

One of the most important aspects of the history of Ladd Field is how this remote outpost played a pivotal role in a campaign by the United States to help the Soviet Union battle Hitler. Serving as a bridge to Russia became its most sensitive mission, although one that was officially cloaked in secrecy for the first two years.

The Alaska ★ Siberia Route



The 5,000th aircraft delivered at Ladd Field, Sept. 1944.

Early in the war, Germany collaborated with Russia, but that ended in 1941 when Hitler double-crossed Stalin and sent 250 divisions toward key Russian cities across a 2,000 mile front. Hitler believed that defeating Russia was the key to conquering England. "If Russia is beaten, England's last hope is gone. Germany is then master of Europe and the Balkans," Hitler had written a year earlier.

As the Germans battered the unprepared Red Army in 1941 and wiped out many of its aircraft, the Roosevelt administration declared that helping the Russians was essential to the defense of the United States. Recognizing that the Russians were taking some pressure off England, Roosevelt pledged to help.

Nearly \$50 billion worth of war material flowed to a total of 32 U.S. allies under the Lend-Lease Act. About \$11 billion of that went to the Russians, with most of the 15 million tons delivered by ship. The supplies included 427,000 trucks, 13,000 combat vehicles and everything else from shoes to diesel engines and nearly 15,000 combat planes.

In the fall of 1942, U.S. and Russian leaders had worked out a scheme under which airplanes would be delivered from the United States to Russia via Alaska. Other routes by sea and air were used to supply Lend-Lease equipment, but going through Alaska was a way to get planes to the front within days, instead of weeks or months.

The leaders of the two nations agreed, after months of haggling, that Ladd Field, hitherto a small testing station, would be the point where the planes would be handed over to the Russian pilots. The Soviets wanted no part of a plan to have Americans fly beyond Alaska.



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1943

August 22, 1943

Allied forces launch assault on Kiska. They discover the Japanese had abandoned the island the previous month. Mines, booby traps and friendly fire accidents create casualties. Total of about 1,000 U.S. forces die during Aleutian campaign from June 1942 to August 1943.

October 1943

Ladd Field transferred to Air Transport Command.

November 1943

150,000 military personnel in Alaska. War Department publicly confirms Lend-Lease program.

December 1943

Lt. Leon Crane survives crash of B-24. Spends 84 days in wilderness.

December 21, 1943

Naval aircraft from Attu, Aleutian Islands, bomb Paramushiro- Shimushu area, Kurile Islands.



1944

February 1944

Dog teams help rescue pilots who crashed east of Harding Lake.

May 1944

Vice President Henry Wallace stops at Ladd.

June 1944

D-Day invasion begins on the Normandy Coast.

July 1944

Commercial use allowed on the Army's Seattle-Ketchikan communications line.

August 1944

War Department cuts back Alaska forces. Ladd Field has 1,700 civilians on payroll.

October 1944

Japanese Navy suffers heavy losses in Battle of Leyte Gulf.

November 1944

FDR elected to fourth term.

December 1944

Air assaults increase on Japanese capital.