



The installation known today as Fort Wainwright entered the world stage during the 1940s because of a unique episode in American military history, one brought about largely by weather, geography and international politics.

The post was Ladd Field, established in 1939 as a small cold weather test station. The airfield was named in recognition of Maj. Arthur K. Ladd, an Army Air Corps pilot who died in a crash in South Carolina in 1935. Cold weather testing remained an important element of Ladd Field operations throughout World War II, but another task conceived as an act of U.S. diplomacy soon emerged as the dominant mission.

The United States and the Soviet Union agreed that Ladd Field would be the transfer point for thousands of warplanes provided to the Russians to help win the fight against Hitler's Germany. The tale of how the airmen known later as the "Cold Nose Boys" developed the techniques needed for safe cold weather operations in the air and how an air bridge to Russia formed on the outskirts of Fairbanks is the story of Ladd Field during World War II.

The demands of wartime transformed Ladd Field into a major military installation that was home to thousands of troops, more than 700 buildings and connected in important ways to the war in the Pacific and in Europe.

Alaska's key position on the world map contributes to the importance today of Fort Wainwright. That was no less the case for Ladd Field, built not long after Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell had warned Congress, "I believe, in the future, he who holds Alaska will hold the world and I think it is the most strategic place in the world." It was only as World War II was starting in Europe that a consensus developed that Mitchell was right about the strategic importance of Alaska.



*Maj. Arthur K. Ladd. Courtesy Alaskan Air Command History Office, Elmendorf AFB.*



*Alaska's delegate to Congress, Anthony Dimond, 1932-1945. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, UAF-1992-90-17.*



*Brig. Gen. Billy Mitchell. University of Alaska Fairbanks, Archives, 1987-0149-00074.*