this change in the tactical situation in the Alaskan Theater, the Alaskan Department concluded to suspend construction of the fixed batteries on Kruzof and Biorka islands and to rush completion of the battery at Harbor Defense headquarters on Makhnati. The last known report on this battery, dated sometime in 1944, stated that the work was practically completed. By spring 1944, the Army had decided to close its Sitka establishments and in August a company of Coast Artillery troops arrived to assume caretaker duties. The war was now far away, but Makhnati had already proven its worth as the most important element in Sitka's defenses through its weapons, radar, Harbor Defense Command Post, Harbor Entrance Control Post, and Harbor Defense headquarters.

<sup>1.</sup> At that time, the 6-inch battery on Biorka (Fort Pierce) was 98 percent completed; the battery on Kruzof (Fort Babcock), 88 percent; and the battery on Makhnati (Fort Rousseau), 98 percent. When work was stopped on Kruzof, construction material was stored inside the completed magazines where some of it remains to this day, in excellent condition. The Biorka site was not visited.

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9. Bilbiography Item number

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Item number 9. Bibliography

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Item number 10. Geographical Data page

#### GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal boundary description: Naval Air Station: Starting at a point at the water's edge 2,000 feet east southeast of the northwest end of Japonski, then following the shoreline along Sitka Harbor but to include the seaplane ramps and piers, to the southeast end of Japonski, then southwest 700 feet to enclose the southeast end of the island, then west northwest 1,500 feet along the shore of a lagoon that separates Japonski from Charcoal Island, then north northwest 2,000 feet on a line that separates the air station from a housing complex and the Public Health hospital to the road that runs along the northeast side of Japonski, then west northwest 2,000 feet on a line 100 feet southwest of the road and generally paralleling it so as to include a row of officers' quarters, then north northeast 700 feet to the point of origin. These boundaries include the seaplane facilities, industrial area, administrative area, and officers' country of the Sitka Naval Air Station.

Makhnati and Causeway: Starting at a point at the east junction of the Causeway and Japonski Island, then following an irregular line along the southern shores of the Causeway and the seven islands to the southwest end of Makhnati Island, then following an irregular line along the northern shores of the Causeway and the islands to the west junction of the Causeway and Japonski, then across the Causeway to the point of origin. These boundaries include the entire Causeway and the coastal defense works on the several islands.





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