

Overview of Ladd Field, Fort Wainwright

Fort Wainwright was originally established in 1939 as Ladd Field, a natural winter laboratory and home to the Cold Weather Test Detachment.

At Ladd Field, military and civilian personnel made vital advancements in communications, aircraft maintenance, and combat operations, helping to unravel the mysteries of Arctic flying. With the entrance of the United States into World War II, Ladd Field also became important strategically to the defense of Alaska and as a link on the international supply route.

To accommodate the increased wartime missions, Army and civilian workers built a second runway, constructed six additional hangars, and added hundreds of temporary buildings. Ladd Field emerged as the Alaskan Air Transport Command hub, supporting military operations throughout the region, including the Aleutian Islands campaign.



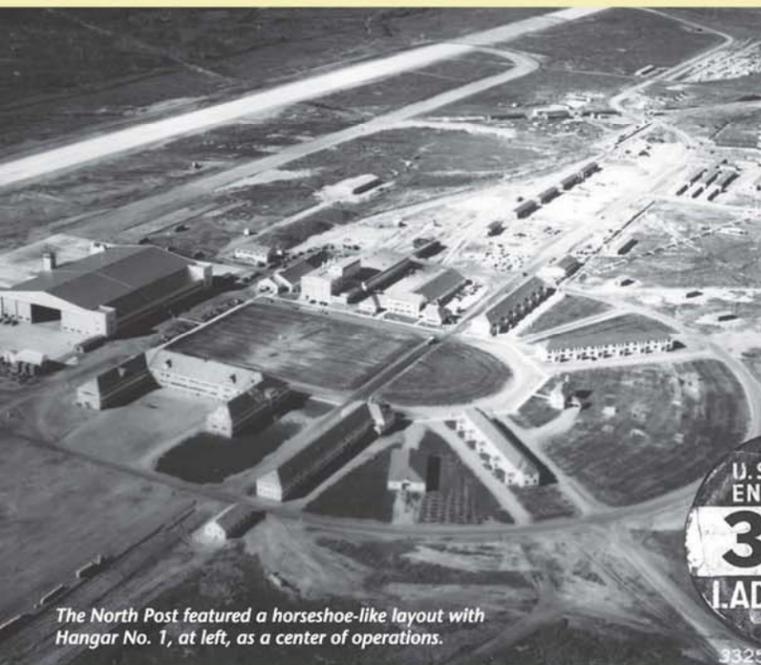
U.S. crews prepare Lend-Lease fighter aircraft for delivery to the Russians at Ladd Field during World War II.

During WWII, the most significant new task was Ladd Field's international role as the transfer point for nearly 8,000 aircrafts U.S. crews delivered the airplanes to the Soviet Union under the Lend-Lease program, under which the United States provided military aid to its allies.

American pilots flew planes along the Northwest Staging Route through Canada to Ladd Field where Russian pilots took over and ferried the aircraft to Europe. Hundreds of Russian personnel were stationed at Ladd Field during much of the war, working alongside their American counterparts. While there was some early friction, the project succeeded, as Otis Hays Jr. of the Alaska Defense Command put it, because the Russians and Americans cooperated and "refused to let mutual suspicion overwhelm them."

Cooperation gave way to confrontation during the late 1940s as Cold War tensions and reconnaissance units replaced wartime alliances. During the 1950s, Ladd Field saw a construction boom brought on by the Cold War. Air defense networks and aircraft tests dominated the base until the Air Force transferred most of its operations to Eielson Air Force Base and Elmendorf Air Force Base near Anchorage in 1960.

On Jan. 1, 1961, Ladd, which had been under Air Force control since the establishment of a separate branch of the military in 1947, was transferred back to the U.S. Army and renamed Fort Jonathan M. Wainwright, in honor of General Wainwright, the hero of Bataan. Today, the soldiers and units stationed at Fort Wainwright train for rapid worldwide deployments and provide ground defense for Alaska.



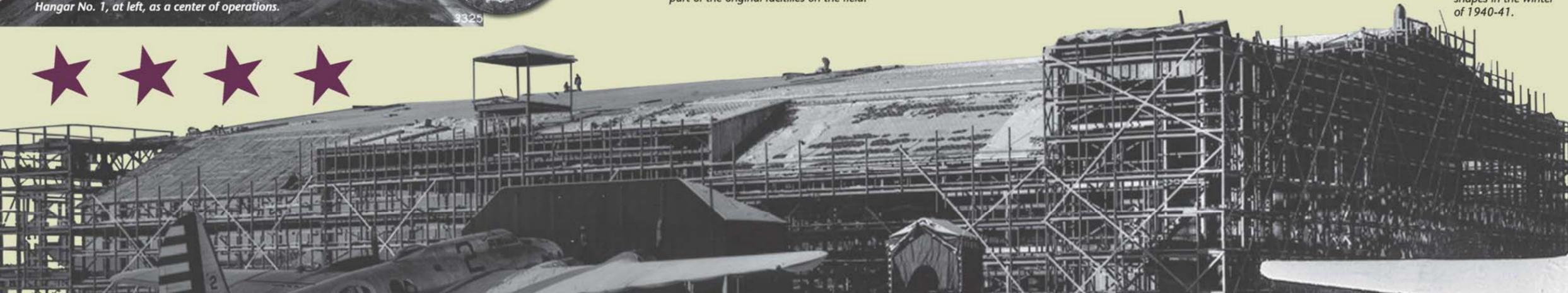
The North Post featured a horseshoe-like layout with Hangar No. 1, at left, as a center of operations.



Cold weather testing at 35 below zero helped improve Army technology during World War II.



The Quartermaster Building and power plant were part of the original facilities on the field.



Hangar No. 1, the largest building in Interior Alaska, takes shape in the winter of 1940-41.



The 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team is an integral part of the Army's modern role at Fort Wainwright.