



An early model Sikorsky helicopter was tested at Ladd Field in the winter of 1943-44, nicknamed "the Arctic Jitterbug," University of Alaska, Fairbanks Archives UAF-1999-204-82

Photo at left; Airmen of Ladd Field, 1940. Courtesy of Elmendorf AFB History Office.



extended, preparing to hurl a bomb, which prompted newspapers to coin the term "Polar Bear Squadron" and later the "Cold Nose Boys."

The station had a roster of 14 officers and 200 enlisted men and a limited menagerie of two B-17s, two P-37s and one O-38. The B-17s undertook flights that ranged from photographic missions of central Alaska to a trip to Nome in November, returning with 2,000 pounds of fur mukluks and reindeer parkas to be tested by servicemen. The Daily News-Miner said that nearly everyone in Nome turned out to get a look at the plane, which returned to Fairbanks that night, landing by the light of flares.

But one of the P-37s and one of the B-17s did not even make it through the winter. A P-37 was damaged and out of commission soon after its arrival and one of the Flying Fortresses crashed while on a trip Outside, killing the crew of eight. The airmen were memorialized by the naming of roads on the new base after them, with most of the names still in use today—Freeman, Ketcham, Trainer, Whidden and Applegate.

The biggest challenges facing the Cold Weather Test Detachment appeared when the temperature dropped. Airplane heaters wouldn't work, wheels wouldn't turn, controls wouldn't budge, ice covered the insides of cockpit windshields and brakes froze. "Planes and men at Ladd Field will get a real taste of the rigors of an Arctic winter this year, for hangars have not been completed and will not be ready until the next year, so the planes will be out in the open in temperatures ranging down to 50 degrees below zero. It's just plain hard work to service and fly a plane in temperatures like that," Gaffney said.



Cold Weather Test Detachment ground equipment test area, east side of Hangar One. Note C-13 battery carts and Herman-Nelson heaters. B-26 in background. Temperature -35°F. AAF photo ca. 1944, courtesy Russ Sackett.

# The Cold Nose Boys GET TO WORK



A C-54 gets a hot-air treatment before flying into the cold blue yonder.

The main road leading into Fort Wainwright is named for Brig. Gen. Dale V. Gaffney, who became known in some quarters as the "Screaming Eagle of the Yukon."

Gaffney, who arrived at Ladd Field with the original survey crew and was closely connected to every stage of the field's development throughout the war, said the goal for the first winter of the detachment was to "Fly 'em and watch 'em." The pilots and other crew members would fly the planes and watch what happened, making adjustments and recommendations to deal with the cold.

In October, two B-17s arrived and the Cold Weather Test Detachment "grew into its name," the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner said. "The mammoth sky destroyers are but the leadoff guinea pigs of a composite squadron from Uncle Sam's military menagerie," the newspaper said. The planes had a logo showing a bear with its right paw



Chilly Billy, a B-17G, receives cold weather preparation for the arctic environment.



A B-24D with open bay doors awaits the loading of practice bombs that were delivered by sled. University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1987-0149-00035.



B-24 with engine heater (duct) at 35°F below.



P-38 readied for flight. Courtesy Pioneer Air Museum.



Alaska Air Depot flight test on B-25 and Jeep at Ladd Field. The B-25 had a 75mm cannon on the left lower nose. University of Alaska Fairbanks Archives, 1987-0149-00039.



The wings are swept clear of snow on this C-46. Courtesy Pioneer Air Museum.