

# The Arctic Airfield That Helped Win The Second World War

During the Second World War, the Arctic played a pivotal role in the Allied victory, serving as a crucial lifeline for the transportation of supplies and aircraft to the Soviet Union under the lend-lease program. At the heart of this logistical operation was an airfield located in a remote and unforgiving region of Alaska: Ladd Field.

## Ladd Field: A Gateway to the Arctic

Established in 1939, Ladd Field was initially conceived as a military outpost to protect the American territory of Alaska from potential Japanese aggression. However, with the outbreak of the Second World War in Europe, its significance soared as it became a key link in the lend-lease supply chain to the Soviet Union.



## Remembering Blue West One: : The Arctic Airfield That Helped Win the Second World War by Daniel Ford

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Ladd Field's strategic location on the western coast of Alaska, facing the Bering Sea, made it an ideal staging point for aircraft bound for the Soviet Union. These aircraft, primarily lend-lease P-39 Airacobras and B-25 Mitchell bombers, were essential reinforcements for the Soviet air force, which was heavily depleted after the German invasion in 1941.

### **The Challenges of Arctic Logistics**

Operating in the harsh Arctic environment presented formidable challenges for the personnel stationed at Ladd Field. The relentless cold, snow, and ice made maintenance and operations hazardous. Temperatures regularly plummeted to below -50 degrees Fahrenheit, and visibility was often hampered by dense fog and blinding snowstorms.

Moreover, the vast distances involved in transporting supplies and aircraft required meticulous planning and coordination. Aircraft would often have to

fly several hours over treacherous terrain and unforgiving weather conditions to reach their destinations in the Soviet Union.

## The Lend-Lease Lifeline

Despite these challenges, Ladd Field became a vital cog in the lend-lease program, which provided the Soviet Union with over \$11 billion worth of supplies and equipment during the war. The airfield served as a central hub for the assembly and dispatch of aircraft, as well as for the delivery of other essential goods, including fuel, ammunition, and medical supplies.



Lend-lease supplies being unloaded from an aircraft at Ladd Field

The lend-lease program played a crucial role in bolstering the Soviet war effort, providing the Red Army with the resources it desperately needed to withstand the German onslaught and eventually turn the tide of the war.

## **Post-War Legacy and Cold War Tensions**

With the end of the war, Ladd Field's wartime significance diminished, and it was eventually abandoned. However, its legacy as a strategic Arctic airfield remained, and it continued to be used for military exercises and training during the Cold War.

The Cold War brought renewed tensions to the Arctic region, and Ladd Field once again found itself at the forefront of military operations. In 1958, the United States Air Force established the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line, a chain of radar stations designed to detect Soviet bombers. Ladd Field served as a strategic support base for the DEW Line, providing logistical and operational support.

## **Abandoned and Reclaimed**

With the end of the Cold War, Ladd Field was once again decommissioned and abandoned. The harsh Arctic environment quickly took its toll, and the once-bustling airfield fell into disrepair. Buildings crumbled, runways were overrun with vegetation, and the once-vital infrastructure faded into the desolate landscape.

In recent years, efforts have been made to reclaim and preserve the site of Ladd Field. Historical groups and organizations have worked to document the airfield's history and significance, and there are plans to establish a museum to showcase the airfield's role in the Second World War and the Cold War.

Ladd Field's story is a testament to the human ingenuity and determination that prevailed during the Second World War. Despite the formidable challenges posed by the unforgiving Arctic environment, the airfield served as a lifeline for the Soviet Union, helping to turn the tide of the war and secure an Allied victory.

Today, Ladd Field stands as a silent reminder of the sacrifices and triumphs of the past, a testament to the strategic importance of the Arctic region and the role it played in shaping the course of world history.

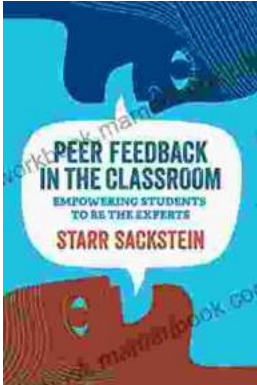


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