

TED STEVENS

**United States Senator
For Alaska**



FUND WILL HELP HEAL SCARS THAT WAR LEFT IN OUR STATE

By Ted Stevens

As devastating as the bombing of Pearl Harbor was to Hawaii at the beginning of World War II, it was Alaska which suffered more direct impacts during the four-year course of that war.

The first occupation of American soil by a foreign country in well over a century was when the Japanese landed at the Aleutian Islands of Attu and Kiska.

Dutch Harbor was the only American soil other than Pearl Harbor to be bombed by carrier aircraft during the war. A Japanese Zero aircraft crashed, almost intact, during the Dutch Harbor attack.

Across our state the defense buildup included frame and metal huts, 55-gallon barrels, vehicles and equipment necessary for communications and other military uses.

At the war's end, much of the equipment was abandoned. It was far less expensive to leave it in place than to try to re-locate the relics thousands of miles from Alaska.

It wasn't until several decades after the war that we realized that the abandoned equipment left not only unsightly scars on Alaska's landscape, it also left, in some cases, chemical wastes that could be hazardous.

Because lands from the public domain were used by our government for defense purposes, it appeared only logical to me that the property should be restored by the Department to its original environmental condition. A program created by Congress would be an important impetus to ensure that restoration could take place, adequately funded, and in a timely manner.

Studies in the 1970s, by our state's Department of Environmental Conservation and the Corps of Engineers, indicated Alaska was indeed the most adversely affected state. Other sites across the nation were also impacted by hasty defense buildup in the 1940s. But more than 650 potential cleanup sites were identified in Alaska alone, while potential sites in all the other 49 states numbered slightly more than 2,100.

In most cases, the sites are not immediately harmful to the health of residents nearby, but they are eyesores and possible safety hazards. In some cases, however, not only are hazardous wastes potentially contaminating the land and threatening the health of the people, but there is even the possibility of discarded ammunition being present.

In the 1984 Defense Appropriations Bill, I initiated legislation to create the Defense Environmental Restoration Fund (DERF). The largest single portion of the \$150 million appropriated for the program was allocated for cleanup of abandoned military sites in our state.

Work under the program in FY84 included sites at Lake Louise, Port Clarence, Unalaska, Yakutat, Kodiak and Prudhoe Bay.

This year, Alaska projects include site surveys or cleanup design and work at many more locations, including St. Lawrence and St. Paul Islands, Atka, Amchitka, and Cold Bay.

Under the Defense Appropriations Bill for Fiscal Year 1985, an additional \$314 million was appropriated. By that time, fortunately, the Defense Department supported my initiative and budgeted for the second year funding. This year, the pending budget request is for \$324.1 million.

Although the Pentagon's budget submissions have parcelled funding for other projects among the various services, I have maintained this appropriation in a separate special account to ensure that the entire funding is dedicated to environmental cleanup.

Estimates indicate that the ongoing assessment of potential hazardous sites and their cleanup could continue through the 1980s, and it is my intent, as chairman of the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, to continue to seek needed funding in future legislation.

With the Corps of Engineers responsible for cleanup of lands no longer owned by the federal government, and each branch of the military responsible for cleaning up its own land, the sites will return to the natural beauty that is our state's greatest asset.