

Photo # 1



Meeting at a military airport near Moscow are (left to right) Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin; Sergei Ordjonikidze, head of Heavy Industry; Alexander Beliakov, navigator; an unidentified airman; and Valery Chkalov, pilot. This Russian photograph was used to give the impression that it was taken just prior to Pilot Chkalov's departure on a non-stop "transpolar flight" to the United States June 18-20, 1937. Actually Ordjonikidze died under mysterious circumstances on February 18, 1937, four months before the first "transpolar flight."

"The United States government followed these "transpolar flights" with keen interest, yet no high official raised any questions about their authenticity despite innumerable discrepancies and strange happenings. It was obvious the American government, including the departments of War and State and other key agencies within the Executive Branch, gave the Russian government total cooperation and assistance in the "transpolar flights." The U.S. also honored Soviet requests to keep all information and correspondence confidential. Although the Soviet requests didn't appear to be warranted, the U.S. stamped all the file material "Secret." Why were these files made secret? The answers are buried deep in secret files, some of which have since been purged clean.' Robert J. Morrison, *Russia's Shortcut to Fame*, p. 206

A photo from George Baidukov's *Over the North Pole* (Harcourt & Brace, New York, 1938) supposedly shows the historic takeoff of an ANT-25 aircraft (with no markings on the right side of the fuselage) on a non-stop flight from Russia to the United States on June 18,

CHAPTER 3

The Russian Bear Awakes

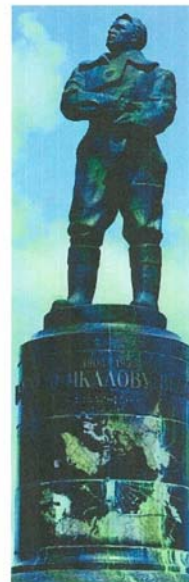
In the 1930s Russia had much to prove to the world—aviation was a political weapon in Stalin's game plan. Russian aviators were good at long-distance flights in the Arctic and were at home in that environment because they had been the first to use an aircraft in the Arctic during the 1914 search for the missing *Sedov*. So when rumors surfaced about a nonstop Moscow to San Francisco flight, the press had a field day, speculat-

ing on this dangerous and unprecedented flight over what Amundsen had once called "the silent white" of the Arctic.

Treating it almost as a military operation, the Russians blanketed the Tupolev ANT-25's departure in June 1937 in secrecy. Even the crew's identity was a mystery. Many critics thought the popular Sigismund Levanevsky would be the pilot. How wrong they were! Levanevsky's proposal for

Opposite: The crew of the ANT-25, the second plane to make a transpolar nonstop flight from the USSR to the United States in the summer of 1937. Shown at the Shelkovo Airdrome near Moscow in front of their plane are: Mikhail Gromov (L), commander, S. A. Danilin, navigator, and A. B. Yumashev, second pilot. Sovfoto.

Monument to Valery Chkalov in Gorky, Russia. This legendary Russian Arctic pilot was known as "Russia's Lindbergh." In 1937, he flew nonstop 6,262 miles from Moscow to the North Pole to San Jacinto, California. Courtesy Alex Panchenko.



doing the trip in a four-engine Tupolev ANT-4 lost out to a proposal by Valery Chkalov to use a Tupolev ANT-25. Stalin made the final decision in favor of Chkalov and the single-engine aircraft. It did have some advantages—an improved 950-horsepower M-34 engine, retractable gear, and greater range. And the sleek aircraft carried somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000 gallons of fuel.¹ Only well into the flight did the world finally learn of the attempt, and radio stations tried monitoring the aircraft's progress. The Russian crew could not speak English so good tracking was next to impossible.

When the Tupolev ANT-25 finally did make contact with a U.S. radio station while it was over Great Bear Lake in Canada's Northwest Territories, Americans realized that an important aircraft record was about to be shattered. Stalin must have been in seventh heaven. His airmen, whom he




Right: J. V. Stalin and Sergei Ordzhonikidze talking with Soviet flyer V. P. Chkalov at Moscow Central Airdrome, May 1935. Sovfoto.

Opposite: Exhausted but happy, three Russian fliers, A. Beliakov (L), navigator, V. Chkalov, pilot, and G. Baidukov, co-pilot, upon their arrival at Vancouver, Washington, after an epic 5,300-mile polar flight, June 21, 1937. ©AP Wide World Photos.

nicknamed Stalin's Falcons, had accomplished some aviation firsts.

Russian and U.S. officials up and down the West Coast rushed to finalize parades and receptions. Fog finally stopped the flight in Vancouver, Washington, where there were few people to greet the crew. The Russians had landed, but more than 300 miles short of the 5,658-mile record recorded by Rossi and Codos.

Headwinds, oxygen deprivation at high altitudes, frozen drinking water, and icing were only some of the handicaps they had faced. For almost a full day, their radios could not receive any weather briefings, and on another day they flew through fog and cloud without a break.

General George Marshall and a Russian-speaking U.S. student attempted to control the publicity descending upon the exhausted Russians. They embarked on a tour of the entire United States, telling their incredible story to a receptive public. 

Right: Setting a nonstop record of 6,262 miles, Soviet Mikhail Mikhailovich Gromov piloted an ANT-25 from Moscow to San Jacinto, California, on July 15, 1937. Sovfoto.



Photo # 2





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Soviet ANT-25 completes first transpolar flight at Vancouver on June 20, 1937.

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On June 20, 1937, a Soviet-built ANT-25 monoplane lands at Vancouver's Pearson Air Field, completing the first flight from the Soviet Union to the United States across the North Pole. The unfamiliar-looking aircraft, with long, red, albatross-like wings, passes over the field in preparation for an unscheduled and unexpected landing. And although the arrival at Pearson Field is a complete surprise, there is no mystery as to the aircraft's identity. For the past several days people around the world have anxiously followed its progress as its crew sought to be the first to cross the North Pole from Moscow to San Francisco.

Heroes of the Soviet Union

Three Soviet flyers, pilot Valery Chkalov, co-pilot Georgy Baidukov, and navigator Alexander Belyakov, operated the ANT-25 single-engine monoplane on this attempt to be the first cross the polar regions. All were experienced cold-weather pilots, each having been made Hero of the Soviet Union and awarded the Order of Lenin for their achievements in a pioneering flight in the same aircraft across the Soviet Union's frozen Siberian provinces, from Moscow to Udd Island (now Chkalov Island) on the Soviet Union's Pacific coast.

Long and careful preparations were made for the flight, as a forced landing in the Polar Regions would mean certain death for the entire crew. Finally, after receiving last-minute permission from Soviet dictator Josef Stalin, Chkalov lifted the heavy, fuel-laden aircraft off the runway at Moscow's Shchelkovo airport at dawn on Friday, June 17, 1937. Unlike the well-publicized flights of the likes of Charles Lindberg, Wiley Post, and other aviation record-setters, the closed and



Alexander Belyakov, Valery Chkalov, and Georgy Baidukov, Pearson Field, Vancouver, June 20, 1937
Courtesy Pearson Air Museum



Soviet ANT-25 at Pearson Field, Vancouver, June 20, 1937
Courtesy Pearson Air Museum



Crowds viewing the Soviet ANT-25 aircraft at Pearson Field, June 20, 1937

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paranoid nature of the Soviet Union attempted to keep all knowledge of the flight a secret. It was a full 24 hours into the flight before word of it leaked out. When it did, people around the world were captivated, and eagerly devoured what little information could be gleaned from their newspapers.

Flying Blind with Ice for Water

The first 24 hours of the trans-polar flight proved to be routine and uneventful, but the remainder of the long flight would test the mettle of the Soviet Union's elite flyers. As the flight neared the Polar Regions, the aircraft's magnetic compass became inoperable; navigation would have to rely solely on dead reckoning and a solar heading indicator, with corrections made by regular sun and star observations. Unfortunately, bad weather awaited the flight and only rarely could navigator Belyakof take accurate sightings.

Adding to the crew's worries were frequent storms, strong headwinds and dangerous icing conditions. The headwinds and storms slowed the ANT-25's progress and consumed fuel at an alarming rate. These impediments to progress also threatened to stretch the crew's meager oxygen supplies to the limit. Icing of the planes fabric-covered wings was a constant hazard, and only the plane's propeller had any de-icing capability. At one point in the flight even the coolant for the ANT-25's engine began to freeze up. The crew quickly thought to utilize their supply of drinking water, only to find that it, too, was frozen. In the end, the reservoirs of the pilots' own urine were used to solve the problem (and stored for later study by Soviet flight surgeons).

Over the Pole

The flyers crossed the North Pole on Friday night and the plane headed into northern Canada. With little opportunity for navigational sightings and no radio stations in Canada's far north, the Russian's were literally flying blind, while on the ground millions waited eagerly for any word from the plane. It wasn't until early Saturday morning that a Canadian Signal Corps outpost in the Northwest Territories heard from the plane. They forwarded word from the Russians that the ANT-25 would have to come down somewhere between Seattle and Oakland, depending on how long their fuel held out. Spectators and reporters

Courtesy Pearson Air Museum



Funeral of aviator Valery Chkalov, with
Premiere V. M. Molotov and General St
Joseph Stalin leading the pallbearers, C
1937
Courtesy Pearson Air Museum

acquiring the nickname "The Russian Lindberg." Such was his popularity that by year's end he was made a Deputy of Soviet Nationalities and a member of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union.

Sadly, Chkalov's reign as the Soviet's premier aviation hero would be short-lived. Eighteen months after his transpolar achievement the Russian hero was dead, killed in a controversial flight test of a new Soviet fighter plane. Such was Chkalov's fame that both Stalin and his Foreign Minister Molotov served as pallbearers, although rumors persisted that the Soviet dictator might have played a role in the aviator's death. His remains were deposited in a place of honor in the Kremlin wall.

In 2004, the Pearson Air Museum in Vancouver is home to a small but interesting collection of materials about the Soviet Transpolar Flight of 1937. Pictures, documents and other items from the flight and from other aspects of Chkalov's career, including his Hero of the Soviet Union medal, are either on display or preserved in the museum's collections. The families of the celebrated fliers donated many of the items. Outside the museum stands the monument to the flight, erected in 1975. It is the first monument in the United States commemorating an achievement by the Soviet Union.

Photo # 3



The Russian Tupolev ANT-25, after landing at Vancouver, Washington, was protected from a small crowd by army guards. Bad weather had forced the Russians to land at Vancouver instead of California. One witness said the red-winged aircraft looked like a huge bat. Emerging exhausted from the ANT-25, Chkalov and his crew requested water and then cognac. Smithsonian NASM Archives.

HOUSE RESOLUTION NO.4711, by Representative Moeller

WHEREAS, History was made on the morning of June 20, 1937, with the landing of Russian aviator, Valery Chkalov, and his crew, Georgy Baidukov and Alexander Belyakov, in their single-engine aircraft ANT-25 at Pearson Army Airfield in Vancouver, Washington; and

WHEREAS, Chkalov completed the first nonstop flight across the North Pole setting a world aviation record by flying for 63 hours and 16 minutes over the North Pole from Schelkovo Air Field near Moscow, Russia, to Vancouver, Washington; and

WHEREAS, In an international feat of great aviation significance, Chkalov set down at the Pearson Airfield in Vancouver, Washington, the oldest continuously operating general aviation airfield in the United States, where he and his crew were greeted by General George C. Marshall, commander of the Vancouver Barracks; and

WHEREAS, Citizens throughout the world were following this first transpolar flight, on radio and in the newspaper, as Valery Chkalov spoke on NBC Radio from the balcony of the stately Victorian-era Army military residence of General Marshall; and

WHEREAS, Chkalov proclaimed that like the Volga and Columbia Rivers which flow on the same planet and ultimately merge into one and the same World Ocean without interfering with one another, "Our peoples...should live in the same world in peace. Our joint efforts should beautify the ocean of human life"; and

WHEREAS, In the intervening years, the polar bridge established by the Chkalov flight has been the basis for numerous visits and exchanges between local residents and citizens and with Valery Chkalov's family and village, and has been kept alive by the long established Vancouver Chkalov Transpolar Flight Committee and, since 1999, the Chkalov Cultural Exchange Committee; and

WHEREAS, In 1975, Vancouver citizens dedicated a monument honoring the bravery of Valery Chkalov and his crew, thus making this flight the only one in the world with commemoratives marking both departure and arrival points; and

WHEREAS, The Russian Federation and many individual Russians have responded with friendship to this expression of international goodwill by visiting the city of Vancouver to lay flowers at the monument and by hosting groups from Vancouver in Russia; and

WHEREAS, February 2, 2004, was the 100th anniversary of Valery Chkalov's birth, and this occasion and events honoring his birth are being held in Russia throughout the year as part of an official "State Event"; and

WHEREAS, The Vancouver Chkalov Transpolar Flight Committee, the Chkalov Cultural Exchange Committee, and the City of Vancouver are planning numerous events in Vancouver throughout the year, and over 200 Russian officials, including a number of famed Russian aviators, high ranking officials of the Russian Federation, and others, will be in Vancouver, Washington, to participate in these events; and

WHEREAS, The City of Vancouver, the Vancouver National Historic Reserve Trust, and Celebrate Freedom, joined by Governor Locke, Lt. Governor Owen, and other officials, have extended to His Excellency Vladimir Putin, president of the Russian Federation, an invitation to deliver the annual General George C. Marshall Lecture in June 2004 in Vancouver;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Washington State House of Representatives hereby acknowledge the historic feat of famed Russian aviator Valery Chkalov and call upon the citizens of the State of Washington to join the citizens of Russia in celebrating the 100th Birthday of Valery P. Chkalov, and extend a warm welcome to all Russian visitors who travel to Vancouver to participate in these events and encourage all Washington citizens to participate.

I hereby certify this to be a true and correct copy of
Resolution 4711 adopted by the House of Representatives

March 4, 2004

Richard Nafziger, Chief Clerk



Photo # 4



Attired in arctic flight gear, three Russian fliers (left to right), Alexander Beliakov, navigator; Valery Chkalov, pilot; and George Baidukov, copilot, pose at Pearson Field in Vancouver, Washington shortly after their arrival on June 20, 1937



Army General George C. Marshall, then commander of Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver, Washington, quickly orders soldiers at Pearson Field to throw a tarpaulin over the cabin of a Russian ANT-25 and places guards around the aircraft after it landed on June 20, 1937, following a claimed

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Russian delegation to help honor Chkalov

Tuesday, July 03, 2007
BY DEAN BAKER, Columbian staff writer

A short, public Fourth of July ceremony at the Pearson Air Museum will honor the 70th anniversary of the landing of a Russian plane in Vancouver.

Participating in the event at 4 p.m. Wednesday at the Chkalov Monument will be a six-member delegation from the city of Nizhny Novgorod and the region surrounding it in Russia, said organizer Jess V. Frost.

Vancouver's Chkalov Cultural Exchange Committee will host the Russian delegation through Sunday in Vancouver and Portland. The purpose of the visit is to celebrate the 70th anniversary of Valery Chkalov's record-breaking nonstop flight from Moscow via the North Pole to Vancouver in June 1937.

On June 20, 1937, Chkalov and his two crewmates, co-pilot Georgy Baidukov and navigator Alexander Belyakov, set an aviation record on the flight by flying for 63 hours and 16 minutes from an airfield near Moscow to Pearson Field. They were greeted by Gen. George C. Marshall, then commander of the Vancouver Barracks.

This Russian visit is an exchange for a visit to Russia by an eight-member Vancouver committee delegation, which was invited by Nizhny Novgorod Gov. Valery Shantsev when the city also honored Chkalov, its native son, in ceremonies June 16 to 26.

"Chkalov is called 'the Russian Lindbergh,'" said Frost, who was a member of the delegation to Russia. "But he is more than the American aviator Charles Lindbergh over there. He is an

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icon."

Frost, a Vancouver native, knows a lot about Chkalov. Frost recently completed a translation of a biography of the Russian hero by his daughter, Valeria Valerievna Chkalova. It's called "Valery Chkalov: Vancouver USA's Russian Hero," and is available at Pearson Air Museum as well as on Amazon.com.

The Russian delegation to Vancouver includes a crew that will film the ceremonial Independence Day celebrations for viewing in Russia.

The delegation includes the Russian city's minister of culture, Sergei Sherba regional administrative head, Sergei Lunkov; and its chief expert of the Department of International Relations, Oleg Vakhruhev.

The Nizhny Novgorod region has a population of 4 million, including Russia's which has a population of 1.5 million.

During the rest of the week, the delegation will meet Vancouver Mayor Royce Council, Clark County commissioners and local government, state and federal including Washington Sen. Patty Murray and business leaders.

In Oregon, the delegation will visit with Portland Mayor Tom Potter, Port of I Department of Commerce officials and business leaders. Their visit will concern the Columbia River Gorge, Frost said.

If you go

What: A ceremony honoring the 70th anniversary of Russian pilot Valery Chkalov landing in Vancouver.

When: 4 p.m. Wednesday.

Where: Chkalov Monument next to Pearson Air Museum, 1115 E. Fifth St.

Information: Call Jess V. Frost, president, The Valery P. Chkalov Cultural Exchange, 503-432-8529.

Reservoir

- » Man arrested for alleged brother in arm
- » Around the area
- » FYI
- » Corrections

Photo # 5



Army General George C. Marshall, along with his wife Katherine (in background) and stepdaughter Molly Brown, host the Russian fliers. Also shown is Soviet Ambassador Alexander Troyanovsky.



Crowds gather around a Soviet ANT-25 aircraft that landed at a ranch near San Jacinto, California on July 14, 1937, supposedly after a second non-stop flight from Russia, via the North Pole. The poor workmanship of the aircraft is clearly visible on the tail airfoil. The plane used in this second "transpolar flight" does not have markings on the fuselage.



Russian pilots have repeated the route of Chkalov

Higher and Higher and Higher!

THE LAST WEEK WILL BE ENTERED INTO THE HISTORY OF RUSSIAN AVIATION AS THE SIGNIFICANT EVENT: ON SEPTEMBER 8, WHILE CELEBRATING THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST NON-STOP FLIGHT MADE BY VALERY CHKALOV IN JULY 1936, OUR PILOTS REPEATED THE ROUTE OF THE FAMOUS HERO.

At midnight sharp, the Honored Tests Pilot of the USSR, Hero of Russia Anatoly Kvochur with his co-pilot, Test Pilot of the second class Sergey Korostiev piloting the SU 30 fighter of Russian Air Force made the non-stop flight along the route: Zhukovsky airfield (near Moscow)-Igarka- Yakutsk-Island Chkalov (the former island Udd)in the entry of Amur river-Neriungry-Tomsk-Zhukovsky airfield.

During its flight SU 30 was 4 times refueled in the air. Fuel was supplied by two IL 78-tankers. The first of them took off from the Vorkuta airfield and supplied fuel to SU 30 over Igarka, Yakutsk and Neriungry. The second IL 78 took off from the Ryazan airfield "Diagilevo" and refilled the fighter in the area of Tomsk.

The total length of the route, that the fighter covered for 14 plus hours was around 12,000 km. By the expert opinion aircrafts of the SU 27 family, to which SU 30, selected for the flight, belongs, are the best fighters to fulfill such tasks, and first of all due to their unsurpassed flight length-without mid-air refueling a fighter of this type can cover the distance of 4,000 km.

Valery Chkalov made his famous flight in ANT-25. He flew along the route from Moscow to Island Udd for 56 hours and 20 minutes, the co-pilot Georgy Baidukov and the navigator Aleksandr Bellakov were in his crew. Some time later Valery Chkalov, with the same crew, made another unprecedented non-stop flight from Moscow to Vancouver over the North Pole.

For many years Russian pilots dreamed of repeating the feat of the most famous Russian airman, to pay him tribute banking over Island Udd. And, at last, it became possible, due to activity of the event organizers. This large scale action was prepared by the well-known MVK Exhibition Holding.

The project "Higher and Higher and Higher" had offered another interesting event that is the world first exhibition in the stratosphere (at the altitude of over 12,000 km.). Small by its size exposition was arranged on board of one of the tankers, which took off from Ryazan airfield "Diagilevo". All major exhibition projects and achievements of MVK Holding were presented there as well as brands of the largest Russian furniture manufacturers. Representatives of the Russian Record Book and Guinness Book of Records, who were on board of the tanker, took notice of every action in order to register the record.

Aleksey Shaburov, Chairman of the Directors' Board, Executive Vice-President of MVK International Exhibition Company, stressed: "Our goal is to unite Russia through the history and patriotism. We wish that the pride for achievements of Russian manufacturers was as strong as the pride for our heroes and history". The pilot Anatoly Kvochur, after the flight, noted that it was the honorable duty of the descendants to commemorate the legendary pilots of the past.

Russian newspaper
September 11, 2006