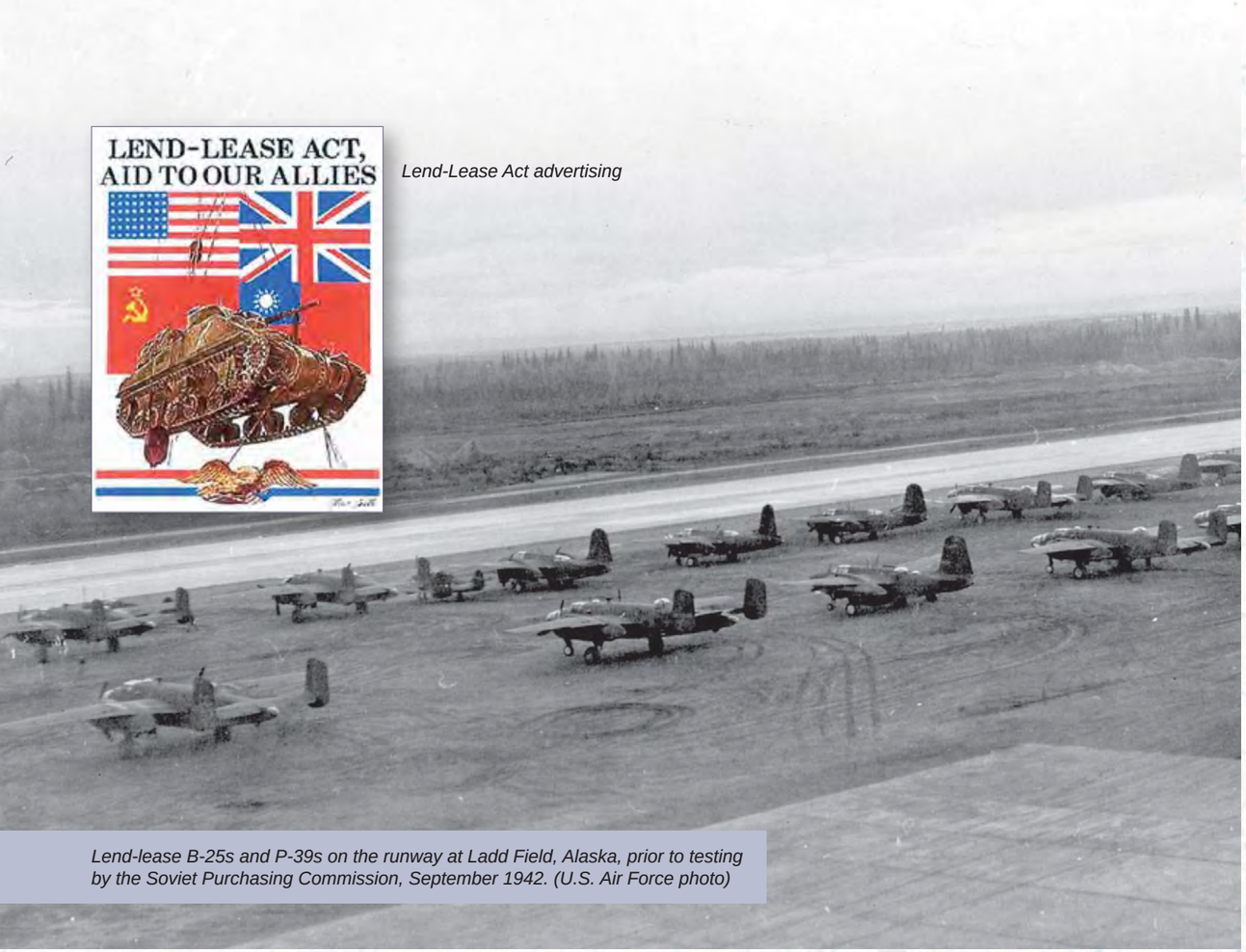
THE GREAT ARSENAL OF DEMOCRACY IN ALASKA:

LEND-LEASE OPERATIONS

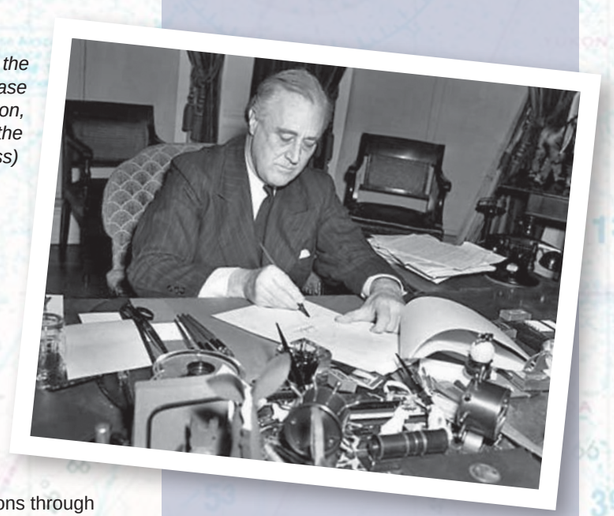
1942-1945

Lend-Lease Act advertising



Lend-lease B-25s and P-39s on the runway at Ladd Field, Alaska, prior to testing by the Soviet Purchasing Commission, September 1942. (U.S. Air Force photo)

In 1940, the Lend-Lease Act was introduced as a tool for the U.S. to help Allied nations against the Axis powers during World War II. Between 1942 and 1945, the U.S. provided supplies ranging from food and clothing to military trucks and planes to the Allies, including Britain and the Soviet Union. One of the greatest shortages along the Eastern Front was Soviet aircraft. The U.S. worked with the Soviet Union to select a handoff location for aircraft and material and, in 1942, Alaska's Ladd Field was chosen. During the course of the Lend-Lease operations, over 7,900 aircraft were transferred from the continental U.S. to Alaska before they were ferried by Soviet pilots to the Soviet Union. During the war, Ladd Field became a military hub of activity where Americans and Soviets worked and trained together for Allied victory and, in the process, made lasting impacts not only on the field's landscape, but also on each other.



President Roosevelt signs the order to extend the Lend-Lease program to the Soviet Union, June 24, 1941 (Courtesy of the Associated Press)

LEND-LEASE ACT

In the late 1930s, the U.S. watched Germany and Italy wage war in Europe from a distance. The U.S. was not anxious to return to another international conflict after the First World War, and the nation was still struggling with the Great Depression. Since the war did not affect the nation directly, Americans preferred not to engage directly. Despite these isolationist attitudes, the U.S. found ways to aid the Allied nations through other means.

The year 1940 served as a turning point in the war when Japan joined Germany and Italy in a Tripartite Pact, creating the Axis powers. Additionally, in 1940, Great Britain began running out of money and supplies, leading Prime Minister Winston Churchill to turn to President Franklin D. Roosevelt for U.S. aid. During a radio broadcast on December 29, 1940, the president proposed the Lend-Lease Act and asserted that it was the best way to help Allied forces, allowing the U.S. to serve as an "arsenal of democracy." When the president sought public support, he explained that this was not only a duty to allies in Britain and the Soviet Union, but was a necessary tool to protect Americans' future since Axis powers may threaten U.S. freedoms next.

The act passed on March 11, 1941, and, by the end of the year, several nations received aid in exchange for deferred payment, including Canada, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, Brazil, and China. On December 7, 1941, when Japan attacked the U.S-held Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the nation officially joined the war as an Allied power. For the remainder of the war, the U.S. continued to support its allied partners with supplies and military resources.

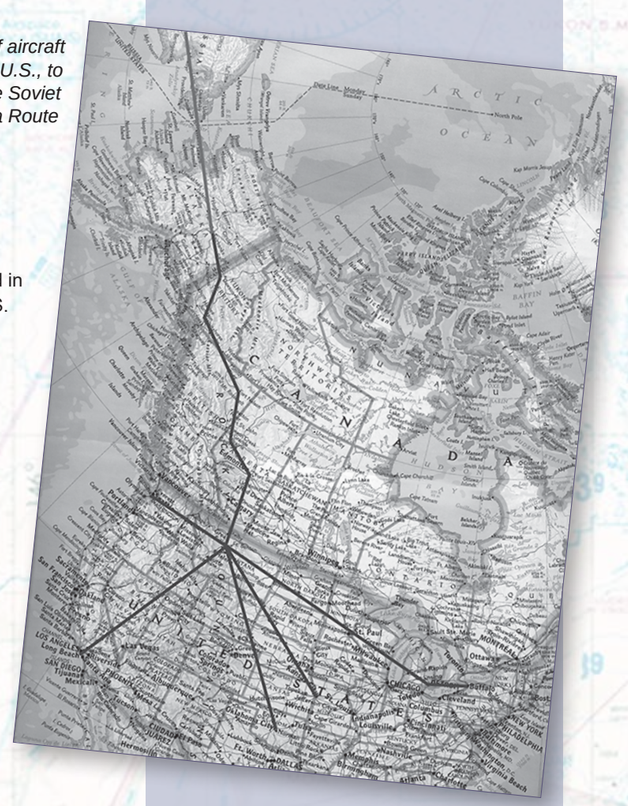
During the Lend-Lease operations, the U.S. supplied $50 million of military equipment to the Allies with approximately $11 million sent to the Soviet Union alone. Supplies varied to include trucks, combat vehicles and planes, oil, food, and even clothing. Perhaps the most significant contribution was the large number of aircraft, which were produced in U.S. factories in mass quantities and provided to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had lost more than half of its aircraft within the first year of war against the Nazis' Luftwaffe forces, making the new planes vital to Allied victory. Through Lend-Lease, the U.S. sent 2,397 Bell P-63 Kingcobra aircraft to the Soviets, which became the trademark plane of the Soviet Air Force during the war.

Two travel routes were selected to transfer supplies to Moscow in the Soviet Union. The first went through Florida and North Africa, and the second originated in Montana and traveled through Alaska and Siberia. Although other routes were tried and utilized, the route through Alaska was shorter

Flight line at Gore Field, Montana, 1943

A crate of airplane wings arriving via rail at Gore Field

Planes arranged for final outfitting, June 1945



Map showing the transfer of aircraft from factories across the U.S., to Gore Field, and on to the Soviet Union via the Alaska-Siberia Route

in distance and considered less hazardous, making the Alaska-Siberia Route the preferred flight path. Within Alaska, Ladd Field in Fairbanks was elected the official transfer point between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

ON TO GORE FIELD

The Ferry Command was created to transport U.S. supplies to Allied hands. This was a unique development in aviation history as the command's primary duty was flying aircraft to handoff stations rather than engaging in combat. Aviators called into this particular action were usually either fresh from the Army flying training program or from the civilian world. Once selected for ferrying duty to Alaska, pilots were ordered to report to Great Falls, Montana. Often this was a shock to the system. As one pilot recalled, "When we arrived at Great Falls some ten days later, it was thirty-five degrees below zero with only the main street passable and it was kept open only by the vigilance of a lone snowplow driver. It had been seventy-four degrees on departure from Lake Charles [Louisiana]."

Gore Field, near Great Falls, Montana, was selected as the staging base of the Alaska-Siberia Lend-Lease Route and served as a base for the 7th Ferrying Command. The site was chosen as the launching point because of its similar latitude to Moscow and its average of more than 300 clear flying days each year. New planes were flown into Gore Field from factories in Oklahoma, California, Missouri, and New York or arrived in crates and required assembly.

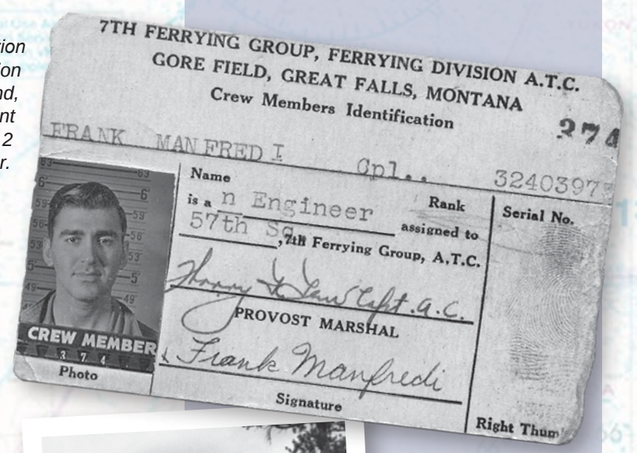
After arriving in Great Falls, pilots were assigned their planes. Often, inexperienced pilots were given the dreaded Bell P-39 Airacobra. Under normal conditions, the Airacobra was an easy plane to pilot, but the necessary addition of the 175-gallon external ferrying fuel tank made the aircraft unstable and unpredictable, quickly earning a deadly reputation. Although many male pilots transported aircraft, after 1942 and the formation of the Women Airforce Service Pilots organization (or WASPs), several female pilots were brought in to transfer planes to Montana, with some eventually flying to Ladd Field in Alaska.

Once in Great Falls, the planes were thoroughly checked over and winterized before beginning the long, cold journey northward along the Northwest Staging Route to Fairbanks.

P-39 Airacobra flying over Beaver Creek, Yukon, Canada

Flight over Watson Lake, Yukon, Canada, 1944

Corporal Manfred's identification card. During Manfred's duration in the Air Transport Command, he rose to the rank of sergeant and was designated a class 2 aerial engineer.



NORTHWEST STAGING ROUTE

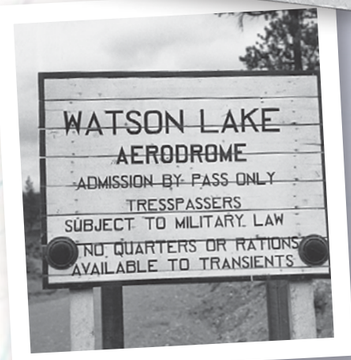
In 1942, the U.S. worked with Canada to complete the Northwest Staging Route airfields, a chain of airfields and radio stations that connected Alberta, British Columbia with the Yukon and Alaska. The Northwest Staging Route served as the Canadian and American portion of the Alaska-Siberia Route and was utilized as part of Lend-Lease operations to transport planes to Ladd Field. Working with Canada's cooperation, U.S. pilots utilized landing fields in Alberta, British Columbia, and the Yukon Territory before landing in Alaska.

Ferrying Lend-Lease planes along the Northwest Staging Route was exhausting and nerve-wracking work for new pilots. Once assigned their planes, pilots took off and flew in groups, allowing experienced flight leaders to guide new pilots, particularly in unfamiliar weather and terrain. A good flight leader guided a group along the route, pointing out important landmarks and giving detailed instruction on how to land the precariously balanced planes at the various airfields along the way. Pilots in the 1940s were trained in "four-course range navigation," which utilized Morse code to help maintain a straight flight path. If pilots were on course, they heard an even tone, but they heard an "A" if they veered too far to one side, or an "N" if they moved over the line.

The first group of planes sent to Alaska left Great Falls, Montana, on September 1, 1942. Five A-20 Havoc bombers took off from Gore Field and passed through Edmonton, Alberta; Fort Nelson, British Columbia; and Whitehorse, Yukon before arriving at Ladd Field on September 3rd.

The travel time to fly along the Northwest Staging Route into Fairbanks varied widely. Airfields were spaced approximately 100 miles apart along the route, but stormy weather often delayed takeoff for hours or days at a time. If weather was questionable, pilots and traffic control looked to the airfield windsocks to see which way the wind was blowing. When storms were so thick that the socks were not visible, the pilots stayed grounded and were considered "socked in." When "socked in," pilots often turned to silly games or activities to alleviate the boredom. One humorous activity involved whittling the strangest nose picker, a feat that could earn the winner admission into the very exclusive "Nose Picker's Club," whose sole purpose was creating ideal tools for picking one's nose.

Flying the route presented many challenges to pilots, including unpredictable weather, extreme temperatures, primitive facilities, and navigating large swathes of unmapped country. Despite these challenges, fatal crashes



Watson Lake signage, 1944. Watson Lake was one of the most luxurious stops on the Northwest Staging Route and was, by comparison, well-appointed and comfortable.

Sleeping tent at Watson Lake, 1944

P-63 Kingcobra crash at Ladd Field, Alaska

P-39 Airacobra with wing and cockpit covers

P-63 Kingcobra after an emergency landing on an Alaskan lake, 1944

were uncommon along the route. This can be attributed to rigorous flight training and an informal obligation to fly in groups, a practice that greatly improved the Army's ability to find and rescue downed planes quickly. Additionally, all pilots were required to go through a course of wilderness survival training, which was especially important in the event of a winter crash.

The first winter of Lend-Lease operations along the Northwest Staging Route was an especially cold season and temperatures frequently plummeted to -70 F. Pilots along the route carried a lifesaving packet of supplies known as the "Arctic Kit." The kit was included as part of the standard seat-pack and contained winter survival essentials such as matches, snare wire, fishing line and hooks, a hatchet, gloves, flares and flare gun, and a woolen face mask. Rounding out the survival equipment was a purpose-designed winter ensemble of coat, pants, and high-top insulated boots.

In a letter to his mother, Major George Racey Jordan recalled the frigid flight to Ladd Field,

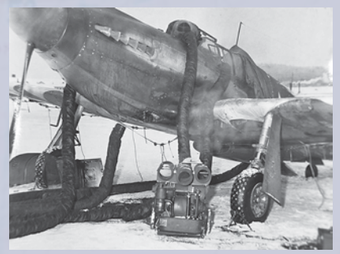
> I never knew a person could be so cold. I nearly lost a couple of toes, and my heels are still sore. My nostrils cracked when I breathed and the corners of my mouth hurt like a toothache. I shut my eyes because the eyeballs pained so. My shaving brush froze and the hairs dropped off – just like my eyelashes. I ate forty lumps of sugar and lots of candy bars…The pilot couldn't see out of the window because of his breath freezing on the plane. So we flew by instruments until the end, when we used lighter fluid to wash a hole to land by.

Cold Weather Test Detachment recommended cold-weather rations for 1942-1943 (Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force)

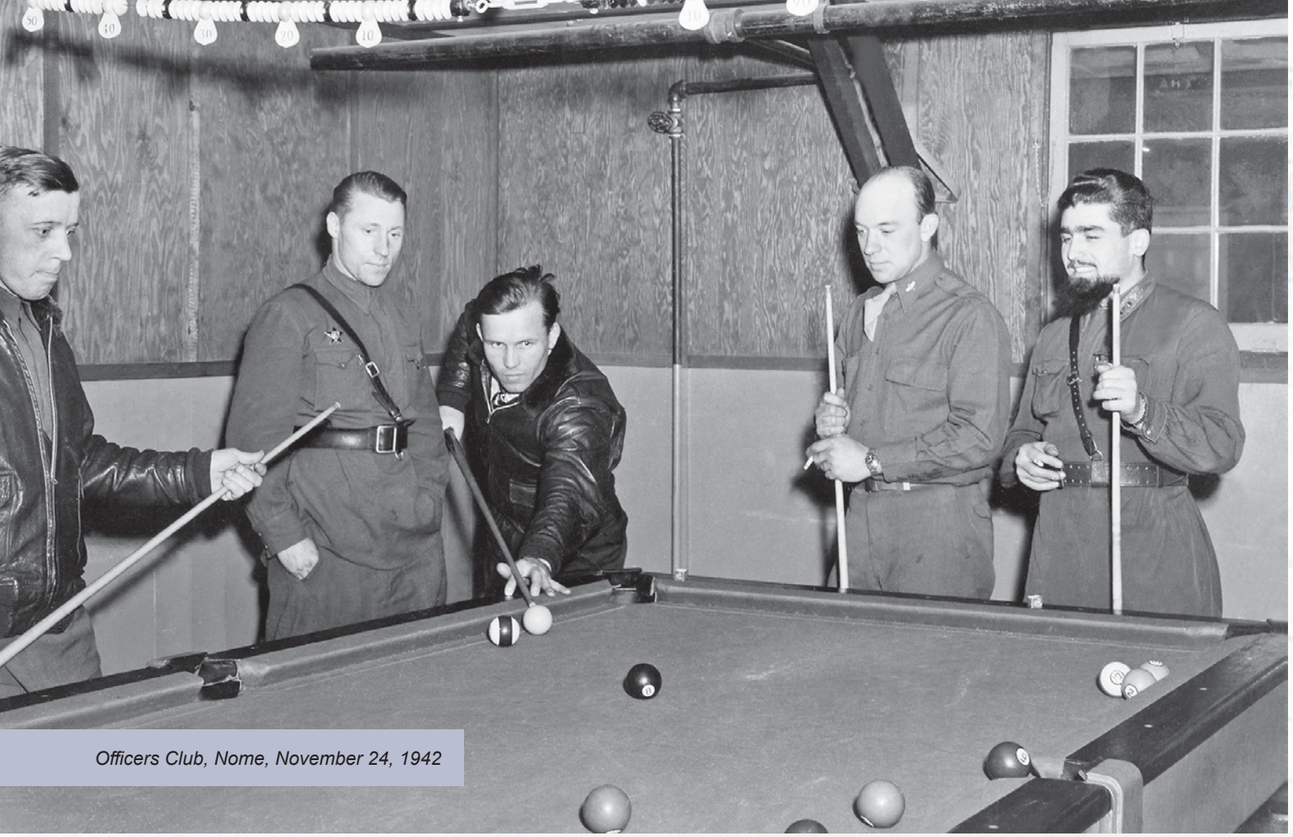
A mechanic sweeping snow off a Curtiss C-46 during a snowstorm, 1944

Keeping planes running in the freezing temperatures along the Northwest Staging Route required both imagination and patience for the pilots and mechanics. As temperatures dipped into the negative digits, the exposed planes were subject to additional damage. These hazards included: brittle rubber, antifreeze and lubricants changing viscosity, metal shrinking, cables drooping and slacking, deflated and warped tires, shrinking and seeping gaskets, slushy fuel lines, and ice melting and refreezing into hinges and cables.

By far the greatest difficulty was simply getting a cold engine to start. Few hangars or shelters existed along the route, leading mechanics to turn to creative methods to start aircraft engines. One effective method involved mixing fuel into the airplane's oil, but this was only effective to a point. On extremely cold days, mechanics drained all of the oil out of the planes and simmered it over a stove all night before putting it back the next day. This



Airplane with wing covers and heaters



Officers Club, Nome, November 24, 1942

Soviet ferrying pilots, Nome, Alaska, 1944

Soviet airmen in downtown Fairbanks (Courtesy of University of Alaska Fairbanks)

time-consuming method, though very effective, became less and less practical as Lend-Lease aircraft deliveries increased in number. At the height of winter ferrying operations, mechanics diluted the oil with fuel and then immersed an electrical heating unit into the oil tank to let it simmer all night. In the morning, mechanics removed the immersion heater and blasted the engine areas with heaters before even attempting to start the engines.

Even after landing at Ladd Field, pilots were not given much time to relax. Rather, after delivering their planes and receiving receipt, pilots were usually put onto the next transport plane and sent back to Montana to begin the journey again with new planes.

THE SOVIETS ARRIVE

Beginning in September 1942, the first of many Soviet transport planes arrived at Ladd Field. Sent aboard a Lisunov Li-2 transport plane, the first group of Soviets consisted of key operation personnel: representatives from the Soviet Purchasing Commission, commanding officers, technical inspectors, and translators. Once settled at Ladd Field, the Soviets began developing the operating procedures that would be used to quickly process and ferry planes across Alaska and into Siberia.

On September 24th, 5 transport planes arrived at Ladd Field carrying 65 Soviet pilots. Immediately, they began familiarizing themselves with American aircraft. Since most of the Soviet pilots were experienced flyers, flight training was mostly limited to cockpit and instrument control familiarization, takeoff and landing practices, and Ladd Field-specific air traffic control procedures. A mere five days later, on the 29th, Soviet pilots began flying the first group of Lend-Lease aircraft out of Ladd Field.

NEW ALLIES

From 1942 to 1945, Ladd Field developed into a busy air field dominated by both American and Soviet pilots. At the height of Lend-Lease activities, more than 300 Soviets were stationed at Ladd Field. During the 1920s and 1930s, the U.S. became more isolated from the rest of the world. The Soviet presence and resulting cross-cultural interaction at Ladd Field and in Fairbanks was a stark contrast to the rest of the U.S. Not only did the Soviets speak another language, but also they dressed and behaved differently than most Americans. Lend-Lease control officer Major Jordan described the Soviet pilots, “[T]hey were older and hardier than our boys,

Soviet and American officers examine the "Bomber Nose" variation of the Douglas A-20 Havoc, 1944

Soviet and U.S. airmen playing billiards

Colonel Keillor, Commanding Officer of Ladd Field; General Gaffney, Commander of the Alaskan Division of the Air Transport Command; and Colonel Kiselev, Soviet Union representative posing with the 5,000th Lend-Lease plane to pass through Ladd Field, September 1944 (Courtesy of the U.S. Army)

and nearly all were combat veterans. The deadly Siberian lane was considered a great honor by these pilots, and it was held out to them as a reward for courage and for wounds in action."

Their presence was widely noticed in the community, in part due to their distinctive style of dress. Visiting artist Henry Varnum Poor recalled seeing them walking around Fairbanks:

> The Russian pilots are dressy and wear all the hardware they can; pistols on their hips, and some wore the Red Star of Lenin on their breasts. They are a leather loving people. They wore high boots and wide leather belts and shoulder straps, and I wondered at the abundance of leather in a country so stripped down to essentials.

Engineering aide Helen Bowles also remembered the Soviets' leather boots and could recognize their approach down the utilidors at Ladd Field since their boots squeaked so loudly. Richard Frank worked at the field in early 1945 and recalled, "It was interesting because [it] seemed like the Russian pilots would come in bunches, and there were many of them and their clothing, I remember on warm days they'd had these long leather jackets. And then there was women pilots also, that was something new to me."

Despite the cultural differences, the two groups found ways to cope with the strain of war. Frank Nigro worked as a bartender in the American Officers' Club and frequently interacted with Soviet pilots at Ladd Field. Nigro remembered,

> [T]he Russian pilots, they didn't have a club, so they used the American officers' club, they loved to play the slot machines…[the club] had pool tables, ping pong tables, and tables where they could play chess. They loved to play chess…I was the bartender. I tell you those guys, they went crazy. They played those [slot] machines constantly. And the money that was drawn from there was taken in to operate the clubs, you see. My job was to see that I had enough cigarettes, I had enough beer, had enough candy bars, had enough change to supply the boys, when they came. When I was through working, you know, I would open up possibly around five o'clock, and then would close the club around maybe eleven o'clock at night. Beer in those days, mostly Olympia beer that we got, came in cases, packed in sawdust…I sold the beer there for ten cents a bottle on the bar, see. Hershey, and the candy bars I sold for a nickel, and cigarettes I sold for a nickel also, five cents a pack. But my orders were not to give them more than two packages of cigarettes a day, and two candy bars a day, they rationed me out, you know. That was OK. I got to learn…quite a bit of Russian. I tried to converse with

Lieutenant Makarova translating for American and Soviet engineers, 1943

Lieutenant Fenelonova speaking with Soviet mechanics at Ladd Field (Courtesy of the Kay Kennedy Collection)

those boys. A lot of them were young, like me, young pilots. They were good guys, you know.

RUSSIAN TRANSLATORS

The first set of Russian pilots to arrive at Ladd Field required training on the specifics of American planes, and translators were necessary to communicate between pilots. Early in the program, the U.S. operated a Transition School to familiarize Soviet pilots with the new planes, but shortly thereafter, the Soviets were able to instruct their own pilots.

When the first Soviet transport planes arrived at Ladd Field in September 1942, the male-dominated ferrying crews, engineers, and mechanics were accompanied by two Soviet women, Lieutenant Elena A. Makarova and Lieutenant Natasha Fenelonova. Both women attended the Military Faculty of the Institute of Foreign Languages in Moscow and graduated as lieutenants in the Soviet's Army Administrative Service. Arriving at Ladd Field after a stint on the Lend-Lease "South Route" in Tehran, Iran, Lieutenants Makarova and Fenelonova were fluent in the inner workings of American planes. Lieutenant Makarova said that, "from being technically ignorant about airplanes in the beginning, Natasha and I progressed to the point of being able, based on our experience of translating and interpreting technical data for the engineers, to become technicians in our own right."

As interpreters of important technical information, Lieutenants Makarova and Fenelonova were considered essential staff officers to the Soviet mission and, although Russian-speaking American interpreters were available, Soviet officers preferred their own interpreters during their time at Ladd Field. Both Lieutenants Makarova and Fenelonova served at Ladd Field for the duration of Lend-Lease operations before returning to the Soviet Union.

AIRCRAFT HANDOFF

During Lend-Lease operations, aircraft were required to go through rigorous inspections before being handed off to the Soviets. After the 2,000-mile journey through the Northwest Staging Route, planes arrived at Ladd Field and were checked over by the 6th Air Depot Group to ensure everything was in working order. Once cleared by American mechanics, the planes were then checked over by Soviet mechanics. If the Soviets did not agree

Soviet pilot with a North American AT-6 Texan aircraft (Courtesy of The Siberian Times)

An American soldier applying the Soviet red star, Ladd Field, 1942 (Courtesy of the U.S. Army)

that the planes met their specifications, they could, and did sometimes, refuse to accept the aircraft. Initially this generated frustration on both sides, but eventually the Americans came to understand that once the planes left American airspace, repairs would not be easy. Similarly, Soviet pilots did not want to be accountable for aircraft that failed along the Soviet leg of the route or arrived needing repairs. Over time, each unit developed a better understanding of the other, and operations ran smoothly.

Early in the Lend-Lease program, when Soviets accepted each aircraft, the Soviet red star was painted on each plane to show ownership of the aircraft. Later, as operations became more streamlined, the red star was applied at either Gore Field or at the factory. The red star itself changed throughout World War II. At the beginning of Lend-Lease operations, the emblem was a simple red star. Later it was changed to a red star over a white disc, and finally to a red star with a thin white border.

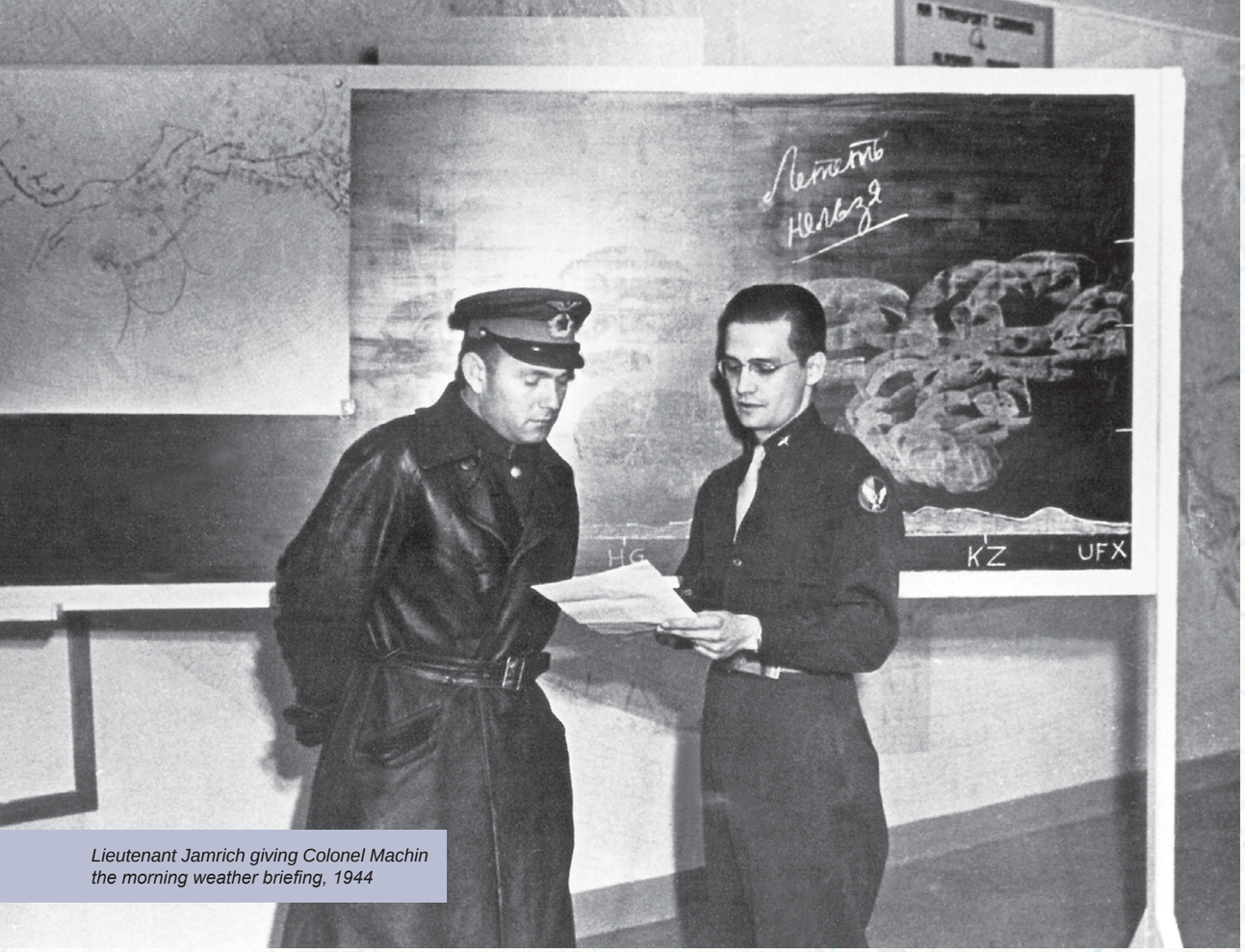
After an aircraft was deemed acceptable by the Soviets, a purchasing commission representative took over and processed the paperwork to officially transfer the aircraft into Soviet hands. Once the paperwork was completed, and the aircraft and crews were ready, the Soviets left Ladd Field in groups for the journey to Nome and then on to Siberian airfields. Departing flight groups typically consisted of a B-25 bomber, several A-20 light bombers, and P-39 fighters with extra fuel tanks. Other aircraft sent in smaller numbers to the Soviet Union included P-63s, P-40s, P-47s, C-47s, AT-6s, and one C-46.

Soviet pilots were seasoned from years fighting against the Nazis and were anxious to take the aircraft to the Eastern Front in Europe. Their departure was recounted by journalist Wesley Price, “They flew combat style, taking all the airplanes had to give, bending everything forward to the firewall and racking the P-39s around in screaming verticals. They had to fly to Nome…and on…and
they were in hell’s own hurry.”

Lieutenant Jamrich in Alaska wearing the distinctive “DVG” coat, a Cold Weather Test Detachment invention whose design was overseen personally by Colonel Gaffney, 1943

ALASKA’S CLIMATE

While Alaska proved a valuable and strategic location for the Lend-Lease program, the climate and weather were not always accommodating. Winter months were particularly harsh for Lend-Lease activities, especially when temperatures dropped severely. On particularly cold mornings, individual heaters were placed on aircraft engines for up to two hours to begin warming the mechanisms. Additionally, Ladd Field’s heating plant combined with the frigid weather often produced



Lieutenant Jamrich giving Colonel Machin the morning weather briefing, 1944

Lieutenant Thompson Highfill of the 99th Bomb Ground (center) with Russian pilots, Andrea Hincerockur (left) and Corzen Venzopkin (right), in front of a Soviet P-39 (Courtesy of the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force)

ice fog that covered the runways. These conditions, in conjunction with the shorter period of daylight and window for flying, often hindered operations.

Lieutenant John X. Jamrich joined the first class of cadets at the University of Chicago Meteorology Program in March 1942 before going on to complete the program in November the same year. After graduating, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Air Corps and sent to Anchorage, Alaska, where he trained for service in the Aleutian Islands. This plan was waylaid when Jamrich's commanding officers discovered that he was fluent in several languages, including Russian. The lieutenant transferred immediately to Ladd Field as a weather forecaster in the 16th Weather Detachment to assist Soviet pilots ferrying planes to the Soviet Union along the Alaska-Siberia Route.

Forecasting the weather in the early 1940s was a skilled task as there was no high-tech satellite/radar imagery to pull from or wide network of weather stations in Alaska. Lieutenant Jamrich and his colleagues received weather observations every six hours from a scattering of stations across Alaska including Point Barrow, Kotzebue, Nome, Anchorage, and Dutch Harbor. Jamrich recalled being able to sometimes "squeeze" encoded weather observations from the Soviet Commanding Officer, Colonel Michael G. Machin, but not always. Jamrich shared his struggle when deciphering the forecast because, "If my forecast was for a flight and I would be wrong, all that effort of heaters and awakened personnel would not be very welcome."

The photograph shows Lieutenant Jamrich giving his morning weather briefing to Colonel Machin, commander of the Soviet military mission in Alaska, in the Weather Briefing Room. Jamrich drew out a cross-section of the weather between Fairbanks, Nome, and Markovo in Siberia (as seen behind him in this image) and would write either "flight not possible" or "flight possible" (the day pictured here on August 14, 1944, was a "flight not possible" day). The easy to understand visual aid of the cross-section, as well as his simple directive to fly or not, was greatly appreciated by the Soviet commanders and earned Jamrich their respect.

ON TO RUSSIA

Soviet pilots were responsible for the aircraft once the planes transferred to Soviet control. Pilots traveled from Ladd Field through Galena, Moses Point, and Nome, Alaska, until they reached Siberia and utilized Soviet airfields in Uel'kal Markovo, Siemchan, Yakutsk, Kirensk, Krasnoyarsk, and Novosibirsk.

Soviet and American ferrying pilots, 1944

Captain Louis Klam (left) with Captain Gamov (right), Nome, 1944

The Soviet pilots experienced several accidents due to weather, equipment difficulties, and inexperience in U.S. planes. At times, U.S. pilots traveled with the Soviets to transport planes to the far eastern side of Siberia. On August 4, 1943, Captain Peter Gamov was scheduled to accompany a group of P-39 aircraft across the Bering Strait to Uel'kal in his assigned B-25 bomber. Shortly after takeoff, Gamov's mechanic drew his attention to a problem with the bomber's nosewheel. Gamov investigated and found that a strut loosened and the wheel was dangling. Realizing that landing was going to be an issue, Gamov radioed to the P-39 pilots to fly to Galena and wait for him while he figured out what to do. He contacted Colonel Machin at Ladd Field and relayed the situation.

Colonel Machin rushed to the control tower and with Captain Gamov on the radio, discussed options. Machin initially ordered Gamov to belly-land the bomber on the Ladd Field runway, but Gamov offered a different suggestion, one given to him by his American flight instructor, Lieutenant Nicholas de Tolly, the year prior. The plan was to have two trucks, manned with grappling hooks, on either side of the runway. As the plane came in to land, the hooks would snag the plane's tail and hold it down while everyone braked to a slow and hopefully controlled stop. This approach was meant to prevent the handicapped plane from ground-looping, or spinning out to the side, possibly even cartwheeling, and crashing into the river.

As Captain Gamov approached Ladd Field, two trucks were already speeding down either side of the runway, their beds containing men with grappling hooks and ropes, eyeing the big B-25 warily as it came in for landing. As Gamov lowered the plane over the tarmac, the men with the hooks took aim and snagged the bomber's tail with their hooks. Everyone began to slowly brake, drawing the big bomber to a stop along the edge of the river. It seemed that all was well, until, in their excitement to get their feet on the ground, the flight crew that Gamov ordered to the back of the plane to counter-weight the nose-heavy bomber, surged forward to the exit, tipping the bomber forward and bending its propellers.

Once the aircraft reached Krasnoyarsk in Russia, they had traveled over 8,000 miles from their launching pad in Great Falls, Montana. Lend-Lease control officer Major Jordan explained, "It is the coldest airway in the world across the Yukon to Alaska and through the 'Pole of Cold' in Siberia, but it worked."

Lend-Lease Monument, Fairbanks, Alaska (Courtesy of Alaska.org)

Lieutenant N.F. Kuznetsov after a successful sortie in his P-40K (Courtesy of The Siberian Times)

LASTING IMPACT

Lend-Lease operations played a significant role in aiding the allied Soviet forces and contributed to the eventual victory against Axis forces. Over the course of the war, 7,926 planes (or approximately 56% of the Lend-Lease aircraft destined for the Soviet front) traveled through Ladd Field along the Alaska-Siberia Route. The former Soviet Minister of Defense, Marshal G. K. Zhukov, cited the Lend-Lease operations as instrumental to the war's outcome. He asserted,

> When we entered the war, we were still a backward county in the industrial sense as compared to Germany…Today [in 1963] some say the Allies really didn't help us… But, listen, one cannot deny that the Americans shipped over to us materiel without which we could not have equipped our armies held in reserve or been able to continue the war… We did not have enough munitions [and] how would we have been able to turn out all those tanks without the rolled steel sent to us by the Americans?

The efforts of those involved in the Alaska-Siberia Route were considered top secret, and their activities were not made public until near the end of the war. However, their efforts are well-known and even commemorated. In 2006, the Lend-Lease Monument was introduced to Griffin Park in Fairbanks as a testament to these men and women from the U.S., Canada, and Russia.

Russian planes flying over Berlin

Yalta Conference with the three “Big Allies” of Britain, the U.S., and the Soviet Union represented (Winston Churchill, Franklin Roosevelt, and Josef Stalin), 1945 (Courtesy of the Getty Foundation)

In 1945, the war began winding down with Allied victory in Europe in May and in the Pacific in August. Following the Japanese surrender, Soviet personnel pulled up stakes at Ladd Field and returned home. Following that homecoming, relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union reached a breaking point, which led to a Cold War lasting nearly 50 years. Once again, Ladd Field served a significant role, but this time as a focal point for reconnaissance and strategic defense against its former World War II allies.

Otis Hays, Jr. served as a staff officer with the Alaska Defense Command, which supervised the liaison program between the Americans and Russians in Alaska. Hays explained the legacy of the Lend-Lease operations in Alaska this way, “[T]he real story of the Alaska-Siberia Route’s success was a genuine tribute to Russians and Americans alike. They shared sub-Arctic flying hazards, surmounted most of the language and cultural barriers, and refused to let mutual suspicion overwhelm them.” For a brief time in the 1940s, Americans and Soviets worked side-by-side to support the Lend-Lease Act’s “arsenal of democracy.”

Hangar 1, Ladd Field, 1942

Acknowlegements

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Cultural Resources Management at Fort Wainwright

The Cultural Resources Management Program supports the Army's mission by inventorying and managing cultural resources in a manner that complies with federal law, minimizes impacts on the mission, supports sustainability of resources and infrastructure, and provides sound stewardship of properties eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Cultural Resources Management Office is located within the Environmental Division, Building 3023. Copies of our publications and additional information on the history of Fort Wainwright are available at the program office and other outlets. Business hours are Monday through Friday 7:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

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