

Historic Significance Summary of Hangar 11

Hangar 11 is listed on the Inventory of Historic Resources in Edmonton, and is the last remaining Second World War-era hangar structure on the Blatchford site. It is believed to be one of the last remaining buildings of its kind in western Canada, and its international associations make it one of the most significant historic structures in Edmonton.

Built in 1942 by the United States Army Air Force, Hangar 11, and many other buildings on the site built at that time, figured prominently in the United States government's Lend-Lease program. Initiated in March 1941, the program allowed the United States government to provide military aid and equipment to its allies, prior to the United States formally entering the war in December 1941.

In June of 1941, Germany initiated Operation Barbarossa, the formal invasion of the Soviet Union. With nearly 3,000,000 Axis powers troops involved over the course of the conflict, the invasion remains to this day the largest military operation ever undertaken. With the Axis forces penetrating into Soviet Union territory, the United States government decided to approve over \$1 billion in Lend-Lease aid to the Soviets in October of 1941.

To facilitate the Lend-Lease aid in being provided to the Soviet Union, a network of airfields, known as the Northwest Staging Route, was formally established in 1941 by the United States and Canadian governments. The United States-Canadian Joint Board of Defense had earlier agreed in the fall of 1940 that a highway (the Alaska Highway) and a series of airfields should be constructed between Edmonton and Fairbanks, Alaska, to provide a corridor for American military equipment to be stationed in Alaska. The initiation of Operation Barbarossa and the subsequent agreement to provide Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union placed an immediate priority in channeling aid to Alaska. Construction of the Alaska Highway, starting from Edmonton, could not happen quickly enough to facilitate timely movement of the aid for the Soviet Union, so a focus was placed on establishing the airfields network of the Northwest Staging Route.

Two main distribution hubs for the Lend-Lease aid were established in the United States at Great Falls, Montana, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. The need existed to create a central distribution centre in Canada, and Blatchford Field in Edmonton, with its long associations with aviation and northerly location, was identified as this Canadian hub. Edmonton subsequently became the headquarters of the Alaskan Wing, Air Transport Command, and approximately 60 buildings (including four main hangars, of which Hangar 11 was one) were constructed by the United States Army Air Force at Blatchford Field, starting in 1942, largely

where the campus of the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) stands today. From the Edmonton base, airfields were established approximately every 160 kilometres on the way to Fairbanks. Aircraft and other material were manufactured and marked with Soviet insignia in the United States and Edmonton, inspected by the Soviet military upon their arrival in Alaska, and then transferred to the Soviet Union's forces across the Bering Strait for immediate deployment to the Eastern Front and other locations related to the war effort.

It is estimated that Blatchford Field channeled as many as 10,000 aircraft and other war materials to the Soviet Union through Fairbanks over the remainder of the Second World War. At times during 1943, Blatchford Field was the busiest airfield in the world, with nearly 900 flights a day arriving and departing, or roughly every 1.5 minutes over a 24 hour period.

The impact that the Lend-Lease program had on the eventual outcome of the Second World War cannot be overstated. The Eastern Front saw some of the largest and most destructive battles in history, with horrific atrocities and massive numbers of casualties for the Soviet Union and the Axis powers alike, with military casualties alone being estimated at over 5,000,000. Without the critical materials being provided by the United States to the Soviet Union, victory in this conflict would have been doubtful. The ability of the Soviet military and its citizens to hold, and eventually reverse, the Axis invasion forces, with the support of the Lend-Lease aid, retained a two-front war for Germany. If Germany had been able to effectively remove the Soviet Union from the war, the ability of the Allied powers to launch Operation Overlord at the Battle of Normandy in June 1944 would have been seriously jeopardized. The delay or inability of the Allies to land on D-Day would have had unknown repercussions on the outcome of the Second World War, and on the history of the 20th century. Hangar 11 is an excellent and rare remaining physical representation of this type of aviation facility in Edmonton and Alberta, and has direct associations with the historical narrative of the Second World War, and the critical role Edmonton played in these world-altering historic events.

The value of utilitarian structures such as Hangar 11 rests in the expression of their function, reflecting the nature of the working processes they supported. They have value in demonstrating the nature of labour, economic drivers, processes and products important to Edmonton's development. Hangar 11 has a unique design, utilizing a significant Bowstring timber truss roof structure to provide the large clear span. Unlike many other hangars, Hangar 11 also accommodated a large office function, which flanked the main hangar space, using functional design elements of the International Style, which was coming into fashion in Edmonton at the time.

Beyond its architectural and historical significance, the building also possesses connections to prominent Edmontonians. In the post-war era, Hangar 11 was utilized by Northwest Industries Ltd., which provided hangar space, maintenance and other operational needs for aircraft serving the explosive growth in northern Alberta, furthering Edmonton's role as the Gateway to the North. Leigh Brintnell, the famous aviation pioneer, and after whom the Brintnell neighbourhood in north Edmonton is named, was the company's first executive officer. Dr. Francis Winspear, one of Edmonton's most noted businessmen and philanthropists, later became President of Northwest Industries Ltd. after Brintnell.