

Walter T. Granath: An Airmen in Alaska

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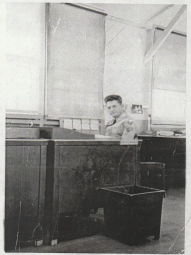
ENGLA476:
ENGLISH IN ALASKA
ARTIFACT ANALYSIS
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OVERVIEW

The artifact I chose to examine is a Department of Defense form DD214 belonging to my grandfather, Walter T. Granath. This document was created in 1954 and is his official separation paperwork from the United States Air Force. The Air Force is what originally brought my grandfather to Alaska when it was still just a U.S. territory. I never met my grandfather, but from his DD214 I learned more about his life and the role he played in the military in Alaska.

From a linguistic perspective, the DD214 provides an excellent piece of evidence to examine the military register. It demonstrates the extensive use of military acronyms at use during this period in Alaska and includes new terminology specific to Alaska. Additionally, it illustrates that while the force was only recently established as a military branch separate from the Army Air Corp, very little terminology was left over.

Through this document I discovered the increasing importance of the United States Air Force in Alaska as it transitioned from a post-World War II to an early cold-war era. The role of the Headquarters Unit at Elmendorf Air Force Base, my grandfather's unit, played a key role in this period as the military presence in Alaska expanded rapidly. Finally, the document provides evidence to the issues and quality of life Airmen like my grandfather experienced on a daily basis.



Phillip D. Granath, personal photo, used with permission.
Walter T. Granath, 11th ACC HQ, 1952

BROAD HISTORICAL INQUIRY

- In 1940 the United States Army Air Corp begins construction of airbases across Alaska. Initial forces would consist of just two bomber squadrons first stationed at Dutch Harbor and later on Adak (Garfield pg.4).
- On June 7th, 1942, Japanese imperial forces invaded the Aleutian Islands, landing troops on Attu and Kiska. Attu would be retaken in May 1943 and the retreating Japanese forces would abandon Kiska three months later (Garfield pg. 273).
- In 1947 the United States Air force was formed. To simplify All military air assets in Alaska would fall under the newly established Alaskan Air Command (AAC). All military air defense capabilities in the state, including Army and Navy operations, would now be overseen and coordinated through the Elmendorf AFB headquarters (Elmendorf).
- In 1949 Congress Authorizes the establishment of a series of radar stations across Alaska intended to provide an early warning for Soviet Aircraft approaching Alaska from over the North Pole. Eventually 12 sites would be constructed, all the sites required maintenance, resupply and manning support from the AAC. In 1953 these sites would be incorporated into the White Alice Program establishing a total of 34 additional radar sites across Alaska (DEW).
- By 1950 the AAC established 20 separate Air Control and Warning (AC&W) stations across the state. The stations provided weather reporting, communication and navigational aid and emergency support to aircraft in distress (Elmendorf).
- By 1952 the AAC had supported three separate scientific ice station research programs (1946-52). The manned stations floated on the sea ice to record weather patterns, ice conditions and sea currents. AAC routinely landing aircraft on sea ice to support the stations and tracking the drifting stations for over 1500 miles in 1952, all the way to the coast of Greenland (Fletcher pg. 490).
- By 1957 the Alaskan Air Command consisted of approximately 200 fighter aircraft assigned to six air interceptors squadrons based out of Elmendorf AFB. It supported 15 separate airfields across the state and maintained 12 of the newly established DEW Line locations. At its peak the command consisted of 20,687 personnel (Elmendorf).

LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

- The Military lexicon is filled with examples of abbreviated words, both is the form of alphabetism and acronyms. In my analysis of SSgt Granath's DD214, 36 abbreviated words occur in the form's 48 blocks of information. Because of its prevalence in my artifact I chose to focus on my efforts on these abbreviated words.
- The widespread use of abbreviations, both alphabetism and acronym, as part of the military register was recorded in 1941 and was part of expanding application in American Government (Alego, pg.14). This trend is reflected in the DD214, as 6 of the 36 (16%) abbreviations identified were not military in origin but were rooted in other government entities. For example the alphabetism in "DOT" for the Department of Transportation and "PL" for a congressional proclamation. Additionally 8 of the 36 (22%) had a civilian or business origins, such as the acronym "Co." for Company. The remaining abbreviations (61%) were of entirely military origin.
- While the use of acronyms in the military is widely documented with terms like "AWOL" and "PACAF" (Malencia, pg.71) of the 22 strictly military abbreviations used in SSgt Granath's DD214 no acronyms occur, all of the abbreviations identified utilize alphabetism.
- Malencia and Fabjanic state that the 4-letter abbreviation is the most common form in the military register at 45.95% (Malencia, pg. 69). I found this figure to be surprisingly accurate in the case of SSgt Granath's DD214, in which 10 of the 22 military abbreviations, 45.45% were 4-letters long.
- While analyzing the abbreviations in the DD214 I discovered only one piece of evidence of the continuing influence of the Army Air Corp in the newly formed service, indicating that by 1954 the USAF was almost completely independent. In Block 39, the personnel officer signing the discharge is listed as a WO1G, a Warrant Officer Junior Grade. This is an Army rank and was carried over from the transition to the Air Force in 1947. The Warrant Officer program was created to fill shortfalls in the pilot ranks during WW2. However, the Air Force refused to accept Warrant Officers as full officers and they were used as needed to fill shortages in support positions until they were removed entirely in 1949 (History).

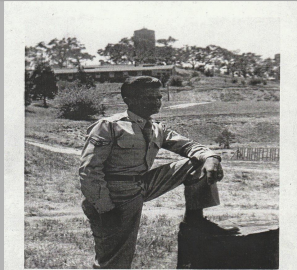
FOCUSED HISTORICAL INQUIRY

- SSgt. Granath was awarded the Good conduct medal in 1954 upon completion of 5 years of service without a disciplinary action. He also received the National Defense service medal, for serving during the Korean War.
- Entered the United States Air Force at 20 years old. Prior to enlisting he worked as an operator for the Thompson Optical Company, in Hobbs, New Mexico.
- Attend Air Force technical training at Lowry Air Force Base in Colorado between September 1949 and January 1950. This training certified SSgt Granath to work as a Statistical Specialist.
- As a Staff Sergeant (SSgt) with 5 years of service, SSgt Granath's base pay would have been \$160.52 (Pay Chart). While his DD214 records his time overseas it makes no record of any additional pays he may have been entitled to. The Social Security Administration reports the national median income to be \$262.97 in 1954 (SSA).
- SSgt Granath's address is listed as a "General Delivery" post office box in Palmer Alaska. This means that he would have driven 83.6 miles round trip from Palmer to Elmendorf AFB each day (Stone pg. 98). As is still true today, the Glenn Highway was the only road connecting Elmendorf and the Matanuska Valley. The roadway was originally gravel but paving operations began 1949 and lasted through 1952 (Carlson pg. 234).

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Phillip D. Granath, personal photo, used with permission.
Walter and his wife Geraldine, 1954



Phillip D. Granath, personal photo, used with permission.
Walter T. Granath, Lowry AFB, 1949

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