

War in the Aleutians

For it is a lonely front—the least-known and loneliest of all our far-flung fronts. These pilots are not fighting a glamorous war of blazing guns and gallant encounters in mid-air; they fight an unseen foe, and they fly and die alone. Their enemy is the weather. Their battlefield is a boulder-strewn beach scattered with tell-tale bits of twisted metal, or a snow-covered mountainside where the torn wing of a plane flaps emptily in the wind, or an icy strait into which a flaming bomber hisses into silence like an extinguished cigarette. They do not parachute to safety and a hero's medal; they struggle for a few minutes in the numbing water until their 'chute fills and drags them out of sight forever. Their citation reads, 'Missing....'

Collier's, March 27, 1943

The bombing of Dutch Harbor on June 3-4, 1942, just six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, marked the beginning of the Aleutian Campaign. For 15 arduous months Allied airmen struggled to take the fight to the Japanese who were entrenched on Kiska and Attu in the western Aleutians. The American and Canadian military were forced to battle the weather as well as the enemy – and it was the weather that claimed more lives than the Japanese.

With the Japanese driven from the Aleutians in August 1943, the stage was set for the US military to take the fight directly to enemy territory. The targets for the Empire Express missions were facilities on the islands of Paramushiro and Shimushu in the Kurile Islands of Japan and shipping. Weather and long over-water missions, testing the range of the aircraft, would continue to take their toll on air crews.

The 2009 calendar, through squadron insignia, images, poems and personal accounts, tells the story of the pilots, co-pilots, navigators, bombardiers, radio operators, flight engineers, waist gunners, and tail, top and ball turret gunners who risked their lives on every mission as well as the ground crews who kept them flying and support personnel that provided rescue services. We are grateful for their service to our country.

A special thank you to the Aleutian veterans and their families who so generously contributed photos and information for the calendar.

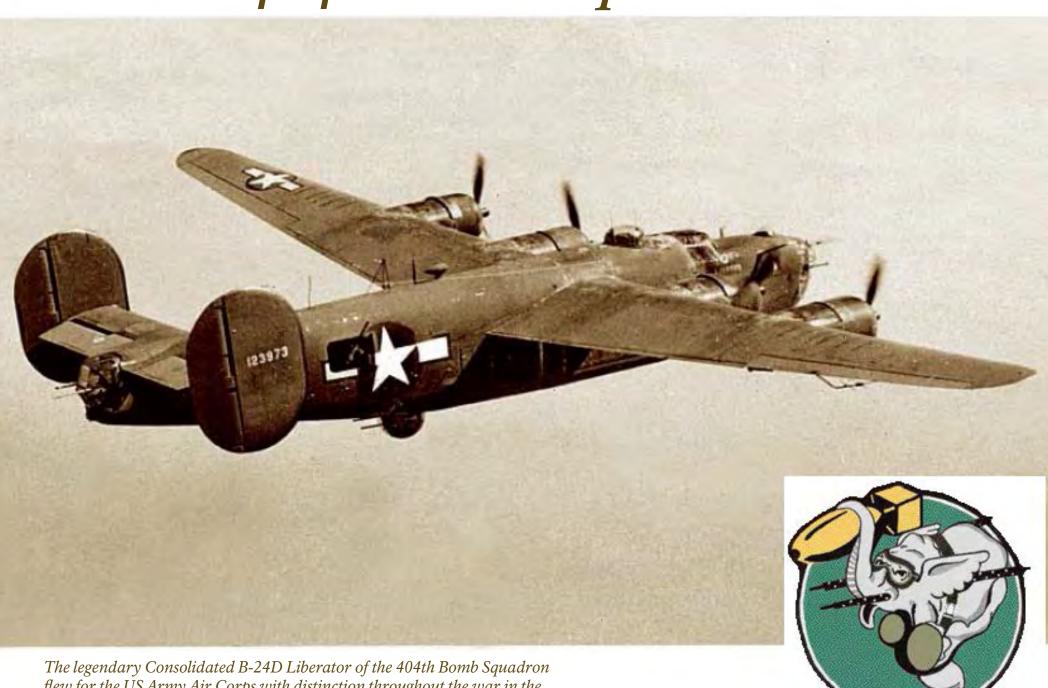








404th Bomb Squadron



The legendary Consolidated B-24D Liberator of the 404th Bomb Squadron flew for the US Army Air Corps with distinction throughout the war in the Aleutians from the Kiska Blitz to the Kurile Island raids over Northern Japan. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

January 2009

Some of the B-24D's in the Aleutians had been diverted from Africa and were painted pink for desert operations. These aircraft were affectionately known as "pink elephants" and were assigned to the 404th Bomb Squadron.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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		market and	50	New Year's Day		The same of
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19 Martin Luther King Day	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 New Moon	27	28	29	30	31



St. Paul, MN - June, 1942
Perchance 'twas best the week
was short, for downing fast
the final snort. Each left the
place and his lady fond and
saw....Pink Elephants beyond.
A disgusting symbol of Army
brains; Desert pink for Aleutian
rains. But, nevertheless, we
piled aboard, and "Westward
Ho" the Elephants roared.

Aleutian Base - August 1942 Anchorage, and then to the land of fog-- Bombs and bullets, beans and bog. Farewell to Peace and fun-filled days. "Load the guns" - "Fill the bomb bays."

-- James C. Beardsley Foul Weather Front, by Rhodes Arnold

Above: Attu post office, 1943. Courtesy Ralph Carrigan. From the collection of Paul Carrigan, Aerographer, 1941-45. **Background**: The 404th Bomb Squadron over Paramushiro. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

73rd Bomb Squadron



A Martin B-26 at Cold Bay ca. 1942. Alaska was one of the first combat theaters to see service of the B-26. These aircraft are fitted with torpedo racks for use against the Japanese carrier task force that bombed Dutch Harbor in June of 1942. The planes were operated by the Army Air Corps 73rd Bomb Squadron. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

February 2009



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ł	1 -	Full Moon	17	10	10	20	
H	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
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		President's Day Last Quarter Moon					
ŀ	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
	22	25	24	23	20	21	20
		405				1-1-21-57	
				New Moon		- 4 -	-3-5

We came up with nine B-18As which were the first bomber airplanes to arrive in Alaska. They weren't suitable for combat, but were alright for patrolling and that sort of thing. I had been checked out in the B-18, but my checkout in the B-26 was four take-offs and four landings without leaving the traffic pattern and they said, "You are now a B-26 pilot." My crew had never been in one. But they said, "Well, you're a pilot you're supposed to be able to fly anything." A lot of things went that way in the early days of World War II.

-- John Pletcher, pilot, B-26, 73rd Bomb Squadron, 1941-43

Above: 73rd Bomb Squadron at McChord Field, WA. Eight crews are set to fly the B-18 Bolo to Alaska. Courtesy John Pletcher. **Background:** Kiska Volcano. Courtesy National Archives.



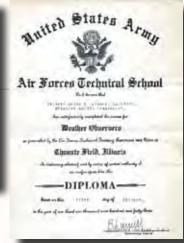
March 2009

The flight characteristics of Alaskan mosquitos have been greatly exaggerated. It is not true that they are as large as vultures. It is not true that antiaircraft outfits fresh from the States have opened fire on them, thinking they were Japanese Zeros. Their tail assemblage is entirely different.

-11th AIR FORCE PILOT (in Brian Garfield's, Thousand Mile War, 1995)

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Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4 First Quarter Moon	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Daylight Savings Time Begins	9	10	Full Moon	12		
15	16	17	- 18	19	20	21
		3	Last Quarter Moon	3	Vernal Equinox	- 1
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
				New Moon		==//
29	30	31	7		-	
		-13	-	3	3	1/15





We found that the somewhere else was also fog-bound. I realized that we faced the same fate that those men had faced two weeks earlier. I can't remember that raw fear or the terror of death that I must have felt that day, but I do remember praying and asking God to spare us. There are no atheists in airplanes lost in the Aleutian fog.

Which brings to mind the oft told story of the P-40 pilot who arrived over fog-shrouded Adak, low on fuel. He called Adak tower and asked for instructions. The tower said, "Repeat after me. Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name..."

--Ray C. Galloway

Above: Marco J. Cramer, weather observer, friend of all air men. Courtesy Mark S. Cramer, MD, FAAFP, San Diego, CA. From the collection of Lt. Marco James Cramer, Ph.D., US Army Air Corps, Meteorologist & Cryptographist, UCLA & Aleutian Islands 1943-1946, late of Venice, CA & Eleanor Mae Cramer—wife. Background: Courtesy Robert H. McGinnis. From the collection of Clifford F. McGinnis, Post Engineer, Amchitka. Dec 1944-Jan 1946.

77th Bomb Squadron



The illustrious Army Air Corps 77th Bomb flew the North American B-25 Mitchell Bombers to Paramushiro Island in the Kurile Islands of Japan. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

April 2009

Picket patrols were flown every day, ordered by the Bomber Command's Colonel William O. Eareckson, who did not want to be "caught with my planes down."

From: Brian Garfield, Thousand Mile War, 1995



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Flying Down the Chain

Give us a hundred foot ceiling And give us nine good men, Our airplane will give them pain And sink the ships they send.

There in the wind and the williwaw, There in the fog and rain, We'll make our run To the setting sun Flying down the Chain.

And after the mission is over We'll think of the boys that are gone. Of those the Chain has chosen to claim, And kept them for its own.

And we shall pray in the peacetime, For the fighting days again, "Give back our men, and send us then Flying down the Chain.

-- Matthew D. Parish Foul Weather Front, by Rhodes Arnold

Above: Clifford McGinnis, Amchitka. **Background**: B-25s await their next mission. Both photos courtesy Robert H. McGinnis, from the collection of Clifford F. McGinnis, Post Engineer, Amchitka. Dec 1944-Jan 1946.

VB-135



May 2009

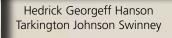
"Stick your hand out [of the plane]. If it touches a ship's mast, you're flying too low."

--Pilot axiom on flying in the Aleutian fog



Janssen Stehle Switzer Baldeschi Silas Molten





Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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	NOT .				First Quarter Moon	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
			1000			Full moon
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Mother's Day						
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
		-				
Last Quarter Moon	100		1000			
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	_				100	
New Moon	Memorial Day	2004				
31		- 10			THE PARTY	
						4
First Quarter Moon						

In June 1944, the first Navy crew to be interned in Russia were from VPB-135. Six PV-1 crews departed for a daylight strike to destroy Japanese "Sally" bombers sited on Miyoshino Airstrip, while a sixth flew a daylight photo reconaissance mission along the east coast of Shimushu and Paramushiro Islands. Japanese fighters attacked the bombers, damaging two and forcing the crews to land at Petropavlovsk in Russia where their aircraft were confiscated and the crews interned.

Above: Three of nineteen VB-139 crews. Courtesy Will Swinney, Radioman, VB-139. **Background**: Quonset hut on Attu. Courtesy Susan Anzalone Sims.

No. 111 Fighter Squadron



Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

June 2009

There was a gauge to measure the wind, but it only measured up to 110 miles an hour, and that was not always enough.

-- CORPORAL DASHIELL HAMMETT

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	0	9	10	1 1	12	13
Full Moon						
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Flag Day	Last Quarter Moon					
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
Father's Day Summer Solstice	New Moon					
28	29	30				
	First Quarter Moon					

The Canadians suffered greater losses of men and aircraft to the Aleutian weather than to any other cause. A tragic incident occurred in July 1942 when an entire flight of P-40 Kittyhawks, as they were known by the British, crashed into a fog shrouded Aleutian mountainside during a flight from Anchorage to Umnak. Killed in the incident were Battle of Britain squadron leader J.W. Kerwin and four other pilots. One pilot missed the mountain ridge that had killed the others by inches only to wander out to sea hopelessly lost and finally ditching in the icy waters of the North Pacific when his fuel ran out.

Above: Roger Jeanfaivre, Navy mobile AA Battery 411, Kiska. His crew was responsible for protecting PBY and OS2-U aircraft of VS-56. Courtesy Roger Jeanfaivre. **Background:** A P-40 lifts off from the Amchitka airfield. Courtesy Robert H. McGinnis, from the collection of Clifford F. McGinnis, Post Engineer, Amchitka. Dec 1944-Jan 1946.

54th Fighter Squadron



July 2009

The difficult, we do immediately, the impossible takes a little longer.

H. W. MARINES

--UNKNOWN

		_	7.4			6
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3	4
			V		Independence Day Observed	Independence Day
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
		Full Moon			160	- Can 180
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
			Last Quarter Moon	16		
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
-		4 - 2	New Moon			
26	27	28	29	30	31	
		First Quarter Moon				

The 54th Fighter Squadron was credited with the first aerial victories for the P-38. On August 4th, 1942 Lieutenants Kenneth Ambrose and Stanley Long each shot down a four engine Japanese Mavis. For extraordinary heroism in battle against the Japanese, Ambrose would receive the Distinguished Service Cross and the Bronze Oak Leaf Cluster.

Sadly, Ambrose wouldn't live to tell his story. Given leave to go to California to meet his newborn daughter and young wife, Ambrose went missing. Sixty years later his aircraft and remains were found by hikers on the slopes of Mt. Baker outside Seattle. He was just 24 years old.

Above: Kenneth William Ambrose, 1st Lieutenant, pilot, 11th Air Force, U. S. Army. Courtesy Kathleen Edwards, daughter. Circa 1941-42, photographer unknown. **Background**: An Aleutian volcano. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

Fleet Air Wing Four



VPB-139 made daring raids in the Lockheed PV-2 Harpoon against the Japanese shipping and military facilities in the Kurile Islands of Northern Japan. The US Navy units of these missions were known as the "Empire Express." Ca. 1945. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

August 2009

The Aleutian raids on the Kuriles bottled up 500 Japanese aircraft—one sixth of the Imperial Air Force at war's end—and 41,000 ground troops. These were soldiers and materials diverted from Japan's desperate fight to hold the South Pacific.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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2	3	4	5	6	7	8
			1	Full Moon	6-10	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
			ALC:	Last Quarter Moon	417	
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
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22	2.4	25	26	New Moon	20	20
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
			E Pili	First Quarter Moon		
30	31	ASS.			OMBING SQUADRON UNF THIRT NUMBERS LAND RAIDS	YNINE
	NOT.	-	<i>y</i> -	1111		1111111

Specifically, the following points are to be remembered:

- (1) Sharp-edged gusts exist.
- (2) Wind gusts may exceed 100 miles per hour.
- (3) Vertical currents may cause sudden vertical displacement of an airplane that crew members may be knocked unconscious.

--Lt. Cdr. John Tatom, Aerological Officer, Fleet Air Wing Four Weather Notes for Pilots: Summer Fogs and Winter Winds of the Aleutian Islands and How to Fly Despite Them. Circa 1942.

Above: PV-2 crew on second tour of duty in Alaska for VB-139. From left to right: Sutton, radioman; Yakich, navigator; Potter, co-pilot; Becnel, mechanic; Jenkins, ordinance; and Bradbury, pilot. The dogs name is unknown. **Left**: VP-139 Kurile Island raid successes. Both photos courtesy Will Swinney, Radioman, VPB-139. **Background**: Japanese boat bombed by VPB-139 aircraft. Taken on May 10, 1945 over Paramushiro, Kurile Islands, Japan. Courtesy Susan Anzalone Sims.

54th Troop Carrier Squadron



priority personnel and cargo throughout Alaska. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

September 2009

Eager Beavers are a motley crew. We've flown the chain since Kiska and Attu. We've made a name of which we are mighty proud. It's written high in each Aleutian cloud. Weather foul, weather fair, the 54th will get it there.

-- CHARLES M. MARK, JR. Englishtown, NJ

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4 Full Moon	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12 Last Quarter Moon
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22 Autumn Equinox	23	24	25	26 First Quarter Moon
27	28	29	30			



To construct major military installations in this remote corner of the continent, engineers faced the barriers of volcanic rock, muskeg, hummocky dense tundra, floods, violent winds, and unpredictable fog cover. Four months was the estimate to build an airfield on Adak, but the 807th completed it in just 10 days. While searching for an airfield site, one of the engineers jokingly suggested the lagoon in Sweeper Cove. The idea was investigated and testing proved it to be suitable. Flooded at high tide the engineers set out to block off the flow of water by constructing a dam, dikes, and a gate from whatever materials they had on hand. The following day the gate was left open until the tide went out and then shut to restrict the flow from refilling the lagoon. This became the new airfield.

Above: Marston mat was utilized for the first time in the Aleutians to surface runways. The heavy matting was expedient, but crude and dangerous on top of the spongy tundra. Pilots said it felt like landing on an air spring mattress. Courtesy National Archives. **Background**: Shishaldin Volcano, Unimak Island. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

VP-41



In early 1942 the new PBY-5A amphibian was assigned to Navy Patrol Wing Four squadrons VP-41 and VP-42. The new planes were immensely popular with the pilots. The higher power and increased load bearing capability was a real boon and having the flexability of landing on runway or water was a real morale booster. The revetments carved out of the hill-side to protect the planes from weather are still used today. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

October 2009

So I wear ribbons proud, and tell my stories loud, Describing smoking guns and bursting flak. But the man not in the story, the one deserving glory, Is the good ole grinning, growling aviation mech.

--KEN LASHBROOK, AAF

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4 Full Moon	5	6	7	8	9	10
11 Last Quarter Moon	12 Columbus Day	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
III a del	First Quarter Moon	Charles III	All of the			Halloween



At night, in foul weather, using only flashlight or the headlights of Jeeps, ground crews labor feverishly to repair damaged aircraft. They worked 24 to 36 hours straight, up at 5:45, then to sleep at midnight. Tools are precious and few. When they are broken, new ones are improvised, salvaged, or acquired—alcohol the currency of barter. Wrecked aircraft are cannibalized for replacement parts, and for those parts that cannot be found, mechanics use the tools of the blacksmith, handbellow forges and hammers, to roll new ones. There are no inspectors to check these rushed repairs, but in the entire campaign not a single aircraft is lost due to a mechanic's error.

Above: VP-61 crew at Dutch Harbor 1945. From left: Cook, 2nd Mech; Skinner, 1st Radioman; Sweet, 1st Mech & Plane Captain; Edlerkin, Ordnance; Ingalis, 2nd Radioman. Courtesy Kenneth "Ray" Skinner, VP-45, VP-61 & VP-62. **Background:** Courtesy Mark S. Cramer, MD, FAAFP, San Diego, CA. From the collection of Lt. Marco James Cramer, Ph.D., US Army Air Corps, Meteorologist & Cryptographist, UCLA & Aleutian Islands 1943-1946, late of Venice, CA & Eleanor Mae Cramer – wife.

VP-42



November 2009

Every flight was a flight that the crew should not have returned from. Every man knew this and yet none wavered.

--CAPTAIN LESLIE E. GEHRES, COMMANDER, FLEET AIR WING 4

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Daylight Savings Time Ends	2	3 Election Day	4	5	6	7
8	9 Last Quarter Moon	10	11 Veterans Day	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 First Quarter Moon	25	26 Thanksgiving Day	27	28
29	30	, 1.32 Quarter 1410011		dinagiving Day		



I don't have much use for the Navy, being an Army man. But I must take my hat off to some pilots of this seafaring clan.

These boys didn't give a damn for the weather, and Jap lead meant even less. I've seen 'em fly through storms aplenty, their plane a riddled mess.

They even patrolled where we were fighting, to save us if we fell. They hid in the clouds from the Zeros, and the ack-ack go to #!@.

So here's to those boys of the Navy, a bunch of d#!@ good guys, And especially to those great pilots who fly the PBYs.

--Jacob W. Dixon, First Lt., Air Corp Foul Weather Front, by Rhodes Arnold

Above: A gunner in the waist blister of a PBY Catalina. Courtesy National Archives. **Background:** Aleutian volcanoes. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute.

American Cruiser Squadron



December 2009

Flying in the Aleutians made me think a lot about life. I had letters made out to my sister and friends in my locker, in case of not returning. . . . I gave my thanks every night for another day to fly.

--FRANK BROWNING VP-41

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2 Full Moon	3	4	5
6	Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day	8	9 Last Quarter Moon	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21 Winter Solstice	22	23	24 First Quarter Moon	25 Christmas Day	26
27	28	29	30	31 Full Moon		



A soldier stood at the Pearly Gate; His face was wan and old. He gently asked the man of fate Admission to the fold.

"What have you done," St. Peter asked, "To gain admission here?"
"I've been in the Aleutians
For nigh unto a year."

Then the gates swung open sharply As St. Peter tolled the bell. "Come in," said he, "and take a harp. You've had your share of hell."

-- Boswell Boomhower, 1943 Thousand Mile War by Brian Garfield, 1995.

Above: Captain C.F. McGinnis and son, Robert H, ca 1943. Courtesy Robert H. McGinnis, from the collection of Clifford F. McGinnis, Post Engineer, Amchitka. Dec 1944-Jan 1946. **Background**: Winter on Attu, 1944. Courtesy Mark S. Cramer, MD, FAAFP, San Diego, CA. From the collection of Lt. Marco James Cramer, Ph.D., US Army Air Corps, Meteorologist & Cryptographist, UCLA & Aleutian Islands 1943-1946, late of Venice, CA & Eleanor Mae Cramer – wife.





Aleutian World War II National Historic Area

During World War II the remote Aleutian Islands, home to the Unangax (Aleut people) for over 8,000 years, became one of the fiercely contested battlegrounds of the Pacific. This thousand-mile-long archipelago saw the first invasion of American soil since the War of 1812, a mass internment of American civilians, a 15-month air war, and one of the deadliest battles in the Pacific Theatre.

In 1996 Congress designated the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area to interpret, educate, and inspire present and future generations about the history of the Unangan people and the Aleutian Islands in the defense of the United States in World War II. In a unique arrangement, the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area and visitor center are owned and managed by the Ounalashka Corporation (the village corporation for Unalaska) and the National Park Service provides them with technical assistance. Through this cooperative partnership, the Unangax are the keepers of their history and invite the public to learn more about their past and present.

For information about the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area, visit our web site at: www.nps.gov/aleu/ or contact:

Superintendent Alaska Affiliated Areas 240 West 5th Ave Anchorage, Alaska 99501 Ounalashka Corporation P.O. Box 149 Unalaska, Alaska 99685

Visitor Information (907) 581-1276 Visitor Center (907) 581-9944

Significant contributions to this calendar, in the form of images, themes, and design expertise were made by Ted Spencer of Alaska Historical Aviation Institute, San Diego, CA. **Front Cover**: A PBY is hauled out of the water at Dutch Harbor. Courtesy Alaska Historical Aviation Institute. **Back Cover**: The Aleutian World War II Visitor Center at Dutch Harbor is housed in the rehabilitated Aerology building. Courtesy National Park Service.