

Type 49 Ammunition Storage Igloos

Earthen Igloos of World War II



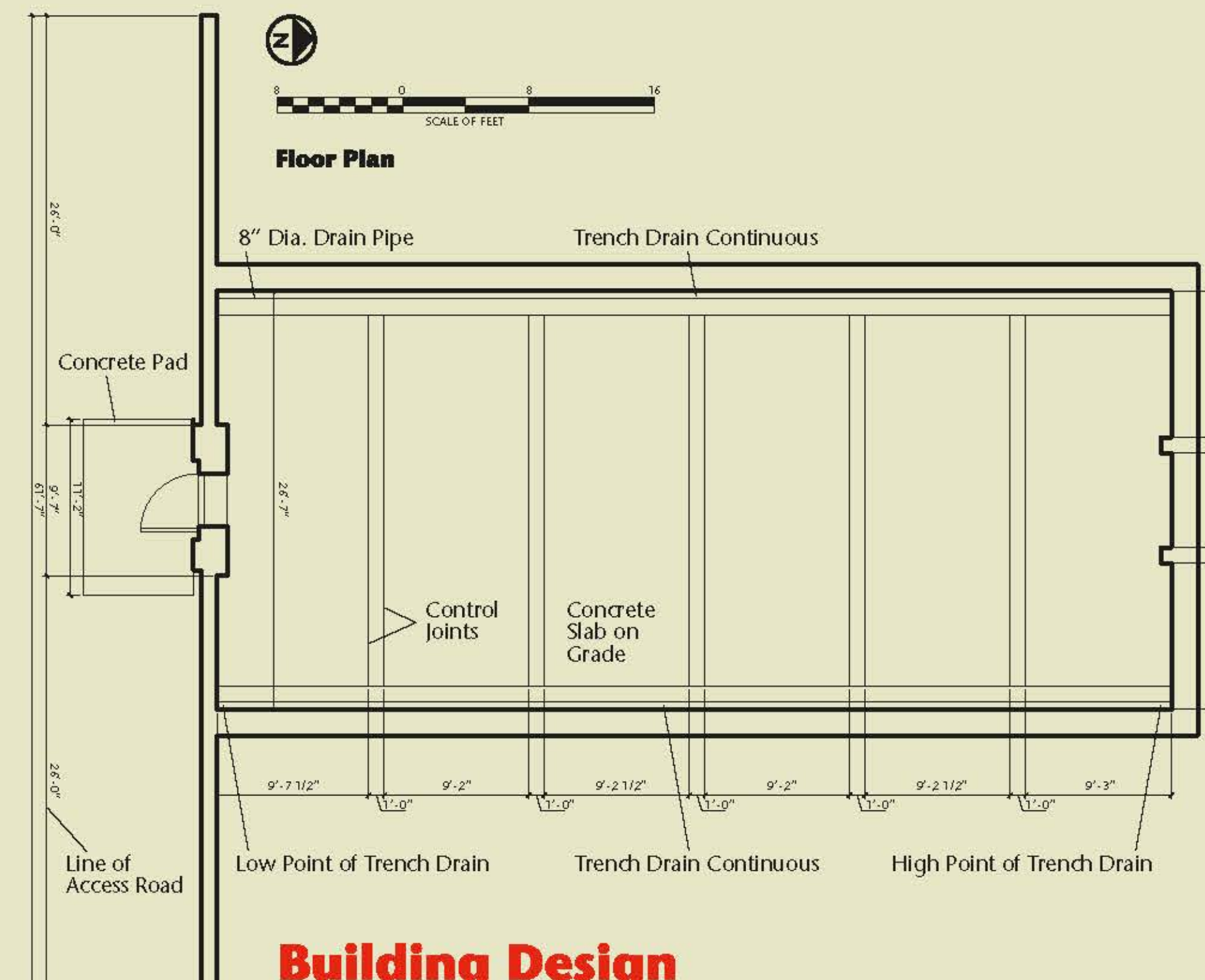
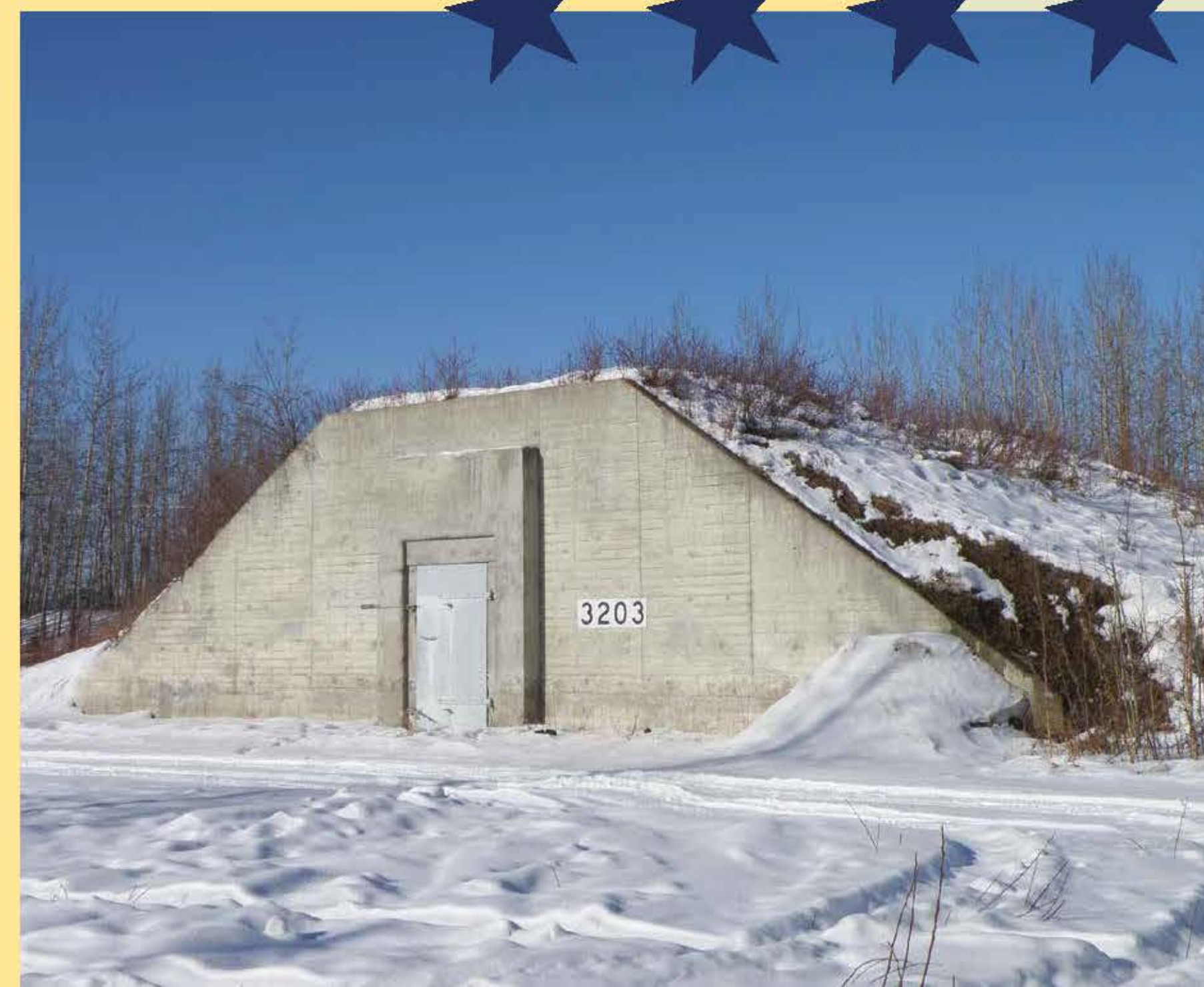
Adjacent to the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark, Building 3203 is the last remaining one of six identical Type 49 ammunition storage igloos constructed here in 1941. By the end of World War II over 20,000 of these standardized storage igloo bunkers were built on Army installations throughout the United States.

Historic Munitions Storage

This igloo and five others once located here were used for munitions storage to support operations of the coast artillery and infantry units of the 4th Army which were stationed here during the early 1940's. In 1941, the stored munitions were used by the 10th Ordnance Service Company and the 699th Ordnance Company. The Cold Weather Test Detachment also used the stored munitions for cold weather performance testing and ice-bombing.

Beginning in 1942, following America's entry into World War II, these buildings played a role in the historic Alaska-Siberia Lend-Lease operation. The Air Transport Command chose Ladd Field as its Alaska Headquarters for this program which involved the servicing and transfer of 7,926 American-made planes to the Soviet Union.

The planes were manufactured at various factories in the Lower 48, then flown to Alaska by American pilots. Command was transferred to Soviet pilots who flew the planes to Nome, then across the Bering Sea and Siberia to the frontlines of war in eastern Europe. Building 3203 and the other igloos located near here held the munitions used to arm the pursuit aircraft which protected these planes and their Soviet pilots.

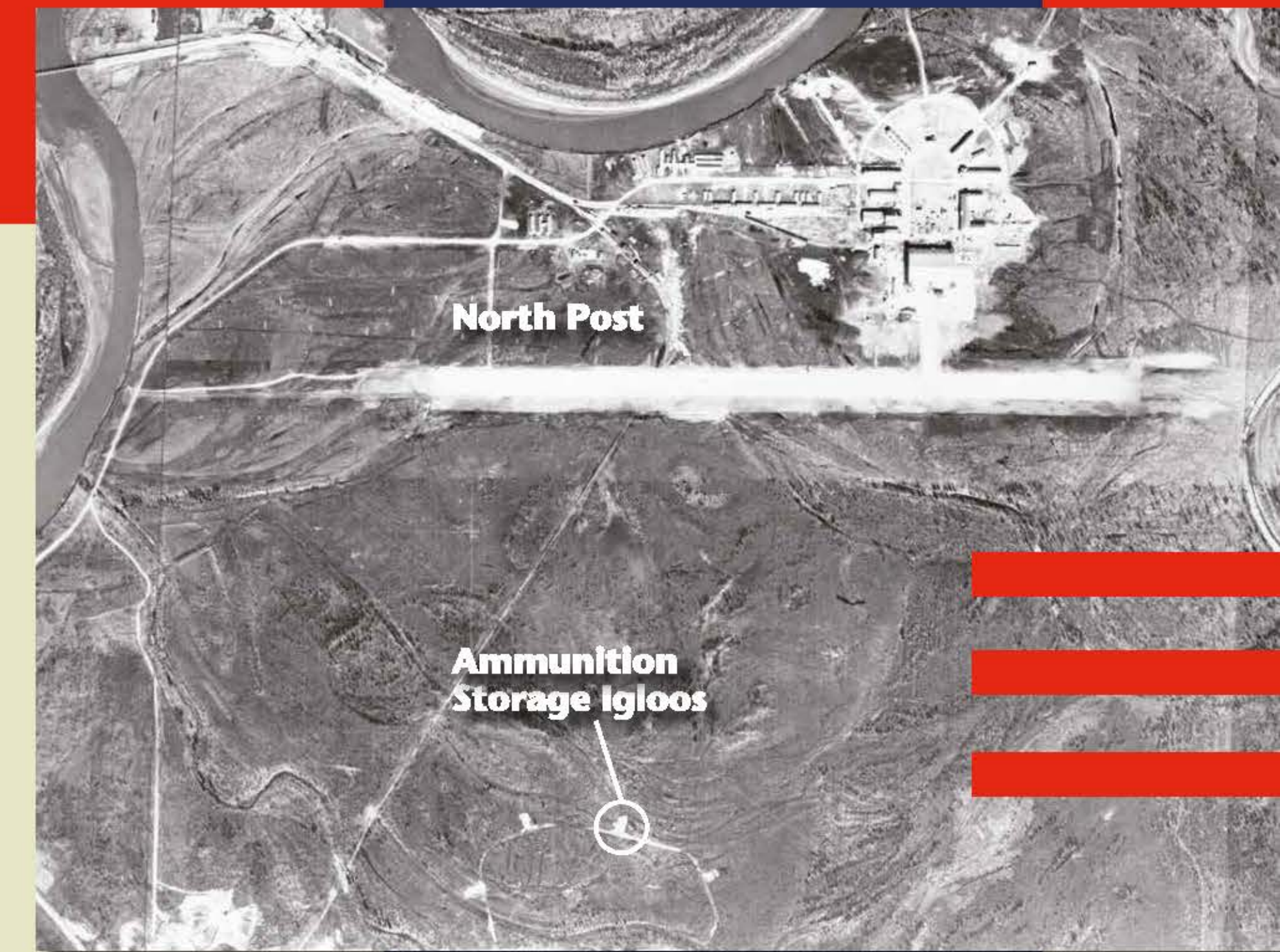
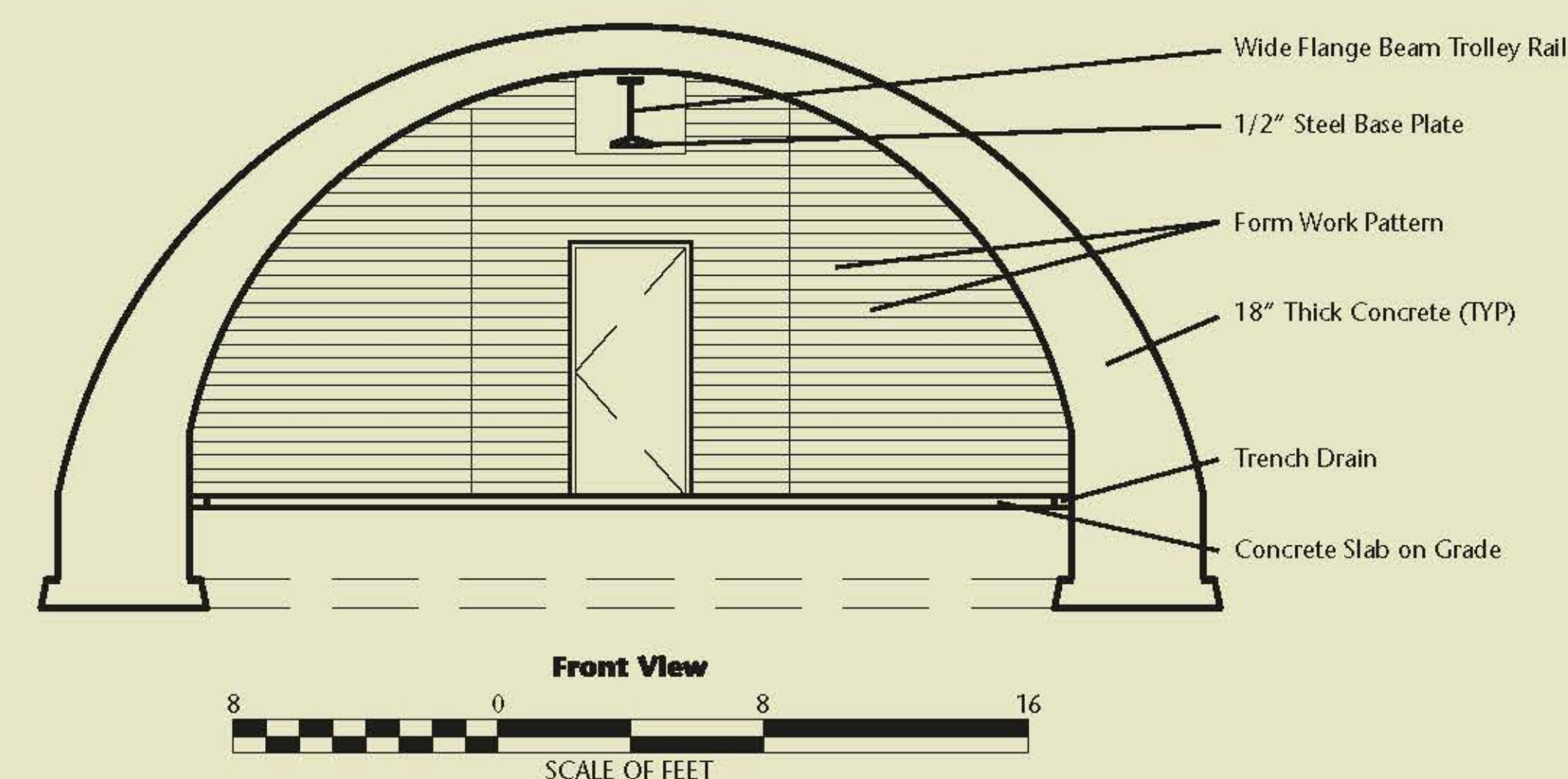


Building Design

Like all Type 49 ammunition storage igloos, Building 3203 is a rectangular, earth-covered igloo which measures 27 feet by 62 feet. The earthen covering was intended to conceal the buildings from aircraft and provide protection from bomb impacts.

Its barreled concrete walls taper in thickness from 18 inches at the base to 6 inches at the top. In the event of an explosion, this tapering design was intended to direct any blasts upward, away from neighboring igloos. The I-beam, running along the ceiling from the rear wall to the entry, originally supported a roller trolley with a coffin hoist for handling ordnance (armed munitions).

An example of the "hasty built" concrete work typical of World War II mobilization construction, the igloo was built using wooden forms made from boards and then filled with concrete. Impressions from these boards, which were removed after the concrete set, run horizontally across the igloo's exposed concrete walls.



Ladd Field, circa 1942

The igloos were built in 1941 in what was then a secluded area south of the runway. They remained in use until 1956. That year, the Air Force constructed barracks on Neely Road. Ammunition storage was then deemed a safety hazard and discontinued. Expanded construction of Soldier housing on Fort Wainwright necessitated demolition of three of the remaining igloos.

This interpretive panel was installed as part of a Memorandum of Agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer signed in 1999.