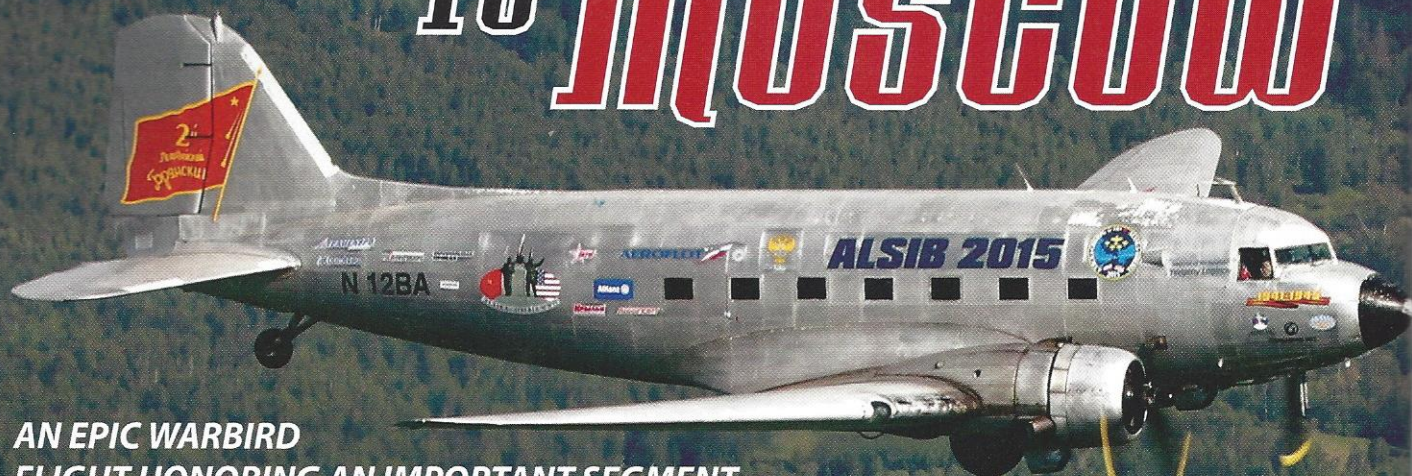


# BY GOONEY BIRD TO MOSCOW



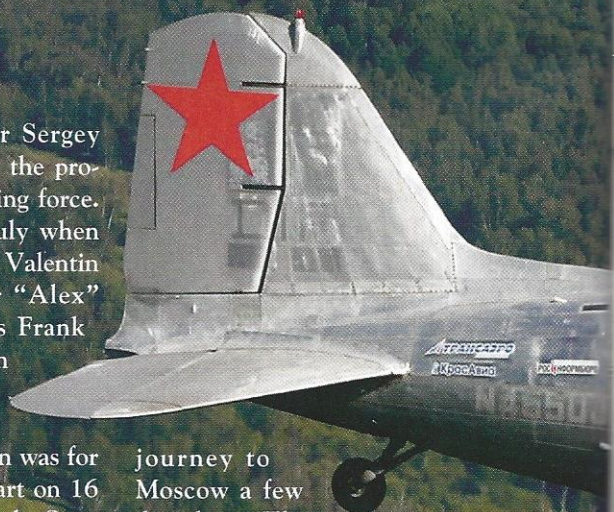
**AN EPIC WARBIRD FLIGHT HONORING AN IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF WWII MILITARY AVIATION HISTORY HAS BEEN SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED**

**BY RALPH M. PETTERSEN**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARINA LYSTEVA

**O**n 4 August 2015, two Douglas DC-3s manned by an international crew of Russian and North American aviators and mechanics completed an epic journey retracing the WWII Alaska-Siberian (ALSIB) Route from Great Falls, Montana, to Krasnoyarsk, Russia. Between September 1942 and May 1945, almost 8000 aircraft were delivered from the United States to Russia under the Lend-Lease Program using this route. The aircraft were flown from Great Falls to Fairbanks by American pilots from the 7th Ferrying Group of the Air Transport Command with Russian pilots taking over for the flight across the Bering Strait to Russia and onwards to Krasnoyarsk in western Siberia. Types of aircraft delivered included P-39, P-40, P-47 and P-63 fighters; A-20 attack aircraft; B-25 bombers; T-6 trainers, and C-47 transports.

The "Warplanes to Siberia Project" was the brainchild of BRAVO 369 Flight Foundation President Jeff Geer and Russian Aviation Company

(Rusavia) General Director Sergey Baranov, with Rusavia being the project's major sponsor and driving force. The journey began in mid-July when newly minted DC-3 captains Valentin Lavrentyev and Alexander "Alex" Ryabinin, along with pilots Frank Moss, Glen Moss, and John Makinson, set off from Florida in DC-3s N12BA and N4550J. The original plan was for the two Gooney Birds to depart on 16 July and attend the "Warbirds Over the Falls" event at Great Falls International Airport on 18/19 July. N4550J experienced an engine failure just a few days prior to the planned departure, which resulted in N12BA departing alone on the 16th. N4550J would follow four-days later and make an overnight stop at the EAA AirVenture event in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, before meeting up with N12BA in Fairbanks, Alaska. Rusavia General Director Sergey Baranov and his daughter Elizaveta attended the event in Great Falls and joined the DC-3 crew when it set off on its long



journey to Moscow a few days later. They would be part of the crew during the entire odyssey to Moscow, with Elizaveta piloting DC-3 N4550J for many long hours across the seemingly endless landscape of Siberia. In addition to the Russian pilots, Russian mechanics Nikolay Demjanenkoni and Pavel Mul also were part of the contingent for the entire trip from Florida to Moscow. A previous article in the October/November 2015 issue of *Warbirds International* described trip preparations and the North American portion of the journey.

Both DC-3s were originally deliv-





Former Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Air Force Peter Deynekin was very interested in the project and poses in the left seat of DC-3 N12BA.



Rusavia General Director Sergey Baranov and his daughter Elizaveta meet Cosmonaut Alexey Leonov and Gen. Deynekin at Ugolny Airport after arrival from Nome. The pair would accompany the DC-3s on the entire journey from Great Falls to Moscow.



On arriving in Magadan, the Gooney Bird crews were welcomed by a trio dressed in native garb with the traditional offering of bread and salt.



The Gooney Birds and the expedition's AN-26B support aircraft at Magadan. The AN-26B shadowed the DC-3s and carried support staff, spare parts, tools, and a spare engine.

vary between 500- and 11,000-ft depending on terrain and weather conditions. The terrain was mountainous in eastern Siberia but flattened out as they proceeded west towards Moscow. They flew over endless miles of wilderness

with civilization only becoming evident as they reached the latter stages of the trip nearing Moscow. For the most part, the weather cooperated with the temperature never going south of 45-deg.

Seven-hours after departing Anadyr,

the aircraft arrived at Sokol Airport in Magadan. The town has a population of about 90,000 and during the Stalin era it was a major transit point for prisoners being shipped to labor camps. Gold mining and fishing are the major industries and the town is quite isolated, with the nearest city of Yakutsk being over 1000-nm away. In addition to local media, the flyers were welcomed by a trio dressed in native garb with a traditional offering of bread and salt. Shortly after arriving the group headed off to an auditorium where the Russian members of the contingent spoke and there was a question answer session. The audience included WWII veterans and the crew, including the Americans, signed autographs for the attendees.

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## YAKUTSK – 31 JULY/3 AUGUST

After spending the night in Magadan, the journey continued next

morning with the DC-3s departing for Yakutsk, which is the capital city of the Sakha Republic. Yakutsk has a population of about 270,000 and its airport serves as an international hub for northeastern Russia. There was a large crowd on hand for the arrival, includ-

ing a pair of **pretty ladies** dressed in traditional garb who presented the crew with a traditional offering of bread and salt washed down with a swig of horse milk from a large urn. The contingent then moved on to a memorial honoring pilots lost on the ALSIB Route. The

memorial featured P-39Q 42-20613, which was prominently mounted on a pedestal. While not thought of highly by the US military, P-39 Airacobras were shipped to Russia in large numbers and were effectively utilized by Russian pilots against the *Luftwaffe*.

During their stay in Yakutsk, the crew was treated to a tour of a local salt mine and a traditional village along with a fishing expedition on the Lena River before departing for Bratsk.

## BRATSK – 3/4 AUGUST

Bratsk has a population of about 250,000 and during WWII the Russians moved industrial plants there to keep them from being destroyed by Nazi invaders. After the war, the Gulag

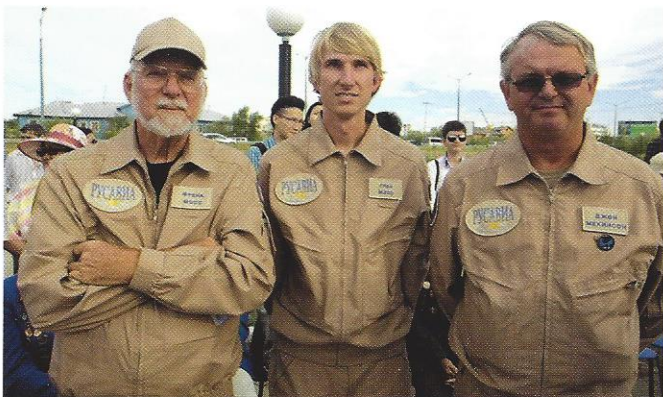


A Gooney poses in a puddle caused by a rainstorm passing over the field.

N12BA departs Magadan for the 625-nm flight to Yakutsk. The DC-3s performed very well on the 9000-nm mission with only minor maintenance issues encountered during the daunting trip.



Sergey Baranov with DC-3 N4550J.



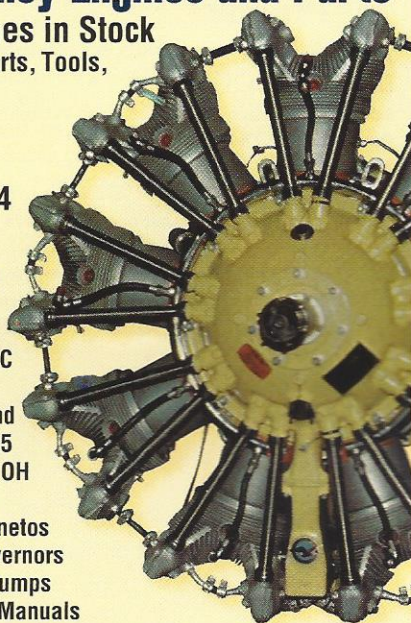
The three American pilots (left to right): Frank Moss, Glen Moss, and John Makinson at Yakutsk.

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SE HABLA ESPAÑOL

Angara prison labor camp was constructed near Bratsk, with capacity for up to 44,000 prisoners. Today the town is home to a large hydroelectric plant, an aluminum smelter, and a pulp mill. The Bratsk Airport is a mixed-use military/civilian airport.

Unlike previous arrivals, there was little in the way of fanfare in Bratsk, with the welcoming crowd consisting mainly of the general public and their children. After securing the aircraft, the crew was ushered to a large auditorium where the audience included WWII veterans and youth groups. The next morning, before departing Bratsk, the crew visited a war memorial where they laid down a wreath at an eternal flame.



The Yakutsk war memorial featured P-39Q 42-20613 mounted on a pedestal.

## THE PRICE THEY PAID

Getting combat aircraft from the USA to the Soviet pick-up points was not an easy task. Flying over extremely hazardous terrain, pilots were often at the mercy of weather and mechanical problems. Unfortunately, there were numerous accidents. The following accident reports were supplied by Norm Malayney and give indication of the problems faced by the USAAF pilots. It should be noted that under the terms of Lend-Lease, the Soviets never paid for, nor returned the aircraft that had been sent to aid their fight against the Nazis.

### ACCIDENT #1

**Date:** 6 December 1943

**Location:** 120-mi north of the Smith River Airport, Northwest Territories.

**Aircraft:** P-39Q-15-BE 44-2485

**Pilot:** 2nd Lt. Delos R. Carpenter

**Report:** The two pilots went on top of the overcast on a CFR clearance and were lost when they broke through. Lt. Carpenter wandered around the valleys until his gas was almost gone and dropped his belly tank, left his gear up and belly landed on a small frozen lake. Flight leader finally made it back to the station from which he cleared. Lieutenant Carpenter was lost and ended up 120-mi at right angles to the course. In the process of landing, the right wing was buckled and the propeller blades bent. With existing conditions, it will be hard to salvage the plane.

### ACCIDENT #2

**Date:** 27 October 1943

**Location:** Between Watson Lake and Whitehorse

**Aircraft:** P-39Q 44-2031

**Pilot:** Lt. Walter T. Kent

**Report:** Missing pilot was flight leader of two P-39s delivered from Watson Lake to Whitehorse. Weather conditions were not good for effective searching. Twelve aircraft had previously cleared Watson Lake. The first three aircraft got through. Of the remaining nine, only one other plane plus Lt. Day (Lt. Kent's wingman) got through, the remainder returning to Watson Lake on account of weather. It is the conjecture of the board that after the aircraft went into the snow flurry, the pilot either lost control of the ship under instrument conditions and crashed into a lake or crashed into the



Dozens of new Bell P-63 Kingcobras in Soviet markings are prepared for the first stage of the long ferry flight to Alaska and delivery to the Soviets. (Bell)

side of a mountain due to restricted visibility. On 3 November, Lt. Ritenour flying an AT-6 spotted an "area on the side of a mountain where trees were knocked down for about 100-yds. Trees on ground were fairly fresh. Cannot say for sure, but suspect strongly a plane caused this." A ground party was sent out but turned back because of bad weather. Plane and pilot not found.

### ACCIDENT #3

**Date:** 2 May 1944

**Location:** 30-mi south of YE on Airways

**Aircraft:** P-39Q 42-20690

**Pilot:** 2nd Lt. Marcello J. Sommovigo, 7th Ferry Group

**Report:** Pilot cleared from Fort St. John to Fort Nelson, called Fort Nelson tower giving his position 40-mi SE of Nelson and was having engine trouble and would the tower inform 417-A to stand by in case of bailing out became necessary. Sommovigo switched from belly to main tank after which he jettisoned the belly. Oil temp and oil pressure readings were normal. However, after the engine began to backfire, the oil pressure gauge read zero and oil temp rose rapidly. Pilot was able to obtain only 26-in of manifold pressure. The cockpit began to fill with smoke and while the pilot was in the process of leaving the ship, fumes within the cockpit ignited, giving Sommovigo minor flash burns on face and hands. His jump was successful. The plane crashed in flames and was completely burned. Photography was impossible as the ship landed in flames and completely burned. Captain William R. Jacobs, Flight Surgeon/Flight B/Search and Rescue Squadron, parachuted to Sommovigo and both men were brought back to Fort Nelson on 4 May. Major powerplant failure can be the only cause of the accident for the pilot tried in every way possible to bring the ship in.

### ACCIDENT #4

**Date:** 17 October 1943

**Location:** Burwash Landing, YT, Canada.

**Aircraft:** P-39Q 42-2100

**Pilot:** 2nd Lt. Harry M. Lasker, 7th Ferry Group

**Report:** Aircraft departed Whitehorse, destination Fairbanks. A few miles south of Burwash Landing, the motor failed and, according to that he later told medical attendants, the pilot bailed out at 5300-ft indicated. On leaving the aircraft, his legs struck the horizontal stabilizer and were broken. Local inhabitants



Lieutenant Ben Brown and a Bell P-39Q Airacobra in Alaska on the way to Fairbanks for delivery to the Soviets. The new aircraft were delivered directly from the Bell factory in Niagara Falls, New York. Note the underwing gun pods. (Ben Brown)



N4550J departs Yakutsk for the 925-nm flight to Bratsk.

## KRASNOYARSK — 4/7 AUGUST

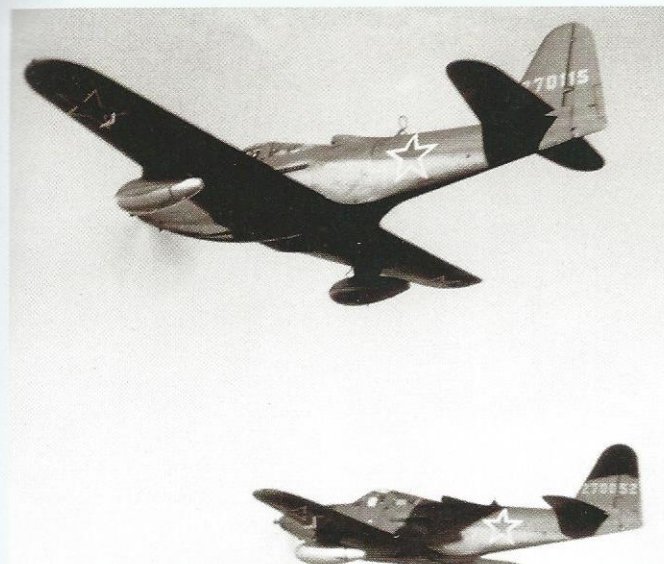
Krasnoyarsk has a population of about 1,500,000 and was the last stop on the ALSIB Route. Fighter aircraft were disassembled and transported west by ground, while larger aircraft continued their journey by air. During the Russian Empire, Krasnoyarsk was one of the places where political prisoners were exiled, usually never to return.

*(continued on page 40)*



Airacobras on their way to the Soviets.

reached the pilot shortly after he landed, and after administering what first aid was available, placed him in an ambulance for Whitehorse. The pilot died the next morning in the Whitehorse hospital as a result of injuries received during his parachute jump. The aircraft crashed a few hundred yards from where the pilot landed and was a complete wreck; although it did not burn. The only evidence as to the cause of the motor failure rests in statements made by the pilot to the persons who took care of him. None were familiar with aircraft and engines. He told witnesses that the motor had been coughing and spitting and then taking hold again all the way from Whitehorse (a distance of 150-mi). The temperature on the ground at Burwash Landing at the time of the accident was 31F. Other ships flying in the vicinity at the time and on that day encountered



Kingcobras tighten up their formation as they approach bad weather over Canada. Note the long exhaust stains from the Allison engines. (Ben Brown)

carburetor-icing conditions. The P-39Q is equipped with a device that automatically compensates for changes in manifold pressure, thus removing the customary warning a pilot gets when carburetor icing occurs. In view of the above facts, as well as the statements of witnesses, it is the opinion of the Board that the probably cause of engine failure was carburetor icing. Unfortunately the condition of the pilot when he arrived at Whitehorse was such that it was not possible for any members of the Board to interview him before his death.

### ACCIDENT #5

**Date:** 10 June 1944

**Location:** Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada

**Aircraft:** P-39Q 44-71157

**Pilot:** 2nd Lt. Peter Emigh, 559th Ferrying Group

Report: Flight consisted of one P-39 flown by Lt. Emigh who was flight leader and one A-20 Havoc flown by Lt. Rolfe. Approaching Grande Prairie, Lt. Emigh signaled to Lt. Rolfe, who was approximately 2-mi behind, to pull up into formation. In doing so, Lt. Rolfe overshot the P-39 and moved into a position some 15-ft above and slightly forward of the other aircraft. At this time, the P-39 was seen to move upward, striking the underside of the left wing on the A-20 with the vertical stabilizer of the P-39. The P-39 then went into a spiral to the right and it is believed that the pilot attempted to bail out at approximately 100-ft and succeeded only in pulling the ripcord before striking the ground. His body struck the ground approximately 10-ft from the aircraft with the parachute out of the pack but unopened. It is felt that the accident occurred due to the fact the pilot of the P-39 changed his position, in relation to the A-20, too suddenly and before Lt. Rolfe, the wingman, had the opportunity to correct his technique of overshooting. It is strongly recommended that proper action be taken to insure that no ferried aircraft, either like or unlike types, be flown in close formation.



Ferry pilot Ben Brown made numerous trips in a variety of aircraft destined for the Soviets. However, the Airacobras and Kingcobras were the most numerous. To relieve the tedium of the flights, Brown often added chalk "nose art" to the aircraft — who knows what the Soviets thought! (Ben Brown)

## BY GOONEY BIRD TO MOSCOW

(continued from page 27)

Krasnoyarsk was also the first stop on the ALSIB Route that wasn't built on permafrost.

The DC-3s and crew arrived at Yemelyanovo International Airport after a 3-hr flight from Bratsk and were welcomed by a large throng of media and a group of re-enactors dressed in WWII Russian military uniforms. The crowd was small by previous standards with very few dignitaries or the general public in attendance. For the first time on the trip, the Americans had an interpreter, which made communications much easier with their Russian hosts. After three-days of visits to war memorials, a visit to the mayor's office and a day of air-to-air photography in the local area, the troupe departed for Ekaterinburg.

### EKATERINBURG — 7/8 AUGUST

The 1050-nm flight from Krasnoyarsk to Koltsovo International Airport in Ekaterinburg (also known as Yekaterinburg) was the longest single segment on the trip. With a population of 1,350,000 it is situated on the border of Europe and Asia. As in their previous stop in Krasnoyarsk, the group's arrival was met by media but also present were local politicians, military VIPs, and WWII veterans replete with their medals. After signing autographs, the crew attended a formal banquet where they shared a meal and toasts with the politicians, military brass, and WWII veterans.



Sergey Baranov and one of the Russian pilots put a wreath on the Bratsk war memorial. There was a war memorial at every stop across Russia and the Gooney Bird contingent paid their respects at all of them.

### MOSCOW-VNUKOVO INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT — 8/20 AUGUST

With their journey nearing completion, the DC-3s departed Ekaterinburg for an 8-hr flight to Vnukovo International Airport in Moscow, where Gen. Peter Deynekin and a small contingent of military officers, dignitaries, and WWII veterans met them. The DC-3s and their crews had successfully completed an amazing 9000+nm journey across some of the world's most inhospitable terrain in 73-year-old aircraft. It was an amazing feat of airmanship and American-Russian cooperation. With only a short hop to nearby Ramenskoye Airport, where



N12BA above the clouds on the flight from Bratsk to Krasnoyarsk.



Elizaveta Baranov flying N4550J. She spent many hours at the controls during the long trek across the Siberian wilderness.



The AN-26B carried most of the heavy support equipment but each of the DC-3s also carried equipment along with passengers seats for crew rest and for the support staff.



The Krasnoyarsk war memorial was replete with main battle tanks and artillery pieces.

At Krasnoyarsk, re-enactors in WWII Russian uniforms greeted the Gooney Birds.



Fine portrait of N4550J.

N4550J parked in front of the classic terminal building at Koltsovo International Airport in Ekaterinburg.



the 2015 Moscow Air and Space Show (MAKS) would be held 25/30 August, the Americans had some downtime to relax and do some sightseeing before the start of the show. In addition to touring the sights of Moscow, the crew managed a three-day visit to St. Petersburg, which had been generously arranged by their Russian hosts.

### MOSCOW-RAMENSKOYE — 20/30 AUGUST

With the start of the 2015 MAKS Airshow scheduled to begin on the 25th, the DC-3s made the short flight to Ramenskoye on the 20th. A contingent of photographers and military officials greeted their arrival and the aircraft were parked at a prominent display location at "Airshow Central." The DC-3s took part in the 2015 MAKS Airshow to commemorate the 70th Anniversary of the end of WWII and were flown in formation every day. After the show was over, the aircraft were slated to go on display at Russian museums. What a fitting retirement for a pair of aircraft whose service spanned eight-decades!



The amazing sight of one the Gooney Birds passing over Moscow.





**N4550J** rumbles over Moscow on the short flight from Ynukovo to Ramenskoye Airport, which would be the site of the big MAKS Airshow.

After the show Frank and Glen caught an airline flight to Geneva, where they met up with wife and mom Camilla. After visiting friends in Geneva, they planned on taking a train to Salzburg to visit the Red Bull hangar but their hosts graciously provided a ride on DC-3 HB-ISC. Glen noted that since he and Frank had helped crew this same aircraft from Switzerland to Wisconsin a few years back, they had almost circumvented the globe in DC-3s. The only missing segment is Moscow to Salzburg and perhaps they'll fill in that gap one day.

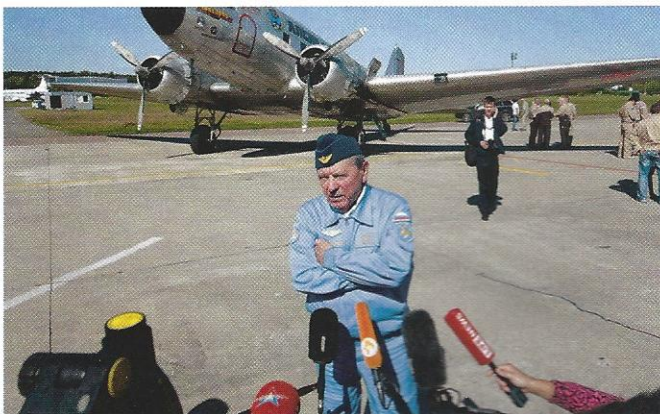
I'd like to thank Glen and Frank Moss for their time and patience in helping me in write this article. I'd also like to thank Marina Lystseva for allowing the use of her photos. She photographed the entire journey across Russia and I'm sorry to only be able to include a small portion of the fantastic



The Gooney Birds execute a formation landing at Ramenskoye Airport.

array of photos she took during the trip. Since I had not been along on the trip, without Glen, Frank, and Marina's assistance, there would not have been an article documenting this amazing

journey. Last but not least, I'd like to recognize Rusavia General Director Sergey Baranov, who was the guiding force behind the project. Without him, it surely wouldn't have happened. **WI**



General Deynekin talks to the media at Ramenskoye.



General Deynekin poses with the Gooney flight crew at Ramenskoye Airport.