

P-63s later on. The Russians always had priority on the airfield, but not in the mess. "We took the first time that was convenient to us, and then the Russians would have to fit into that," Acord said.

The relationship with the Russians was strained at times, with the Americans complaining that the Russians were too picky about accepting planes with minor mechanical problems. David Chavchavadze, an American translator, said there was a good reason for this attitude. The North American part of the Lend-Lease route was difficult, but the Russian segments were worse because landing fields were farther apart and more primitive. "The Americans were irritated because the Soviets were so sticky in signing for and taking over this largess. Chavchavadzew wrote, "They did not realize that if a plane developed mechanical trouble on its way to the front, the Soviet mechanic who had signed for it was held responsible, and if it crashed, the consequence for him could be very serious." He said many American pilots regarded the Russians "as being somewhat arrogant and cavalier about their flying ability, even to the point of being reckless."

With wartime censorship, the presence of Russians in Fairbanks and the existence of the Alaska Siberia (ALSIB) route was not talked about much until the summer of 1944, although in towns along the way the operation had been common knowledge.

The Russians became famous in Fairbanks for buying large quantities of consumer goods that were hard to come by in their homeland. One American officer told of the time he was in a Fairbanks store and a Russian asked to buy shoes. "What kind?" the clerk asked. "All kinds," the Russian said. "What size?" the clerk asked. "All sizes," the Russian said. The clerk sold him the old lines of shoes the store held in stock. Fairbanks, where there was no rationing, was in the words of one historian, a "buyer's paradise" for the Russians.

The Russian presence at Ladd continued until the end of the war. In a span of about three years, the U.S. delivered 7,926 planes at the Fairbanks post. Historian Otis Hays, Jr. summed up this unique episode of the war by writing that the Soviet and American pilots shared the hazards of flying in the far north, conquered most of the language and cultural barriers and refused to allow mutual mistrust to overwhelm them.



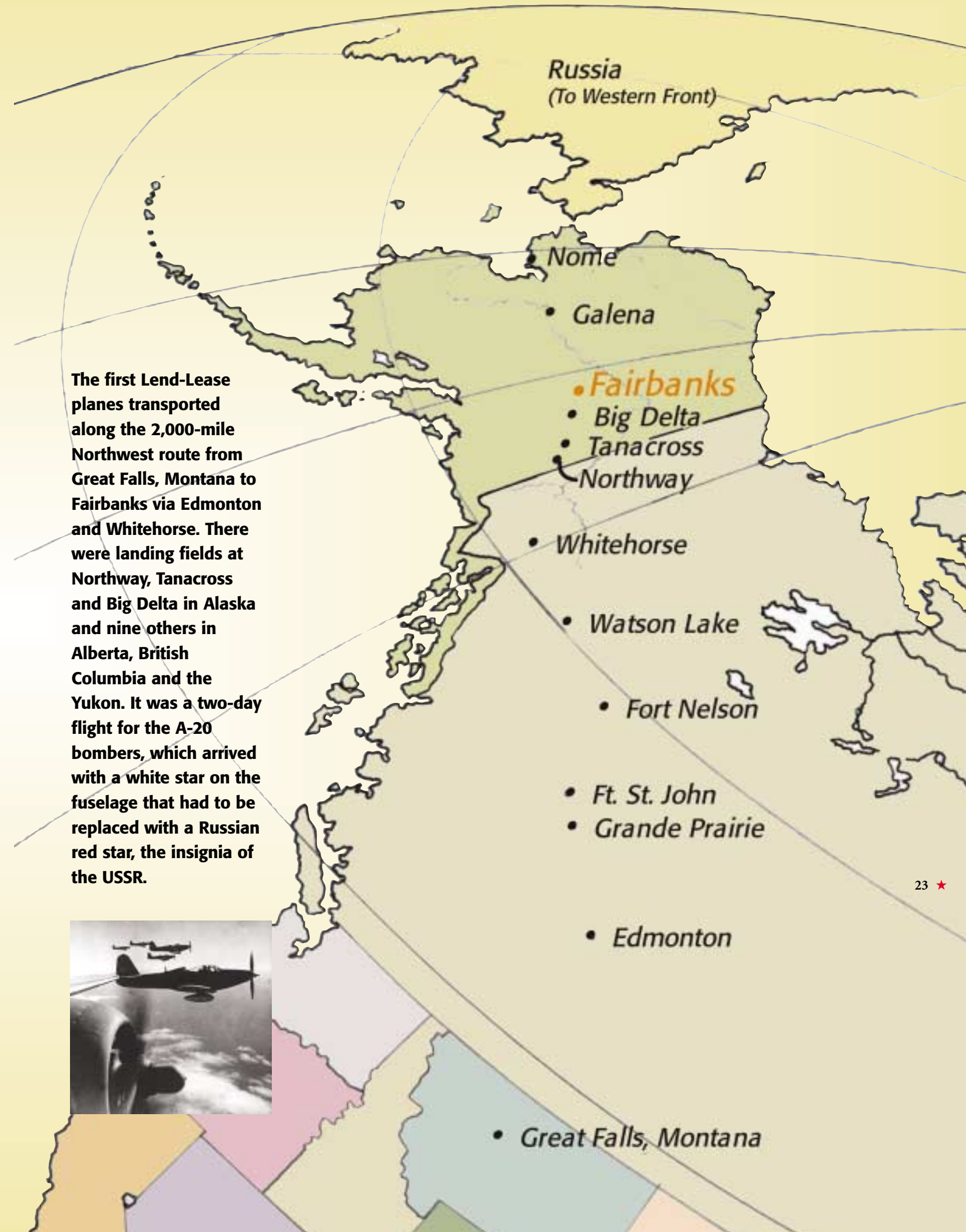
Russian soldiers out and about in front of Lavery's Grocery on 2nd Avenue and Cushman Street. Rex and Lillian Wood collection, 2002-0164-00046, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Visiting Russians shopping in Fairbanks, 1944. The photographer reported that "these women spoke English and appeared to function as interpreters." Rex and Lillian Wood collection, 2002-0164-00048, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



Two Russian officers return a salute from American GIs on 2nd Avenue, Fairbanks, 1944. Rex and Lillian Wood collection, 2002-0164-00049, Archives and Manuscripts, Alaska and Polar Regions department, University of Alaska Fairbanks.



The first Lend-Lease planes transported along the 2,000-mile Northwest route from Great Falls, 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. It was a two-day flight for the 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.

