

# How's Your Russian?

## Lend-Lease Operations

After the aircraft were accepted by the Russian mechanics the planes became the property of the Soviet government. Then, when the aircraft and crews were ready they departed in groups for the journey to Nome and the Siberian airfields. Typical departing flights often consisted of a B-25 bomber, several A-20 light bombers and P-39 fighters equipped with extra fuel tanks to extend their flying range. Russian pilots were combat hardened and were recognized to have a sense of urgency to their mission. The timely delivery of aircraft and supplies, as one report stated was quite literally, "a matter of life and death to them."



At the beginning of the Lend-Lease program U.S. instructors operated a Transition School to familiarize Russian pilots with the American aircraft until the Russians had enough experience with U.S. planes to take over. The language barrier made instruction difficult and required that they rely on interpreters who were not yet familiar with aeronautical terms. The single seat fighters were the most challenging, since all checkouts had to be done on the ground.

One captain reported, "A young fighter pilot with a girl interpreter came over to my P-40 for check. The Russian climbed into the cockpit, the girl got on one wing, and I got on the other. He asked me only four questions and then he took off. The first thing he wanted to know was, "How do you start it?" I told the girl, she told him and he said "Da", Russian for "yes". Then he asked for the maximum pressure and the RPM for the take off. His next question, "How do you keep the oil temperature and the coolant temperature up?" Finally, he wanted to know how to operate the radio. Then he took the plane up for its test run, and he knew how to fly it too!"

By the end of September in 1945, 7,926 aircraft and many tons of cargo had been transferred into Russian control at Ladd. While Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union was controversial it was considered a successful strategy in providing aid to our allies and contributed in part to the defeat of Germany.