



## The Alaska-Siberia Air Route

### The Best Kept Secret of WWII

Very few people know that from 1942 - 1945 the United States secretly delivered nearly 8,000 American made warplanes to the Soviet Union via the Alaska-Siberia Air Route (ALSIB). The route is approximately 6,000 miles long and runs from Great Falls, Montana up through Canada and Alaska, across the Bering Sea, and on to Krasnoyarsk in south central Russia.

On June 22, 1941 Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union in one of the bloodiest and most devastating campaigns ever: Operation Barbarossa. Within the first two weeks, over half of the Soviet Air Force, which at the time was the largest in the world, was destroyed. In the end, nearly 27 million men, women, and children were killed in what the Russian people call "The Great Patriotic War." To put the loss into perspective, imagine a foreign invasion of the United States and the total annihilation of Boston, New York, Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta, Miami, Dallas, Houston, and Denver to name just a few.

As part of the Lend-Lease Act of 1941, under the direction of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, ALSIB was created. This required the construction of airfields every few hundred miles from Great Falls to Krasnoyarsk and was the catalyst for the Alcan Highway. Spanning Canada and Alaska, it was one of the most challenging and brutal transportation projects of its time.

Already painted in Soviet colors with the red star, planes were ferried from the various manufacturers throughout the continental United States to the staging area in Great Falls, under the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) program. Of the 1,070 WASPs, there were 38 casualties. Men from the 7th Ferrying Squadron then flew the aircraft up the route to Fairbanks, year round, through some of the most treacherous country in North America without the aid of modern avionics or proper cold weather gear. Upon arrival in Alaska, the aircraft were handed over to the Soviet pilots who then flew them an additional 3,000 miles across Siberia to Krasnoyarsk and the fighting fronts. In all, there were 177 fatal crashes among the ferrying pilots.

The BRAVO 369 Flight Foundation is developing a series of unique living historical film documentaries called "Warplanes to Siberia" to retrace the route and tell the story of Lend-Lease and the Alaska-Siberia ferrying program. Flying the same type of aircraft that flew the route 70 years ago, the goal is to increase awareness of and provide further education to the general public about the significance of the Alaska-Siberia Air Route and the cooperation between the United States, Canada, and the Soviet Union during a time of global catastrophe.