

# BUILDING THE ALASKA HIGHWAY

## Why This Engineering Feat is Important to Historic Military Vehicle Collectors

### The Alaska Highway Took Only 8 ½ Months to Build in 1942



The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 led to one of the greatest engineering feats of the century. Recognizing that the U.S. West Coast, Canada and all of Alaska were open to possible Japanese invasion, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the construction of the "Alaska Canada Military Highway" on February 11, 1942. This important road would be used to supply forces in Alaska and the airfields located and planned along the West Coast.

Photo Credit: U.S. Army Photo Archives

On March 9, 1942 Army Engineers began work on the highway from both ends — from Dawson Creek in British Columbia and Delta Junction near Fairbanks. They hacked, slugged and pushed their way through dense forests, hard rock, muddy bogs and mosquito-ridden muskeg. Approximately 11,000 service men worked exhausting 12 to 16-hour days in harsh and dangerous conditions.

### Military Vehicles: The Backbone of the Construction Project



Building of the Alaska Highway would not have been possible without over 7,000 pieces of military equipment including 5,000 trucks, 904 tractors, 374 graders and 174 shovels.

**The workhorses of the road project were the Caterpillar D8 and D4 bulldozers – most of the tractors and dozers were Caterpillar machines.**

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## **Trucks used on the construction project:**

**Jeeps by Ford & Willys  
Dodge ½ Ton WC 4X4  
Chevrolet 1 ½ Ton 4X4  
Studebaker US-6 6X6  
GMC CCKW 6X6  
GMC 4X4 Air Compressor Trucks  
Diamond T 6X6  
White 6 Ton 6X6 Heavy Trucks  
International Harvester 2X4 K Series  
AutoCar 4X4  
FWD 4X4**



Construction of the highway was completed 8 months and 12 days later. An opening ceremony was held a Soldiers Summit on Kluane Lake on November 20, 1942.

The road, originally called the Alaskan-Canadian Highway quickly adopted the shortened name Alcan Highway. Today, this road, known as the Alaska Highway, still provides the only land route to Alaska.

## **Why are MVPA Members Convoying on the Alaska Highway in 2012**

Building the Alaska Highway would not have been possible without the dedicated troops and military vehicles that made it happen. Those men and machines were put to the test every day and they rose to the challenge and delivered results. That's why driving the Alaska Highway in 2012 is so important to HMV collectors. It's a chance to celebrate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of this important road, to honor our great Veterans...past and present, and to showcase the historic military vehicles association members work to preserve.

## **Alaska Highway Facts**

- 1,523 miles - length of the historic route from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks
- 11,000 U.S. Troops used in construction - 5 regiments of U.S. Army Engineers
- 16,000 civilian workers - 41 American and 13 Canadian contractors
- 7,000 pieces of equipment
- 133 bridges constructed
- 8,000 plus culverts installed
- Summit, 4,250 feet at Historic Mile 392, highest mountain pass
- Cost \$140 million
- Called the Alaska Military Highway at first, it then became the Alaska-Canada Highway, which was shortened to Alcan before being finally replaced by Alaska Highway, the name by which it is officially known today
- Begun March 9, 1942
- September 24, 1942 crews from both directions met at Mile 588 at what became named Contact Creek, at the British Columbia-Yukon border at the 60th Parallel
- Officially opened November 20, 1942, at Soldiers Summit, Mile 1061
- 8 months, 12 days
- Opened to the public 1948
- Mile 0 - Dawson Creek, British Columbia

- Official end Delta Junction, Alaska, Mile 1,422
- Unofficial end Fairbanks, Alaska, Historic Mile 1,523
- During 50 years of road improvements, the road was shortened by 35 miles