

**Agency: Commerce, Community and Economic Development****Grants to Named Recipients (AS 37.05.316)****Grant Recipient: Anchorage Park Foundation****Federal Tax ID: 412205907****Project Title:****Project Type: New Construction and Land Acquisition**

# Anchorage Park Foundation - African American Soldiers ALCAN Highway Memorial

**State Funding Requested: \$50,000****House District: Anchorage Areawide (16-32)**

One-Time Need

**Brief Project Description:**

Install Memorial in an Anchorage park honoring African-American engineer soldiers of WWII for their contribution to the completion of the Alaska Highway

**Funding Plan:**

|                               |                   |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| Total Project Cost:           | \$50,000          |
| Funding Already Secured:      | (\$0)             |
| FY2013 State Funding Request: | <u>(\$50,000)</u> |
| Project Deficit:              | \$0               |

**Detailed Project Description and Justification:**

The Anchorage Park Foundation will work with volunteers to establish a Memorial in an Anchorage park honoring the African American engineer soldiers of WWII who helped build the Alaska highway.

The Alaska Highway(or ALCAN Highway), was constructed after the attack on Pearl Harbor during World War II to make Alaska by road to the contiguous United States through Canada. The ALCAN begins at the junction with several Canadian highways in Dawson Creek, British Columbia and runs to Delta Junction, Alaska, via Whitehorse, Yukon. It was completed at a length of approximately 1,700 miles long.

Three African-American units-the 93rd, 95th, and 97th Engineers-were be sent to Canada to work on the road with minimal supplies and in terrible weather conditions. The men were not used to arctic conditions. One hundred and sixty two miles out of Dawson Creek they faced a fast-moving river 300 feet wide, but their heavy equipment had been sent to white divisions. The officers said there was no way the men could build a bridge across it on schedule.

The black solders bet their paychecks that they could finish the bridge in less than three days. With hand tools, saws and axes, they prepared the lumber from nearby trees. Tied to the shore with ropes, they plunged chest-deep into the rapid, freezing water and set the trestles. They sang work chants and chain-gang songs. They used the headlights of trucks to keep working in the dark.

They won the bet and completed the Sikanni Chief Bridge, and the commanding officer Col. Heath Twichell ordered his white officers to eat with the black enlisted men. Because it was the first time in the history of the US Army something like

this had happened, the achievement is also credited with helping to desegregate the US Army.

The Anchorage Park Foundation can install a memorial after a site is selected. We hope to augment the effort with an audio memorial celebrating this historic contribution to Alaska.

**Project Timeline:**

Planning Summer 2012

Building Summer 2013

**Entity Responsible for the Ongoing Operation and Maintenance of this Project:**

Municipality of Anchorage

**Grant Recipient Contact Information:**

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Has this project been through a public review process at the local level and is it a community priority? ☐ Yes ☒ No

## **Black soldiers' work on Alaska Highway commemorated**

**1942: African-Americans had central role in job.**

By MIKE DUNHAM

(10/25/11 20:17:52)

The Juneteenth Alaska Alcan Highway Celebration takes place this week under the auspices of the National Juneteenth Observance Foundation.

The October celebration is appropriate, said Dr. Ronald Myers, one of the organizers and the head of the National Juneteenth Holiday Campaign.

The contributions of African-American soldiers building the Alaska Highway was "the first step in the breakdown of segregation in the military," said Myers. Oct. 28, 1942, is the date when crews completed the road that connects Alaska to the rest of North America.

Myers is a physician serving poor populations in Mississippi. He's also a noted jazz pianist and trumpet player. He's performed at the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival and is the artistic director of the Mississippi Jazz and Heritage Festival.

In 1994 he helped start the "Modern Juneteenth Movement" to raise national recognition of Juneteenth. The day commemorates when slaves in Texas received word of the Emancipation Proclamation, June 19, 1865.

In 2001, Alaska became the seventh state to have an official Juneteenth day (Alaska Statute 44.12.090). The law doesn't give anyone the day off with pay, but directs the governor to issue a proclamation. That led to a legal flap when then-Gov. Sarah Palin neglected to do so.

Palin, however, had a hand in the celebrations that will happen in Alaska this week.

"I didn't know anything about (the Alcan) until I did a conference in Anchorage," said Myers. "Sarah Palin came by with the 'First Dude' (Todd Palin)." The governor told him how African-American engineers played a critical role in constructing the Alcan Highway, with details about their sacrifice, heroism and triumphs.

"I was amazed," said Myers. "I'd never heard it before."

The story that astonished Myers involves the construction of the Sikanni Chief Bridge, 162 miles out of Dawson Creek. Black troops in segregated units worked on the road with minimal supplies in miserable conditions. They faced a fast-moving river 300 feet wide, but their heavy equipment had been sent to white divisions. The officers said there was no way the men could build a bridge across it on schedule.

The men thought otherwise. They bet their paychecks that they could finish the bridge in less than three days. With hand tools, saws and axes, they prepared the lumber from nearby trees. Tied to the shore with ropes, they plunged chest-deep into the rapid, freezing water and set the trestles. They sang work chants and chain-gang songs. They used the headlights of trucks to keep working in the dark.

They finished the bridge ahead of schedule.

Winning the bet was sweet, but what happened next is remarkable, said Myers. When the commander in charge, Col. Heath Twichell saw what they'd done, he ordered his white officers to eat with the black enlisted men.

"It was the first time in the history of the Army that anything like that had happened," said Myers.

There was a commemoration at the bridge last Memorial Day at which Myer's son, U.S. Army Capt. Ronald Myers Jr. delivered one of the speeches. Capt. Myers had just returned from his third tour of duty in Iraq. "These soldiers paved the way for me and other African Americans to serve openly as United States commissioned Army officers," he said.

"Alaska has a tremendous African-American legacy," said Myers. "People just don't know about it. But I tell people making speeches about Juneteenth, 'When you mention the Tuskegee Airmen and the Buffalo Soldiers, make sure you mention the African-American Army Engineers and the Alcan Highway.'"

Myers will speak at UAA today before going on to Fairbanks and Delta Junction. His trip will wind up back in Anchorage on Sunday with a free jazz concert featuring several of Alaska's best jazz musicians.

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# Highway History

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## The Road to Civil Rights

### *World War II - The Alaska Highway*

The attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on December 7, 1941, would bring the United States into the war, but it also raised a concern that the U.S. Territory of Alaska was vulnerable to Japanese attack. The Aleutian Islands off southwest Alaska were closer to Japan than any point in North America. Overland travel by car, truck, or train between the United States and Alaska through northwestern Canada was not possible; Canada did not have an incentive to build a connecting road north of Dawson Creek to Alaska across the rugged topography of its northwest to the American Territory. Construction of a land route to Alaska, long supported by Alaskan officials, now became a necessity - and the sooner the better. (Initially, the project was referred to as the Alcan Highway, but on July 19, 1943, Canada and the United States exchanged diplomatic notes formally naming it the Alaska Highway.)

Previous studies had focused on the best route, but disagreements on need and routing had held up the project. Now, speed was essential to military needs. President Roosevelt approved the project on February 11, 1942, and an agreement for U.S. construction of a road in Canada was reached on March 18. The Alaska Highway would stretch northwest from Dawson Creek through Fort Nelson and Whitehorse in Canada, and via Tok Junction to Big Delta southeast of Fairbanks, Alaska. At Big Delta, supply trucks and other traffic could connect with the Territory's road network.

In the interest of speed, officials decided to build the road in two phases. A pioneer road would be carved out of the difficult terrain in 1942 to open the route for supply trucks by year's end. With military traffic flowing, officials would have time in 1943 to build a permanent road on the best alignment.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was to build the pioneer road, with Army engineering units and contractors furnished and directed by the PRA. Initially, the Army divided the 1,500-mile project into five segments, with PRA contractors responsible for the portion from Whitehorse to Big Delta, about 560 miles. After reconnaissance revealed the difficulties, PRA's work was extended 100 miles east to Teslin. As the Federal Highway Administration's Bicentennial history put it:

In actuality, however, it was a combined effort with overlapping work responsibility, shifts in priorities, and a great deal of truly cooperative effort from the time of the arrival of the first Army troops at Dawson Creek on

March 10, 1942, to the removal of all contractor personnel and supervisory engineers of Public Roads at the end of October 1943. [*America's Highways 1776-1976*, Federal Highway Administration, 1976, p. 532]

## Contact

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With so many soldiers needed to fight the war in the European and Pacific theaters of operation, the U.S. Army was in need of men for their half of the project. The units initially designated for the project would not be able to complete the job in the 8 months allotted for the pioneer road. African-American troops were the solution. Since approval of the Selective Service Act of 1940, they had been drafted into the Army on the same terms as whites, but as Heath Twichell explained in his book on the Alaska Highway, "Segregation's legacy of bigotry and prejudice severely limited the possibilities" for the work they would do:

As a result, relatively few black infantry, armor, or artillery units were organized during World War II . . . . In the end, black soldiers were assigned to more than their share of units engaged in low-tech, high-sweat duties in the Engineers and Quartermaster Corps. Although the Corps of Engineers put most of its new black soldiers into general-purpose construction battalions and regiments, shortages of heavy equipment sometimes resulted in the black units' being issued fewer bulldozers and more shovels and wheelbarrows than the white units got.

Another touchy issue was where to station the new black units. In the United States, military leaders felt they had to worry about the impact of large numbers of young black soldiers on nearby civilian communities. [*Northwest* , p. 97-98]

Shipping young African-Americans in engineering units to Canada to build the Alaska Highway solved these problems.

Three African-American units-the 93<sup>rd</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup>, and 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers-would be shipped to Canada to supplement the white units assigned to the job. All, white and black, faced training problems "in the face of equipment shortages, disruptive moves and changes, and the repeated loss of experienced men to provide cadres for newer units." [*Northwest* , p. 140-141] However, the African-Americans faced unique problems, as Professor Ken Coates discussed in his book on the highway:

Many locals commented, with evident sympathy, on the plight of the black soldiers dispatched to work on the highway. These men had particular difficulty because so many were from the American South and had never before experienced a real winter. One army officer alleged that "Our colored boys are allergic to cold weather, and it's going to be a problem to keep them well and happy I fear." Gordon Gibbs [a Vancouver truck driver who helped with transport of supplies] excoriated the U.S. Army for sending troops from the Deep South into the Far Northwest, and then housing them in bell tents. "Now the story was," Gibbs says, "and this I saw, they all had good eiderdown sleeping bags, army issue sleeping bags. And they'd cut the bottom out and they'd wear them. Of course, the feathers kept dribbling out."

After struggling through long, difficult trips to reach the site with their equipment, the African-American troops found that their best equipment would be shifted to the white units. The disparity was evident in many areas:

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Jim Sutton, an American [white] soldier, believes that the black troops got a dirty deal. He says, "They were up here when we got up here. We were put in barracks, wooden barracks, and we had stoves and everything. These poor black people were doing the same job as we were and they had them in tents. I didn't think that was really fair."

Most of the tales about the black troops contain two elements - memories of men as excellent workers and references to their intense dislike of the cold. One officer wrote, "During the most severe weather encountered, it is believed that Negro troops, properly led, have accomplished more physical labour than other troops in the same area engaged in similar work." Ruth Gruber, an official with the U.S. Department of the Interior, quoted the soldiers' officers as saying, "The Negroes were better soldiers and builders than the whites. They put our gold-bricks [slackers] to shame. We never had a bit of trouble with them; they policed themselves . . . ." Today, it is clear that the black soldiers managed to perform as well as the white soldiers, despite the disadvantages imposed by a racist and discriminatory age. [Coates, Ken, *North to Alaska!*, University of Alaska Press, 1992, p. 104-105]

The young African-Americans had attended the inadequate segregated schools of the Jim Crow South. Their white officers considered them not just uneducated but "slow learners." In truth, as Twichell explained, the black units contained "relatively few men who had entered military service already possessing a technical skill." The problem was compounded by "the lack of black leadership and the bigotry of white leaders." Twichell summarized the attitude of white officers:

Most white officers, especially careerists conscious of the risks to their professional reputation, looked upon duty with black troops as an experience to be avoided if at all possible. Indeed, many officers given such assignments devoted considerable time and energy trying to get reassigned-an effort not lost on the men they were supposed to be leading.

General William M. Hoge, the officer in charge of the project during most of the first year, had what Twichell described as "deep-seated doubts about the efficiency of Engineer units largely manned by unskilled blacks, particularly under arctic conditions." He wanted to keep them away from populated areas. Hoge "had no more interest in experimenting with equal opportunity in the middle of the war" than the President or other military leaders. [*Northwest*, p. 146]

In practice, the African-Americans were involved in many phases of construction, often trailing the white troops:

[A]fter cutting an access road over Mentasta Pass from Slana to Tok, Colonel [Stephen C.] Whipple's 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers would be used to speed the opening of the

northernmost third of the Alaska Highway by helping the PRA and the 18<sup>th</sup> Engineers close the gap between Whitehorse and Big Delta. Similarly, after opening a trail from Carcross to help the 340<sup>th</sup> Engineers reach Teslin,

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one battalion of Colonel [Frank M. S.] Johnson's 93<sup>rd</sup> Engineers would start work on the pioneer road from that point toward Whitehorse, while the other began improving the 340<sup>th</sup>'s newly cut trail to Watson Lake. As for Colonel Newman's 95<sup>th</sup> Engineers, neither Hoge nor (subsequently) [his replacement, Colonel James A.] O'Connor could find anything more worthwhile for them to do than to upgrade the pioneer road to Fort Nelson behind the 341<sup>st</sup>. [*Northwest* , p. 146]

With PRA contractors and Army engineering units working on segments of the Alaska Highway, gaps began to close in August. By the end of September, only the most difficult sections, through eastern Alaska and the southwest corner of the Yukon, remained to be completed. [*North to Alaska* , p. 130]

The final gap was closed on October 29, 1942, south of Kluane Lake. Coates quoted Malcolm MacDonald, British high commissioner to Canada, on the final moments:

The final meeting between men working from the south and men working from the north was dramatic. They met head on in the forest. Corporal Refines Sims, Jr., a negro from Philadelphia [of the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers] . . . was driving south with a bulldozer when he saw trees starting to topple over on him. Slamming his big vehicle into reverse he backed out just as another bulldozer driven by private Alfred Jalufka of Kennedy, Texas, broke through the underbrush. Jalufka had been forcing his bulldozer through the bush with such speed that his face was bloody from scratches of overhanging branches and limbs. That historic meeting between a negro corporal and white private on their respective bulldozers occurred 20 miles east of the Alaska-Yukon Boundary at a place called Beaver Creek. [*North to Alaska* , p. 130-131]

A wire-service photographer captured the image of the two men, one white, one black, standing on the bulldozers while shaking hands. The photograph would appear in newspapers around the country, and remains a staple of books and articles about the Alaska Highway.

Officials planned a ceremony on November 15, 1942, to mark completion of the pioneer trail. However, a sudden warming trend caused 1-foot thick ice on the area's rivers and streams to break up. Flood waters washed away or damaged several bridges. The ceremony was delayed until November 20, by which time all but the Peace River Bridge had been repaired. (Repair of the Peace River Bridge was completed on November 21.)

Over 200 dignitaries, guests, and journalists from the United States and Canada arrived at scenic Soldiers' Summit on the south end of Kluane Lake for the ceremony. The freezing temperature (-15 degrees fahrenheit) and falling snowflakes did not stop the speeches, but finally the time came for the ribbon cutting that would signal the opening of the Alaska Highway. Coates described the ceremony:

The formal ceremonies were, by all accounts, quite moving. Four enlisted men - Corporal Refines Sims and Private Alfred Jalufka (the two bulldozer operators who had finished the northern section), representing the Whitehorse sector, and Master-Sergeant Andrew Doyle

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and [African-American] Corporal John Reilly, from the Fort St. John Sector - held the ceremonial ribbon. Captain Richard Neuberger described the highlight of the day's gathering: "The ceremony moved toward a natural climax. At its end, [Canada's Minister of Pensions and National Health Ian ] MacKenzie [representing Prime Minister Mackenzie King] and [Alaska's Secretary of State E. L. "Bob"] Bartlett [representing Governor Ernest Gruening] were given a pair of scissors. These scissors had been especially engraved in Alaska gold by William Osborne, pioneer resident of Juneau . . . . Mackenzie took one blade of the scissors, Bartlett the other. The crowd became tense. Then the blades closed and the red, white and blue ribbon across the road was severed." After the speeches, spirited if somewhat chilled renditions of "God Save the King" and "The Star Spangled Banner" and a benediction by Captain E. May, U.S. Army Chaplain, brought the ceremony to a close. [*North to Alaska* , p. 132-133]

Although trucks began using the Alaska Highway, winter shut down all but maintenance operations on the road.

(in 1954, Captain Neuberger would win election to represent Oregon in the United States Senate. He served until his death on March 9, 1960. As noted earlier, he was instrumental in securing Davis-Bacon Act coverage for construction of the Interstate System.)

By the time the 1943 construction season began, PRA had its contractors ready to get to work on the permanent location of the Alaska Highway. The contractors kept the pioneer trail in service while building the permanent road, much of it on new location. By mid-July 1943, 81 contractors were on the job employing about 14,000 civilian workmen operating 6,000 heavy units of equipment, including scrapers, power shovels, elevating graders, trucks, motor graders, gravel plants, and sawmills. Forces included 1,850 PRA employees. Working two shifts of 10 hours each day, they completed the major portion of the work between mid-July and the end of October. [Annual Report of the Federal Works Agency, 1944, p. 26]

On October 13, the Utah Construction Company completed work on the last major gap. A stretch of permafrost northwest of Kluane Lake near the Alaska border. All the contractors had ceased operation by the end of the month and on October 31, PRA turned the Alaska Highway over to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maintain for the duration of the war. [*Northwest* , p. 251]

Twitchell summarized PRA's contribution:

Of the 1,420 miles of highway across Canada to Alaska that were opened to the public after World War II, about two-thirds (970 miles) consisted of the original Army pioneer road, all of which had been substantially improved and upgraded by the PRA. Another 450 miles of the highway were new - and strictly PRA-built. Here the Army's pioneer road had served its original purpose

as an access route and was abandoned thereafter. The wartime cost of the Alaska Highway came to a seemingly modest \$138 million-less than \$100,000 per mile. [*Northwest* , p. 253]

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The three African-American regiments had left the road by the end of February 1943

According to historian Douglas Brinkley, the Alaska Highway was "not only the greatest engineering feat of the Second World War; it is a triumph over racism." He noted that "of the 10,670 troops assigned to fog-bound Alaska 3,695 of them were African Americans," all with units trained in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. They were, as he added, seldom mentioned in government press releases or featured in press coverage. Nevertheless, he says:

When Private Refines Simms, Jr., a bulldozer technician with the 97<sup>th</sup> Engineers, converged with Private Alfred Jalufka, lead driver of the white 18<sup>th</sup> Engineers, on 25 October 1942 a major construction gap was closed. But the symbolism was even greater: blacks and whites working together for a common cause. Before long the U.S. Army would become integrated, a major step in the African American struggle for racial equality. [Brinkley, Douglas, "The Alcan Highway," Introduction to Griggs, William E., *The World War II Black Regiment That Built the Alaska Military Highway: A Photographic History*, University Press of Mississippi, 2002, p. 9-10, 12]

Over the years, as public attitudes changed, the African-Americans who helped build the pioneer trail received recognition for their accomplishment. Brinkley interviewed some of the veterans:

They all talked to me about duty for country and reminisced about their harsh living conditions, tasteless food, and bitter winters where frostbite was their primary foe. Stories about wading chest deep into freezing lakes to erect bridge trestles or having a finger fall off when the temperature hit a record -70° F or lowering the coffin of a comrade into the cold ground conjured bleak memories of Jack London's most brutal tales like "To Build a Fire" or "Burning Sun." Snowdrifts were often twenty feet deep. "For months on end, I couldn't get a real night's sleep," one veteran recalled. "I had nightmares I was freezing to death." Although these black soldiers had at their disposal 11,107 pieces of equipment, trucks, tractors, crushers, graders, and bulldozers, breakdowns occurred hourly. The job was daunting. Never before, it seems, had so many survey sticks been hammered into the earth at a given time. To keep morale up they often chanted old southern work tunes like "Steel-Driving Song" and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." With brawn and courage and valor they persevered, completing the Alcan Highway in just over eight months, with the official opening on 21 November 1942. [*Alcan*, p. 10]

This recognition of the African-Americans was thanks in part to Professor Lael Morgan of the University of Alaska-Fairbanks. In 1989, *National Geographic* magazine contracted with her to write an article about the Alaska Highway. As she researched construction of the highway, she became interested in the role of the African-American

Engineering Units. An article by Bill Gifford in *Washington City Paper* 25 described her research efforts:

As she researched the road, she became fascinated by its history, especially the Army's use of black troops. But

those black soldiers had scattered to the winds. The Pentagon could provide no troop lists or regimental directories. None of the three black regiments had ever held a reunion, although such events are common among white units. The 18<sup>th</sup> Engineers has held regular reunions since the war, and the 340<sup>th</sup> published a lavish picture book. The blacks had no group history; their memories of military service were undoubtedly less pleasant.

She was frustrated by the lack of interest in the troops by contemporary sources or research by subsequent historians:

Yet she felt the blacks deserved recognition, since they had been deleted from most accounts of the project. The *Trail of '42*, the most popular history of the highway, includes only three grainy photos of blacks, with no close-ups. She found that the official U.S. Army history of the Corps of Engineers covers the contribution of blacks in a single footnote.

Using a list of some of the men's names and hometowns she found in an old issue of *Stars & Stripes*, she managed to located seven veterans to interview.

*National Geographic* was not interested in Professor Morgan's approach to the article. The magazine canceled her article, but her contract forbid her from using the material gathered for the magazine in another publication. [Gifford, Bill, "The Great Black North," *Washington City Paper*, October 8, 1993, p. 30-31]

As she told the Associated Press in 1990:

You go through all the souvenir books of the Alaska highway and all the old news clippings, you never see a single black face. Nor did any historian know the whereabouts of these people. So I started looking. [Hallifax, Jackie, "Historians plan reunion for black soldiers who worked on Alaska road," Associated Press, date unknown, but probably September 1990]

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1991 provided "the hook she needed," as Gifford explained:

Previous anniversaries had celebrated "the same old stuff, with white soldiers shaking hands," says Morgan, a self-described "pushy broad." "I decided, this time would be different. It would not go down in history as just these white soldiers who built it." [*City Paper*, p. 32]

Because many of the soldiers came from the South, she contacted James Eaton, curator of the Black Archives Research Center and Museum at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee. By combining their efforts, they located some of the men, interviewed them, and documented their accomplishments. Twichell, who had researched the subject for *Northwest Epic*, provided the names and addresses of six of the soldiers. Overall, they located 75 veterans.

In January 1992, Eaton and Morgan sponsored a reunion at the university, with 13 of the veterans participating. An article about the reunion in the student newspaper explained:

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There are over 2,000 different celebrations to commemorate the highway's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary [sic] but none of them honored, and most hardly mentioned, the black units who represented one-third of the troops, according to Eaton . . . . [He] called the soldiers, "A lost page in history." [Lindo, Tresha, "Troops re-united for highway's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary," *The Famuan* , January 13, 1992]

These efforts created interest in the subject, such that on July 4, 1992, the city of Anchorage invited several of the troops to participate in the city's parade down Main Street. Two of them, Albert E. France and Donald W. Nolan, Sr., were from Baltimore. Ann LoLordo of *The Baltimore Sun* interviewed them before they departed for Alaska. France was a 75-year old retired railroad worker, while Nolan was a 72-year old retired postal worker. They both recalled, first and foremost, the cold:

"It was awful cold and it snowed for days," recalled Mr. France . . . . It was the coldest winter on record in the territory.

"Leather would freeze," recalled Mr. Nolan . . . . "We'd take galoshes, rubber galoshes - we called them 'Arctics' - and we'd wear three, four pairs of socks We would double up on pants. We slept on the ground in pup tents."

Food was never plentiful. C-rations, bittersweet chocolate and "hardcracks" might be all a soldier would get to eat after the harsh climate cut off supply routes.

"We'd kill a bear, a huge black bear," said Mr. Nolan, "about 9, 10 feet high, and those chops were delicious."

When the snow stopped, the rains started and the rivers swelled. In summer, mosquitoes droned like airplanes and the "muskeg," a uniquely Alaskan bog, swallowed tractors . . . .

In that barren landscape, the off-work hours could seem exceptionally long.

The commander, General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., had accepted the regiments reluctantly and prohibited them from visiting towns and cities along the route:

The men entertained themselves shooting craps and throwing horseshoes and playing ball when the weather broke.

Looking back, Nolan said he was glad to have served on the project. "You have something to tell your kids." [LoLordo, Ann, "Black GIs helped carve a road across frozen hell," *The Baltimore Sun* , July 4, 1992]

(The November 1991 issue of *National Geographic* contained Richard Olsenius' article "Alaska Highway - Wilderness Escape Route." The

author described his trip along the highway, with only a brief reference to its construction during the war. Fifty years earlier, Olsenius explained, it "was hacked out of virtually trackless bush in a mere eight months." A two-page map, with two construction photos, contained a brief explanation that the highway "was built at eight miles

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a day during World War II to counter any invasion by Japanese forces -who thanked workers in a propaganda broadcast for opening a way for their own troops." The article did not mention the contribution of the African-American units to construction of the pioneer trail in 1942.)

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United States Department of Transportation - **Federal Highway Administration**

