

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE  
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON MILITARY AND  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

April 17, 2001  
5:41 p.m.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Representative Mike Chenault, Chair  
Representative Joe Green  
Representative Pete Kott  
Representative Sharon Cissna  
Representative Joe Hayes

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Representative Beverly Masek  
Representative Lisa Murkowski

**COMMITTEE CALENDAR**

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 27

Supporting the erection of monuments in Alaska, Russia, and Canada to commemorate the World War II lend-lease program between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

- MOVED CSHJR 27(MLV) OUT OF COMMITTEE

**PREVIOUS ACTION**

BILL: HJR 27

SHORT TITLE:WWII ALASKA-USSR LEND-LEASE MONUMENTS

SPONSOR(S): REPRESENTATIVE(S)CHENAULT

Jrn-Date	Jrn-Page		Action
04/12/01	0987	(H)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/12/01	0987	(H)	MLV
04/12/01	0987	(H)	REFERRED TO MLV
04/17/01		(H)	MLV AT 5:00 PM HOUSE FINANCE 519

**WITNESS REGISTER**

JOHNE BINKLEY, Director  
Alaska-Siberia Research Center

P.O. Box 34871  
Juneau, Alaska 99803  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 27.

ALEXANDER DOLITSKY, Chairman  
Alaska-Siberia Research Center  
P.O. Box 34871  
Juneau, Alaska 99803  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 27 and answered questions.

REPRESENTATIVE RICHARD FOSTER  
Alaska State Legislature  
Capitol Building, Room 410  
Juneau, Alaska 99801  
POSITION STATEMENT: Expressed thanks to the sponsor and supporters of HJR 27; provided his own historical perspective.

MIRIAM LANCASTER, Board Member  
Alaska-Siberia Research Center  
P.O. Box 34871  
Juneau, Alaska 99803  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 27 regarding why this is different from other memorials.

ROBERT PRICE, Board Member  
Alaska-Siberia Research Center  
P.O. Box 34871  
Juneau, Alaska 99803  
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of HJR 27.

R.T. ("SKIP") WALLEN  
P.O. Box 21063  
Juneau, Alaska 99802  
POSITION STATEMENT: As the sculptor who will build the memorial proposed in HJR 27, explained the details of the monument and the process.

**ACTION NARRATIVE**

TAPE 01-11, SIDE A  
Number 0001

CHAIR MIKE CHENAULT called the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting back to order at 5:41 p.m. Present at the call back to order were Representatives Chenault, Green, Kott, Cissna, and Hayes.

[The minutes for the Presentation by Mr. Robert K. Uhrich with the Naval Facilities Engineering Command: Current information regarding the Adak base closure activities, are found in the 5:10 p.m. cover sheet for this same date.]

HJR 27 - WWII ALASKA-USSR LEND-LEASE MONUMENTS

CHAIR CHENAULT brought before the committee HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 27, Supporting the erection of monuments in Alaska, Russia, and Canada to commemorate the World War II lend-lease program between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

CHAIR CHENAULT, speaking as the sponsor of HJR 27, referred members briefly to the written sponsor statement in packets. He then called upon testifiers.

Number 0186

JOHNE BINKLEY, Director, Alaska-Siberia Research Center, testified via teleconference in support of HJR 27, noting that he had served on the board for the center since 1990. He told the committee this is an exciting project, and said he appreciates Chair Chenault's sponsorship of the resolution.

MR. BINKLEY pointed out the lend-lease program's importance in affecting the outcome of World War II. It was a link between the United States and Russia to provide materials in support of Russia's efforts in World War II. Fairbanks was the transfer point where American pilots turned the aircraft over to the Russian pilots; at the height of the program, as many as 600 Russian pilots were stationed there, coming and going. He noted that his own father was in the Army and helped to support the lend-lease program by hauling fuel down the Tanana and Yukon Rivers to supply the different air bases that allowed refueling along the way, and his mother worked during the war to help build ships for the program.

MR. BINKLEY explained that [the monument proposed by HJR 27] is an effort to memorialize Alaska's participation, as well as the nation's, in the process. In addition to direct efforts, people all across the U.S. supported the lend-lease program by working, buying war bonds, and supporting the U.S. This is a memorial to the efforts of those people as well.

MR. BINKLEY reported that he had spoken with U.S. Senator Stevens in Fairbanks that very morning, who is excited about the project, not only as a veteran of World War II, but also for the symbolism of Canada, Alaska, the rest of the U.S., and Russia working together for mutual defense against a common enemy. He noted that there are similar mutual efforts now, not too far from Fairbanks, with a missile defense system.

Number 0473

ALEXANDER DOLITSKY, Chairman, Alaska-Siberia Research Center, testified via teleconference, noting that his father was a Red Army officer during World War II, from 1942 to 1947, in support of the lend-lease program. He said hundreds of thousands of Americans and Russians cooperated in that important project, the U.S. sent more than \$12.5 million in aid to Russia, and 8,000 airplanes and materials were involved. He stated his belief that without the lend-lease support to Russia during the war, the outcome of World War II would have been different.

MR. DOLITSKY told members the idea is to erect a monumental bronze sculpture first in Fairbanks and then in Nome, with the hope of attracting interest in Canada, Montana, the rest of the U.S., and Russia towards having a similar memorial but perhaps with different messages and plaques. By doing this, several things will be accomplished. Politically, it will bond the U.S., Canada, and Russia. Furthermore, it will honor not only veterans, of which there are 9,000 in Alaska, but others as well. And it will offer a role model for young people. It will be not only a great tourist attraction, but it will tell an exciting story about an important historical period in Alaska's history and the people involved in the effort to win the war against Nazi Germany.

MR. DOLITSKY pointed out that it is 9,000 miles from Great Falls, Montana, to Novosibirsk. The Alaska Highway evolved along the lend-lease route, he noted, mentioning it as a transportation corridor. He then likened the memorial in Fairbanks to the Eiffel Tower in Paris, saying it will be an historical landmark in Fairbanks and elsewhere.

MR. DOLITSKY noted that although not in this particular resolution, support is being sought from the federal government and foundations. He said it isn't a controversial project, and all sorts of groups are excited about it. Dozens of endorsements have been received, including those of [Governor Knowles] and former Governor Walter Hickel, as well as [letters

and resolutions in support] from Fairbanks, Nome, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Alaska Geographic Alliance, the Jewish community, and others. Mr. Dolitsky indicated he has been in communication with a government office about a proclamation day linking the victory against Germany and the lend-lease program, and he emphasized the need to educate the public.

Number 0850

REPRESENTATIVE RICHARD FOSTER, Alaska State Legislature, thanked the sponsor, Mr. Dolitsky, and Mr. Wallen, who he noted is world-famous and had produced the bronze bear in the court plaza [in Juneau]. Representative Foster reported that he himself grew up in Nome, which had an Air Force base; when World War II started, Caterpillars, bulldozers, and machinery were impounded by the military, and mining operations were closed all around Nome, so there were no jobs. However, the building of the runway at least provided an economy until the base closed in 1954. He said 77 Soviet airmen crashed and were killed between Fairbanks and Nome, although he didn't know the number killed between Nome and Siberia.

MR. DOLITSKY specified that 133 [planes were lost] out of 8,000.

Number 0984

MIRIAM LANCASTER, Board Member, Alaska-Siberia Research Center, testified via teleconference in support of HJR 27, noting that she is a captain on active duty in the U.S. Public Health Service and previously worked for the Veterans Administration. She said this topic is dear to her, and that she is excited about the sculpture and the process of people working together to put such a monumental work together.

MS. LANCASTER addressed three major differences between this memorial and others around the country. First, it commemorates the synergy of everyday people, including the pilots, mechanics, and support people, as well as the actual P-39 aircraft. Second, it is one of the few she has seen that recognizes the role of women, particularly women aviators who flew the first legs of the journey for the lend-lease program. And third, it demonstrates North America's and Russia's success in cooperating for the greater good of all people.

MS. LANCASTER informed members that as she looks at the drawings presented by Mr. Wallen, she finds the sculpture itself patriotic, moving, and informative, shedding new light on an

important component of that period of time that few people have heard about. Furthermore, it honors veterans and their families, who sacrificed so much for the sake of the freedoms that people enjoy today.

Number 1192

ROBERT PRICE, Board Member, Alaska-Siberia Research Center, testified via teleconference in support of HJR 27. He also emphasized how exciting and interesting this project is; he recalled that while at an Anchorage museum, he was told that many visitors ask about the lend-lease project and look at pictures there. Mr. Price said this is a project of national interest. He commended Mr. Wallen for his sculpting abilities, mentioning the fine bear sculpture near the Juneau courthouse. He also noted that HJR 27 will assist the efforts of Mr. Dolitsky and other board members in trying to persuade Congress to appropriate funds for construction of the project, first in Fairbanks and then in other cities.

Number 1344

R.T. ("SKIP") WALLEN came forward to testify as the sculptor who will build the memorial proposed in HJR 27. He directed attention to sketches of the monument and the details. He explained that the [stone] plinth at the bottom of the sculpture would be about four feet high. Standing on the plinth are two pilots, each about eight feet high, which puts their heads about at about [twelve feet]. Behind the pilots, and soaring above them, is one blade of the P-39 propeller, reaching [seventeen to eighteen feet] into the air.

MR. WALLEN told members the propeller is from a P-39 Airacobra, built by Bell Aircraft Company in Buffalo, New York, which he chose because that aircraft was delivered in the greatest numbers - more than 2,500 - through Alaska; he noted that an improved version, the P-63 King Cobra, was delivered in similar numbers. The [P-39] was unique, Mr. Wallen said, designed around a cannon that fit in the nosecone; instead of being synchronized to fire between the propeller blades, it fired through the center of the spinner, which meant the engine had to be behind the pilot. A Russian officer, Alexander Akrushkin (ph), had used an American-made P-39 Airacobra to shoot down 58 Nazi aircraft, Mr. Wallen noted, more than [shot down by] the U.S.A.'s [aircraft], and yet the story is essentially unknown.

Number 1502

MR. WALLEN explained that the two pilots in the memorial are, in a sense, symbolic of the home front because the effort was far greater than the pilots'. In representing the transfer [of aircraft] in Fairbanks, he had decided to portray the U.S. pilot arriving: his flight jacket is off; his uniform underneath is exposed, which gives a chance to show an historically accurate uniform and some of the insignia; and he is smoking a cigarette, "politically incorrect but historically accurate," or having a cup of coffee to indicate his arrival.

MR. WALLEN reported results from his research, reflected in the sculpture: Pilots were required to wear a uniform under the flight suit when stopping at the major stopover points on the lend-lease route such as Calgary, Edmonton, Whitehorse, or Fairbanks; they always carried the Army-Air Force Alaska flight manual; and officers' caps started out with a perfect oval on top, but over time, from the pilot wearing radio gear, the cap would form an indentation known as a "50-mission crush," which was the envy of younger officers.

Number 1606

MR. WALLEN turned attention to the sketch of the Russian pilot, shown departing, with flight gear on, including his helmet, goggles, and fleece-lined arctic flight suit. He explained that unlike the U.S. pilots, Russian pilots frequently weren't assigned to the program as a permanent job; rather, they were combat pilots who were rotated and who regarded this more or less as R&R [rest and recuperation] because they were away from the front and able to fly to Alaska. Many were decorated combat veterans, depicted in the sculpture through medals on the pilot's uniform.

MR. WALLEN explained that the texture of the wall behind the two pilots simulates the fuselage of an aircraft, including rivets; applying a patina would be done chemically, resulting in a camouflage Army-green color that was used for many lend-lease aircraft. Behind the U.S. pilot, he hopes to stencil the U.S. Blue Star insignia using paint, just as the insignia were stenciled on the aircraft. Similarly, behind the Russian pilot would be a painted Russian Red Star. In time, the insignia would chip and wear off, as happened on the aircraft; he suggested that from time to time, those could be touched up, which would make them historically accurate.

MR. WALLEN offered another story learned from his research: By the end of the lend-lease program, the [Russian] Red Star insignia was painted on in Buffalo, New York; therefore, aircraft flying over the U.S. and across the prairies of Canada and into Alaska had the Red Star on them, an idea that is difficult to conceive of following the Cold War and the relationship between the U.S. and Russia. He said it jumps back to a period of better relationships.

MR. WALLEN called attention to gear at the pilots' feet, perhaps shoes and other gear that typically would have been there. He proposed to use that as a screen for floodlights that could be cast upon the bronze wall and the star insignia at night, putting the pilots in silhouette.

MR. WALLEN pointed out that on the back [of the sculpture], etched on a bronze plate, would be a map of North America and Asia showing the 9,000-mile lend-lease route and the transfer point in Fairbanks. He informed members that the transfer point was originally planned to be Nome, but there was too much danger of a Japanese naval attack there.

Number 1780

REPRESENTATIVE FOSTER recalled that when he was a youngster in the 1950s growing up in Nome, there were 15 or 20 fighters wrecked around there, mostly P-39s and P-40s. He told members that P-39s were obsolete when the war started, and Stalin "accused us of pawning off old, crummy equipment." He suggested, however, that it shows how skilled the Soviet pilots were to be able to use those and become "aces." The [P-39] had the nickname of "little shaver," he said, and aces like the pilot who shot down 58 German aircraft mostly used them for strafing. He explained:

It was a phenomenal aircraft with machine guns to strafe convoys on their roads, and you had to be a very skilful flyer to be able to fly that and live. The engine was behind you when you sat there, and the crankshaft went between your legs up to the propeller so that as you burned off fuel, your ... center of gravity ... shifted aft. So once you got into a spin, it was very difficult to get out, and if you were alone, you were basically dead. So these guys made the best use out of that to stop the ... Nazi aggression.

Number 0852

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked whether the sculpture itself would be done here.

MR. WALLEN said yes.

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked whether Mr. Wallen is doing three similar sculptures at the different sites.

MR. WALLEN answered that the first project has to be pulled off first, with the hope that when that goes into Fairbanks, interest will be generated in both Russia and Canada to have a monument in cities there. The sculptures would be almost identical. Referring to the sketches, he pointed out that there is room for four bronze plaques on each side. Each city where this would be sited would have its own perspective and own points to emphasize about that city's role in the lend-lease program. For example, Great Falls, Montana, might emphasize its role as the jump-off point; aircraft from all over the country were flown there first, including those flown by women aviators who ferried airplanes as far as Great Falls. By contrast, the Canadian cities might want to emphasize the search-and-rescue aspect because of their involvement with that. And the Russians would have their own perspective.

MR. WALLEN specified that first the original sculpture would be done; molds would be made from that; and then those molds would be cast and assembled. In response to a further question, he estimated that from the time he began the sculpture until it was turned over to the foundry, it would be one year. After that, work would need to be done at the foundry in Enterprise, Oregon, assembling the piece and taking care of details, which he called the worst part of the job because it entails working with grinding wheels and "a lot of noise and mess." He remarked, "The Greeks, by the way, had this stuff figured out 5,000 years ago - wax casting."

Number 1984

MR. DOLITSKY commented on the schedule, noting that if the funds were received this summer or fall, the sculpture would be planned to be erected in Fairbanks in May 2003. That would include the research, casting, transportation, and the opening ceremony in Fairbanks.

Number 2011

REPRESENTATIVE HAYES suggested amending page 2 of HJR 27 to provide a copy to President Bush. He noted that the resolution is already going to Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation. [No formal motion was made, but Chair Chenault indicated agreement and no objection was stated; thus the amendment was treated as adopted.]

Number 2064

REPRESENTATIVE KOTT made a motion to move HJR 27 as amended out of committee with individual recommendations and the zero fiscal note.

Number 2085

REPRESENTATIVE CISSNA asked that the motion be put on hold in order to suggest sending a copy to the prime minister of Canada as well. [Again, no formal motion was made, but Chair Chenault indicated agreement and no objection was stated; thus the amendment was treated as adopted.]

Number 2106

CHAIR CHENAULT referred back to the motion to move HJR 27 as amended from committee. No objection was stated, and he announced that [CSHJR 27(MLV)] was moved out of the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs.

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Military and Veterans' Affairs meeting was adjourned at 6:21 p.m.