



LEND LEASE AIR ROUTE OF WORLD WAR II

On 11 March 1941, the United States Congress passed the Lend-Lease Act in order to assist the Allies in fighting fascist regimes in Europe. This act authorized the country to provide supplies to any countries deemed “vital to the defense of the United States.” The Lend-Lease Act of 1941 permitted the United States to lend or lease supplies to allies fighting aggression. It replaced the cash-and-carry policy. Under the Lend-Lease Act, payment could be in kind, in property, or in any benefit accepted by the United States, and payment could be deferred to a later date. The act intended weapons and supplies to go particularly to Great Britain but allowed shipments to any country whose defense was “vital” to the interests of the United States. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, that included the Soviet Union.

The United States wanted the Soviet Union to continue to fight Germany on Germany’s Eastern Front, so the United States sent equipment and supplies to our Soviet allies. We were allies by sharing a common enemy. To deliver aircraft to the Soviet Union, the United States constructed the Northwest Staging Route, an air route over the Alaska Highway then also under construction. Montana became the point of departure for aircraft being ferried to Russia via Alaska. WASPS, Women Air Service Pilots, often flew airplanes from aircraft factories to Great Falls. In Great Falls, the 7th Ferrying Group of the Air Transport Command took charge. The Ferrying Group transported the planes to Alaska, to Fairbanks, where Soviet pilots accepted command. The Soviets flew the airplanes over the Alaska-Siberia Air Route, from Fairbanks, to Nome’s Marks Field (now the Nome Airport), across the Bering Sea, over Siberia, to the railhead at Krasnoyarsk. The Soviet pilots experienced a few accidents due to weather, equipment problems, or inexperience — most of the Soviet pilots had only a few hours of training in the U.S. aircraft they were flying west, yet most of the planes made it into combat along the Eastern Front.

The Civil Aeronautics Administration began construction of the Nome airfield in 1941, and the Army soon assumed responsibility for what was called Marks Air Force Base. The intent was to protect the northwest coast of Alaska from attack by the Japanese, and military planes based at Nome provided that protection throughout the war. These planes were based initially at Marks Field and later at the nearby Satellite Field. At different times, B-18 and B-24D bombers and P-39F fighters provided the defense of Nome and the northwest coast. The second field was constructed to separate the defensive aircraft of the 11th Air Force from Air Transport Command and Soviet personnel involved in the Lend-Lease activities at Marks Field. Lend Lease became the main activity at Marks Field, though fog at Marks sent all aircraft to Satellite Field or inland landing strips.

From September 1942 through August 1945, Army’s Air Transport Command, specifically the 7th Ferrying Group — based in Great Falls, Montana — delivered nearly 8,000 airplanes to the Soviets in Fairbanks.

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