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Festivities to mark fortieth anniversary of the Alaska Highway



Alaska Highway near Haines road junction in the Yukon.

Forty years ago, during the hectic days of the Second World War, the Canadian and United States governments joined forces to build the Alaska Highway. This year marks the fortieth anniversary of the highway's construction with celebrations planned along the 2 451-kilometre route — 80 per cent of which is in Canada.

The highway, which stretches from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, was constructed in only 20 months, considered an almost impossible task even by current high standards of engineering.

In March 1942, 35 000 U.S. soldiers and a small number of Canadians began to cut their way through the dense brush along the proposed route. The precarious military and naval situations — a threatened Japanese invasion — necessitated a speedy construction with soldiers working seven days a week, 24 hours a day. Transportation, labour, food, accommodation, overtime and other costs were heavy. The United States government spent \$139.8 million on the road with Canada supplying the right of way and

waiving customs duties on equipment and materials from the United States.

Makeshift road

The highway was built in two stages. In 1942 a "pioneer road" was made by cutting brush, laying it on top of the swampy muskeg and covering the brush with gravel. With little time to spare and not enough equipment to blast their way through rough spots, the soldiers created a winding road. In 1943 the road was made permanent, all-weather and gravel-surfaced.

After an exchange of notes between Canada and the United States and a financial settlement, all the portions of the Alaska Highway and part of the Haines lateral road within Canada became an integral part of the Canadian highway system on April 1, 1946.

By a Cabinet decision the Canadian army was charged with the responsibility for the maintenance of the Canadian section of the Alaska Highway. To carry out this task the army organized the North-

Canadian Government Office of Tourism



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