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Wake Island

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Coordinates : 19°17′43″N 166°37′52″E﻿ / ﻿

This article is about the U.S. territory of Wake Island. For other uses, see [Wake Island \(disambiguation\)](#).

Wake Island (also known as **Wake Atoll**) is a **coral atoll** in the western Pacific Ocean in the northeastern area of the **Micronesia subregion** , 1,501 miles (2,416 kilometers) east of **Guam** , 2,298 miles (3,698 kilometers) west of **Honolulu** , 1,991 miles (3,204 kilometers) southeast of **Tokyo**, and 898 miles (1,445 kilometers) north of **Majuro** . The island is an **unorganized** , **unincorporated territory** belonging to, but not a part of, the United States that is also claimed by the **Republic of the Marshall Islands**. Wake Island is one of the most isolated islands in the world and the nearest inhabited island is **Utirik Atoll** in the Marshall Islands, 592 miles (953 kilometers) to the southeast.

The United States took possession of Wake Island in 1899. One of 14 U.S. **insular areas** , Wake Island is administered by the **United States Air Force** under an agreement with the **U.S. Department of the Interior**. The center of activity on the atoll is at **Wake Island Airfield**, which is primarily used as a mid-Pacific refueling stop for military aircraft and as an emergency landing area. The 9,800-foot (3,000 m) runway is the longest strategic runway in the Pacific islands. South of the runway is the Wake Island Launch Center, a **missile launch site**. The island has no permanent inhabitants, and approximately 100 people live there at any given time.

On December 8, 1941 (within a few hours of the attack on Pearl Harbor, Wake Island being on the opposite side of the **International Date Line**), **American forces** on Wake Island were attacked by Japanese bombers. This action marked the commencement of the **Battle of Wake Island** . On December 11, 1941, Wake Island was the site of the Japanese Empire's first unsuccessful amphibious attack on U.S. territory in World War II when **U.S. Marines** , with some **U.S. Navy personnel** and civilians on the island, repelled an attempted Japanese invasion. The island fell to overwhelming Japanese forces 12 days later and remained occupied by Japanese forces until it was surrendered to the U.S. in September 1945 at the end of the war.^[1]

The submerged and emergent lands at Wake Island comprise a unit of the **Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument** . Wake Island is one of nine insular areas that comprise the **United States Minor Outlying Islands**, a statistical designation defined by the **International Organization for Standardization's ISO 3166-1** code.

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Wake Island Enen-kio

United States Minor Outlying Islands



Flag



Unofficial flag

Motto(s): "Where America's Day Really Begins"
Anthem: " **The Star-Spangled Banner** "



Map of Wake Island



Location in the North Pacific Ocean
Coordinates: 19°17′43″N 166°37′52″E﻿ / ﻿

Country	 United States
Status	Unorganized , unincorporated territory
Claimed by the United States	January 17, 1899
Government	
 • Body	United States Air Force (under authority of U.S. Department of the Interior)
 • Civil Administrator	Thomas E. Ayres , General Counsel of the Air Force
 • Island Commander	Capt Ashley Bacon, Detachment 1, PACAF Regional Support Center
Area	
 • Total	5.35 sq mi (13.86 km ²)

- Català
- Cebuano
- Čeština
- Dansk
- Deutsch
- Eesti
- Ελληνικά
- Español
- Esperanto
- Euskara
- فارسی
- Føroyskt
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- 한국어
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- Íslenska
- Italiano
- עברית
- Jawa
- ქართული
- Қазақша
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- Ligure
- Limburgs
- Magyar
- Македонски
- മലയാളം
- मराठी
- Bahasa Melayu
- Nederlands
- 日本語
- Нохчийн
- Nordfriisk
- Norsk bokmål
- Norsk nynorsk
- ਪੰਜਾਬੀ
- Polski
- Português
- Română
- Русский
- Gagana Samoa
- Sardu
- Scots
- Sicilianu
- Simple English
- Slovenčina
- Slovenščina
- Српски / srpski
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Etymology [edit]

Wake Island derives its name from sea captain Samuel Wake, who rediscovered the atoll in 1796 while in command of the *Prince William Henry*. The name is sometimes attributed to Captain William Wake, who also is reported to have discovered the atoll from the *Prince William Henry* in 1792. ^[2]

Geography [edit]

Wake is located two-thirds of the way from Honolulu to **Guam**. Honolulu is 2,300 *statute miles* (3,700 km) to the east, and Guam 1,510 statute miles (2,430 km) to the west. Midway is 1,170 statute miles (1,880 kilometers) to the northeast. The closest land is the uninhabited **Bokak**

<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Land Water Lagoon EEZ </div>	<div> <p>2.85 sq mi (7.38 km²)</p> <p>2.5 sq mi (6.48 km²)</p> <p>2.00 sq mi (5.17 km²)</p> <p>157,237 sq mi (407,241 km²)</p></div>
Highest elevation	21 ft (6 m)
Lowest elevation	0 ft (0 m) (Pacific Ocean)
Population (2017)	
 • Estimate	0
 • Non-permanent residents	c. 100
Demonym(s)	Wakean
Time zone	UTC+12 (Wake Island Time Zone)
APO / Zip Code	96898
Currency	U.S. dollar (US\$)

Name	acres	hectares
Wake Islet	1,367.04	553.22
Wilkes Islet	197.44	79.90
Peale Islet	256.83	103.94

Sunda
Suomi
Svenska
Tagalog
தமிழ்
ភាសាខ្មែរ
Türkçe
Українська
اردو
Tiếng Việt
Winaray
吴语
Yorùbá
粵語
中文

 Edit links

Atoll 348 mi (560 km) in the **Marshall Islands** , to the southeast. The atoll is to the west of the **International Date Line** and in the **Wake Island Time Zone** (**UTC+12**), the easternmost time zone in the United States, and almost one day ahead of the **50 states**.

Although Wake is officially called an island in the singular form, it is actually an atoll composed of three islets and a **reef** surrounding a central lagoon:^[3]

Climate [[edit](#)]

Wake Island lies in the tropical zone, but is subject to periodic **temperate** storms during the winter. Sea surface temperatures are warm all year long, reaching above 80 °F (27 °C) in summer and autumn. **Typhoons** occasionally pass over the island. ^[4]

Climate data for Wake Island, US													[hide]
Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Average high °F (°C)	82.2 (27.9)	82.0 (27.8)	83.1 (28.4)	83.8 (28.8)	85.6 (29.8)	87.6 (30.9)	88.2 (31.2)	88.2 (31.2)	88.2 (31.2)	87.4 (30.8)	85.5 (29.7)	83.5 (28.6)	85.4 (29.7)
Daily mean °F (°C)	77.5 (25.3)	77.4 (25.2)	78.1 (25.6)	78.6 (25.9)	80.4 (26.9)	82.2 (27.9)	82.8 (28.2)	82.8 (28.2)	82.9 (28.3)	82.2 (27.9)	80.8 (27.1)	79.0 (26.1)	80.4 (26.9)
Average low °F (°C)	72.7 (22.6)	72.1 (22.3)	72.9 (22.7)	73.4 (23.0)	75.0 (23.9)	76.6 (24.8)	77.4 (25.2)	77.4 (25.2)	77.7 (25.4)	77.2 (25.1)	76.1 (24.5)	74.1 (23.4)	75.2 (24.0)
Average precipitation inches (mm)	1.16 (29)	1.60 (41)	2.23 (57)	2.51 (64)	1.74 (44)	2.29 (58)	4.02 (102)	6.16 (156)	5.07 (129)	4.33 (110)	2.79 (71)	1.78 (45)	35.68 (906)
Source: Climatemps.com ^[5]													

Typhoons [[edit](#)]

On October 19, 1940, an unnamed typhoon hit Wake Island with 120 knots (220 km/h) winds. This was the first recorded typhoon to hit the island since observations began in 1935.^[6]

Super Typhoon Olive impacted Wake on September 16, 1952 with wind speeds reaching 150 knots (280 km/h). Olive caused major flooding, destroyed approximately 85% of its structures and caused \$1.6 million in damage.^[7]

On September 16, 1967, at 10:40 pm local time, the eye of **Super Typhoon Sarah** passed over the island. Sustained winds in the eyewall were 130 knots (240 km/h), from the north before the eye and from the south afterward. All non-reinforced structures were demolished. There were no serious injuries, and the majority of the civilian population was evacuated after the storm.^[8]

On August 28, 2006, the United States Air Force evacuated all 188 residents and suspended all operations as category 5 **Super Typhoon Ioke** headed toward Wake. By August 31 the southwestern eyewall of the storm passed over the island, with winds well over 185 miles per hour (298 km/h),^[9] driving a 20 ft (6 m) **storm surge** and waves directly into the lagoon inflicting major damage.^[10] A U.S. Air Force assessment and repair team returned to the island in September 2006 and restored limited function to the airfield and facilities leading ultimately to a full return to normal operations.

Important Bird Area [[edit](#)]

The atoll, with its surrounding marine waters, has been recognised as an **Important Bird Area** (IBA) by **BirdLife International** for its **sooty tern colony**, with some 200,000 individual birds estimated in 1999.^[11]

History [[edit](#)]

Prehistory [[edit](#)]

The presence of the **Polynesian rat** on the island suggests that Wake was visited ^[12]

Wake Island (total of all three islets)	1,821.31	737.06
Lagoon (water)	1,480.00	600.00
Sand Flat	910.00	370.00



Damaged trees and debris left by Super Typhoon Ioke in 2006 at the Memorial Chapel on Wake Island

by Polynesian or Micronesian voyagers at an early date.

Early European contact [edit]

Wake Island was first encountered by Europeans on October 2, 1568, by Spanish explorer and navigator **Álvaro de Mendaña de Neyra**. In 1567, Mendaña and his crew had set off on two ships, *Los Reyes* and *Todos los Santos*, from **Callao**, **Peru**, on an **expedition** to search for a **gold-rich land** in the South Pacific as mentioned in **Inca** tradition. After visiting **Tuvalu** and the **Solomon Islands**, the expedition headed north and came upon Wake Island, "a low barren island, judged to be eight **leagues** in circumference". Since the date – October 2, 1568 – was the eve of the **feast of Saint Francis of Assisi**, the captain named the island "San Francisco". The ships were in need of water and the crew was suffering from **scurvy**, but after circling the island it was determined that Wake was waterless and had "not a **cocoonut** nor a **pandanus**" and, in fact, "there was nothing on it but **sea-birds**, and sandy places covered with bushes."^{[13][14][15]}



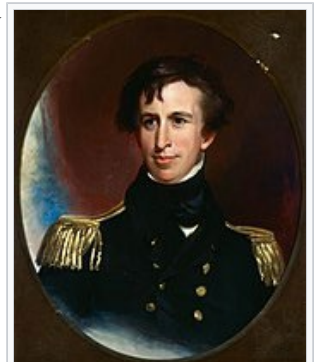
Palm trees at Wake Island's lagoon [edit]

In 1796, Captain Samuel Wake of the **merchantman** *Prince William Henry* also came upon Wake Island, naming the atoll for himself. Soon thereafter the 80-ton **fur trading** merchant **brig** *Halcyon* arrived at Wake and **Master** **Charles William Barkley**, unaware of Captain Wake's earlier and other prior European contact, named the atoll Halcyon Island in honor of his ship.^[16]

In 1823, Captain **Edward Gardner**, while in command of the **Royal Navy's** **whaling ship** *HMS Bellona*, visited an island at 19°15′00″N 166°32′00″E﻿ / ﻿19.25000°N 166.53333°E﻿ / 19.25000; 166.53333, which he judged to be 20–25 miles (32–40 kilometers) long. The island was "covered with wood, having a very green and rural appearance". This report is considered to be another sighting of Wake Island.^[17]

United States Exploring Expedition [edit]

On December 20, 1841, the **United States Exploring Expedition**, commanded by US Navy Lieutenant **Charles Wilkes**, arrived at Wake on *USS Vincennes* and sent several boats to survey the island. Wilkes described the atoll as "a low coral one, of triangular form and eight feet above the surface. It has a large lagoon in the centre, which was well filled with fish of a variety of species among these were some fine **mullet**." He also noted that Wake had no **fresh water** but was covered with shrubs, "the most abundant of which was the **tournefortia**." The expedition's **naturalist**, **Titian Peale**, noted that "the only remarkable part in the formation of this island is the enormous blocks of coral which have been thrown up by the violence of the sea." Peale collected an egg from a **short-tailed albatross** and added other specimens, including a **Polynesian rat**, to the natural history collections of the expedition. Wilkes also reported that "from appearances, the island must be at times submerged, or the sea makes a complete breach over it."^[18]



Lieutenant **Charles Wilkes**, [edit]
commander of the U.S. Navy's **United States Exploring Expedition**, 1838–42

The wreck and salvage of *Libelle* [edit]

Wake Island first received international attention with the **wreck** of the **barque** *Libelle*. On the night of March 4, 1866, the 650-ton iron-hulled *Libelle*, of **Bremen**, struck the eastern reef of Wake Island during a gale. Commanded by Captain Anton Tobias, the ship was en route from San Francisco to Hong Kong with a cargo of **mercury** (quicksilver). After three days of searching and digging on the island for water, the crew was able to recover a 200 US gallons (760 l) water tank from the wrecked ship. Valuable cargo was also recovered and buried on the island, including some of the 1,000 flasks of mercury, as well as coins and precious stones valued at \$93,943. After three weeks with a dwindling water supply and no sign of rescue, the passengers and crew decided to leave Wake and attempt to sail to **Guam** (the center of the then **Spanish** colony of the **Mariana Islands**) on the two remaining boats from *Libelle*. The 22 passengers and some of the crew sailed in the 22-foot (7 m) **longboat** under the command of First Mate Rudolf Kausch and the remainder of the crew sailed with Captain Tobias in the 20-foot (6 m) **gig**. On April 8, 1866, after 13 days of frequent **squalls**, short rations and tropical sun, the longboat reached Guam. Unfortunately, the gig, commanded by the captain, was lost at sea.^{[19][20]}

The Spanish governor of the Mariana Islands, Francisco Moscoso y Lara, welcomed and provided aid to the *Libelle* shipwreck survivors on Guam. He also ordered the schooner *Ana*, owned and commanded by his son-in-law George H. Johnston, to be dispatched with first mate Kausch to search for the missing gig and then sail on to Wake Island to confirm the shipwreck story and recover the buried treasure. *Ana* departed Guam on April 10 and, after two days at Wake Island, found and salvaged the buried coins and precious stones as well as a small quantity of the quicksilver.^{[21][22]}

The wreck of *Dashing Wave* [edit]

On July 29, 1870, the British tea clipper *Dashing Wave*, under the command of Captain Henry Vandervord, sailed out of Foochoo, China, en route to Sydney. On August 31 "the weather was very thick, and it was blowing a heavy gale from the eastward, attended with violent squalls, and a tremendous sea." At 10:30 p.m. breakers were seen and the ship struck the reef at Wake Island. Overnight the vessel began to break up and at 10:00 a.m. the crew succeeded in launching the longboat over the leeward side. In the chaos of the evacuation, the captain secured a chart and nautical instruments, but no compass. The crew loaded a case of wine, some bread and two buckets, but no drinking water. Since Wake Island appeared to have neither food nor water, the captain and his 12-man crew quickly departed, crafting a makeshift sail by attaching a blanket to an oar. With no water, each man was allotted a glass of wine per day until a heavy rain shower came on the sixth day. After 31 days of hardship, drifting westward in the longboat, they reached Kosrae (Strong's Island) in the Caroline Islands. Captain Vandervord attributed the loss of *Dashing Wave* to the erroneous manner in which Wake Island "is laid down in the charts. It is very low, and not easily seen even on a clear night."^{[19][23]}

American possession [edit]

With the annexation of Hawaii in 1898 and the acquisition of Guam and the Philippines resulting from the conclusion of the Spanish–American War that same year, the United States began to consider unclaimed and uninhabited Wake Island, located approximately halfway between Honolulu and Manila, as a good location for a telegraph cable station and coaling station for refueling warships of the rapidly expanding United States Navy and passing merchant and passenger steamships. On July 4, 1898, United States Army Brigadier General Francis V. Greene of the 2nd Brigade, Philippine Expeditionary Force, of the Eighth Army Corps, stopped at Wake Island and raised the United States flag while en route to the Philippines on the steamship liner SS *China*.^[24]



Commander Edward D. Taussig of USS *Bennington* takes formal possession of Wake Island for the United States with the raising of the flag and a 21-gun salute on January 17, 1899.

On January 17, 1899, under orders from President William McKinley, Commander Edward D. Taussig of USS *Bennington* landed on Wake and formally took possession of the island for the United States. After a 21-gun salute, the flag was raised and a brass plate was affixed to the flagstaff with the following inscription:

United States of America
William McKinley, President;
John D. Long, Secretary of the Navy.
Commander Edward D. Taussig, U.S.N.,
Commander U.S.S. Bennington,
this 17th day of January 1899, took
possession of the Atoll known as Wake
Island for the United States of America.^[25]

Although the proposed route for the submarine cable would have been shorter by 137 miles (220 km), the Midway and not Wake Island was chosen as the location for the telegraph cable station between Honolulu and Guam. Rear Admiral Royal Bird Bradford, chief of the U.S. Navy's Bureau of Equipment, stated before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce

on January 17, 1902, that "Wake Island seems at times to be swept by the sea. It is only a few feet above the level of the ocean, and if a cable station were established there very expensive works would be required; besides it has no harbor, while the Midway Islands are perfectly habitable and have a fair harbor for vessels of 18 feet (5 m) draught."^[26]

On June 23, 1902, USAT *Buford*, commanded by Captain Alfred Croskey and bound for Manila, spotted a ship's boat on the

beach as it passed closely by Wake Island. Soon thereafter the boat was launched by Japanese on the island and sailed out to meet the transport. The Japanese told Captain Croskey that they had been put on the island by a [schooner](#) from [Yokohama](#) in Japan and that they were gathering [guano](#) and [drying fish](#) . The captain suspected that they were also engaged in [pearl hunting](#). The Japanese revealed that one of their parties needed medical attention and the captain determined from their descriptions of the symptoms that the illness was most likely [beriberi](#) . They informed Captain Croskey that they did not need any provisions or water and that they were expecting the Japanese schooner to return in a month or so. The Japanese declined an offer to be taken on the transport to Manila and were given some medical supplies for the sick man, some tobacco and a few incidentals.^[27]

After USAT *Buford* reached Manila, Captain Croskey reported on the presence of Japanese at Wake Island. He also learned that USAT Sheridan had a similar encounter at Wake with the Japanese. The incident was brought to the attention of [Assistant Secretary of the Navy Charles Darling](#) , who at once informed the [State Department](#) and suggested that an explanation from the [Japanese Government](#) was needed. In August 1902, Japanese [Minister Takahira Kogorō](#) provided a diplomatic note stating that the Japanese Government had "no claim whatever to make on the sovereignty of the island, but that if any subjects are found on the island the Imperial Government expects that they should be properly protected as long as they are engaged in peaceful occupations."^[28]

Wake Island was now clearly a [territory of the United States](#) , but during this period the island was only occasionally visited by passing American ships. One notable visit occurred in December 1906 when U.S. Army General [John J. Pershing](#) , later famous as the commander of the [American Expeditionary Forces](#) in western Europe during [World War I](#) , stopped at Wake on USAT *Thomas* and hoisted a [45-star U.S. flag](#) that was improvised out of [sail canvas](#) .^[29]

Feather collecting [[edit](#)]

With limited fresh water resources, no harbor and no plans for development, Wake Island remained a remote [uninhabited Pacific island](#) in the early 20th century. It did, however, have a large [seabird](#) population that attracted Japanese feather collecting. The global demand for [feathers](#) and [plumage](#) was driven by the [millinery](#) industry and popular European fashion designs for hats, while other demand came from [pillow](#) and [bedspread](#) manufacturers. Japanese poachers set up camps to harvest feathers on many remote islands in the Central Pacific. The feather trade was primarily focused on [Laysan albatross](#) , [black-footed albatross](#), [masked booby](#) , [lesser frigatebird](#) , [greater frigatebird](#), [sooty tern](#) and other species of tern. On February 6, 1904, Rear Admiral [Robley D. Evans](#) arrived at Wake Island on *USS Adams* and observed Japanese collecting feathers and catching sharks for their fins. Abandoned feather poaching camps were seen by the crew of the [submarine tender](#) *USS Beaver* in 1922 and *USS Tanager* in 1923. Although feather collecting and plumage exploitation had been outlawed in the territorial United States, there is no record of any enforcement actions at Wake Island.^[30]



Members of the [Tanager Expedition](#) explore an abandoned feather collecting camp on Peale Island.

Japanese castaways [[edit](#)]

In January 1908, the Japanese ship *Toyoshima Maru*, en route from [Tateyama](#) , Japan, to the [South Pacific](#) , encountered a heavy storm that disabled the ship and swept the captain and five of the crew overboard. The 36 remaining crew members managed to make landfall on Wake Island, where they endured five months of great hardship, disease and [starvation](#) . In May 1908, the [Brazilian Navy](#) training ship *Benjamin Constant*, while on a voyage around the world, passed by the island and spotted a tattered red [distress flag](#) . Unable to land a boat, the crew executed a challenging three-day rescue operation using [rope](#) and cable to bring on board the 20 survivors and transport them to [Yokohama](#) .^[31]



The *Benjamin Constant* [[edit](#)]

USS Beaver strategic survey [[edit](#)]

In his 1921 book *Sea-Power in the Pacific: A Study of the American-Japanese Naval Problem*, [Hector C. Bywater](#)

recommended establishing a well-defended fueling station at Wake Island to provide coal and oil for United States Navy ships engaged in future operations against Japan.^[32] On June 19, 1922, the **submarine tender** *USS **Beaver*** landed an investigating party to determine the practicality and feasibility of establishing a naval fueling station on Wake Island. Lt. Cmdr. **Sherwood Picking** reported that from "a strategic point of view, Wake Island could not be better located, dividing as it does with Midway, the passage from Honolulu to Guam into almost exact thirds." He observed that the boat **channel** was choked with **coral heads** and that the lagoon was very shallow and not over 15 feet (5 m) in depth, and therefore Wake would not be able to serve as a base for surface vessels. Picking suggested clearing the channel to the lagoon for "loaded motor sailing launches" so that parties on shore could receive supplies from passing ships and he strongly recommended that Wake be used as a base for aircraft. Picking stated that "If the long heralded trans-Pacific flight ever takes place, Wake Island should certainly be occupied and used as an intermediate resting and fueling port."^[33]

Tanager Expedition [edit]

In 1923, a joint expedition by the then **Bureau of the Biological Survey** (in the **U.S. Department of Agriculture**), the **Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum** and the **United States Navy** was organized to conduct a thorough biological reconnaissance of the **Northwestern Hawaiian Islands**, then administered by the Biological Survey Bureau as the **Hawaiian Islands Bird Reservation**. On February 1, 1923, **Secretary of Agriculture Henry C. Wallace** contacted **Secretary of Navy Edwin Denby** to request Navy participation and recommended expanding the expedition to **Johnston** , **Midway** and Wake, all islands not administered by the Department of Agriculture. On July 27, 1923, *USS **Tanager***, a **World War I minesweeper** , brought the **Tanager Expedition** to Wake Island under the leadership of **ornithologist Alexander Wetmore** , and a tent camp was established on the eastern end of Wilkes. From July 27 to August 5, the expedition charted the **atoll**, made extensive **zoological** and **botanical** observations and gathered specimens for the Bishop Museum, while the naval vessel under the command of Lt. Cmdr. **Samuel Wilder King** conducted a **sounding survey** offshore. Other achievements at Wake included examinations of three abandoned Japanese feather poaching camps, scientific observations of the now extinct **Wake Island rail** and confirmation that Wake Island is an **atoll**, with a group comprising three islands with a central lagoon. Wetmore named the southwest island for **Charles Wilkes** , who had led the original pioneering **United States Exploring Expedition** to Wake in 1841. The northwest island was named for **Titian Peale** , the chief naturalist of that 1841 expedition.^[34]



Tanager Expedition tent camp in 1923 at Wake Island, established on the eastern end of Wilkes Island

Pan American Airways and the U.S. Navy [edit]

Juan Trippe , president of the world's then-largest airline, **Pan American Airways** (PAA), wanted to expand globally by offering passenger air service between the United States and China. To cross the Pacific Ocean his planes would need to island-hop, stopping at various points for refueling and maintenance. He first tried to plot the route on his **globe** but it showed only open sea between **Midway** and **Guam** . Next, he went to the **New York Public Library** to study 19th-century **clipper ship logs** and **charts** and he "discovered" a little-known **coral atoll** named Wake Island. To proceed with his plans at Wake and Midway, Trippe would need to be granted access to each island and approval to construct and operate facilities; however, the islands were not under the jurisdiction of any specific U.S. government entity.^{[35][36]}

Meanwhile, U.S. Navy military planners and the **State Department** were increasingly alarmed by the **Empire of Japan** 's expansionist attitude and growing belligerence in the Western **Pacific** . Following **World War I**, the **Council of the League of Nations** had granted the **South Seas Mandate** ("Nanyo") to Japan (which had joined the **Allied Powers** in the **First World War**) which included the already Japanese-held **Micronesia** islands north of the **equator** that were part of the former colony of **German New Guinea** of the **German Empire**; these include the modern nation/states of **Palau** , **Federated States of Micronesia**, **Northern Mariana Islands** and **Marshall Islands** . In the 1920s and 1930s, Japan restricted access to its **mandated territory** and began to develop harbors and airfields throughout **Micronesia** in defiance of the **Washington Naval Treaty** of 1922, which prohibited both the United States and Japan from expanding military fortifications in the Pacific islands. Now with Trippe's planned Pan American Airways aviation route passing through Wake and Midway, the U.S. Navy and the State Department saw an opportunity to project American air power across the Pacific under the guise of a **commercial aviation** enterprise. On October 3, 1934, Trippe wrote to the **Secretary of the Navy**, requesting a five-year lease on Wake Island with

an option for four renewals. Given the potential military value of PAA's base development, on November 13, **Chief of Naval Operations** Admiral **William H. Standley** ordered a survey of Wake by USS *Nitro* and on December 29 President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** issued **Executive Order** 6935, which placed Wake Island and also **Johnston** , Sand Island at **Midway** and **Kingman Reef** under the control of the Department of the Navy. In an attempt to disguise the Navy's military intentions, Rear Admiral **Harry E. Yarnell** then designated Wake Island as a bird sanctuary.^[37]

USS *Nitro* arrived at Wake Island on March 8, 1935, and conducted a two-day ground, marine and aerial survey, providing the Navy with strategic observations and complete photographic coverage of the **atoll**. Four days later, on March 12, Secretary of the Navy **Claude A. Swanson** formally granted Pan American Airways permission to construct facilities at Wake Island.^[38]

Pan American "Flying Clippers" base [edit]

To construct bases in the Pacific, **Pan American Airways** (PAA) chartered the 6,700-ton **freighter** SS *North Haven*, which arrived at Wake Island on May 9, 1935, with construction workers and the necessary materials and equipment to start to build Pan American facilities and to clear the lagoon for a **flying boat** landing area. The atoll's encircling **coral reef** prevented the ship from entering and anchoring in the shallow lagoon itself. The only suitable location for ferrying supplies and workers ashore was at nearby Wilkes Island; however, the chief engineer of the expedition, Charles R. Russell, determined that Wilkes was too low and at times flooded and that Peale Island was the best site for the Pan American facilities. To offload the ship, cargo was **lightered** (barged) from ship to shore, carried across Wilkes and then transferred to another **barge** and towed across the lagoon to Peale Island. By inspiration, someone had earlier loaded railroad track rails onto *North Haven*, so the men built a **narrow-gauge railway** to make it easier to haul the supplies across Wilkes to the lagoon. On June 12, *North Haven* departed for Guam, leaving behind various PAA technicians and a construction crew.^[39]

Out in the middle of the lagoon, Bill Mullahey, a swimmer from **Columbia University** , was tasked with blasting hundreds of coral heads from a 1 mile (1,600 m) long, 300 yards (300 m) wide, 6 feet (2 m) deep landing area for the flying boats.^[40]

On August 17, the first aircraft landing at Wake Island occurred when a PAA flying boat, on a survey flight of the route between Midway and Wake, landed in the lagoon.^[41]

The second expedition of *North Haven* arrived at Wake Island on February 5, 1936, to complete the construction of the PAA facilities. A five-ton diesel **locomotive** for the Wilkes Island Railroad was offloaded and the **railway track** was extended to run from dock to dock. Across the lagoon on Peale workers assembled the Pan American Hotel, a **prefabricated structure** with 48 rooms and wide **porches** and **verandas** . The hotel consisted of two wings built out from a central **lobby** with each room having a bathroom with a hot-water shower. The PAA facilities staff included a group of **Chamorro** men from **Guam** who were employed as kitchen helpers, hotel service attendants and laborers.^{[42][43]} The village on Peale was nicknamed "PAAville" and was the first "permanent" human settlement on Wake.^[44]

By October 1936, Pan American Airways was ready to transport **passengers** across the Pacific on its small fleet of three **Martin M-130** "Flying Clippers". On October 11, the *China Clipper* landed at Wake on a press flight with ten journalists on board. A week later, on October 18, PAA President **Juan Trippe** and a group of **VIP** passengers arrived at Wake on the *Philippine Clipper* (NC14715). On October 25, the *Hawaii Clipper* (NC14714) landed at Wake with the first paying airline passengers ever to cross the Pacific. In 1937, Wake Island became a regular stop for PAA's international trans-Pacific passenger and **airmail** service, with two scheduled flights per week, one westbound from Midway and one eastbound from Guam.^{[45][46]}

Wake Island is credited with being one of the early successes of **hydroponics** , which enabled Pan American Airways to grow vegetables for its passengers, as it



Pan American Airways (PAA) construction workers "lighter" building materials from SS *North Haven* to the dock at Wilkes Island, Wake Atoll. [edit]



Aerial view of Pan American Airways [edit] Hotel and facilities on Peale Island at Wake Atoll. The hotel is on the left, the anchor from the *Libelle* shipwreck and the pergola leading to the "Clipper" seaplane dock is on the right.

^[47]

was very expensive to airlift in fresh vegetables and the island lacked natural soil. Pan Am remained in operation up to the day of the first Japanese air raid in December 1941, forcing the U.S. into [World War II](#).^[48]

Military buildup [[edit](#)]

On February 14, 1941, President [Franklin D. Roosevelt](#) issued [Executive Order](#) 8682 to create naval defense areas in the central Pacific territories. The proclamation established "Wake Island Naval Defensive Sea Area", which encompassed the territorial waters between the extreme high-water marks and the three-mile marine boundaries surrounding Wake. "Wake Island Naval Airspace Reservation" was also established to restrict access to the airspace over the naval defense sea area. Only U.S. government ships and aircraft were permitted to enter the naval defense areas at Wake Island unless authorized by the [Secretary of the Navy](#) .^[49]

Just earlier, in January 1941, the [United States Navy](#) began construction of a military base on the atoll. On August 19, the first permanent military garrison, elements of the [U.S. Marine Corps'](#) [First Marine Defense Battalion](#) ,^[50] totaling 449 officers and men, were stationed on the island, commanded by Navy [Cmdr. Winfield Scott Cunningham](#).^[51] Also on the island were 68 [U.S. Naval](#) personnel and about 1,221 civilian workers from the American firm [Morrison-Knudsen](#) Corp.^[52]

World War II [[edit](#)]

Battle of Wake Island [[edit](#)]

Main article: [Battle of Wake Island](#)

On December 8, 1941 (December 7 in Hawaii, the day of the [attack on Pearl Harbor](#)), at least 27 Japanese [Mitsubishi G3M](#) "Nell" medium bombers flown from bases on [Kwajalein](#) in the [Marshall Islands](#) attacked Wake Island, destroying eight of the 12 [Grumman F4F Wildcat](#) fighter aircraft belonging to [United States Marine Corps](#) Fighter Squadron 211 ([VMF-211](#)) on the ground. The Marine garrison's defensive emplacements were left intact by the raid, which primarily targeted the aircraft.^[53]

The garrison – supplemented by civilian construction workers employed by [Morrison-Knudsen](#) Corp. – repelled several Japanese landing attempts.^[54] An American journalist reported that after the initial Japanese amphibious assault was beaten back with heavy losses on December 11, the American commander was asked by his superiors if he needed anything. Popular legend has it that Major James Devereux sent back the message, "Send us more Japs!" – a reply that became famous.^{[55][56]} After the war, when Major Devereux learned that he had been credited with sending that message, he pointed out that he had not been the commander on Wake Island and denied sending the message. "As far as I know, it wasn't sent at all. None of us was that much of a damn fool. We already had more Japs than we could handle."^[57] In reality, Commander [Winfield S. Cunningham](#) , USN was in charge of Wake Island, not Devereux.^[58] Cunningham ordered that coded messages be sent during operations, and a junior officer had added "send us" and "more Japs" to the beginning and end of a message to confuse Japanese [code breakers](#) . This was put together at Pearl Harbor and passed on as part of the message.^[59]

The U.S. Navy attempted to provide support from Hawaii but had suffered great losses at Pearl Harbor. The relief fleet they managed to organize was delayed by bad weather. The isolated U.S. garrison was overwhelmed by a reinforced and greatly superior Japanese invasion force on December 23.^[60] American casualties numbered 52 military personnel (Navy and Marine) and approximately 70 civilians killed. Japanese losses exceeded 700 dead, with some estimates ranging as high as 1,000. Wake's defenders sank two Japanese fast transports (*P32* and *P33*) and one submarine and shot down 24 Japanese aircraft. The relief fleet, en route, on hearing of the island's loss, turned back.^{[61][62]}

In the aftermath of the battle, most of the captured civilians and military personnel were sent to [POW camps](#) in Asia, though some of the civilian laborers were [enslaved](#) by the Japanese and tasked with improving the island's defenses.^[63]

Japanese occupation and surrender [[edit](#)]

The island's Japanese garrison was composed of the [IJN](#) 65th Guard Unit (2,000 men), Japan Navy Captain [Shigematsu Sakaibara](#) and the [IJA](#) units which became 13th

Historical population		
Year	Pop.	±%
1941	1,738	—
1943	98	−94.4%
1945	400	+308.2%
1960	1,097	+174.3%
1970	1,647	+50.1%
1980	302	−81.7%
1990	7	−97.7%
2000	3	−57.1%
2009	150	+4900.0%
2010	188	+25.3%
2015	94	−50.0%
2017	100	+6.4%

^[64]

Independent Mixed Regiment (1,939 men) under command of Col. Shigeji Chikamori. Fearing an imminent invasion, the Japanese reinforced Wake Island with more formidable defenses. The American captives were ordered to build a series of bunkers and fortifications on Wake. The Japanese brought in an 8-inch (200 mm) naval gun which is often incorrectly^[65] reported as having been captured in Singapore. The U.S. Navy established a submarine blockade instead of an amphibious invasion of Wake Island. The Japanese-occupied island (called Ōtorishima (大鳥島) or *Big Bird Island* by them for its birdlike shape)^[66] was bombed several times by American aircraft; one of these raids was the first mission for future United States President **George H. W. Bush** .^[67]



U.S. Civilian POWs Memorial

After a successful American air raid on October 5, 1943, Sakaibara ordered the execution of all of the 98 captured Americans who remained on the island. They were taken to the northern end of the island, blindfolded and machine-gunned.^[68] One prisoner escaped, carving the message "*98 US PW 5-10-43*" on a large coral rock near where the victims had been hastily buried in a mass grave. This unknown American was soon recaptured and beheaded.^[69]

Since the 1943 air raids, the garrison had been almost cut off from supplies and was reduced to the point of starvation. While the islands' **sooty tern** colony had received some protection as a source of eggs, the **Wake Island rail** was hunted to extinction by the starving soldiers. Ultimately about three-quarters of the Japanese garrison perished, and the rest survived only by eating tern eggs, the **Pacific rats** introduced by prehistoric voyagers, and what scant amount of vegetables they could grow in makeshift gardens

among the coral rubble.^{[70][71]}

On September 4, 1945, the Japanese garrison surrendered to a detachment of United States Marines under the command of Brigadier General **Lawson H. M. Sanderson** .^[72] The garrison, having previously received news that Imperial Japan's defeat was imminent, exhumed the mass grave. The bones were moved to the U.S. cemetery that had been established on Peacock Point after the invasion. Wooden crosses were erected in preparation for the expected arrival of U.S. forces. During the initial interrogations, the Japanese claimed that the remaining 98 Americans on the island were mostly killed by an American bombing raid, though some escaped and fought to the death after being cornered on the beach at the north end of Wake Island.^[73] Several Japanese officers in American custody committed suicide over the incident, leaving written statements that incriminated Sakaibara.^[74] Sakaibara and his subordinate, lieutenant commander Tachibana, were later sentenced to death after conviction for this and other war crimes. Sakaibara was executed by hanging in Guam on June 18, 1947, while Tachibana's sentence was commuted to life in prison.^[75] The remains of the murdered civilians were exhumed and reburied at Honolulu's **National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific** at section G, commonly known as **Punchbowl Crater** .^[76]

Post-World War II military and commercial airfield [edit]



The original Drifter's Reef bar, built near the harbor area at Wake Island, opened its doors to **aircrews**, visitors and other "**drifters**" on November 8, 1949.

With the end of hostilities with Japan and the increase in international air travel driven in part by wartime advances in **aeronautics** , Wake Island became a critical mid-Pacific base for the servicing and refueling of military and commercial aircraft. The United States Navy resumed control of the island, and in October 1945 400 **Seabees** from the 85th Naval Construction Battalion arrived at Wake to clear the island of the effects of the war and to build basic facilities for a **Naval Air Base** . The base was completed in March 1946 and on September 24, regular commercial passenger service was resumed by **Pan American Airways (Pan Am)** . The era of the **flying boats** was nearly over, so Pan Am switched to longer-range, faster and more profitable airplanes that could land on Wake's new **coral runway** . Other airlines that established transpacific routes



The formal surrender of the Japanese garrison on Wake Island, September 7, 1945. Island commander Admiral **Shigematsu Sakaibara** is the Japanese officer in the right-foreground.

through Wake included [British Overseas Airways Corporation](#) (BOAC), [Japan Airlines](#), [Philippine Airlines](#) and [Transocean Airlines](#) . Due to the substantial increase in the number of commercial flights, on July 1, 1947, the Navy transferred administration, operations and maintenance of the facilities at Wake to the [Civil Aeronautics Administration](#) (CAA). In 1949, the CAA upgraded the runway by paving over the coral surface and extending its length to 7,000 feet.^{[77][78]}

Korean War [[edit](#)]

In June 1950, the [Korean War](#) began with the United States leading United Nations forces against a North Korean invasion of [South Korea](#) . In July, the [Korean Airlift](#) was started and the [Military Air Transport Service](#) (MATS) used the airfield and facilities at Wake as a key mid-Pacific refueling stop for its mission of transporting men and supplies to the Korean front. By September, 120 military aircraft were landing at Wake per day.^[79] On October 15, U.S. President [Harry S. Truman](#) and General MacArthur met at the [Wake Island Conference](#) to discuss progress and war strategy for the [Korean Peninsula](#). They chose to meet at Wake Island because of its close proximity to [Korea](#) so that MacArthur would not have to be away from the troops in the field for long.^[80]



President [Harry S. Truman](#) awards the [Distinguished Service Medal](#), Fourth Oak Leaf Cluster, to General [Douglas MacArthur](#) during the [Wake Island Conference](#).

Missile Impact Location System [[edit](#)]

From 1958 through 1960 the United States installed the [Missile Impact Location System](#) (MILS) in the Navy managed Pacific Missile Range, later the Air Force managed [Western Range](#), to localize the splash downs of test missile nose cones. MILS was developed and installed by the same entities that had completed the first phase of the Atlantic and U.S. West Coast SOSUS systems. A MILS installation, consisting of both a target array for precision location and a broad ocean area system for good positions outside the target area, was installed at Wake as part of the system supporting [Intercontinental Ballistic Missile](#) (ICBM) tests. Other Pacific MILS shore terminals were at the [Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay](#) supporting [Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile](#) (IRBM) tests with impact areas northeast of Hawaii and the other ICBM test support systems at [Midway Island](#) and [Eniwetok](#) .^{[81][82][83]}

Tanker shipwreck and oil spill [[edit](#)]

On September 6, 1967, [Standard Oil of California](#) 's 18,000-ton [tanker](#) SS *R.C. Stoner* was driven onto the reef at Wake Island by a strong southwesterly wind after the ship failed to [moor](#) to the two [buoys](#) near the harbor entrance. An estimated six million gallons of refined [fuel oil](#) – including 5.7 million gallons of [aviation fuel](#) , 168,000 gallons of [diesel oil](#) and 138,600 gallons of bunker C fuel – spilled into the small boat harbor and along the southwestern coast of Wake Island to Peacock Point. Large numbers of fish were killed by the oil spill, and personnel from the FAA and crewmen from the ship cleared the area closest to the spill of dead fish.^{[84][85]}

The U.S. Navy [salvage](#) team Harbor Clearance Unit Two and Pacific Fleet Salvage Officer Cmdr. John B. Orem flew to Wake to assess the situation, and by September 13 the Navy tugs *USS [Mataco](#)* and *USS [Wandank](#)*, salvage ships *USS [Conserver](#)* and *USS [Grapple](#)*, tanker *USS [Noxubee](#)*, and *USCGC [Mallow](#)*, arrived from [Honolulu](#) , [Guam](#) and [Subic Bay](#) in the [Philippines](#) , to assist in the cleanup and removal of the vessel. At the boat harbor the salvage team pumped and skimmed oil, which they burned each evening in nearby pits. Recovery by the Navy salvage team of the *R.C. Stoner* and its remaining cargo, however, was hampered by strong winds and heavy seas.^[86]

On September 16, [Super Typhoon Sarah](#) made landfall on Wake Island at peak intensity with winds up to 145-knots , causing widespread damage. The intensity of the storm had the beneficial effect of greatly accelerating the cleanup effort by clearing the harbor and scouring the coast. Oil did remain, however, embedded in the reef's flat crevices and impregnated in the coral. The storm also had broken the wrecked vessel into three sections and, although delayed by rough seas and harassment by [blacktip reef sharks](#), the salvage team used explosives to flatten and sink the remaining portions of the ship that were still above water.^{[87][88]}

U.S. Air Force assumes control [[edit](#)]

In the early 1970s, higher-efficiency jet aircraft with longer-range capabilities lessened the use of Wake Island Airfield as a

refueling stop, and the number of commercial flights landing at Wake declined sharply. [Pan Am](#) had replaced many of its [Boeing 707s](#) with more efficient [747s](#), thus eliminating the need to continue weekly stops at Wake. Other airlines began to eliminate their scheduled flights into Wake. In June 1972 the last scheduled Pan Am passenger flight landed at Wake, and in July Pan Am's last cargo flight departed the island, marking the end of the heyday of Wake Island's commercial aviation history. During this same time period the U.S. military had transitioned to longer-range [C-5A](#) and [C-141](#) aircraft, leaving the [C-130](#) as the only aircraft that would continue to regularly use the island's airfield. The steady decrease in air traffic control activities at Wake Island was apparent and was expected to continue.

On June 24, 1972, responsibility for the civil administration of Wake Island was transferred from the [FAA](#) to the United States Air Force under an agreement between the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of the Air Force. In July, the FAA turned over administration of the island to the [Military Airlift Command](#) (MAC), although legal ownership stayed with the [Department of the Interior](#), and the FAA continued to maintain the air navigation facilities and provide [air traffic control](#) services. On December 27, the [Chief of Staff of the Air Force](#) (CSAF) General [John D. Ryan](#) directed MAC to phase out en-route support activity at Wake Island effective June 30, 1973. On July 1, 1973, all FAA activities ended and the U.S. Air Force under [Pacific Air Forces](#) (PACAF), Detachment 4, [15th Air Base Wing](#) assumed control of Wake Island.^[89]

In 1973, Wake Island was selected as a launch site for the testing of defensive systems against [intercontinental ballistic missiles](#) under the U.S. Army's *Project Have Mill*. Air Force personnel on Wake and the [Air Force Systems Command](#) (AFSC) [Space and Missile Systems Organization](#) (SAMSO) provided support to the Army's Advanced Ballistic Missile Defense Agency (ABMDA). A missile launch complex was activated on Wake and, from February 13 to June 22, 1974, seven Athena H missiles were launched from the island to the [Roi-Namur](#) Test Range at [Kwajalein Atoll](#).^[90]

Vietnam War refugees and *Operation New Life* [[edit](#)]



Vietnamese refugees on Wake Island await resettlement processing by [U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service](#) personnel in May 1975

In the spring of 1975, the population of Wake Island consisted of 251 military, government and civilian contract personnel, whose primary mission was to maintain the airfield as a Mid-Pacific emergency runway. With the imminent [fall of Saigon](#) to [North Vietnamese forces](#), President [Gerald Ford](#) ordered American forces to support *Operation New Life*, the evacuation of [refugees](#)

from [Vietnam](#). The original plans included the Philippines' [Subic Bay](#) and [Guam](#) as refugee processing centers, but due to the high number of Vietnamese seeking evacuation, Wake Island was selected as an additional location.^[92]

In March 1975, Island Commander Major Bruce R. Hoon was contacted by [Pacific Air Forces](#) (PACAF) and ordered to prepare Wake for its new mission as a refugee processing center where Vietnamese evacuees could be medically screened, interviewed and transported to the United States or other resettlement countries. A 60-man [civil engineering team](#) was brought in to reopen boarded-up buildings and housing, two complete [MASH](#) units arrived to set up [field hospitals](#) and three Army [field kitchens](#) were deployed. A 60-man [United States Air Force Security Police](#) team, processing agents from the [U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service](#) and various other administrative and support personnel were also on Wake. [Potable water](#), food, medical supplies, clothing and other supplies were shipped in.^[93]

On April 26, 1975, the first [C-141 military transport aircraft](#) carrying refugees arrived. The airlift to Wake continued at a rate of one C-141 every hour and 45 minutes, each aircraft with 283 refugees on board. At the peak of the mission, 8,700 Vietnamese refugees were on Wake. When the airlift ended on August 2, a total of about 15,000 refugees had been processed through Wake Island as part of *Operation New Life*.^{[94][95]}

Bikini Islanders resettlement [[edit](#)]

On March 20, 1978, Undersecretary [James A. Joseph](#) of the [U.S. Department of the Interior](#) reported that [radiation](#) levels



The unofficial flag of Wake Island was designed in 1976 to commemorate the [United States Bicentennial](#). The three stars represent the three islands of the atoll, and the flag bears a resemblance to the [flag of the Philippines](#), as many workers on the island at the time were from the country.^[91]

from *Operation Crossroads* and other atomic tests conducted in the 1940s and 1950s on *Bikini Atoll* were still too high and those island natives that returned to Bikini would once again have to be relocated. In September 1979 a delegation from the Bikini/*Kili* Council came to Wake Island to assess the island's potential as a possible resettlement site. The delegation also traveled to Hawaii (*Molokai* and *Hilo*), *Palmyra Atoll* and various atolls in the *Marshall Islands* including *Milij Knox*, *Jaluit*, *Ailinglaplap*, *Erikub* and *Likiep* but the group agreed that they were only interested in resettlement on Wake Island due to the presence of the U.S. military and the island's proximity to Bikini Atoll. Unfortunately for the Bikini Islanders, the U.S. *Department of Defense* responded that "any such resettlement is out of the question."^{[96][97][98]}

Commemorative and memorial visits [edit]

In April 1981, a party of 19 Japanese, including 16 former Japanese soldiers who were at Wake during World War II, visited the island to pay respects for their war dead at the Japanese *Shinto Shrine*.^[99]

In the early 1980s, the *National Park Service* conducted an evaluation of Wake Island to determine if the *World War II* (WWII) cultural resources remaining on Wake, Wilkes and Peale were of national historical significance. As a result of this survey, Wake Island was designated as a *National Historic Landmark* (NHL) on September 16, 1985, helping to preserve sites and artifacts on the atoll associated with WWII in the Pacific and the transpacific aviation era prior to the war. As a National Historic Landmark, Wake Island was also included in the *National Register of Historic Places* .^[100]



Passengers and crew of Pan Am's *China Clipper II* Boeing 747 at Wake Island during a 1985 trip across the Pacific to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the first *China Clipper* flight

On November 3 and 4, 1985, a group of 167 former American *prisoners of war* (POWs) visited Wake with their wives and children. This was the first such visit by a group of former Wake Island POWs and their families.^[101]

On November 24, 1985, a *Pan American Airlines* (*Pan Am*) *Boeing 747* , renamed *China Clipper II*, came through Wake Island on a flight across the *Pacific* to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the inauguration of Pan American *China Clipper Service* to the *Orient* . Author *James A. Michener* and Lars Lindbergh, grandson of aviator *Charles Lindbergh*, were among the dignitaries on board the

aircraft.^[102]

Army missile tests [edit]

Subsequently, the island has been used for strategic defense and operations during and after the *Cold War* , with Wake Island serving as a launch platform for military rockets involved in testing *missile defense* systems and *atmospheric re-entry* trials as part of the *Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site* . Wake's location allows for a safe launch and trajectory over the unpopulated ocean with open space for intercepts.^[103]

In 1987, Wake Island was selected as a missile launch site for a *Strategic Defense Initiative* (SDI) program named *Project Starlab/Starbird*. In 1989, the U.S. Army Strategic Defense Command (USASDC) constructed two launch pads on Peacock Point, as well as nearby support facilities, for the eight-ton, 60 feet (20 m), multi-stage Starbird test missiles. The program involved using electro-optical and laser systems, mounted on the Starlab platform in the payload bay of an orbiting *Space Shuttle*, to acquire, track and target Starbird missiles launched from *Cape Canaveral* and Wake. After being impacted by mission scheduling delays caused by the *explosion of the Space Shuttle Challenger*, the program was canceled in late September 1990 to protect funding for another U.S. Army space-based missile defense program known as *Brilliant Pebbles*. Although no Starbird missiles were ever launched from Wake Island, the Starbird launch facilities at Wake were modified to support rocket launches for the *Brilliant Pebbles* program with the first launch occurring on January 29, 1992. On October

Wake Island	
U.S. National Register of Historic Places	
U.S. National Historic Landmark	
 <div>The "98 Rock" on Wilkes Island was carved by a World War II American civilian POW prior to his execution by Japanese Admiral <i>Shigematsu Sakaibara</i>.</div>	
Location	Pacific Ocean
NRHP reference No.	85002726
Significant dates	
Added to NRHP	September 16, 1985
Designated NHL	September 16, 1985

16, a 30 feet (10 m) **Castor-Orbus** rocket was destroyed by ground controllers seven minutes after its launch from Wake. The program was canceled in 1993.^{[104][105]}

Missile testing activities continued with the **Lightweight Exo-Atmospheric Projectile** (LEAP) Test Program, another U.S. Army strategic defense project that included the launching of two **Aerojet** Super Chief HPB rockets from Wake Island. The first launch, on January 28, 1993, reached **apogee** at 240 miles (390 kilometers) and was a success. The second launch, on February 11, reached apogee at 1.2 miles (1.9 kilometers) and was deemed a failure.^[106]

Due to the U.S. Army's continued use of the atoll for various missile testing programs, on October 1, 1994, the **U.S. Army Space and Strategic Defense Command** (USASSDC) assumed administrative command of Wake Island under a caretaker permit from the U.S. Air Force. The USASSDC had been operating on Wake since 1988 when construction of Starbird launch and support facilities was started. Now under U.S Army control, the island, which is located 690 miles (1,110 kilometers) north of **Kwajalein Atoll**, became a rocket launch site for the **Kwajalein Missile Range** known as the Wake Island Launch Center.^[107]

In July 1995, various units of the U.S. military established a camp on Wake Island to provide housing, food, medical care and social activities for Chinese **illegal immigrants** as part of *Operation Prompt Return* (also known as *Joint Task Force Prompt Return*). The Chinese immigrants were discovered on July 3 on board the *M/V Jung Sheng Number 8* when the 160-foot-long vessel was **interdicted** by the **U.S. Coast Guard** south of Hawaii. The *Jung Sheng* had left **Canton**, China en route to the United States on June 2 with 147 Chinese **Illegal Immigrants**, including 18 "enforcers", and 11 crew on board. On July 29, the Chinese were transported to Wake Island where they were cared for by U.S. military personnel and on August 7, they were safely **repatriated** to China by commercial air charter. From October 10 to November 21, 1996, military units assigned to *Operation Marathon Pacific* used facilities at Wake Island as a staging area for the repatriation of another group of more than 113 Chinese illegal immigrants who had been interdicted in the Atlantic Ocean near **Bermuda** aboard the human smuggling vessel, the *Xing Da*.^{[108][109]}

U.S. Air Force regains control [edit]

On October 1, 2002, administrative control and support of Wake Island was transferred from the U.S. Army to the U.S. Air Force's **15th Wing**, an **aviation unit** of **Pacific Air Forces** based at **Hickam Air Force Base** in Hawaii. The 15th Wing had previously been in control of Wake from July 1, 1973 to September 30, 1994. Although the Air Force was once again in control, the **Missile Defense Agency** would continue to operate the Wake Island Launch Center and the U.S. Army's **Ronald Reagan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site** would continue to maintain and operate the launch facilities and also provide instrumentation, communications, flight and ground safety, security, and other support.^[110]

On January 6, 2009, President **George W. Bush** issued **Executive Order** 8836, establishing **Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument** to preserve the marine environments around Wake, **Baker**, **Howland**, and **Jarvis Islands**, **Johnston Atoll**, **Kingman Reef**, and **Palmyra Atoll**. The proclamation assigned management of the nearby waters and submerged and emergent lands of the islands to the **Department of the Interior** and management of fishery-related activities in waters beyond 12 nautical miles from the islands' mean low water line to the **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration** (NOAA).^[111] On January 16, Secretary of the Interior **Dirk Kempthorne** issued Order Number 3284 which stated that the area at Wake Island assigned to the Department of Interior by Executive Order 8836 will be managed as a **National Wildlife Refuge**. Management of the emergent lands at Wake Island by the **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**, however, will not begin until the existing management agreement between the **Secretary of the Air Force** and the **Secretary of the Interior** is terminated.^{[112][113]}

The **611th Air Support Group** (ASG), a U.S. Air Force unit based at **Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson** in **Anchorage, Alaska** took over control of Wake Island from the 15th Wing On October 1, 2010. The 611th ASG was already providing support and management to various geographically remote Air Force sites within Alaska and the addition of Wake Island provided the unit with more opportunities for outdoor projects during the winter months when projects in Alaska are very limited. The 611th ASG, a unit of the **11th Air Force**, was renamed the **Pacific Air Forces** (PACAF) **Regional Support Center**.^[114]

On September 27, 2014, President **Barack Obama** issued **Executive Order** 9173

to expand the area of the [Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument](#) out to the full 200 nautical miles U.S. [exclusive economic zone](#) (EEZ) boundary for each island. By this proclamation, the area of the monument at Wake Island was increased from 15,085 sq mi (39,069 km²) to 167,336 sq mi (433,398 km²).^[115]



A Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) interceptor is launched from a THAAD battery located on Wake Island, during Flight Test Operational (FTO)-02 Event 2a, conducted November 1, 2015.

On November 1, 2015, a complex \$230 million U.S. military missile defense system test event, called *Campaign Fierce Sentry* Flight Test Operational-02 Event 2 (FTO-02 E2), was conducted at Wake Island and the surrounding ocean areas. The test involved a [Terminal High Altitude Area Defense](#) (THAAD) system built by [Lockheed Martin](#), two [AN/TPY-2 radar systems](#) built by [Raytheon](#) , Lockheed's Command, Control, Battle Management, and Communications system, and [USS *John Paul Jones*](#) guided missile destroyer with its [AN/SPY-1](#) radar. The objective was to test the ability of the [Aegis Ballistic Missile Defense](#) and THAAD Weapon Systems to defeat a raid of three near-simultaneous air and missile targets, consisting of one [medium-range ballistic missile](#), one [short-range ballistic missile](#) and one [cruise missile](#) target. During the test, a THAAD system on Wake Island detected and destroyed a short-range target simulating a short-range ballistic missile that was launched by a [C-17 transport plane](#) . At the same time, the

THAAD system and the destroyer both launched missiles to intercept a medium-range ballistic missile, launched by a second C-17.^{[116][117]}

Demographics [edit]

Wake Island has no permanent inhabitants and access is restricted. However, as of 2017, there are approximately 100 Air Force personnel and American and Thai contractor residents at any given time.^[118]

Government [edit]

On June 24, 1972, the United States Air Force assumed responsibility for the civil administration of Wake Island pursuant to an agreement between the Department of the Interior and the Department of the Air Force.^[119]

The civil administration authority at Wake Island has been delegated by the Secretary of the Air Force to the [General Counsel of the Air Force](#) under U.S. [federal law](#) known as the *Wake Island Code*. The general counsel provides civil, legal and [judicial authority](#) and can appoint one or more judges to serve on the Wake Island Court and the Wake Island Court of Appeals.^[120]

Certain authorities have been re-delegated by the general counsel to the Commander, Wake Island, a position currently held by Commander, Detachment 1, [Pacific Air Forces Regional Support Center](#). The commander may issue permits or registrations, appoint [peace officers](#) , impose [quarantines](#) , issue [traffic regulations](#), commission [notaries public](#) , direct [evacuations](#) and inspections and carry out other duties, powers, and functions as the agent of the general counsel



The insignia for *Campaign Fierce Sentry* (FTO-02 E2), a [Missile Defense Agency](#) Integrated Flight Test in 2015, depicts a map of Wake Island within the head of an eagle



US Air Force Captain Allen Jaime, commander of Wake Island at the time, unveils the new Guam Memorial on June 8, 2017. The memorial honors 45 [Chamorros](#) from Guam who worked for Pan American Airlines and were on the island when the Japanese attacked on December 8, 1941. 10 of the men were killed during the attack and the

on Wake.^[121]

Since Wake Island is an active Air Force airfield, the commander is also the senior officer in charge of all activities on the island.^[122]

remaining 35 were sent to prison camps in Japan and China.

Transportation [edit]

Aviation [edit]

Air transportation facilities at Wake are operated by the **United States Air Force** at **Wake Island Airfield** in support of trans-Pacific military operations, western Pacific military contingency operations and missile launch activities. The 9,850-foot-long (3,000-meter) runway on Wake is also available to provide services for military and commercial in-flight emergencies. Although there is only one flight scheduled every other week to transport passengers and cargo to Wake, approximately 600 aircraft per year use Wake Island Airfield.^{[123][124]}



The VFA-27 Royal Maces, a **United States Navy F/A-18E Super Hornet** squadron based in **Atsugi, Japan**, flies over the "Downtown" area of Wake Island.

Ports [edit]

Although Wake Island is supplied by sea-going barges and ships, the island's only harbor between Wilkes and Wake is too narrow and shallow for sea-going vessels to enter. The Base Operations Support (BOS) contractor maintains three small landing barges for transferring material from ships **moored** offshore to the dockyard in the harbor. Off-load hydrants are also used to pump gasoline and **JP-5** fuels to the storage tanks on Wilkes. The landing barges and recreational **offshore sportfishing** boats are docked in the **marina**.^[125]

Roads [edit]

Transportation on Wake Island is provided by contractor or government-owned vehicles. The primary road is a two-lane paved road extending the length of Wake Island to the causeway between Wake Island and Wilkes Island. The causeway was rehabilitated in 2003 and is capable of supporting heavy equipment. A bridge connecting Wake and Peale Islands burned down in December 2002. A combination of paved and coral gravel roads serves the marina area. Paved access to Wilkes Island ends at the petroleum tank farm, where a road constructed of crushed coral provides access to the western point of Wilkes Island. A portion of the road, near the unfinished WWII submarine channel, is flooded nearly every year by high seas. The launch sites are accessed from the main paved road on Wake Island by paved and coral roads. Generally, the road network is suitable for low-speed, light-duty use only. Wake Island's paved roadway network has been adequately maintained to move materials, services, and personnel from the airfield on the southern end to the personnel support area on the northern end. Modes of transportation include walking, bicycles, light utility carts, automobiles, vans and larger trucks and equipment.^[125]

Territorial claim by the Marshall Islands [edit]



Aerial view of Wake Island Atoll [edit]

The Republic of the Marshall Islands has claimed Wake Island, which it calls Enen-kio.^{[126][127]} In 1973, Marshallese lawmakers meeting in Saipan at the **Congress of Micronesia**, the legislative body for the **Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands**, asserted that "Enen-kio is and always has been the property of the people of the Marshall Islands". Their claim was based on oral legends and songs, passed down through generations, describing ancient Marshallese voyages to Wake to gather food and a sacred bird's wing bone used in traditional tattooing ceremonies.^[128] In 1990, legislation in the U.S. Congress proposed including

Wake Island within the boundaries of the U.S. territory of **Guam**. In response, Marshallese President **Amata Kabua** reasserted his nation's claim to Wake, declaring that Enen-kio was a site of great importance to the traditional chiefly rituals of the Marshall Islands.^[129]

The self-declared **Kingdom of EnenKio** has also claimed Wake Island as a separate sovereign nation and has issued passports.^{[130][131]} The Kingdom of EnenKio is not recognized in any international forum as a sovereign state, nor does any

internationally recognized state recognize it.^[132] The Kingdom of EnenKio is characterized as a scam by anti-fraud website **Quatloos!** .^[133] In 2000, Robert Moore, who claimed to be the head of state, was prevented by the **U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission** from fraudulently issuing bonds for the non-existent nation.^[134] On April 23, 1998, the Marshall Islands government notified all countries with which it has diplomatic ties that the claims of the Kingdom of EnenKio are fraudulent.^[135]

Popular culture references [edit]










- Wake Island is a recurring map in the *Battlefield* first-person shooter series.^[136] It appears in *Battlefield 1942*, *Battlefield 2*, *Battlefield 2142*, *Battlefield Heroes*, *Battlefield 1943*, *Battlefield 3* and *Battlefield V* as a principal game map.
- The 1942 Hollywood movie, *Wake Island*, starring **Brian Donlevy**, **Robert Preston** , and **Macdonald Carey** , tells the story of the U.S. fight to hold the island from the invading Japanese in December 1941.^[137]

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125. [^] ^a ^b *Integrated Flight Tests at Wake Atoll Proposed Environmental Assessment*, Missile Defense Agency, US Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command and Teledyne Brown Engineering, Inc., February 2015

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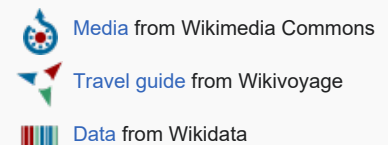
Further reading [edit]



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External links [edit]

- Wake Atoll National Wildlife Refuge
- Wake Island – Pacific Wreck Database
- *Wake Island* (1942) at IMDb
- *Wake Island: Alamo of the Pacific* (2003) at IMDb
- Current Weather, Wake Island
- AirNav – Wake Island Airfield – Airport details, facilities and navigational aids
- Rocket launches at Wake Island
- The Defense of Wake – United States Marine Corps historical monograph
- Surrender of Wake by the Japanese – Marines in World War II
- U.S. Army Strategic and Missile Defense Command – Logistics, flight schedules, facilities (*archived – snapshot at December 8, 2016*)
- Photographic history of the 1975 Vietnamese refugee camp on Wake Island
- Australia-Oceania: Wake Island – CIA: Library – Publications – The World Factbook

Wake Island
at Wikipedia's sister projects



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	In part	Chile (Easter Island · Juan Fernández Islands) · Indonesia (West Papua · Papua) · Japan (Bonin Islands · Volcano Islands · Minami-Tori-shima) · United States (Hawaii · Palmyra Atoll)	
Associated states of New Zealand	Niue · Cook Islands		
Dependencies and other territories	Australia	Ashmore and Cartier Islands · Coral Sea Islands · Norfolk Island	
	United States	American Samoa · Baker Island · Guam · Howland Island · Jarvis Island · Johnston Atoll · Kingman Reef · Midway Atoll · Northern Mariana Islands · Wake Island	
	New Zealand	Tokelau	
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Political divisions of the United States

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Federal district	Washington, D.C.
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