THE YUKONER MAGAZINE

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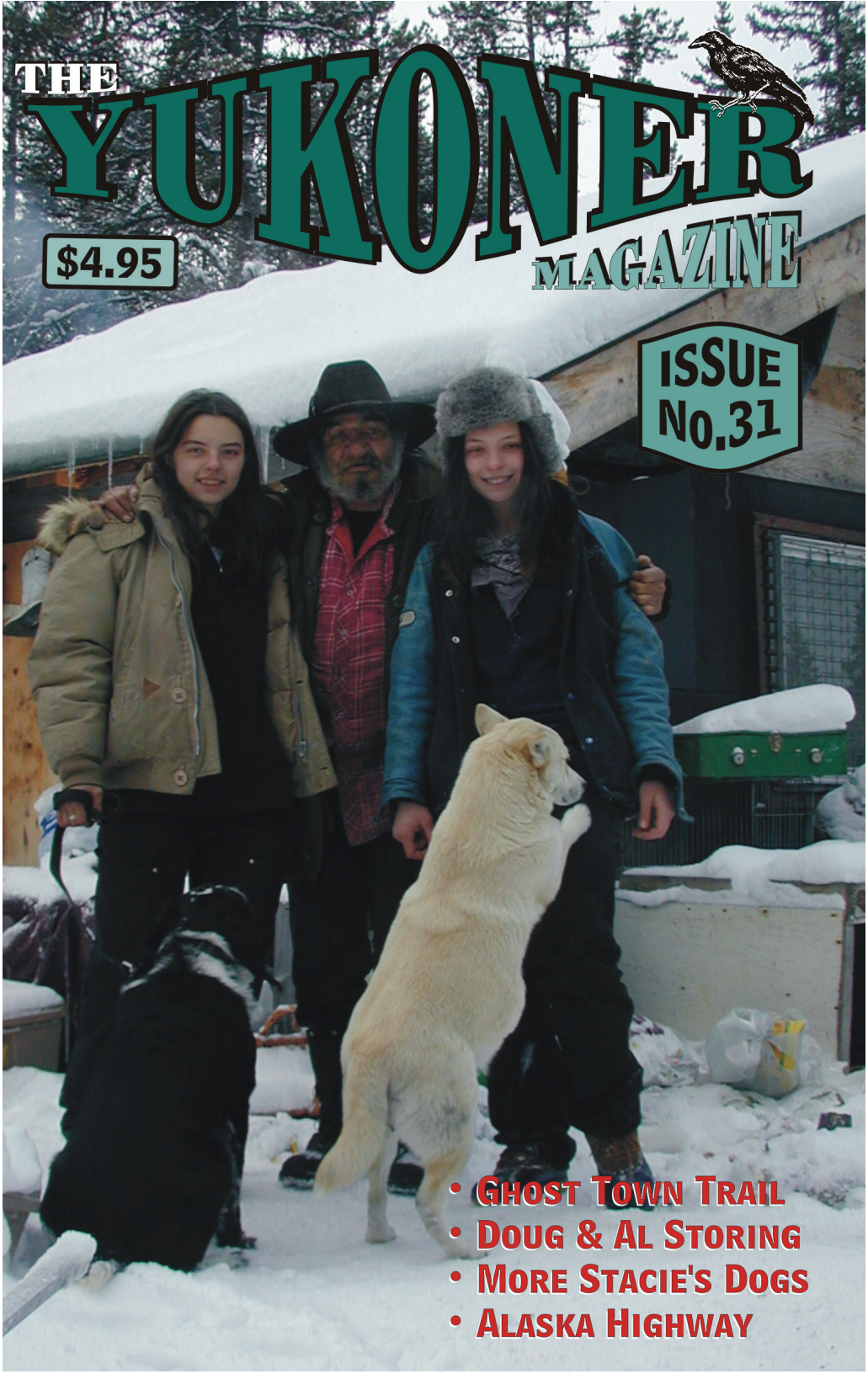

- Ghost Town Trail
- Doug & Al Storing
- More Stacie's Dogs
- Alaska Highway

WHITEHORSE MOTORS

Ford

SALUTES

Betty & Dan Davidson of Dawson City

1976

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Cover: Ana and Diana Jovmir, with "Sundance," a well-known First Nations carver, at a cabin on Squatters' Row, February, 2004. [S.H. photo]

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From the Editor

It will be 17 years that I have been patching this magazine together (counting the Yukon Reader). Dianne has been with me all the way and during that time we built a home here at Marsh Lake, my son grew into a young man with his own family and old Dodgie has something like 900,000 miles on her.

You may have noticed that, calendar-wise, the issues seem further apart. Yet, to me, they seem closer together all the time. Like an inverted hour-glass, time picks up speed as we get older. I'm pushing 60 and what was so easy just ten years ago feels like hard work now—and takes longer.

I bucked up a cord of wood the other day. My right hip felt like it had a nail going through it and my left hand wouldn't let go of the chain saw. Am I aging prematurely, or does everyone experience these at three score years? My neighbour, Neil Wright, said to me last summer: "Sam, you better enjoy the aches and pains you have to day... because tomorrow they'll be worse!"

So there we are with some excuses. Apart from that, though, I have been trying to make some money, first at electrical work (didn't pay) and now I am installing security systems, mostly in Whitehorse. (Criminals create a lot of jobs while in jail and they create more work when they're out.)

The magazines may come to you further apart but if you're over 40, won't they seem to arrive faster?

—Sam

The winner of the gold nugget draw (for subscription renewals) is Mac Savage of Meachem, Saskatchewan.

Leaving Burwash, January, 2006, at 42 below. This Dodge minivan I'm towing is to be a parts van for another such beast that I have at home. I'm hoping to save gas and money on this operation. [photo by John Obermeier of Burbilly Hill].

The Mail Run

Dear Dianne and Sam,

As a young man I trained and operated as a pilot in the RCAF during WWII. After that, I became a bush pilot, first flying on floats on our West Coast, based at Sea Island, Vancouver. When that job came to a close, in 1952, I went to Yellowknife for the next four years – flew prospectors, mail and goods of all sorts out to mines and settlements up in the Arctic. When the DEW line started in February 1955, with Cambridge Bay as the base, I placed the first markers (flags) on nine of the sites, which became DEW line stations, from Lady Franklin Point in the West to Shepherd Bay (on the west side of Boothia Peninsula) in the East.

I left the North in December 1955 and hired on with Imperial Oil Limited. As you know, that company was one of the early operators in the north, carrying out a great exploration and drilling program down the MacKenzie River and into the high Arctic Islands during the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s. I flew for that company for just over 27 years. Retired the last day of 1982, a great company to work for.

I confess, I am a bit of a history buff. Now I must correct a statement in the fine write-up (Will Rogers, The Man with the Hat) in Issue No. 30. On page 60 the writer states, "This was the same model that Amelia Earhart had flown to her grave on July 2, 1937…." Here the writer is referring to Wiley Post's Lockheed Vega model 5-C. Now I believe Amelia did fly a Vega on some of her early flights, but the aircraft that she and her navigator Fred Noonan disappeared in was a twin-engined, all-metal Lockheed-10. It was specially equipped for her round-the-world attempt. Locheed-10s were designed as early, fast airliners. Our own Trans Canada Airlines started its operations with those airliners – first flight September 3, 1937 – Vancouver to Seattle and return. Pilots Billy Wells and Morris McGregor.

Dave Floyd
Red Deer, Alberta

Hi,

My grandfather was John Murray, younger brother to Frank Murray, whose son Phil was killed on the Columbian. John was known as the Kid Captain, because he was so young when he piloted a steamboat during the gold rush years. He worked on the Yukon steam vessels until 1937, when he died of consumption. I was born 1944, never knew him. I have not been able to find out much about him through my mother, who seems to remember little of him, and who apparently did not like to visit the Yukon. John was gone at least six months out of the year, and came home to his home on Alki Point when not in the Yukon. My mother said he was a strict father. (I don't think she liked him). I know she did not like her Uncle Frank, who chopped off one of John's fingers when they were boys growing up. She said Frank was a mean older brother. John had one leg missing below the knee, which

THE MAIL RUN

my mom cannot explain. I have John's .32-caliber pistol, which he carried at all times on his person. Mom said he was tough and merciless with troublemakers on the vessels. I would like to find out more about him.
Murray McCory
Tonasket, Washington (?)

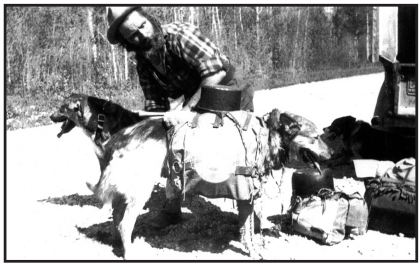
Dear Dianne/Sam:

In a recent issue of The Yukoner, there was mention of a character known as "Yukon Joe". I remembered meeting him in the summer of 1954 when I was building a government campsite at Whisker's Point on McLeod Lake, north of Prince George. Joe used to travel up (and probably down) the Hart Highway and perhaps the Alaska Highway leading a string of dogs fitted out with packs according to their sizes, which ranged from German Shepherd down to Chihuahua.

I am enclosing a photograph of Yukon Joe and his dogs and also providing the following extract from a letter I wrote to my parents on June 21, 1954.

"On one of these trips I saw Yukon Joe, one of the local characters. He is about 50, 5'3", large beard, is a prospector and really dresses the part. We rather suspect he makes more money "panning" the tourists than he ever does in the streams. He walks along the highway with his string of pack dogs, and of course the tourists stop to take pictures of him, which he maneuvers them into offering to pay for. He also sells them some of his paintings, which are done on anything from canvas to those mushroom-shaped funguses, which grow on tree trunks. The gaudy colours are blended well but the composition is poor and every picture I've seen is the same [sun setting behind snow-capped peaks in the background, a lake framed by trees in the foreground plus a small cabin] except that there is the name of a different Yukon lake under each.

"Yukon Joe had a partner, Casey, about 35, who looked like a bandit or rustler out of a western movie [he was leading a string of horses up the highway]. Our maintenance man, Chuck Rogers, stayed in a cabin with them one night two weeks ago. That night, the partners had a violent argument over sanitary habits (they lived like pigs, slept fully clothed including moccasins). Joe objected to Casey's relieving himself on the stove or the floor and Casey offered to settle the argument with 'guns, knives or fists', but Yukon pulled up stakes and left, threatening to put a bullet



THE MAIL RUN

into Casey if he ever met him on the trail. Joe said he was taking a 3-year trip to the Nahanni Valley in the Yukon [*sic*] but we think this is more hot air."

A day or two after they split up I was driving up the Hart Highway and saw them heading in the same direction, a few miles apart. There were no subsequent reports of murder so perhaps they didn't cross paths again.

Rae Wigen
Whitehorse, Yukon

Dear Sam,

I remember that old tractor there was a picture of in a recent magazine. Myers Samuelson, Joe Redmond and I used to play on this machine when we were kids. It must have been the summer of 1919. The tractor had been stripped of all its copper or brass fittings by some of the older boys who sold them to the Dawson secondhand or junkman.

Gordon McIntyre
Whitehorse, Yukon

Hello Sam & Diane,

My husband and I absolutely LOVE your magazine. We have been subscribers for a while now and, whenever we receive a new issue, it's a fight over who gets to wear out the pages first!!! Though we live in Southern Ontario (Peterborough area), there's no doubt in my mind that if my husband had the chance, he would move our family to the Yukon. Most people around here save for a holiday on the beach in the south - we're saving to come North!!! I would love to see the Northern Lights at their best.

Both our children (daughter 11 and son 8 yrs. old) would have no problem fitting in. They were raised, until two years ago, in Toronto and have made the transition to "County Life" very well. They both get to go hunting with Dad whenever possible and absolutely love it. I myself come from this area - "you can take the girl out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the girl...." I'm very glad to be back living a comfortable, slow paced life.

Thanks again for a GREAT magazine and keep them coming.

Teena Woollings
Douro, Ontario

Hi Sam,

I was glad to receive issue number 30 of your magazine. I read your article on costs and can understand, as I have been engaged in a small business for the past 25 years. Some people pay, some don't. Those that don't only go through my office once. I live in Carberry, Manitoba, and subscribe to a paper, The Morden Times, printed in Morden, my family's origi-

nal homestead. They add a little cost to people subscribing outside their area, The Pembina Valley. I am aware of the rising postal rates. Sometimes it is not worth returning items not ordered as the postage is more than the item is worth.

I am enclosing a sawbuck and hope others can do the same, as I certainly would miss getting a copy of your magazine. Keep up the good work.

Les Morden
Carberry, Manitoba
Greetings Dianne and Sam,

I was very pleased to finally receive a letter from my long-time pen-pal friend, Tensley Johnston of Ross River, Yukon who I was introduced to in your "Yukoner." Tensley wrote long letters to me every week for six of eight years then they slowed down to two or three a month but he wrote a paragraph almost every day and mailed it all together.

I have all Tensley's letters to me here and if I ever have time I may write his history for a trapper's magazine, if there is one. Do you know if one is published up there or anywhere else?

Lois Argue
Edmonton, Alberta
Publisher:
Hi, Lois. I see on the Internet that B C Trapper's Association publishes a magazine. Also the National Trapper's Association in the U S. Thanks for sending the book, "The Wildfire Season," which is set in Ross River, Yukon, where our friend Tensley Johnston is a resident.

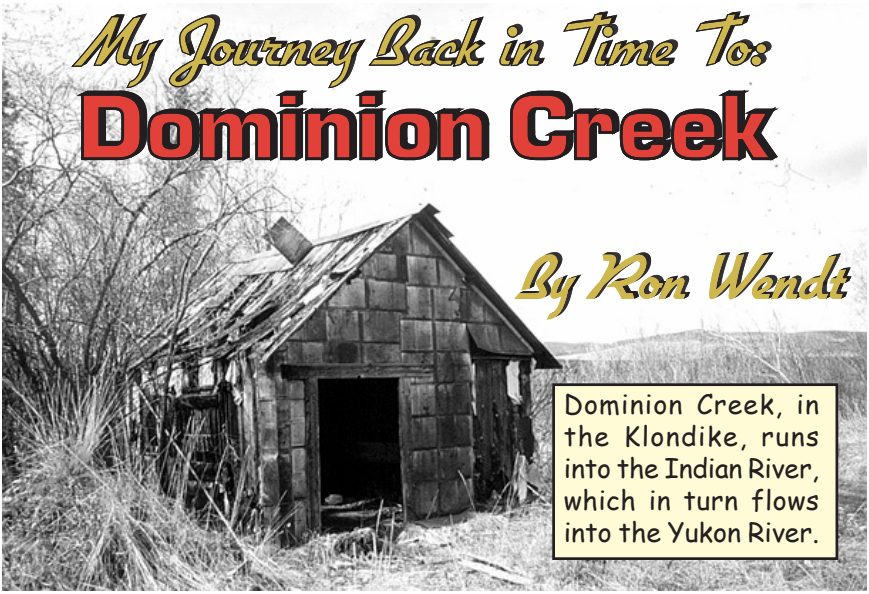
In 1976, Dan Davidson and his wife, Betty, left Nova Scotia to teach school in the Yukon. They arrived at Beaver Creek driving a Volkswagen. After a year of bumping over windrows, poor heating at 50 below and meeting too many stone-throwing trucks on the gravel highways, they traded in the bug on a Ford pickup.

Dan started writing book reviews and upon moving to Faro in 1979, he became involved with the Faro Raven newsletter until they moved to Dawson City in 1985.

Even though he wrote hundreds of Whitehorse Star columns (Uffish Thoughts), Dan helped found the Klondike Sun newspaper in 1989. A good-sized book could be compiled from all his writings over the years. The above photo was taken on the Davidson's departure from the Maritimes by Helen Davidson. The later photo on the back cover was shot at Klondike Kate's Restaurant in Dawson by Eric Wilson in 2004.

My Journey Back in Time To: Dominion Creek

By Ron Wendt



Dominion Creek, in the Klondike, runs into the Indian River, which in turn flows into the Yukon River.

Hootch Albert was probably laughing at me the first time I set foot into Dominion Creek valley. I believe his ghost still hovers over this wild, beautiful, foreboding landscape.

A hot Yukon sun sizzled down on me on lower Dominion Creek as I made my way along the muddy streambed. I had made a dozen trips into this creek and found something different each time I explored here.

In the old days this valley was a hopping place, bustling with activity and commerce. On this trip it was as quiet as I have ever heard in my memory, almost to the point of being lonesome. The occasional sound of a fly or bee and the high pitched song of the mosquito filled the air.

In the near distance, I saw one of the Dominion Creek dredges, one I had targeted to explore. It sat in a stagnant pond with the dredge ladder where buckets once mechanically made their way up into the huge wooden boat. Bucket after bucket, dumped paydirt brought up from the depths with chunks of bedrock and pay headed to the large trommel inside.

I played my first game of cribbage on Dominion Creek. My prospecting partner, Bob Lee, showed me the ropes of this game. Having spent many days and nights on Dominion, Bob and I decided to set up camp along the well-maintained gravel road on the lower portion of the valley. Some of the best memories of my prospecting trips are the good conversations with friends around the campfire; sharing stories about adventure, gold, grizzly bears, and ghost towns. Dominion has all of the above, including a half-dozen dilapidated gold dredges along its watershed.

Top photo: Covered with metal fuel cans used for siding, this cabin has survived the elements for many years on lower Dominion. [Ron Wendt photo]

Dominion has proved to be the richest creek in the Klondike region and boasts the largest nugget find of 126 ounces found on upper Dominion Creek. There was also a rumored report of a 450-ounce chunk found on American Gulch but it was mostly quartz.

"Hootch" Albert Fortier first discovered Dominion Creek gold. He was from Quebec and got his name Hootch because he had a knack for making alcohol out of nearly anything. Hootch actually found gold here in 1896 but did nothing about it until 1897.

Hootch staked lower Discovery in May of '97. John Brannin staked No. 1 Above on June 12th. At the same time Frank Biederman found gold on upper Dominion and thought he was the first to find gold here. The Canadian government allowed both discovery claims and gave the creek name as Dominion.

Dominion was the scene of political corruption when Yukon Commissioner James Walsh reserved some alternate mining claims on the creek. There was great bitterness among the miners when they learned that friends and relatives of government officials had staked claims the day before informing the general public that the creek was open to staking. This circumstance along with other complaints led to Walsh's recall to Ottawa and the appointment of William Olgilvie, whose integrity was accepted by all.

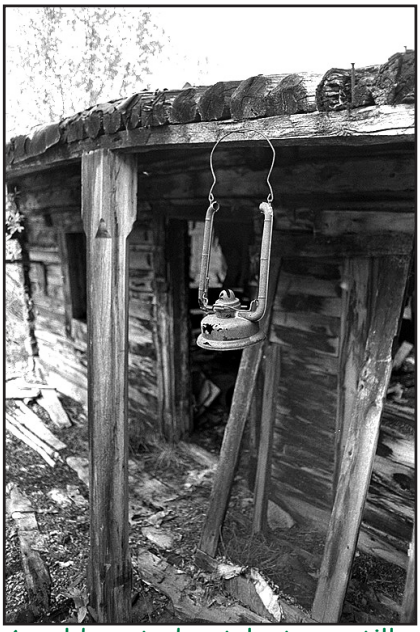
Walsh had come to the Yukon after serving in the Northwest Mounted Police. A quarter of a century earlier, Walsh had been the first uniformed man to ride into the camp of Sitting Bull and his warriors, from whose saddle horns the scalps of Custer's men still hung. This was the man who had kicked the famous medicine man in the pants and who had humiliated White

On Dominion Creek 40 miles east of Dawson, there's a cabin about every quarter mile, many caved in, some still standing solidly with sod on the roof. [Ron Wendt photo]

Dog, the fierce Assiniboine in the presence of a hundred armed Indians. Also, he was the conqueror of Little Child, the horse-stealing Chief of the Salteaux.

Walsh lasted only two months in the Klondike. His colorful, proud place in Canadian history was forever tarnished by his experience in the North.

On Dominion Creek, 40 miles east of Dawson, there's a cabin about every quarter mile. Some of these are caved in, some still stand solidly with sod on the roof. The Canadian government maintains the Dominion Creek road, which meanders through the spruce-covered hills. Remnants of wooden sluice boxes, gray with age can be found along the hillsides and gravel side benches where the old timers thought they might get rich.



An old rusted out lantern still hangs by a nail at a Dominion cabin dating back to around 1915. [Ron Wendt photo]

In 1898, with the discovery of Dominion Creek gold a large group of miners came out of Dawson to mine its rich paydirt. Along the road and scattered through the trees is evidence of the tent cities the miners built. Outlines of each site can still be found, along with an occasional bottle and can dump. I have dug through a lot of these dumps and found many bottles, some worth as much as $20 a piece to a collector.

One cabin still had calendars on the walls dating back to the '30s. Another cabin had stacks of old newspapers from the '30s and '40s. There were lots of other items, mostly junk. The squirrels had taken over many of these cabins. Nearby, I found an old wagon sunk in the dirt with moss growing on the top and down the sides. It seems as if moss grows on everything that doesn't move.

Some claims were being worked with front-end loaders busily scurrying about, D-9 Cats pushing tons of dirt about, working down to the bedrock, and running the dirt through a large sluice box. On one claim a pipeline ran up the creek and over the hill into the next valley, evidently siphoning water back into Dominion Creek. Old trailer houses where miners lived while working the claims were scattered about. None of the dredges are working anymore. Most of them are so old that the dredge walls are falling apart.

There are numerous dredges in the Dawson area. Most of these used to be the YCGC concessions (Yukon Consolidated Gold Company), run by Joe Boyle back in the early days of Dawson. Now, it is said that gold can still

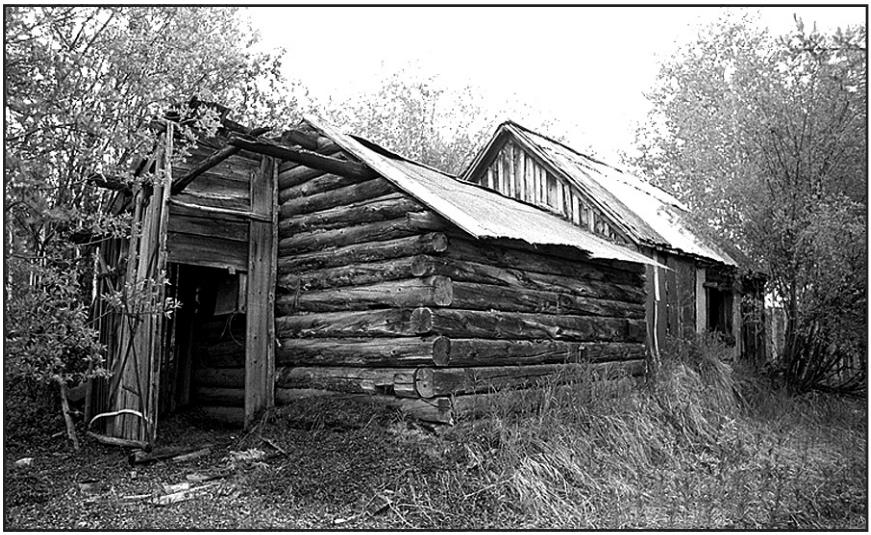
be cleaned off these dredges. I know this to be true because there are areas where the gold collects on the dredge and where it sifts through into nooks and crannies.

I traveled to the last dredge on Dominion Creek. This operation was six miles back up the road. I walked through a quarter of a mile of tailings before I got to the dredge. A light breeze began blowing along the creek. I climbed up on the bow of the large boat. The cables were humming and whining.

What a beautiful setting it was out in that vast wilderness. I was looking at some of the most beautiful country in the world and could see rolling hills for miles. The land was not much for large trees; only small bushes and scrub spruce were scattered about. The sun was shining, and, every once in awhile, dodging behind a cloud or two.

Suddenly, in the midst of this quiet beauty, I felt very lonely. I had never felt this way before. It was a very strange feeling. As I made my way up the stairs of the dredge, I kept hearing a very strange thump and clatter sound and expected at anytime run into a bear, or some other beast, or the barrel of a gun. As I neared the top of the stairs I realized the banging was only a loose board. Such complete silence has a way of magnifying sound and imagination.

All of a sudden the wind came up rather ferociously and set these huge cables humming and clanging, and corrugated sheet metal resounding as it moved up and down, sending chills up and down my spine. The loneliness left me then, and the sensation of fear seemed to take over for some unexplainable reason.



One cabin still had calendars on the walls dating back to the '30s, another had stacks of old newspapers from the '30s and'40s. There were lots of other items, mostly junk. Squirrels have taken over many of these cabins. [Ron Wendt photo]

I was about to head back downstairs, when I paused momentarily to look around at the massive piece of machinery. At this point of hesitation, fate was playing an important role in my life, for if I hadn't paused at the top of the steps, this writer wouldn't be alive to write this story.

Before me, 30 feet below, were the remnants of broken stairs resting on top of a large iron wheel. If I hadn't paused for that one brief moment, I might have plunged those 30 feet to my death. I quickly withdrew my step and stood back, thanking God for sparing me. I walked over to the other stairs that I had come up on, realizing that they were the right ones, the only ones.

I slowly made my way back downstairs to the first deck and found one of the old fines boxes. I got out some scraping tools and began digging in the cracks of steel and welded plates. I would then pour my dust and dirt into a small bag to pan it later. This was indeed the lazy man's way to wealth.

As I mentioned before, after years of accumulation, a dredge is very likely to have some gold still left in it. Although scraping through a dredge doesn't necessarily ensure any horrendous discovery of gold, you can get good returns, and in some cases small nuggets to boot

In this case I cleaned up only about $100 worth in a couple of hours. This was better than nothing, believe me! I walked off the dredge, relishing the fact that I was still alive and kicking.

Not far from here, in one old garbage dump, I estimated there were probably 10,000 bottles. Nearby moss and trees were slowly swallowing barrows and wheel-less wagons. A large cabin complete with wooden floor, heaving badly, had a trap door located in the center. Beneath the door I spotted a

Bob Lee stands near remnants of a horse barn used for freighting. Not far away, pieces of wagons stick up out of the moss. [Ron Wendt photo]

water-filled hole, which was probably used for storing food or hiding a few gold pokes.

At the head of the creek on the summit, the Granville Roadhouse sits. The roadhouse served as a rest stop for freight wagons and dog teams tired from the long pull up the Hunker Creek summit. The roadhouse, long abandoned, is a two-story log structure with a small cabin next door. A large, ancient, gold-rush dump is scattered throughout the high mountain alder bushes, which breed a million mosquitoes.

Inside the roadhouse I found a deposit slip with the Canadian Bank of Commerce logo and some handwriting on it. The slip's date was 1903.

Rocks from Dominion Creek have a greater variety than other creeks in the area. The upper portion of Dominion is cut through a grayish sericite schist, alternating through bands of greenish chloritic schist. The chloritic is fairly massive in places, and is often filled with grains of pyrite and magnetite.

Downstream on middle Dominion, the common Klondike schists are replaced by biotite-bearing schists, greenish schists, and quartzose schists. Bands of graphite schists are also present. The auriferous gravels of Dominion consist of yellowish creek gravels, white creek gravels underlying these, and terrace gravels.

I prospected mostly, on the middle and lower portion of Dominion Creek. The gold specs and nuggets I recovered near small tributaries and actual Dominion stream channel gravels were mostly flat and worn.

The Dominion Creek road is maintained by the Canadian government. Remnants of wooden sluice boxes, and rocker boxes, gray with age can be found along the hillsides and gravel side benches where the old timers thought they might get rich. [Ron Wendt photo]

Some of the gold above Lombard Creek is in rounded grains and small nuggets. Below Lombard, the gold varies from well-worn nuggets to a more flaky variety. An occasional large, worn nugget has been found. Below Lower Discovery the gold becomes finer and flakier and nuggets have been found.

Today, a few medium-size mining operations still dig up the gold-bearing gravels. On lower Dominion, the biggest operation, known as Ross Mining, moves thousands of yards of gravel on a grand scale and is dubbed as the largest mine in the Klondike. The ancient stream course has been scoured and cleanly gouged out revealing a large open pit where thousands of ounces of gold are recovered each summer.

Not far up the road, a small, white picket fence still stands around the graveyard. Birch and aspens grow around it and moss and grass devour rotting remnants of old headboards and crosses, where those who participated in Dominion life were laid to rest.

The gold in my pants pocket clattered a bit as I walked to a few graves. That wide, vast view of the Dominion valley set the scene for the dead buried here. Perhaps children, mothers, fathers, storekeepers, and gold miners found their final resting-place here.

I couldn't read any inscriptions on the crosses or monuments. It was kind of an unusual feeling, being 40 miles out in the middle of nowhere, in this cemetery filled with people from different places of the world; people whom time had forgotten. No one in this age ever knew them.

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The last dredge on Dominion Creek. I walked through a quarter of a mile of tailings before I got to the dredge. [Ron Wendt photo]

I Dream of the Yukon

The Saga of Doug and Al Storing

MY FATHER

DOUGLAS DONALD STORING was born April 13, 1923 in Edmonton, Alberta. Doug wasn't his birth name but a name he took while in foster care. Dad never knew his birth name as he was turned over to the State at the tender age of one month. His mother was to be married and her new husband did not accept her illegitimate son. Even at the age of 65 dad could not collect the Canadian pension as he had no birth certificate and no idea of his birth name.

Doug was passed from one foster home to another until he was approximately five years old when the Storing family of Clover Bar, just outside of Edmonton, took him in and gave him a real home until he left when he was 18. It had not been easy for the young boy but this new family who had adopted an older child, a girl, certainly gave him something he had never had before. Even though he wasn't adopted, at the age of six years old he decided to take the Storing name and call himself, "Douglas Donald." Throughout his lifetime he always wondered what his given name at birth was. I have a small sheriff's badge that dad made out of aluminum that he scratched his name into. It took awhile before he realized his last name was not spelled "Storey" but "Storing".

Dad attended an Edmonton school until the age of nine when he was needed to work on the Storing homestead. With only a grade 4 education he was self-taught in everything he was involved in and there were times he would tell me that he wished he could have continued his education.

Doug worked on the farm until 1941 and that same year went to work for Okes Construction out of Dawson Creek, B.C. The company was contracted to work on the construction of the Alaska Highway and Doug welcomed the opportunity to work on a caterpillar in unfamiliar surroundings. His foster parents insisted the children help in every capacity on the farm so Doug was no stranger to working on heavy equipment. The years he spent on the farm prepared him for the unexpected in the Canadian wilderness. With little instruction on the large cat it didn't take the young lad long to excel on the heavy equipment. He loved the work and he certainly gained an appreciation for the landscape. He was enthralled with the military vehicles as is apparent in the photos he took during the highway construction.

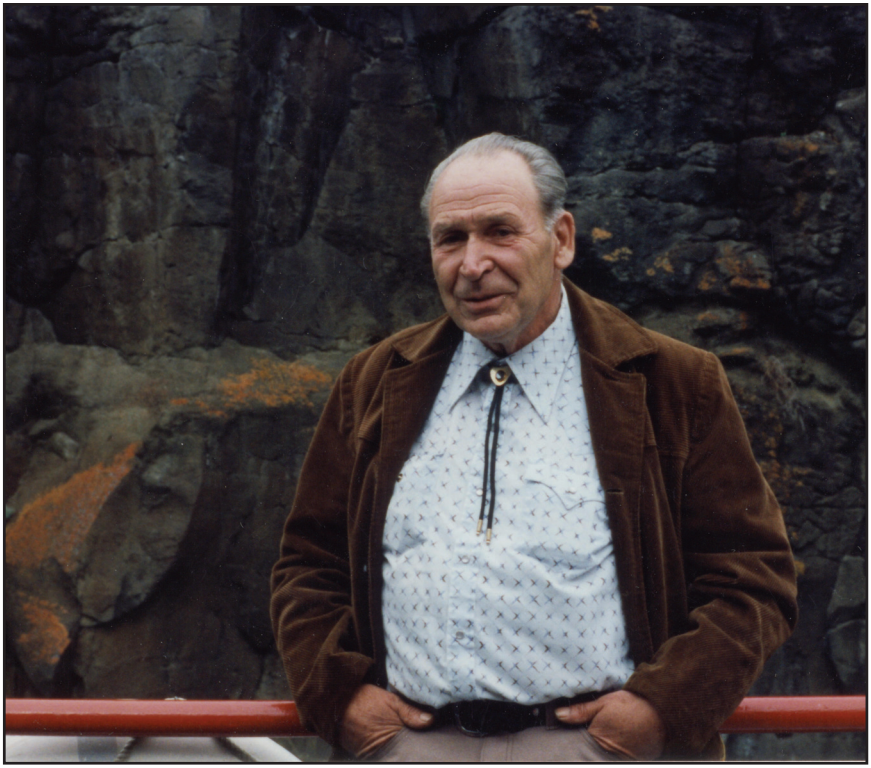
In the conversations I had with dad in the 1960s he indicated he never regretted the time he spent on the construction. He thrived and was determined to learn everything he could about heavy equipment. Even though he didn't have a heavy equipment diploma he was known as one of the best mechanics in the north in later years.

By Donna Clayson (nee Storing)

Doug had many interests throughout his life. One was photography and he was never without his camera. Some of the photos he took during the Alaska Highway construction rank among the best I've seen. In fact I won a black and white print of one of his photos that McBains Cameras enlarged and framed for me.

When the *Klondike* stern-wheeler was moved through the streets of Whitehorse to its new home at Rotary Park, dad took roll after roll of slides. He wanted me to have them in 1986 but I refused at the time and always thought they would be there for me when I was ready for them. That was a fatal error in judgment. The suitcase they were in disappeared after dad passed away. I have spent all these years looking for that suitcase with no luck. Dad took numerous photos of wildlife and scenery that was also in the suitcase. Thank goodness I accepted all his Alaska Highway photos years earlier.

Another interest dad had was rifles and hunting. When I was five he began teaching me rifle safety. I loved boy-things and if I pointed my toy



Doug Storing on the deck of tourboat *MV Schwatka* in Miles Canyon, Yukon, July, 1986.

guns at anyone or at animals the guns were taken away for a week. I learned to respect weapons and the value of life at an early age.

He wouldn't let me actually hunt until the age of 11 and I could only take animals we were going to eat such as rabbits and moose. He taught me to clean and quarter my game and to never leave any sign of a kill.

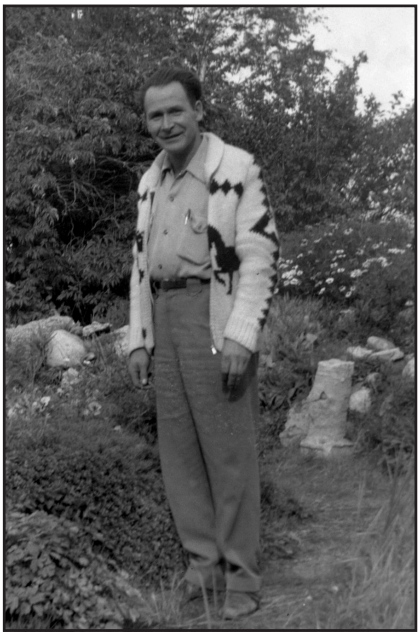
He insisted on safety at all times and if I could not get a clean shot I was to let the animal go. He would not use vehicles of any kind for hunting and we would scout the area for at least two weeks on foot before a hunt. Once he got his winter meat hunting was no longer allowed. He would get irritated when he heard about trophy hunters.

Dad was a lover of any animal or bird. He taught me how to walk quietly in the bush and he could spot any wildlife before it was in my view. I've seen him take his time and let the animals get used to his smell and presence. He was then able to walk up to wildlife and actually touch them. He had them following him around. I never learned that skill although I tried numerous times. He never used this gift with animals during hunting season.

He had a pet squirrel he called *Peanuts* and when dad would drive into our yard in Porter Creek *Peanuts* would come running for a treat. The crazy squirrel would climb all over dad until he could find the treat in one of his shirt pockets. My friends would like to come over and watch the show.

The old farm in Drayton Valley.

When dad saw an animal that had been killed on the road he would stop and bury it right there. I attended many a funeral for wildlife that had been hit by a vehicle and dad insisted on saying a prayer. He would always be silent for quite some time after and I learned to let him be until he was ready to talk. He would keep turning his head to look out the side window of the vehicle not wanting me to see his tears for a life lost so needlessly.



Doug Storing in 1957.

Dad also loved music. He couldn't carry a tune but he was always humming, which used to drive me nuts as a teenager. He said, "If you have a song in your heart you will always be happy". Now I sing around the house driving my own family to cover their ears.

Another interest was art and drawing. When we shopped for groceries on our monthly trip to Whitehorse dad would be drawn to the magazine and bookracks at the store. Instead of truck magazines he would look at art magazines and travel magazines that let him escape to far away lands like the Orient and Europe. Books were his love although he had trouble reading the big words. On our shopping trips he usually came home with a book so he would have a good supply during the long winter nights. His books were always non-fiction and talked about other countries, places I'm sure he longed to visit. When he came across a word he didn't know his trusty dictionary always helped him out. He insisted I learn to read and appreciate the books that would tell me tales of far away places. To this day I yearn to visit Switzerland from a book I helped him read.

Once Doug left the farm he never went back to live there. He would visit his stepparents and was secretly hoping they would leave him the farm they had acquired east of Drayton Valley, Alberta. I remember as a young child the times we spent on this property. There were no farm animals and only a small shack where we stayed on weekends during the summer. I loved the smell of the old structure that had no electricity and only a one-hole outhouse in the back. Dad planted a birch tree in his early twenties that must be 60 feet tall today. That is the only thing left on the farm now that still reminds me of the Storings. In 1958, after the deaths of both William and Eva Storing, dad tried to make a go of it selling hay off the land. Unfortunately, with limited education in finances, dad lost the farm for taxes to Stan Reynolds, well-known businessman in Westaskwin, Alberta. Dad never really got over the disappointment and blamed Mr. Reynolds for the loss.

The Storings were a kind family so, when his foster stepfather, William passed away November 9th, 1957, young Doug was devastated. Dad was crushed when his foster stepmother, Eva, passed away three months later of Alzheimer's on February 13, 1958. Again, he was alone with no family whatsoever. He had lost track of the adopted daughter, Vivian.

Kristine on the MV Schwatka ,Whitehorse, July 1992.

MY MOTHER

MY MOTHER, Alfilda Wilhelmina Kristine Paulsen was born in Calgary on April 6, 1913 of Norwegian parents. Mom had a tragic beginning. While living in Dapp, Alberta, her father shot and killed her mother over a disagreement. Her father spent 11 years in jail. Mom was two years old at the time and her grandmother raised all six children. When her father was released from prison, Mr. Paulsen would visit his children until his death in 1942.

Mom married Harold James Armstrong on January 5, 1932 and together they raised five daughters. Harold passed away March 19, 1950 of tuberculosis.

Al loved sports. Throughout her life she was on a curling team, dart team and bowling league. She loved to go fishing and scouting back roads. In her early twenties she owned a pool hall and never lost the urge to pick up a pool cue.

Mom had quite a sense of humour. She would say things that appeared logical to her but usually had us in stitches. In the late 1980s she was sitting in her perfect little living room and realized she disliked the lampshade. She replaced it then realized it didn't match the couch so a new couch was in order. Then the couch didn't match the curtains so they needed to go. Then the curtains didn't match the carpet. Of course that was replaced. Once the living room was completely remodeled she stood back and said, "But I didn't like the lampshade, everything else was okay."

Even though mom changed her name from Al to Kristine sometime in the 1970s, northerners still knew her as Al.

OUR FAMILY

DAD MET MY MOTHER in 1949. He was smitten with the beautiful, outgoing woman and managed to win her hand and they were married October 18, 1950 in Dawson Creek, B.C. Mom was ten years senior to dad but that didn't matter and the couple was very happy. At 27 years of age dad acquired five stepchildren with one more daughter on the way. I was born August 2, 1950.

I grew up in a warm, loving environment. Both my parents doted on me. I remember falling asleep in front of the television and waking to the gentle arms of my father carrying me to bed. I pretended to be asleep and as he gently laid me in my bed and tucked the covers behind my neck I could hear my mother whispering, "quiet, don't wake her". I must note that even though I had five sisters they all left home not long after I was born so I basically grew up an only child.

I was a very petite five and six year old when we lived in Edmonton. Dad and mom loved driving on the country roads and made up a bed for me in the back window of the car. I would lie snuggled in the blanket watching the scenery pass by. Sometimes I'd lie on the front seat with my head on my mother's lap and feet on dad's knees. As I grew older, my parents began arguing quite a bit. They tried keeping their arguments behind closed doors, trying to spare me what appeared to be a breakdown of a well-adjusted home. They did their best to make their marriage work for the sake of their young daughter and also bestowed all their love on me. Perhaps they should have shared some between the two of them.

The first 10 years of their marriage my parents moved quite a bit between Dawson Creek and Edmonton with a short time spent in Drayton Valley. I never understood why we moved so often and it wasn't until later years that I began to understand that dad really didn't like to keep a job. It tied him down and hindered his gypsy way of thinking. He didn't like to be told what to do and wanted to be his own boss – work his own hours. This caused financial hardship and rent and bills couldn't be paid so we moved from house to house, having to leave when the landlord reclaimed the home. Mom realized that if there was to be food on the table and a roof over our heads that she would have to become the breadwinner much to dad's delight. I don't think it bothered mom to work; she enjoyed it and quickly made friends with co-workers.

Doug would talk constantly about his time on the Alaska Highway construction and the sights he saw. I think Mom knew that his first love would always be the Yukon and she accepted it. She never dreamed that someday in the near future she would have to make a choice – stay in Dawson Creek or follow her husband to the land of his dreams.

After the construction of "The Road" was completed Dad drove a tourist bus from Dawson Creek to Whitehorse. He didn't care for the job and finally decided to quit when, on the way to Whitehorse, he stopped to let the tourists view a bear on the side of the road. When everyone ran to the same side of the bus the vehicle started to tip and he had to insist they all sit in

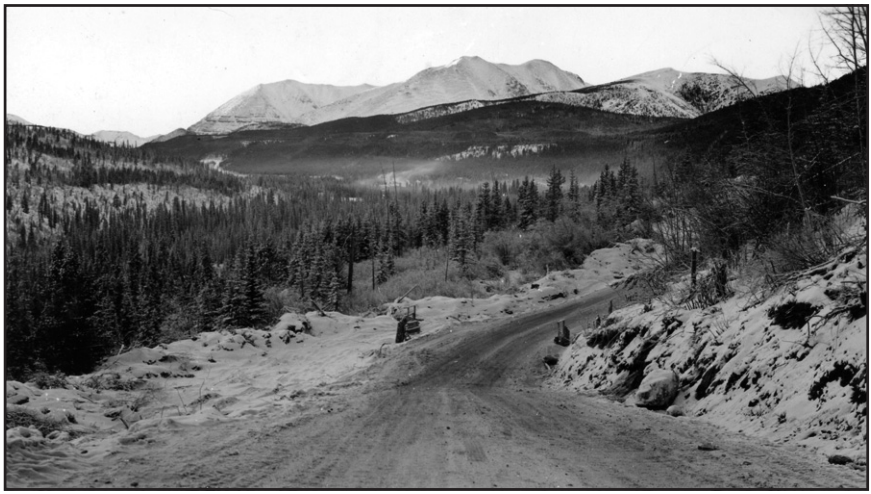
their seats. When he reached Whitehorse his nerves were rattled and he refused to drive the bus back to Dawson Creek.

While in Dawson Creek, dad drove for Northern Freightways and Loiselle Transport in the mid 1950s to 1961. He loved driving truck and had discovered his third love, the first being the Yukon and the second being his family.

Dad was driving for Northern Freightways when he knew he had to "go home to the Yukon". Mom wasn't too thrilled about leaving Dawson Creek. We had finally found a small affordable house and she thoughts our roots were finally set. I was in Grade 6, dad had a good driving job and we all had lots of friends. Should she go to an unknown destination or stay with what was familiar? After thinking about it long and hard she came to the conclusion that in a way the Yukon wasn't all that unfamiliar. Since first meeting dad that was all he talked about and knew that someday he would go back. She just didn't think it would be so soon. Dad had made friends with Jack and Jean Courtney (I'm not sure of the spelling) in Haines Junction who owned a service station and small food take out. Dad leased it and turned into a businessman in May of 1961.

Mom was left to tie up loose ends and sell everything. In July of 1961 we boarded a Greyhound bus and began a journey to an unknown place. I didn't want to leave everything I knew and leave all my friends behind – never to see them again. As soon as we boarded the bus and were settled in our seat I cried while mom lit a cigarette and sat there in silence. As the bus pulled out of the terminal we never dreamed our journey would take us to places and sights that would remain in our memories forever.

The miles flew by and after a few hours I asked mom when we would get there. When she answered "three days" I was shocked. At this point I was mad at dad for taking us to a place that I knew I would hate. All my toys



The Alaska Highway, 1942, possibly at Steamboat Mountain. {Doug Storing photo]

were gone, my friends were gone and for what? A garage in the middle of nowhere? As mom wrapped her arms around me I could feel her shaking a bit although I didn't understand why.

Before reaching Fireside I was sleeping and uncomfortable from the heat. As I awoke smoke burned my lungs. I was wishing mom and the other passengers would quit smoking and as I came fully awake I realized the smoke wasn't from cigarettes; it was from a forest fire. The ditches were burning with scattered flames and the forest on either side was being engulfed with fire. The bus driver pulled into the restaurant at Fireside and got us all wet cloths to hold to our faces. We couldn't stop, as the driver wanted to try and drive away from the flames. We were choking and a miserable lot but I must give credit to the driver. He got us through and the rest of the trip was smoke-free.

At Whitehorse there was a change of drivers. I couldn't believe we hadn't reached our destination yet. There was a three-hour wait so Mom and I decided to find a place to eat. I was getting pretty excited, as I knew in just a few hours I would be seeing my dad for the first time in two months. We made our way from the bus depot to the Edgewater Hotel. As I looked around I wasn't impressed with Whitehorse. It was so dirty and uninviting and I was hoping Haines Junction wouldn't be the same. The more I saw of the Yukon the more I disliked it. I wanted to go back home to Dawson Creek. How in the world dad fell in love with this country was beyond me. I'm pretty sure Mom was thinking the same thing.

Soon we were back on the bus, on our way to our new home. I wondered where we would live, where would I go to school and were there kids my age in this new place mom called a village? As the bus passed the village of Champagne I started looking at the country through different eyes. As the bus followed the winding road just outside of Haines Junction the St. Elias Mountains came into view. I was stunned by the beauty and abso-

The Fort Nelson Hotel, ca 1942. [Doug Storing photo]

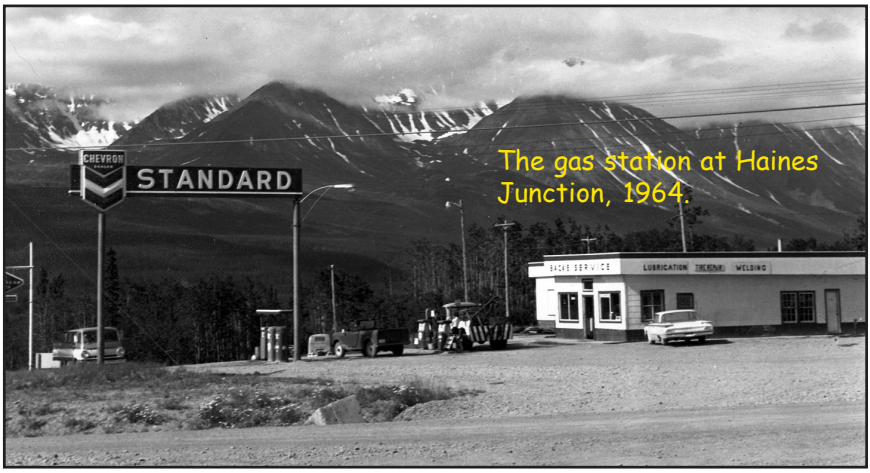
lutely thrilled that I would be able to look at those mountains every single day.

As the bus pulled into Bakkes we went into the restaurant to inquire where dad was. I believe it was Sally Bakke who pointed across the street. We gathered our luggage and with quickened step we went to announce our arrival. Dad didn't see us at first. He was busy gassing up a semi truck. He was smiling and laughing. Dad was a changed man, a happy man, someone who had finally 'come home'. I knew right then and there that he had made the right choice, not only for himself but for his family too. When he saw us he broke out into the biggest grin I had ever seen. Thus began my love affair with the north – my first love.

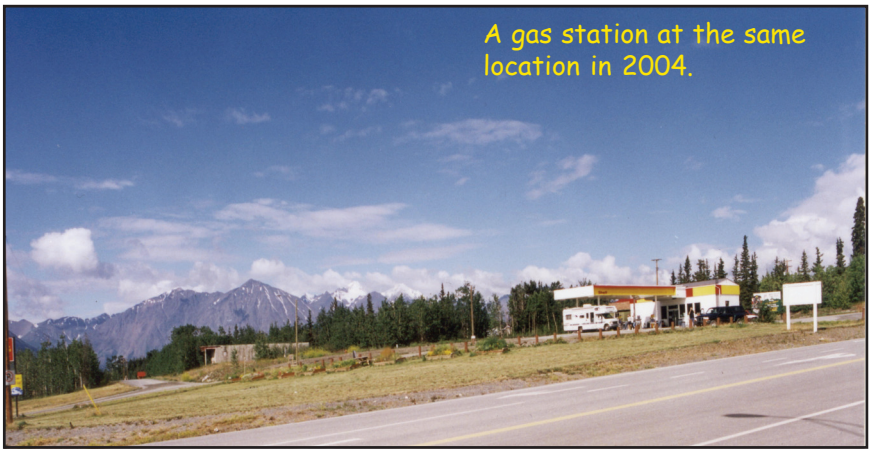
Dad had been running the garage and had not opened the take-out part of it. He was waiting for mom. We lived in the house behind the garage. We didn't have much to start out with so it didn't take long to unpack. The day after arriving, mom with pail, soap and water in hand went about cleaning the small eating area with gusto. She was in the middle of washing the floor when I went in to see what I could do. As I walked in the door mom was whistling! I didn't know moms could whistle. Just then dad came in and informed me I had a job running the gas pumps. Awesome, 11 years old (soon to be a grownup 12) and I would be making my own money. What a great birthday present!

While dad ran the shop doing repairs mainly for tourists I pumped the gas while mom's take-out burgers were doing a thriving business. I'd heard years later from Phil Bastein that mom's ice cream was the best in the Junction. Between flipping burgers, serving ice cream and preparing take-out meals for the truckers, mom kept busy – and happy. I was happy in my own way, especially the grown up responsibility of serving gas. It wasn't long before I could tell you what U.S. state or Canadian province the vehicles were from according to the license plates before they even drove right up to the pumps. The tourists were all happy to be on vacation and driving

Doug drove for Northern Freightways.



The gas station at Haines Junction, 1964.



A gas station at the same location in 2004.

on their way to Alaska. Little did they know that a happier threesome could not be found running the garage. We had found heaven and I couldn't understand why anyone would want to continue on their way to places unknown.

I remember one incident while I was perched on the hood of a semi cleaning the windshield. I could see a car speeding toward us and as he cranked the wheel hard the car almost flipped onto its side. Screeching to a halt, surrounded by dust and flying dirt, the driver flew out of the vehicle yelling to get a pail as gas was spewing out of the tank. I yelled to dad to grab a pail and jack. No questions, dad came flying out of the shop with both in hand. As he jacked up the car he threw the pail in the location of the spreading gas. I noticed the driver's wife and two children sitting wide-eyed in the car, not moving. The semi-driver quickly paid and, with half a clean windshield, left saying something about "there's going to be an explosion". Once things settled down the driver explained that he knew there was a pinhole leak in the gas tank that had to be repaired or replaced. He

had heard about the best mechanic in Haines Junction when he was quite a ways down the highway and didn't want anyone touching his car other than the best. Dad was not a happy camper and quietly told the man he put his family in jeopardy and should have had the tank replaced in Whitehorse. Dad ordered a tank while the family stayed with us. Once repairs were completed the family was on their way again in a few days. Dad didn't charge the man, feeling he had been a bit harsh on him. Thus began the downfall of a great business.

Dad had a bad habit of not asking for payment for work done. If he felt a customer couldn't afford his services he would tell them to leave a donation – whatever they felt the service was worth. Of course it didn't take long for the word to reach up and down the highway. Great, cheap service at the B/A garage in Haines Junction. One and half years after arriving in the Junction dad had to give up the garage and we moved to Whitehorse. Mom was very upset but understood that we all must move on. She got a job working at the Whitehorse Inn and, later, for Tippy Mah at the Taku Hotel both as a chambermaid and waitress. Even though I went to school full time I took the dishwasher job at the Taku for two years.

While in Whitehorse Dad worked for the City of Whitehorse running their backhoe and in later years for Van Marnal Construction, John McIsaac Construction and Don's Backhoe Service. The only time dad really enjoyed working was at the Junction and as he got older he enjoyed working even less. When employed he missed going out into the bush and interacting with his beloved animals. He gave up hunting when we moved to Whitehorse. The meat could be purchased and he seemed thankful for that. He never gave up his love for rifles though and we enjoyed our usual treks out to the firing range outside of town. After a session out at the range we enjoyed the time it took to clean the guns and ensure they were well oiled and put away in their cases.

How we all enjoyed our camping trips, especially to Kathleen Lake, my favorite. The three of us would sit around the campfire and roast marshmallows. We did this so often I lost my taste for the treat and can't handle them now. Both mom and dad loved to get out into the bush and they were never happier when they were able to do so. I remember some great times with Walter and Marion Huebschwerlen and Hans and Laura Gloslee. My folks gave me my appreciation of the trees, the mountains, wildlife and all the seasons the north has to offer

Dad did most of the cooking at home, particularly on holidays as mom was usually working. Christmas and Easter were his specialty. He would cook up a huge feast knowing it was too much for the three of us then go around the Junction and later, Whitehorse and bring the homeless and the down and out for a home cooked meal. I never knew who would be sitting with us at our table. Dad was really fond of Wigwam Harry, who joined us on a regular basis for meals and once a year a good bath when a new set of clothes arrived from his brother in the U.S. There were a few times dad would come home with no shirt and the term, "would give the shirt off his back" certainly applied. If he saw someone that needed a shirt he would

give that person his. Dad liked to wear work shirts and western shirts with snap buttons. Not that many people wore clothing with snap buttons so it was easy to spot the persons he gave his shirts to. At least he kept his pants. In the beginning mom would complain that shirts were expensive to replace but her words fell on deaf ears. Dad insisted there was someone that could use a shirt worse than he.

I mentioned that dad loved the holidays. Christmas and Easter were special in our house, also Halloween. During the Christmas season our house was filled with hymns and the tree would stay up until well past New Years. On Christmas Day Dad would dress up in a Santa outfit my mother made and he wouldn't take it off until midnight.

One Easter in Dawson Creek I awoke to a sound on my bedroom window. Looking at me was the largest Easter Bunny I had ever seen! I only caught a quick glimpse and as I bounded out of bed to the window I spotted the back end of the bunny heading into some bushes. I ran out into the snow in my bare feet and there were tracks everywhere and in the rabbit tracks were colourful Easter eggs. I was 11 years old when I realized the Easter Bunny had an alias (aka dad).

Then, of course, Halloween would be just as much fun. Dad always liked to dress up and hand out the candy. He wouldn't hand any candy over until the costumed figure at the door sang a short song or did a short skit. The entire time the actor at the door was carrying on dad would giggle and dance a jig. I didn't like going out on Halloween to collect my own candy, it was more fun staying home. Mom would stay in the background and laugh at everyone's antics.

Dad had a few small gold claims. One was up at Forty Mile and in 1966 along with Walter and Marion Huebschwerlen, Marion's parents and their dog, Lady, the three of us headed up to the mine for a two-week stay. Dad operated the caterpillar while Walter helped with laying the sluice box with the grader blades and carpet to catch the bigger nuggets. Marion and my mother operated the small rocker box. It was backbreaking work lifting the dirt-filled pails and dumping them into the box. My job was to collect the nuggets using the gold pan method. We collected enough gold to purchase a vehicle, a good down payment on a house in Porter Creek and all my school supplies and clothes. It was a good season and if the forest fires had not driven us out I think it would have been a better season.

One day while up at the claim Walter and dad decided to take a break and scout the area around camp. We could smell bear and the place was known to have lots of grizzly. The men didn't want to be surprised by an unwelcome visitor. While they were gone Lady began barking incessantly. She was close to having giving birth so mom told me to go see if she was having her pups. As I turned the corner of the tent I ran into a huge, off-white grizzly. I literally fell into his face and as my hands touched his shoulders I pushed myself back. Mom and Marion were watching everything through the tent window. I screamed and ran up the closest tailing pile. Days previous I had tried climbing that pile but the rocks kept knocking me back but I had no trouble reaching the top this time. Mom said as I was

climbing the tailing pile the bear was running just as fast in the opposite direction. I was sliding back down to the tent when the men arrived. They heard my screams and ran back to camp as fast as they could. Dad emptied the shells out of his 30.06 as I excitedly told my story. Dad always told me to not talk while emptying the clip and barrel but I forgot. He wasn't paying attention and he accidentally pulled the trigger. The shell hit a rock, ricocheted into the tent hitting Marion in the face, just below her eye. Thank goodness it was a small piece of metal and Marion would be fine. Dad gave me a gentle reminder to never talk to anyone while they were emptying their gun.

Dad was a believer in teaching without physical punishment. When I was a young teenager I became upset about something I have long forgotten. I stormed to my bedroom and slammed the door. Immediately I realized that would not be tolerated. Once I was cooled down I came out of my room and apologized for slamming my door, expecting something to be said. Dad said I must have been really upset to do something so uncalled for. Um, I got away with that with not much said. A few days later I was again upset and slammed my door. Within minutes I could hear something scratching my door and soon there was no door. Dad had removed it and I was without any privacy for a month. I never slammed my door again.

When washing dishes dad insisted I not keep the cupboard doors open as someone might run into them and hurt himself. I was careful to always close the cabinet doors. Well, one day I was drying the plates and didn't want to keep opening and closing the cupboard door so left it open. Sure enough dad walked into it. He was still rubbing his sore head when he removed all the cupboard doors, which remained off for a month. Mom was not too pleased with me as she started arranging the dishes in a respectable order in case we had company. When the time came to put the doors back on, dad handed mom and I a screwdriver and we completed the job as a family.

Dad always insisted I never throw any garbage onto the ground. He said to hang onto it until we got home. It bothered him to see candy wrappers and cigarette butts scattered about. I was 14 years old when the two of us were coming back to Haines Junction from purchasing school supplies in Whitehorse. Dad gave me a chocolate bar. Without thinking I threw the wrapper out the open window of the truck. I realized right away what I had done and glanced over at dad to see if he had seen me. No reaction so I got away with that one. One mile down the road the truck came to a stop and dad pulled out his tobacco and wrappers. He said, "I think you dropped something back there, you better go get it." I waited for him to turn the truck around and when he didn't I knew he expected me to walk back a mile, find the wrapper and walk back. I was afraid of bears so grabbed the 30.06 and headed back down the road. I found the wrapper with no problem and was thankful to get back to the truck. Nothing was said as I climbed onto the seat and the trip back to the Junction was uneventful.

Friday the 13th of June 1969 was one of the hottest days on record in the Yukon. I was working at Takhini in the YTG building when I looked out the

window and noticed smoke in the direction of Porter Creek. I telephoned mom at the Taku to say I was going home to get the animals in case the fire was in that area. On the way I met up with dad. He had just purchased a retired Forestry truck and hadn't taken the beacon off the roof yet so he turned it on. We raced home only to find the roads blocked. The fire was on the hill above our house on Birch Street. With the beacon flashing its orange light we were ushered through. A large caterpillar was ripping our yard up trying to make a fire break. We managed to save the animals and, eventually, saved the house after three days of battling the fire. It wasn't until Sunday night that I realized mom had not arrived home. We found her at the Whitehorse General Hospital in bad shape from a traffic accident. Her driver had hit another vehicle head on while trying to pass on the old dump road. Mom was flown to Vancouver General and would remain in hospital until the spring of 1970. While she was gone we tried to fix up the yard she had spent years landscaping but to no avail. No one could decorate like mom. She eventually recovered minus her kneecap but her spirit remained strong. Not one to look back, she anticipated a bright future. In 1969 my parents decided to divorce. When mom returned to the Yukon from Vancouver she moved to Faro and lived there for three years, then moved to Slave Lake, Alberta. In 1975 she moved to Tofield, Alberta to be near her daughter, Jane

Mom and her boyfriend, Bert loved to decorate and make things "pretty". Her house was known as the "dollhouse" by the locals in Tofield. During the summer months flowers adorned her yard and birdhouses kept the bird population very happy. When a baby bird fell from the nest mom would very carefully put it back. During the Christmas season her yard was decorated with Santa and lit snowmen. Two years in a row, 1989 and 1990, she won the local decorating contest. A mention in the local newspaper, a plaque and letter from the community thrilled her to bits. She was also an excellent baker and her pies were the best.

I moved to Edmonton July 1978. I missed the north but my daughter was quite sick and needed medical care in Alberta that the Yukon could not provide. I would never move back north but it wasn't because I didn't want to. I made a life in Alberta with a new husband and a 26-year career with Edmonton Transit, but we do try to go back for a visit every few years.

As I said mom wasn't one to pine away about the past except when it came to the Yukon. Many, many times over the years she would telephone me in tears saying how much she missed the Yukon. She needed to go back and Bert wouldn't take her so the second week of July 1992 I took her back 'home'. I treated her to a ride on the Schwatka, something she had always wanted to do. We stayed with her old friends, Bob and Doreen Weeks. I took her back to Haines Junction and she visited with George Washington, her old friend. We sat at the junction of the Alaska Highway and the Haines Road and she reminisced as she looked toward where the garage used to be, now replaced with a new structure. The trees between the garage and the house we lived in were gone, bringing her to more tears. After losing the garage so many years previous we had moved into the Mounties' house

and she wanted to see it again. We tried to find it but couldn't. She cried a little and remembered a lot. For one solid week I took her everywhere that held a memory. Less than two weeks after returning back to Alberta mom passed away of a blood clot after falling from the camper while at a lake. It was August 2nd, my birthday.

As dad got older he began slowing down. He was a heavy smoker and after 50 plus years of smoking pipe and/or cigarettes he just didn't feel good. He gave up his home and purchased a fifth wheel and truck. He was caretaker at the Casa Loma Motel in Porter Creek and had a room there. At times he slept wherever the fifth wheel was that night or he stayed at the "Casa Boo Boo" has he called it. It was a good life and I thought he was content. In 1987 dad called Bryan and I at home in Alberta to say he had married Mary Ellen Armstrong whom he had met at the Casa Loma where she was working in the laundry. I found out later that Mary Ellen and my mother were once married to brothers. I'm not sure if dad realized this before they married.

Mary Ellen had a home at Mile 928 so dad moved in there. His new wife had a green thumb and currently has a thriving greenhouse business. Dad not only moved in with Mary Ellen but acquired all her farm animals too. He was in his glory. He even loved the idea a grizzly had a well-worn path beside the house.

In March of 1991 Mary Ellen called to say she felt dad wasn't well — perhaps his heart. Bryan and I made arrangements at work to take our vacation early and we headed north. Dad was very uncomfortable with chest pains but refused to see a doctor. He had never been under medical care in his life. He didn't want us hanging around so we headed to the Kenai Peninsula asking him to come with us. He refused indicating in case he died he wanted to die in the Yukon. He seemed better when we returned and we had to get back to work. Just a few hours after we left on June 4th a stomach aneurysm took his life.

Dad loved life to the fullest. He was a great teacher who taught by example. He had an enormous amount of patience, was kind and very soft spoken. He loved helping those less fortunate. I am proud that both my parents taught me kindness and thoughtfulness.

Right after dad died I decided to try and find his biological mother. The only thing dad left me was a bible that belonged to his stepmother where she had written the names of all the foster children she had cared for over the years. I had no idea which name to start with so decided to find it the scientific way. I closed my eyes and let my finger fall where it may. When I opened my eyes my finger sat squarely on the name "John Switzer". I always thought dad was adopted but when I called the adoption agency in Edmonton the clerk couldn't find that name. Just as I was about to hang up I heard the gentleman yelling, "Don't hang up". I quickly put the receiver back to my ear and heard the clerk explain that dad must have been a foster child and since he wasn't adopted all information would be open. I gave him the only information I had: dads' birthday and place of birth. He said to give him two days to see what he could find.

Sure enough two days later an excited clerk called to say he found the birth record and that he would mail it. He sounded as thrilled as I was but that's all he would tell me. In two more days I had the record saying his birth mother was 18-year-old Winnifred Switzer from Claysmore, Alberta and his father was Ben Rozelle, a farmer from Ontario.

I dug out a map to find Claysmore. I wanted to put an ad in the local newspaper to see if I could find anyone who had known the family back in 1922 or 1923. There was no town by that name in Alberta. I then called the telephone operator in Edmonton to ask her. The friendly operator had never heard of that town. Just as I was hanging up the phone I heard her yelling, "Wait!" As I listened the operator said a co-worker had overheard her say Claysmore and she knew where it was, or rather, where it used to be. The town disappeared in the 1930's but it was close to Vermillion, Alberta. I then called the local Vermillion newspaper and placed an ad to run one time that read, *"Anyone knowing Winnifred Switzer/Ben Rozelle family from Vermillion or area around 1922 call collect (403) 992-1316 after 6:00 p.m."*

Two weeks later the telephone rang and a man's voice on the other end asked, "Why are you looking for my mother?" I was speechless. My uncle was on the other end. I explained why and that I was his niece and that my father was his brother whose name was John. My uncle said, "Well, that's my name and I never heard of an unknown brother." Apparently John's son who lived in Elk Point, Alberta was passing through Vermillion and was having car problems. He decided to stop at the garage and have it checked out. As he was waiting for the mechanic he picked up the newspaper and spotted my ad looking for his grandmother. He called his dad and told him someone was looking for her. The mechanic told my cousin he couldn't find anything wrong with his vehicle and the young man was on his way.

John didn't want to call me and only did so because of the persistence of his girlfriend. We made arrangements to drive to a ranch outside of Calgary where John was working. As soon as he saw me he said, "Yup, you're family" as he looked over my big hips and well-rounded tummy. He wasn't much taller than me and it was as though I was looking at my father. The resemblance was uncanny. As we got acquainted over a cup of coffee his mannerisms and expressions were a bit unnerving. It was as if I was again talking to my father, casually having a cup of coffee and chitchatting.

I met all but one of dad's seven siblings; the one I haven't met yet lives in the United States. I have met most of my cousins. I have been invited to family reunions and have been welcomed with open arms by them all. I grew up in the north with just mom, dad and me. My half-sisters all lived in Alberta or British Columbia and we didn't keep in touch with them. Our gatherings were just the three of us and now there are hundreds of relatives. I missed seeing my grandmother by six months as she had passed away.

I found out some of dad's siblings knew about him and said their mother always wondered what happened to her first born. Ben Rozelle was a farmhand and left shortly after my grandmother was sent to friends in Ed-

monton to have the baby. Winifred's sister, Ada, traveled from Ontario to come meet me and told me how much my grandmother wanted to know what happened to her son. She named another son the same.

Once I met John the phone rang steady with relatives introducing themselves. When driving home from work we would see a hitchhiker and Bryan said maybe we should pick him up, he might be a relative.

Dad may be gone but whenever I see John and another uncle, Alex, it's as though dad is still with us. The family resemblance is amazing and comforting.

When I write or research anything to do with the Yukon I feel both my parents are right beside me, guiding me and helping me retain my memories of a very special place. I now wish I had thanked my father for showing me what the Yukon could offer. I have been blessed thanks to him and to my mother for if it wasn't for her taking a chance and believing that dad was doing the best thing for his family who knows what would have happened? I like it just the way it is.

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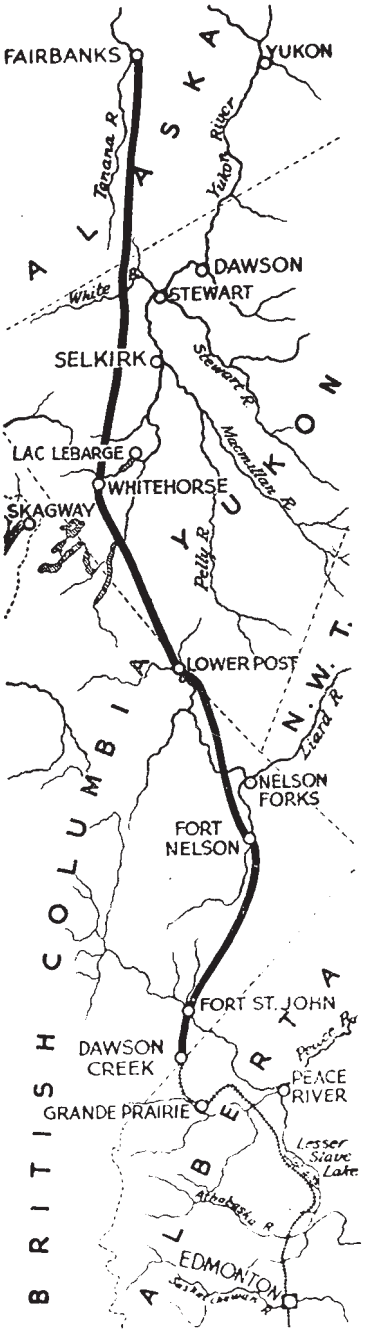
Aunts and uncles with Winnifred.



The Alaska Highway

From Rocky Mountain Tote Trail to Modern Highway

By Dick McKenna

*Except where noted, these photos are from the collection of Earl Ostlie of East Mission, Washington, USA. Most of them were taken by his father, Leonard Ostlie, during the wartime building of the Alcan.

Left: Early map of the Alcan Highway

THE SIGN PRINTED in bold red lettering on the wall of a U.S. Army Engineer's office at Whitehorse summed it up pretty well: "The difficult we do immediately. The impossible takes a little longer."

Some said it would be impossible. Some said it would be a waste of time - and money. Some said that it was not only possible but of utmost importance to the prosperity and the very survival of the region. Haggling over the prospect of building a road connecting the Yukon and Alaska to the south dates back a long time.

Long in opposition to the idea were the existing steamship and railway companies of the north. Indeed, these companies did have a lot to lose should a highway encroach upon their rather comfortable transportation monopoly. Some Alaskans as well were opposed to the idea, insisting that the territory would be literally overrun by "Oakies and Arkies" looking for an easy place to homestead.

A very strong proponent of having a highway built was Donald MacDonald of Fairbanks. MacDonald's credentials were very strong: eight years as resident engineer for the Alaska Government Railroad and 18 more as engineer for the Alaska Road Commission. His main concern was the complete vulnerability of Alaska to enemy attack, particularly the increasingly hostile Japanese. In 1928 he brought his cause to Senators and Congressmen in Washington where his efforts gained him little more than a reputation for being some sort of fanatic.

British Columbia's Premier, T. Duff Pattullo was with MacDonald. Pattullo's concerns, however, were more about the tourism benefits a highway would bring to his province than the defense of Alaska. All talk aside, the real question was, "Where would the money come from?" Such an undertaking would surely cost millions of dollars and take years to complete.

A work crew with all their possessions, stuck on the new highway.

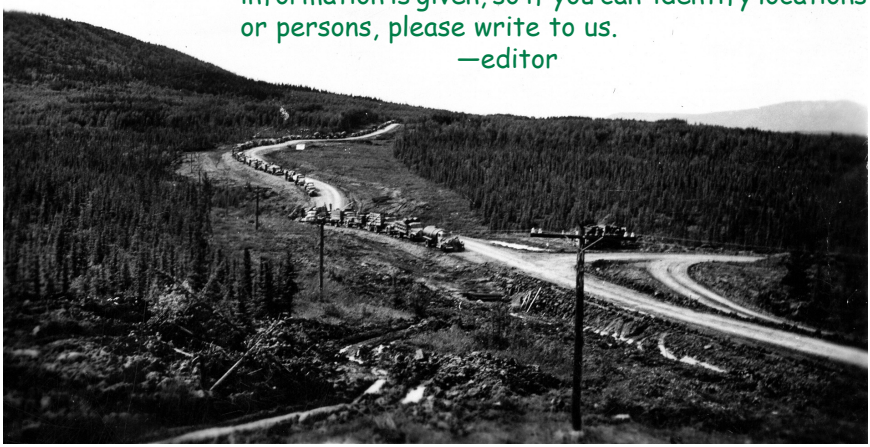
With both countries in the early stages of the Depression, neither of these two stout advocates stood a chance of raising the required capital.

Gradually, however, the idea began to win support in Washington. In 1933 a commission initiated by the Hoover government "reported favourably" on the construction of such a highway. But five years later, progress had gone little further than the appointment of two more commissions to study the proposal in more detail. Finally, in 1938, with the Japanese flexing their muscles in the North Pacific, President Roosevelt appointed a second emergency commission to study the plan, as did Canadian officials. With little debate, both commissions favoured construction at the earliest date possible.

Meanwhile, the Japanese were keeping a keen eye on these developments. In 1939 Hirochiro Nemichi, the Japanese Consul at Vancouver, was instructed by his government to fly to Whitehorse and make a direct report on the proposed highway. His espionage plans were thwarted when Canadian agents at the Vancouver airport intercepted him just prior to departure. At the same time, Japan was protesting the highway construction to the British Government stating that it would consider the highway as being "inimical" to Japanese interests.

What exactly these interests were, Donald MacDonald knew alarmingly well. For years the Aleutian Natives reported seeing vessels that would break the ocean waves and ride along then dive "like a whale" and disappear again below the surface. Once a band of Aleuts on one of the Aleutian Islands spotted a Japanese fishing boat anchored in a bay and upon closer observation saw there were no nets to tend. These "fishermen" were instead occupied with electrical gadgets that they pointed at various landmarks. And it was also noticed that their fishing lines, rather than having a hook and bait, were weighed down with heavy pieces of iron.

Note:
These photos were taken in 1942 by the late Leonard Ostlie, a catskinner on the highway. No information is given, so if you can identify locations or persons, please write to us.
—editor



In reality, these Japanese "fishermen" were spies, sounding, charting and mapping every last inlet, bay and island of Alaska's Aleutian chain.

In the spring of 1940, 18 months before the bombing of Pearl Harbour, MacDonald again attempted to raise the alarm in Washington. He stated, "I don't know who taught people to place all their reliance on Pearl Harbour, but I do know their blind faith is not shared in Alaska."

Still, it wasn't until the actual bombing of Pearl Harbour on December 7, 1941 that the defense of Alaska and the building of a military highway to America's highly vulnerable and undefended northern frontier became of paramount importance. Another emergency commission was quickly assembled and in February of 1942 President Roosevelt gave the order to commence construction "with haste."

Proposed Routes

From the North West Defense Highway Commission's investigations three possible routes emerged. Route "A", the coastal route, fed by both highway and rail from Vancouver, started at Prince George. From there, it swung northwest to Hazelton and up the Stikine River towards Atlin, then to Whitehorse and to Fairbanks via the Tanana River Valley. This route, though an attractive one as a tourist highway, had the steepest grades and heaviest snowfall. Being within 150 miles of the coast, it was also the most vulnerable to carrier-based enemy aircraft attack.

Route "B" also started at Prince George but instead it followed the Rocky Mountain trench, along valleys of the Parsnip and Finlay Rivers to the Liard River. From there it progressed to Francis Lake and down the Valley of the Pelly River, then northwest to Dawson City and down the Yukon to Fairbanks. This route was the shortest and least costly but was also prone to possible enemy attack and it lacked a connection to vital supply links such as air, rail or steamship facilities.

Route "C", though oddly not recommended by any of the forgoing commissions, was the one chosen by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. It started at the end of steel at Dawson Creek, B.C. and swung north to Fort St. John then to Fort Nelson, Watson Lake, Whitehorse and northwest to Alaska connecting to the Richardson Highway at Delta Junction then on to Fairbanks.

This route, though not the least costly or most tourist oriented, was from a practical and military standpoint the obvious choice. It was far enough inland to evade enemy attack. It had steamer and railway connections at Whitehorse and Valdez. It traversed the most level ground and was connected with a string of civilian airfields that stretched from Edmonton to Fairbanks. Later known as the Northwest Staging Route, these airfields were seen as a strategic route for flying military reinforcements and war supplies from the U.S. to Alaska.

Advantages aside, 1,600 miles of the most rugged and inhospitable terrain on the continent separated Dawson Creek from Fairbanks, includ-

ing five major mountain ranges, dozens of brutal northern rivers, hundreds of raging northern streams and countless miserable miles of swamps, muskeg and mosquitoes. Assigned to carry out the monumental task, was a workforce that included 11,000 American soldiers, 6,000 American and Canadian civilian contractors, and an estimated 15,000 pieces of road-building equipment.

Specifications were for a road 20 to 22 feet in width with a gravel surface of no less than 12 inches that would be able to withstand heavy truck traffic. Bridges were to be of the trestle type and built using local timber. Bridges under 100 feet in length were to be dual lane with 24-foot-wide decking; those over 100 feet, would be limited to a single lane with 12-foot decking. Ferries and pontoon bridges would carry traffic across the larger rivers until permanent structures could be built.

Apparently, there was no limit to the amount of money, men or equipment needed to get the job done so long as it got done before the Japanese could secure a foothold on Alaska. The U.S. Army would pay the entire cost. For its part, the Canadian Government agreed to waive all import duties, immigration regulations and income taxes, and provide timber, gravel and any other mineral aggregate needed during the road's construction. Once the highway was completed the U.S. military would be responsible for its control and maintenance for the duration of the war. Six months after the war's end it was to be handed back to the Canadian authorities.

Due to the size and scope of the project, the highway was split into northern and southern sectors. The northern sector headquarters was located at Whitehorse, about midway along the route, while the southern sector headquarters was located at Fort St John.

In charge of the Northern Command was Brigadier General William M. Hoge. Hoge was a tall, broad-shouldered, granite-faced, native of Booneville, Missouri who brought north with him a rather impressive list of credentials. These included a degree in advanced engineering gained at MIT, several years' experience in wartime frontier road construction and a

distinguished-service medal that he earned for building pontoon bridges under German shellfire in WWI. As commander of the northern sector, Hoge would spend much of his time in the passenger seat of local bush pilot Stan Cook's aeroplane scouting out the highway route with binoculars.

In charge of the southern sector, and later to be given complete control of the highway, was Major General James "Patsy" O'Connor. O'Connor was a short, spry West Point graduate of 1907 who was already a veteran of two wars. Among O'Connor's achievements was the successful tunnelling of the Corregidor Fortress in Manila Harbour during the war in the Philippines.

Sitting in Washington was a third general, Brig-General Clarence Sturdevant who had overall responsibility for the highway. Sturdevant was a very decorated veteran who was known to be one of the army's most expert marksmen. Included in Sturdevant's job was handling all of the logistics - from allocating railway and shipping links, to preparing blueprints, and keeping the steady stream of supplies, jeeps, gasoline, machinery and troops moving steadily.

Troops, supplies and equipment would be funnelled towards the construction sites from three major supply points. Three regiments of 1,000 to 2,000 soldiers each would approach the task from the south via Dawson Creek and build the road northward towards Watson Lake. Three more would approach through Whitehorse and build the road both northward towards Alaska and southward towards Dawson Creek and one regiment would approach via Valdez and the Richardson Highway, then build the road southward towards the Yukon.

Initial Attack: The Pioneer Road

On March 10, 1942, under cover of darkness and a late winter blizzard, the first consignment of soldiers, the 35th Regiment, along with six trainloads of road-building equipment and supplies, arrived at Dawson Creek, B.C. taking the sleepy village of 400 citizens by storm. Eunice Fell, a pioneer resident of Dawson Creek, remembered the town's sudden "American Army occupation": *"There was no warning. I got up and there were Yank soldiers right in my front yard, Blacks and Mexicans and officers with grey hair, all sipping tea! My eyes bugged out!"*

Almost immediately, the 35th Regiment proceeded with its equipment and supplies 320 miles overland by cat train on the winter trail to Fort Nelson, the staging area for their assigned section of the road. Throughout the haul the weather remained unseasonably cold, sometimes dipping to 47 degrees below zero. To the soldiers, most of whom hailed from the southern states, this initiation to the northland must have been brutal.

One aspect of the cold temperatures did work to their advantage, however, by keeping the rivers sufficiently frozen to allow the passage of the many thousands of tons of equipment, fuel and supplies before spring breakup. The equipment list for the 35th Regiment, alone, included: 20 , 20-ton heavy duty bulldozers, 24 lighter duty bulldozers, six pulled road graders, three patrol graders, six router ploughs, six 12-yard scrapers, nine two-and-a-half-ton dump trucks, 93 half-ton dump trucks, seven four-ton cargo trucks, one six-ton prime mover truck, 25 jeeps, 12 pickup trucks, 10 command cars and one sedan. All were fresh off the assembly line.

Also listed was a vast assortment of portable generators, concrete mixers, pile drivers, welding machines, compressors, ploughs, pontoons, and gas-driven portable sawmills. Plus, there was fuel required to keep

this onslaught of machinery going for four months and food, tents and other necessities required to keep a force of some 1,000 personnel provisioned for the same.

Finally, on April 5th after three and a half weeks of steady hauling, the last piece of equipment arrived at Fort Nelson. The task that now lay ahead of the 35th Regiment was to build 350 miles of road north towards Watson Lake. Most of April and May was spent on a crash course in the techniques of northern road building.

Muskeg (the swampy bog land that is generously laced throughout all of northern British Columbia, Yukon and Alaska) was a major obstacle. However, a senior engineer managed to acquire a 1917 Alaska Department of Highways "Road Building in Alaska" manual that did shed some light on the subject. According to the guide the men were to "cut it out and lay down a bed of corduroy logs", which they did. But they soon found out that within days of removing the topsoil, the permafrost underneath would melt and create a soupy quagmire that seemed to suck up everything in its path: logs, troops, jeeps, dozers and anything else that came into contact with it.

Instead, they found that the going was a lot easier if the muskeg was left undisturbed and the roadbed built directly over it. Still, in some swampy areas, as many as four layers of corduroy between successive layers of gravel had to be used in order to build up a stable enough road bed. At one place 50 miles north of Ft. Nelson, crews had to put down two straight miles of it.

Soon an even more effective method of dealing with these trouble spots was discovered: all out avoidance. This is the main reason the highway turned out to be so crooked. By following along the lateral contours of the land and sticking to the higher ground located on the hillsides, areas requiring large amounts of fill and thus time were skirted. The idea being

that the quickest way at getting between two points was not necessarily a straight line, but rather the contrary. It was often cheaper and quicker to build two miles of crooked road than it was to build one mile of straight road.

As the 35th Regiment was winding its way towards Watson Lake, the other six regiments had been deployed and had begun their assigned sections of the road. Following the 35th Regiment through Dawson Creek were the 341st and the 95th Regiments. The 341st Regiment derailed in late April and moved immediately to Fort Saint John to begin building road towards Fort Nelson. The 95th derailed in June and began building road from Dawson Creek to Fort Saint John. Once there, kept it on going improving the work of the previous two regiments.

Three regiments, the 18th, the 93rd and the 340th, approached the task through Whitehorse via the White Pass Railway. All three regiments arriving in Skagway in April. The 18th proceeded immediately to Whitehorse, the 93rd derailed at Carcross and the 340th sat tight at Skagway where they awaited the arrival of their equipment. From Carcross, the 93rd worked towards Whitehorse following and improving the old wagon road as they went and once they reached Whitehorse they proceeded southeast towards Lake Teslin.

From Whitehorse, the 18th Regiment made its way north building road towards Alaska to meet up with the 97th which was working its way south from Big Delta in the interior. The 340th Regiment arrived at Whitehorse in June where it split into two battalions. One battalion proceeded via sternwheeler down the Yukon River and up Teslin River and Teslin Lake to Morley Bay, while the other proceeded overland to Morley Bay. Then, following along the Swift and Morley rivers, the 340th worked southeast towards Watson Lake to meet up with the 35th.

Highway construction methods varied according to circumstances

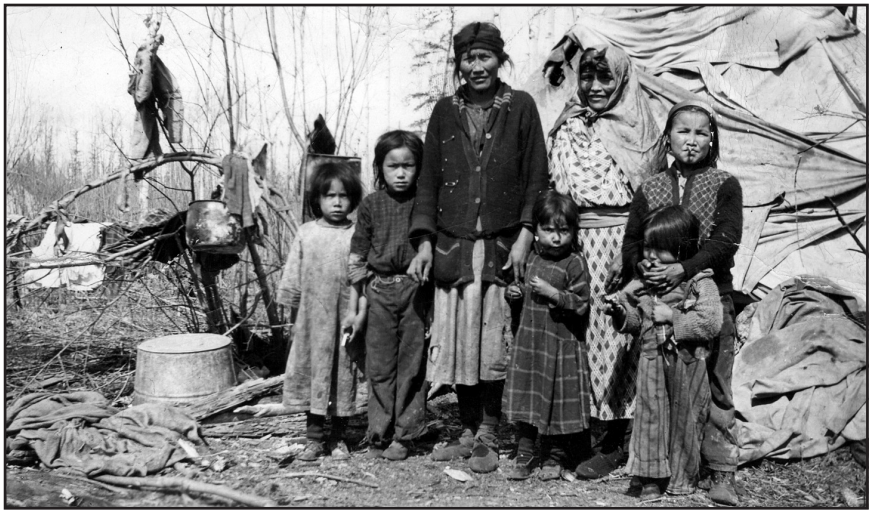
and terrain but, in general, a lead bulldozer led the attack plowing over trees. Behind, three more bulldozers pushed the trees, rock and debris aside. And these were followed by yet more bulldozers, perhaps three or four, doing the final mop up. (It was commonly said that a sea of sweat and a helluva lot of bulldozers built the Alaska Highway.)

Strung out from 30 to 50 miles behind were ground crews armed with axes, picks, shovels and saws who were busy clearing, filling, corduroying and building the numerous log culverts and timber trestle bridges required along the route. Surveyors were just one step ahead of the dozers, being guided primarily by the local Indians and bush pilots. When neither of these was available, they often relied on "sight engineering," a technique that involved climbing the tallest tree around and looking ahead with field glasses.

Natives stood (usually from great distance) and stared in wonder as the line of bulldozers grunted, snorted and crashed their way through their traditional hunting and trapping grounds. Most had never seen anything like it before and were amazed by the power of the great big mechanical monsters. So amazed were some that for awhile more than one operator made a killing in furs by giving the bravest and richest Natives joyrides at a pelt a ride.

Taking advantage of the midnight sun, crews worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week. During the days, temperatures soared to 90 degrees above and flying insects constantly pestered the men, including mosquitoes so large that the men jokingly threatened to pump aeroplane fuel into them. Blackflies caused the most grief, however, sometimes inflicting bites so serious that the victims' eyes would become swollen completely shut. Many of the soldiers wished like hell that they were on the battlefront facing the enemy's gunfire rather than being subject to this primeval torture of the northern forest.

In the Kluane, crews found themselves up against an even more bru-




Leonard Ostlie

tal helping of nature's wrath. Meandering glacial streams carrying logs and debris wreaked havoc on the trestle bridges, often reducing them to cordwood as fast as they could be put up. The White, the Slims and the Donjek rivers were the worst.

Mud and rockslides were also a serious problem, sometimes wiping out the work of a week in a few split seconds. Rockslides were especially frequent in the Kluane region where engineers had no choice but to route the highway along a slim shelf of land between the largest lake in the Yukon and the highest mountain range in North America.

Still, despite these formidable natural barriers, by July all regiments were proceeding steadily forward at the rate of four miles a day, cutting, dozing and blasting a 50-foot swath through the virgin expanse of the north. Along the way, the onslaught caught the attention of more than a few of the region's inhabitants. Here one Beaver Creek area prospector relates his first experience with the highway builders:

"We was prospectin' when the first Cat came through here. When the first Cat came through, I was goin' down to Snag to get some grub, and here I run acrost a guy and I says, "Where you goin'?" "Wher'm I goin"? he says. "Wher' you goin?"

I says, "Prospectin' out here with Pete Eikland; we been here many years. What the hell you goin' to cut here now?" He says "This is the Highway!" Well I says, "That's good. Wher's it comin from?' and he say's "We're on our way now to Burwash." Well I says "I've come fer some grub." He says "Ther's camps along there. Go and see them."

Well, I went out and asked the fellas fer a little bit o'grub , and I wouldn't have ta go any further. The cook says, "Whadda yuh want?" I says "I want a pound o'tea anyway." He says, "Take a hundred pound. We don't need tea. We're coffee people." I says, "That's alright." He says,

"There's the camp that's full o'grub, and the doors open. Hep yoursef!"

Well I had three dogs, and I says, "Now I won't git in trouble goin back home? Do you wanta git paid?" "No no no. No pay! Jist hep yersef! Sugar and rice" and he says, "What you need! And don't fergit, take a hundred pounds o'tea."

Well for chris sake! I thought he was kinda nuts, and I as much as told im. I says, "I don't want to git in trouble. I got the money in my pocket."

He says, "No money". He says "That doors open. Hep yersef." And he says..., "Wher you workin?"

I says, "Twenty miles up here on a placer prospect."

"Well", he says, "I'll git this Cat to run you up there..."

Yes Sir, and he put in everything, that fella. He was the head Cat man, and he just throwed stuff in there, and he says, "You'll need this, and you'll need that." And he says, "Later on we'll bulldoze a trail up there, and you won't have no hard time gittin grub."

And they did!"

Unlike our Beaver Creek prospector, the soldiers who built the highway were not northern pioneers or even soldiers by their own choice but rather by a duty to their country. Most were average American youth of the day who had been drafted into the services to do their part in the global fight for freedom. Farmers from Kansas, clerks from New York, factory workers from Illinois, truck drivers from Michigan and labourers from California were among their diverse backgrounds. In fact, three of the seven regiments were composed entirely of Black soldiers from the Deep South.

Living conditions for all these men were crude, the food monotonous, and entertainment was non-existent. Sometimes they worked 36 hours non-stop, which left little desire, or energy for recreation. For those few times they did get the chance to have a breather, playing cards competed with complaining about the weather as their chief means of passing the time.

Yet, despite all of the hardship and deprivation, these men threw themselves to the job with youthful patriotic valour, knowing that the very free-

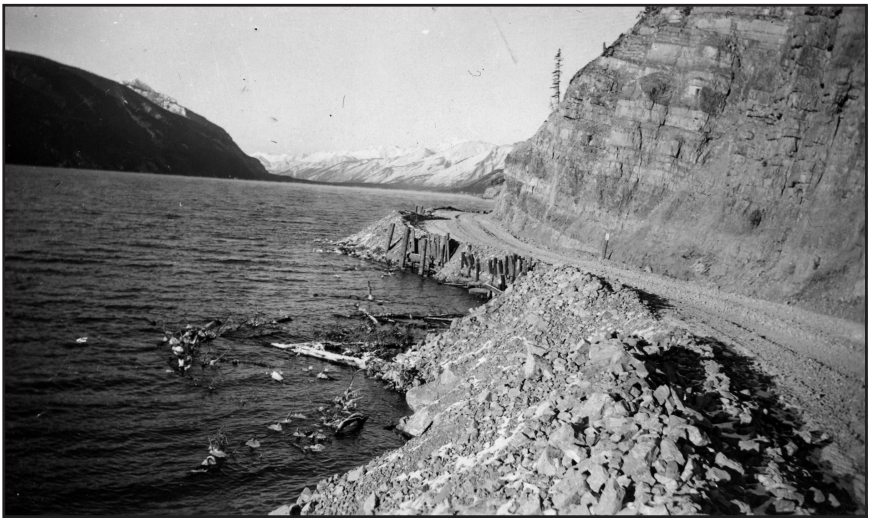
dom of their country and perhaps that of the whole world, could very well depend on the quality and expedience of their work.

The threat was real, very real. In fact, by June the threat of a Japanese invasion of Alaska had become a reality! The first major Japanese strike took place on June 2nd 1942 at the military base and fishing community of Dutch Harbour in the Eastern Aleutian Islands. On that cold and fog-shrouded morning, a total of 15 fighter jets and four bombers, all bearing the insignia of the rising sun, were released from two aircraft carriers anchored just a few miles offshore. Within minutes they had zoomed in over their targets sending their bombs cascading downwards. Direct hits were made on the hospital, the power plant and on military installations. Seventy-eight people, mostly military personal, were killed and another 100 were wounded.

American land-based pursuit planes and torpedo bombers stationed at the secret American military base of Umnak, just 70 miles to the west, were quickly deployed to the scene, this time taking their Japanese attackers by surprise. A fiery battle ensued. Japanese Zeros were sent spiralling in pyro-techniques through the sky and into the sea. Others retreated to the their carriers hidden offshore amid the dense fog, only to strike again the next morning! This time, however, the weakened attack force did little damage other than reducing a few fuel storage tanks into flaming infernos. The Japanese, then quite happy with the damage they had done, retreated silently into the fog.

Within minutes of the first attack a complete radio silence was declared across the entire West Coast of North America. Businesses and homeowners in Anchorage and Fairbanks, fearful of a similar attack, boarded and taped up their windows. Residents were told to gather provisions for two weeks and be prepared to head for the woods at any given moment.

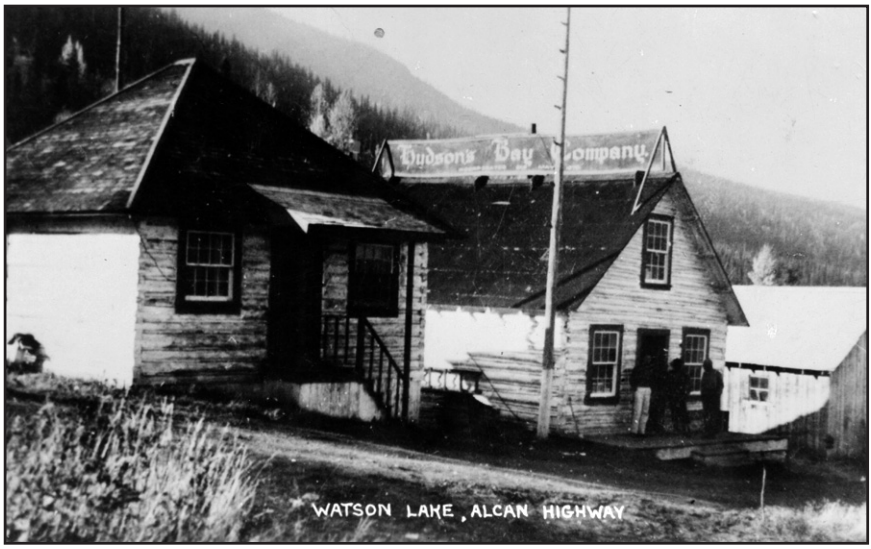
Luckily the Japanese kept on retreating with their fleet of two carri-



ers, three cruisers, eight destroyers and four loaded troop transports. Because they brought troop transports, it was deemed a fair assumption that they did plan on occupation of this easterly extension of the Aleutian Island chain. Instead, while in retreat, they stormed and occupied the Island of Attu killing the schoolteacher and imprisoning 39 Aleut villagers. Next, they took Kiska quickly capturing the island's only defenders, a navy weather team. Thousands of Japanese soldiers swarmed both islands and fortifications and gun emplacements were hastily constructed in preparation for battle. Meanwhile, the Americans had gathered their forces and were establishing a military base at nearby Adak Island, preparing to oust the Japanese invaders.

A publication ban kept most Americans at home completely in the

dark about the war in Alaska then and in years following. But the troops working on the highway knew and consequently they worked at breakneck speed. Finally on September 24, 1942, 305 miles north of Fort Nelson, the 35th and the 340th Regiments met, rather, they "almost collided." The spot was appropriately named Contact Creek. And a month and a day later, on October 25th, near Beaver Creek on the Alaska-Yukon border, the 97th Regiment working south met up with the northbound 18th Regiment thereby closing the final link. The Alaska Highway, albeit a very rough, rude and crude one, was built. From start to finish it had taken exactly eight months and ten days to build 1523 miles of road.



The official opening ceremonies and ribbon cutting took place on November 20th at Soldiers' Summit overlooking beautiful Kluane Lake. Several hundred people including soldiers, Mounties and citizens, braved the minus 30 degree temperatures as great things were said of the soldiers and of the historical significance of their deed. Among those officiating were Commander-in-Chief, Major-General "Patsy" O'Connor and Colonel K.R. Bush.

While Bush paid particular tribute to Donald MacDonald for his amazing foresight and his tireless efforts to set the project in motion, O'Connor paid tribute to the common soldiers who made the highway a reality. When the time came to cut the ribbon, O'Connor, insisting that men of the ranks be represented, motioned four soldiers, two blacks and two whites, to step up and hold the ribbon. Then, with a pair of specially engraved golden scissors, the ribbon, red white and blue was parted. The scissors were then split in half with one half being forwarded to President Roosevelt and the other half going to Canada's Prime Minister William MacKenzie King.

By early1943, all of the original seven Regiments were pulled off the

highway, their job done. But, as significant a job as it was, much work was still needed in order to bring the highway up to any "real" standards. Although convoys of trucks did manage to wind their way north to Fairbanks relatively unobstructed throughout the winter, by springtime things had taken a definite turn for the worst. With the return of spring meltdown, that all too familiar soupy quagmire made its unsightly return again. The going was slow and in some places downright impossible.

When a vehicle did get through (and many a six-by-six didn't), it had only to come to the next river before an even more formidable barrier was reached. Huge masses of ice and debris had swept entire bridges downstream, including the 2,500-foot Peace River Bridge and most of the six small bridges that spanned the various channels of the Donjek. An upgrade was in order, one carried out by professionals who were practiced at the art of road and bridge building.

Called on to carry out this job were five major private contractors and an additional 71 sub-contractors and a gargantuan workforce of some16,000 men. Between 1942 and '44 these companies carried out many improvements such as widening and building up the road bed, reducing many of the steeper grades, straightening many of the bends and by passing much of the swampy ground. Several new steel bridges were also built including the very impressive and expensive Peace River Suspension bridge, which was said to have cost $4,000,000 alone.

By early 1944, however, with the Japanese threat to Alaska diminishing, the highway was no longer considered a priority and all of these companies were relieved of their duties. The U.S. Army arrived to look after the highway's control and maintenance for the duration of the war. Finally, in 1946 as stipulated in agreement, the U.S. Army handed the highway over to the Canadian Army and the last of the American troops left the Yukon.

Between 1942 and 1944 over 36,000 men were directly involved in building the highway. During this time they built over 150 bridges, put in 8,000 log culverts and laid over 40 miles of corduroy. The final cost, all paid for by the U.S. Department of Defense, was $138,000,000, or approximately $66,000 a mile.

Unfortunately, building the highway cost not only in terms of money, but it also cost in terms of human lives. In May of 1942 eleven soldiers drowned when their makeshift raft was swamped in the frigid waters of Charlie Lake in northern British Columbia. And in February of 1943 five were killed and hundreds were injured when 60 boxes of dynamite and blasting caps stored in a barn in Dawson Creek exploded, levelling much of the town. More were killed in equipment accidents, frozen to death after becoming lost or while in stalled trucks, or were swept away by swollen northern rivers. The souls of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice bear true testimony to the fact that the harsh northern wilderness, as unforgiving as it is beautiful, does not surrender to man's encroachment without a fight.

It took a lot of money, a lot of dozers, a lot of men and unfortunately a lot of lives to build the Alaska Highway, but it was definitely not a waste. It served well the purpose it was intended for. Thousands of tons of military armaments, equipment and supplies and tens of thousands of troops travelled over its surface to Alaska during the war years. Troops, equipment, armaments and supplies which ultimately played a major role in securing its freedom.

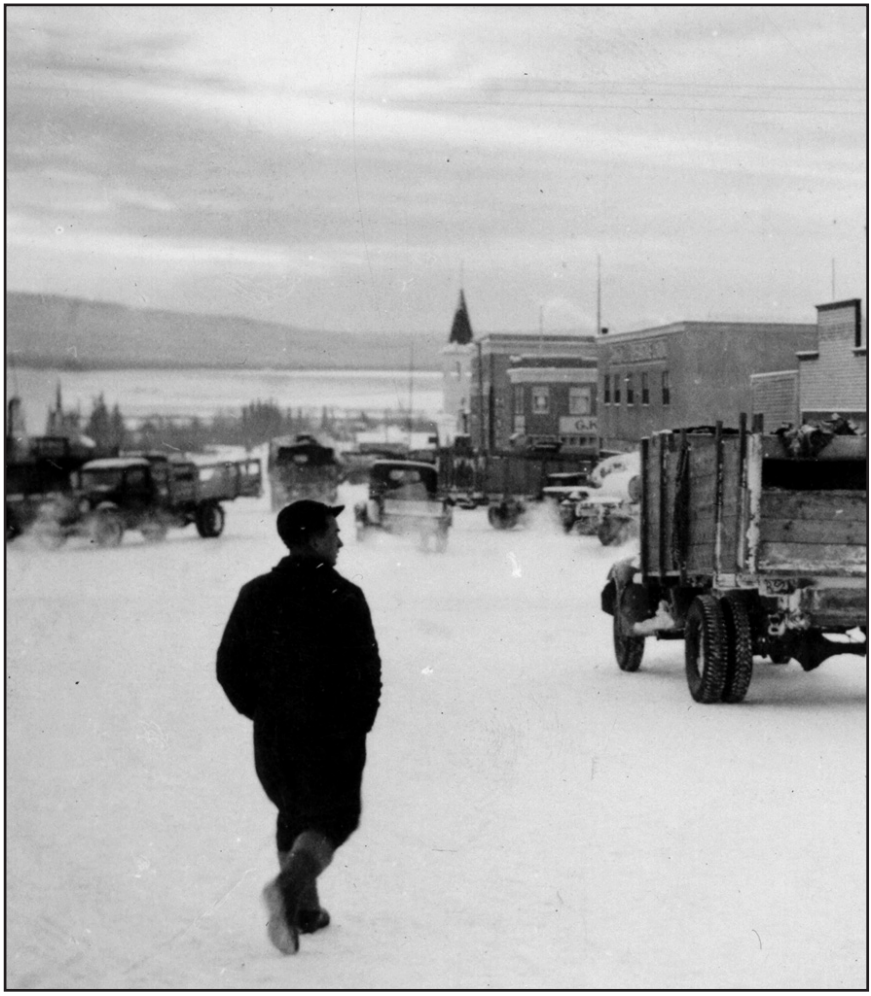
As for the Japanese invasion of Kiska and Attu, the islands were finally reclaimed at the cost of thousands of lives, American, Canadian and Japanese, in several bloody battles, appropriately termed "The forgotten

war". In the end, rather then suffer the shame of defeat, over 500 Japanese soldiers gathered on the cold, foggy and forlorn beach of Attu and held grenades to their chests.

The Alaska Highway Opens to the Public

In the summer of 1948, after five years of military use and control, the Alaska Highway was finally opened to the public. And from the start there was certainly no shortage of hard-bitten road pioneers ready and willing to brave its dusty, crooked, hard-bitten surface. Over 3,500 vehicles made the northward trek the first month alone, and following that, traffic just kept right on increasing. As one witness put it "Now that the highway is open it seems as if everybody is hell bent on seeing the north."

Vehicles of every description including Model T Fords, old delivery wagons, converted school buses, big luxury sedans, specially-built, bubble-



top sightseeing jeeps, 35-foot, four-room trailers, motorcycles and even bicycles were soon bouncing, skidding and sliding up and down the now "World Famous" Alaska Highway. These vehicles bore plates from every state in the union and every province in Canada,

One of the participants in this colourful armada, known as the "Rush of '48", was Pierre Berton who gave this description of a portion of his travels:

"We slid out of Whitehorse on a beautiful section of road, thirty-six feet wide, gravel deep, the curves gentle and well banked. But we had driven only a few dozen miles when its character underwent a remarkable change. The road narrowed and began to writhe and squirm in a zigzag series of hairpin turns, loops and cutbacks. These contorted stretches reappear all along the length of the highway and they puzzle everybody who travels it." Obviously for Pierre, the road still held much of its original "charm".

Opening the highway to the public also opened new business opportunities. Soon service stations (29 opened in 1948), cafes, motels and highway lodges began to spring up all along the route. Although these businesses were not lucrative, many made a healthy and happy living.

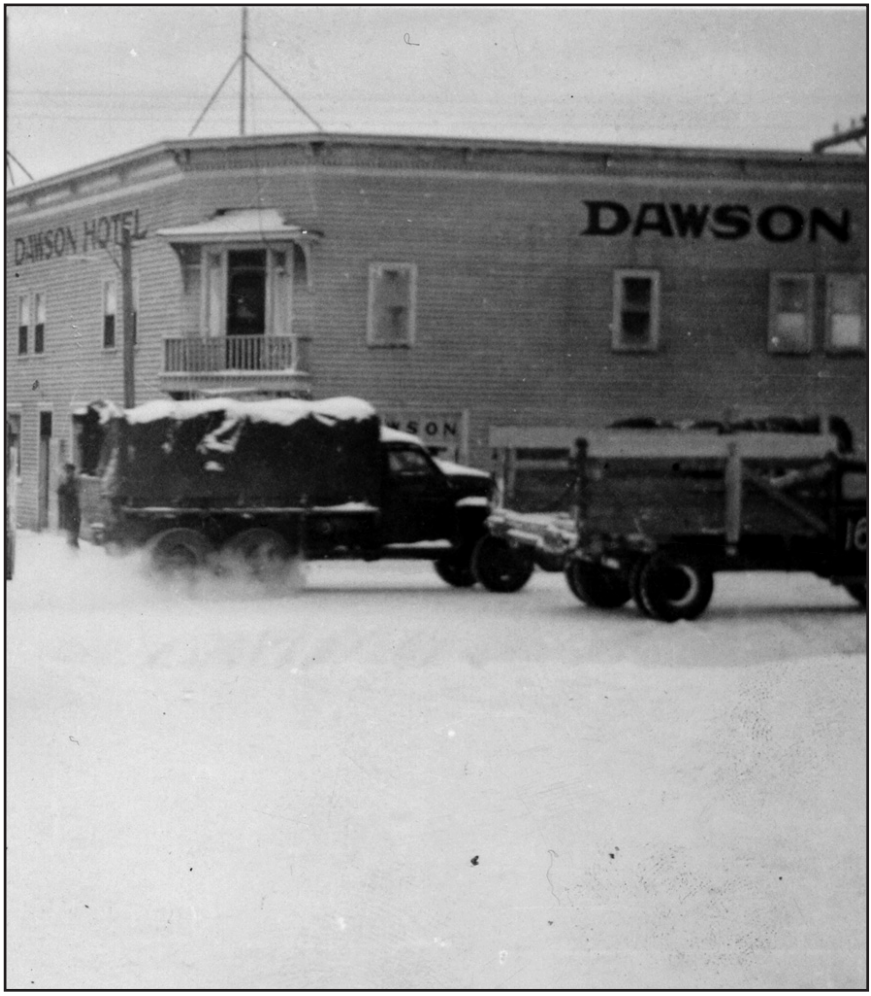
Old-timer Gene Jacquot of Burwash Lodge, who had settled the area in 1904, lived out his old age catering to the rich new tourists so conveniently being funnelled in his direction. Bob Jordan, a retired navy veteran and proprietor of the Border Trading Post, said he had experienced "enough heat to last his lifetime" and was happy to spend his twilight years on the cold northern highway.

Retired Mountie, Mike Nolan, proprietor of "Dun-rovin" on the shores of Marsh Lake was certainly not known to complain about his lot in life either. Nolan's Dun-rovin, was one of the first RV campsites on the

highway. According to early highway adventurer Iris Woolcock who drove the highway solo in '48 pulling an Airstream: *"Mr. Nolan has built a most attractive camp in the most delightful spot I have ever seen in the north country—with the sun setting magnificently over the lavender snow covered peaks on the opposite shore casting purple gold and rose reflections in the silvery smooth mirror of Marsh Lake."*

Soon similar campsites and lodges were established on all of the pristine northern lakes situated along the route, from the deep turquoise waters of Muncho Lake to the cool mountain blue waters of Kluane. Fishing, hunting, camping, canoeing, mountain climbing, sightseeing and other tourism based industries flourished.

Another industry that opened with the coming of the highway was mining and exploration. Within two years of the highway being opened to



the public, mining claims registered in the Yukon increased tenfold. A decade after that the number quadrupled, as mineral deposits previously thought unworthy of exploitation due to lack of transportation facilities suddenly took on a shining new light. In the years following, trucks loaded with everything from asbestos to zinc could be found bouncing their way down the highway and off to market. To this day mining, exploration and tourism remain as the Yukon's most important industries.

As soon as the Alaska Highway was pushed through, a network of secondary roads developed, branching off the Alaska Highway and allowing access to even remoter regions of the territory as well as to neighbouring Alaska and N.W.T. Like the Alaska Highway, some of these roads were built by the American and Canadian Armies as part of the big plan for the defense of the Northwest.

These secondary arteries included the 450 - mile Canol Road connecting Johnson's Crossing to Norman Wells, NWT and the 160-mile Haines, Alaska Road. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built both in 1942-43. The American Army also "knocked in" the 34-mile Tagish Road, the 21-mile Kusawa Lake Road and it rebuilt the 45-mile Carcross Road during this period. To the Canadian Army's credit is the 61-mile Atlin Road built in 1949 by the Royal Canadian Engineers.

In 1950 the 264-mile, government-funded Mayo Road was built and five years later the road was extended to Dawson City. Then in 1968 came the 362-mile Campbell Highway that dissects the territory between Watson Lake and Carmacks. In 1984, the 244-mile Liard Highway connecting Fort Nelson, B.C. to Fort Simpson NWT brought the legendary Nahanni Region to within a stone's throw of vehicular traffic.

The Alaska Highway's Contribution

From the moment that the 35th Regiment stepped off the train at

Dawson Creek that blizzard-like morning of March 10, 1942, the north, and particularly the Yukon ,would never be the same again.

Whitehorse, more than any other Yukon community, changed the most. From a sleepy pre-war population of 500, it ballooned into a city of 15,000 overnight. Even after the American troops left it still held a stable population of 5,000. Thanks primarily to the Americans it now had a new sewage and water system, a generating plant, a telephone link to the south, and a first-class airport.

After the American Army departed, the Canadian Army and Air Force remained at Whitehorse until 1964. The Air force stayed because of its strategic location on the air route to Russia in a world now under the grips of a "Cold War." The Army stayed in the most part to deal with the steadily deteriorating highway. During the Canadian Army's 18-year custodianship of the highway an average of a thousand men at any given time maintained the road and made improvements, including 100 bridge replacements. An even a greater number were employed in the North West Highway System's various service, supply administration and maintenance departments at Whitehorse.

So for 20 years Whitehorse remained a very military town. In fact it would be safe to say that during this period at least three out of four of all of its residents were either military personnel or their families. Completely new subdivisions (with real blacktop) were built to house these residents. Takhini, an office and housing complex, was built in 1951 and used by the Army and their families. Hillcrest was built the same year to house the staff and families of the Air force and shortly afterwards Valleyview and Riverdale, two similar housing complexes, were built to handle the increasing demand for military housing.

Further infra structural improvements including a new 120-bed hospital, a sports and civic centre and a hockey arena with "a larger rink than Maple Leaf Gardens" completely transformed Whitehorse from a quaint little "one horse" town into a vibrant and bustling city. Thanks to the Alaska Highway, Whitehorse had grown up.

Whitehorse's gain however was clearly Dawson's loss. While the former flourished, the latter shrivelled. Having a highway connection to the south meant everything and hard-core Dawsonites were painfully aware of this fact. Almost as soon as the highway was finished the migration from Dawson to Whitehorse began. The first to leave were the RCMP when they moved their 30-man detachment to Whitehorse in 1944. And prominent citizens including the Anglican Bishop and George and Martha Black soon followed suit. Dredge workers flocked south as well, in favour of the higher paying highway jobs. And businesses were not immune to the trend either. Many of its few remaining enterprises, including the Cascade Laundry, pulled up, lock stock and barrel, and headed to where the action was. Finally, in 1953 the Capital itself was moved to Whitehorse.

This was the final insult to the already demoralized former "Queen City" of the north. In ten years, Whitehorse had snatched away almost all

that it had, including its money, its citizenry, its influence and its power. Fortunately, Dawson would later regain much of its former glory, this time as a bustling tourist town. Ironically, Dawson's tourism business grew as traffic on the Alaska Highway increased.

Unfortunately, construction of the Alaska Highway, and later, the roads to Mayo and Dawson, contributed to the demise of the colourful and romantic steamboat era. The riverboats could not compete. The last of over 250 Yukon River sternwheelers was pulled up onto the ways at Whitehorse in 1955. Communities along the Yukon River, Hootalinqua, Selwyn, Yukon Crossing, Coffee Creek, Stewart City and the Yukon's oldest town, Fort Selkirk, were abandoned. The Yukon would never be the same again. Fortunately, both the *SS Klondike* and Fort Selkirk have been preserved and restored by the Canadian government and survive as tributes to that most colourful and nostalgic era.

The Alaska Highway Now

In years of late over a quarter of a million vehicles travel the Alaska Highway's wide, relatively straight, 100 per cent paved surface each year. The beautiful blue mountain lakes, the spectacular camping spots and the awe-inspiring mountain vistas remain. Gone, however, are the curves, twists, switchbacks and "basket ball sized" surfacing aggregates that gave the famous old highway so much of its former character. In fact, where before most accidents along the highway were due to "bad" road conditions, now most accidents along the highway are due to drivers' falling asleep because road conditions just were not quite bad enough! Now that popular selling bumper sticker "We drove the Alaska Highway and survived," has a new meaning.

Gone too, are most (but not all) of the old highway lodges, cafes and service stations that catered to those adventuresome, dusty, shaken, and

hungry and travellers of yesteryear. Not to get excited, the highway still sports fine business establishments from the rustic to the luxurious, but with the straightening and rerouting done over the years, many of the old places were either by-passed or their services were no longer required due to improved highway conditions.

Highway travellers today interested in old highway memorabilia would do well with a visit to the Yukon Transportation Museum located on the Alaska Highway at Whitehorse. Also, Jake's Corner, at the Atlin cut-off should not be missed. There all kinds of old equipment, tools, old rusty signs, prehistoric chain saws, and all sorts of brick-a-brack from the old highway days now rest silently, their job done. Most of the men who held, drove, dragged and otherwise manipulated those old rusty pieces of equipment 60 plus years ago building the "World Famous" Alaska Highway are gone now too.

To the pioneer highway workers who remain with us, to those who don't, and to those crazy Americans who still keep on pumping millions of dollars into the highway each year, obsessed with removing each and every last curve, all credit is due.

The Alaska Highway

winding in

and winding out,

fills my mind

with serious doubt

as to whether the lout

who planned this route,

was going to hell

or coming out.

—Written in 1943 by Troy Hise, a soldier stationed at Summit Lake (mile 392) on the highway.

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