



Back and forth negotiations with Stalin took place while the Japanese were invading the Aleutians. For the meantime the Air Transport Command (ATC) delivered airplanes, cargo and people along the Northwest Route from Montana to Fairbanks via Edmonton and Whitehorse. There were landing fields at Northway, Tanacross and Big Delta in Alaska and nine others in Alberta, British Columbia and the Yukon.

The first Lend-Lease planes transported along the 2,000-mile route from Great Falls, Montana to Fairbanks arrived on Sept. 3, 1942. It was a two-day flight for the five A-20 bombers, which arrived with a white star on the fuselage that had to be replaced with a Russian red star, the insignia of the USSR.

There was a language barrier, a cultural barrier and a political barrier, but the operation was held together by the mutual understanding that the two sides were fighting a common enemy that threatened their survival. Ultimately the Americans transferred 7,926 planes at Ladd Field to Soviet crews, more than half of the nearly 15,000 built for the Russians.

Hangar One was divided into two halves, with the Cold Weather Test Detachment on the east side and the Soviets on the west. One of the two positions in the control tower was taken by a Russian-speaking American to communicate with the pilots, most of whom were combat veterans. "The Russians were well acquainted with the horrors of war," enlisted man Paul Solka once wrote. "Few had not had members of their family killed or mutilated in the struggle."

The Ladd Field newspaper included helpful Russian phrases and the base offered classes in Russian, but the language barrier was such that sign language often came into play when interpreters were not handy.



Russians at mess hall. AAF pilot, courtesy of the Pioneer Air Museum/Randy Acord.



Russian Pilots' Briefing Room, Hangar One. AAF photo, courtesy of the Pioneer Air Museum/Randy Acord.



Russian and American non-commissioned officers at the party celebrating the Second Anniversary of the Soviet Military Mission in Alaska, Sept. 1944. University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1987-0149-00034.

Frank Nigro, a private, worked a second job as a bartender at the Russian officers club. "A lot of them were young, like me, young pilots," he said. "They were good guys, you know."

The size of the Russian contingent sometimes took visitors by surprise. Writing about his stop in Fairbanks, Maj. Gen. Deane, the head of the U.S. military mission in Moscow, said it was a "memorable experience."

"In the first place, we found that our air base at Fairbanks was at least half under Soviet control. Officer's quarters, office space, hangars and shops had been turned over to the Red Air Force. Russian and American officers ate at a central mess. There were no restrictions whatsoever on Soviet personnel. They were free to use all the facilities of the station and to travel at will," Deane wrote.

About 300 Russians served at Ladd during the peak of operations, with many more transient flight crews arriving on a regular basis from the west to pick up airplanes. The Red star became a familiar sight in the skies over Fairbanks as the Russians would leave in groups. "There was feverish activity on the field, a tremendous roaring of motors as a large convoy was getting ready to take off," wrote Henry Varnum Poor, a soldier and artist. The bombers and pursuit planes would take off one after another, circling the field until all were ready to go. "And all together they moved into a tight formation and disappeared over the western hills," Poor wrote.

Cold Weather Test Detachment pilot Randy Acord said the normal procedure was for a flight of three airplanes to leave as a group of one B-25, three A-20s, and nine P-39s or



Inside Russian NCO quarters Sr. Sgt. Karnaoukh takes time out to show M/Sgt. Kostin his collection of "pin-ups." Kay Kennedy Aviation Collection, 1991-0098-00868, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Early in the program, the Soviet Red Star was painted on the aircraft at Ladd Field. September 1942. University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1987-0149-00033.

**January 1945**  
Germans lose Battle of the Bulge.

**March 1945**  
Military personnel in Alaska reduced to 50,000.

**April 1945**  
Roosevelt dies. Truman sworn in as president. Women's Army Corps unit arrives at Ladd Field.

**May 1945**  
Victory in Europe Day celebrated May 8 in U.S. Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis visits Ladd Field.

**June 1945**  
Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, who commanded all troops in Alaska early in the war, was killed by artillery fire on Okinawa. He was one of two three-star generals killed during the war.

**August 1945**  
Japan surrenders after atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

**September 1945**  
Lend-Lease ends.

**November 1945**  
Ladd Field transferred to 11th Air Force.

