

*Alaska Highway*

## ALASKA HIGHWAY

FURTHER REPORT AS TO DESTRUCTION OR  
ABANDONMENT OF STORES

On the orders of the day:

Mr. M. J. COLDWELL (Rosetown-Biggarr): The Minister of Mines and Resources told us, I think, that he would endeavour to obtain some report on the rumours in circulation regarding the disposition of equipment from the Alaska highway. I believe he said he would have something on Thursday. Will he give us any information he has obtained?

Hon. T. A. CRERAR (Minister of Mines and Resources): I referred the matter to the Prime Minister's office, because probably it comes more under external affairs than under any other department, and I shall bring it again to the notice of the Prime Minister. He was not in the house yesterday morning when orders were called and is not here this morning, but I have no doubt he has a reply to the query which he may give later to-day or to-morrow.

Mr. GRAYDON: From information I get now it would appear that this matter actually is being held up by some department or departments of this government. Apparently the war assets corporation or some similar body is not allowed to purchase these goods from the United States government and resell them in the usual way. The minister might look into that also.

Mr. CRERAR: I shall be glad to have that matter brought to the attention of those who have to do with it. But, as I stated the other day, this property belongs to the government of the United States.

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): We all know that.

Mr. CRERAR: Well, then—

Mr. HANSON (York-Sunbury): But it cannot be disposed of; it is being destroyed, and people think that is wrong.

Mr. CRERAR: That may be, but surely my hon. friend realizes that some aspects of the matter may make it difficult for this government to decisively intervene. What I rather object to is the inference that may be drawn from the remarks of the leader of the opposition that in some way the government here is responsible for this situation.

Mr. GRAYDON: I think that is the case.

Mr. CRERAR: Then all I can say is that the leader of the opposition is making a very considerable assumption.

[Mr. Crerar.]

[Later]:

Right Hon. W. L. MACKENZIE KING (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, on Tuesday last reference was made by the hon. leader of the opposition and the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggarr (Mr. Coldwell) to reports to the effect that certain stores and equipment used in the construction of the Alaska highway by the United States had been destroyed and that residents of the Peace River district were facing threats of prosecution by the United States federal bureau of investigation for having recovered from army dumps goods allegedly discarded.

This matter had also been brought to my attention by the hon. member for Cariboo (Mr. Turgeon), in whose constituency these actions are alleged to have occurred.

When these reports were received that useful stores were being destroyed, the special commissioner for defence projects in northwest Canada was asked to investigate and, as I informed the house on July 10, he replied that he had been unable to obtain evidence to substantiate these charges. He has, however, continued his investigations and now reports that United States officers are engaged in closing up one hundred and fifty construction camps, segregating and concentrating all usable material of economic value at thirty collection points for later disposal. When the United States army has completed these operations and has provided lists of surplus equipment which it does not wish to remove to the United States, it may prove practicable for the Canadian government to take custody of this material, dispose of it, and turn over to the United States government the net proceeds of sale, after deducting sales expenses and such duties and taxes as may be assessed. Discussions to this end are now under way between the two governments and it is hoped that an agreement will shortly be reached.

With regard to the specific charges that usable stores have been destroyed, the United States authorities advise that explicit instructions have been issued to their officers in the field that everything of economic value should be salvaged. Infected blankets and clothing and foodstuffs unfit for human consumption are, however, being destroyed. It is, of course, possible that errors of judgment have been made in carrying out these instructions. Officers of the United States northwest service command and representatives of the war department from Washington are now making a complete investigation of charges of improper destruction and waste. Their findings will be communicated to the special commissioner.