

# History and Military Significance of Whittier Alaska

Patrick Durand



Eklutna

Sunrise

Kenai

Nuchek

Seldovia

Kodiak

1895 Communities with  
settlers of European decent.



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

1898

Coastal transport OLGA



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

1895 Sunrise, Alaska Territory



Sunrise

Portage Pass

Passage Canal



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1898

Captain F. Glenn, Capt Culp, US ARMY



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

April 1898

War Department and USGS survey parties on beach at Valdez with supply stockpile.



PS. NEWBY  
5194

LANDING HORSES AT PORTAGE BAY, ALASKA.  
FROM U.S.S. DORA.

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1898

Portage Bay, Passage Canal

8





University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

1898

Glenn party on Portage Glacier looking  
down toward Turnagain Arm.



University of Alaska Anchorage. Archives & Manuscripts Dept.

1898

Glenn Camp at Portage near Turnagain Arm



1903

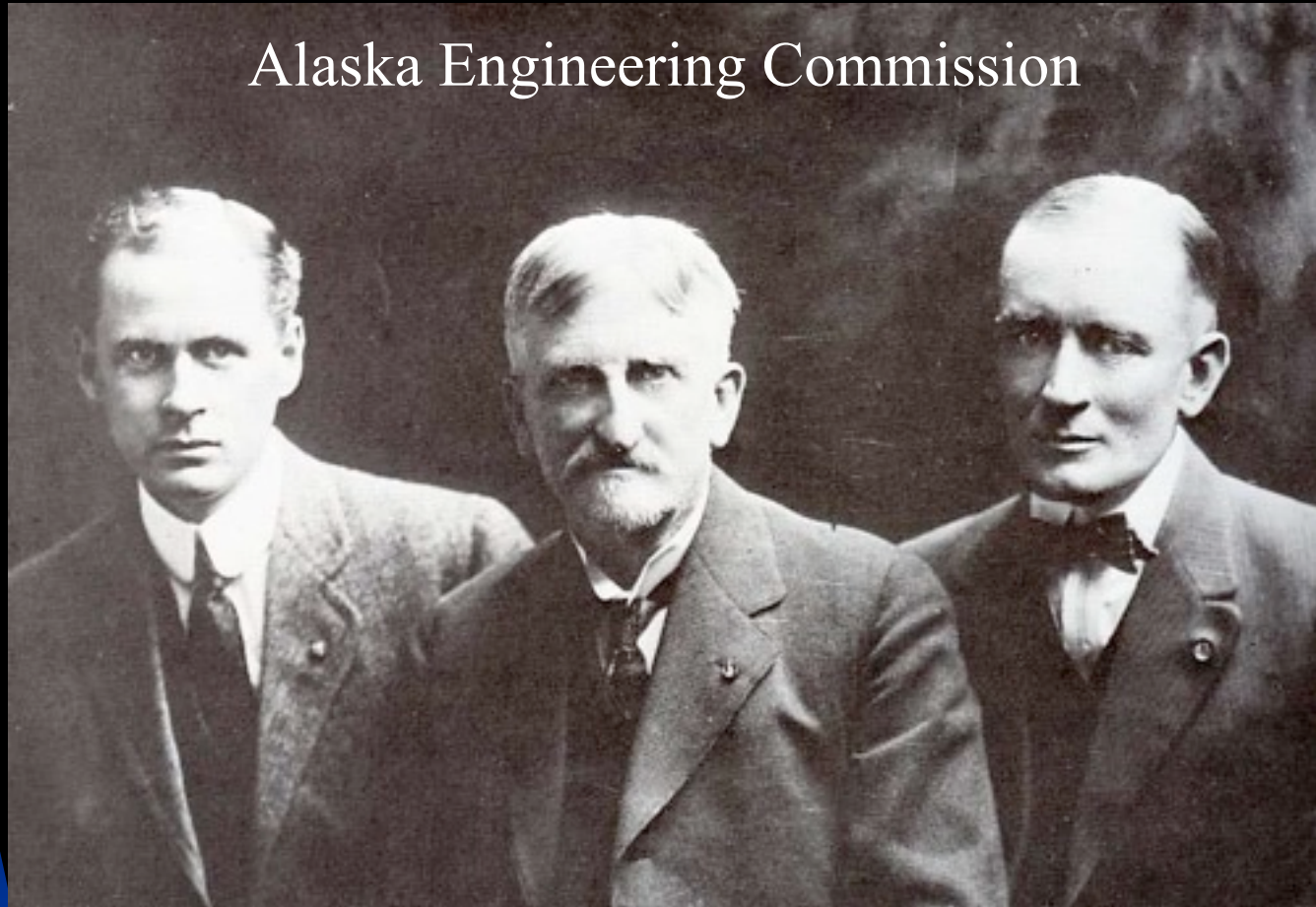
John E. Ballaine founded the City of Seward started building the Alaska Central Railroad



1907

The Alaska Northern advanced to Kern Creek  
and went bust in the recession of 1906.

# Alaska Engineering Commission



Lt. Fredrick Mears, Construction Manager

Thomas Riggs, Member

Chairman, William C. Edes

AEC created  
March 12, 1914



1914 AEC US Army Survey Crew on Portage Glacier



1914 Portage Glacier from moraines in Bear Valley



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

1914 Samples of Chickaloon coal delivered by dog team at Knik for US Navy steaming test.



# Reality Check for 1914

Anchorage did not exist!

The only land route to interior Alaska was the dirt track called the Richardson Highway between Valdez and Fairbanks.

The Copper River & Northwestern Railroad connected to that road at the town of Chitina



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1915 Ship Creek anchorage



1918

Homesteader, John Whitney

19



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1915

4<sup>th</sup> and F street first year of Anchorage



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1917

Laying 12' concrete sidewalks on 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue



C Street hill

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1917

Ship Creek & Anchorage



1917 The Alaska Railroad reached Chickaloon  
Navy coal mines and began hauling coal  
for domestic use and export.



January 1918 Major Mears departs for Europe





1916

Capt Frederick Mears

William Edes



September 17, 1918

The line along Turnagain Arm was opened finally connecting Anchorage and Seward by rail.



August 1919

Col Mears returns as Chairman of the AEC

Here on the rear of business car A-1 the Colonel and his family often entertained visiting dignitaries during inspection trips.



Feb 9, 1923 First train over the Tanana River Bridge. At 704 ft. the world's longest single span bridge.



July 15, 1923

President Harding driving Gold Spike



1923

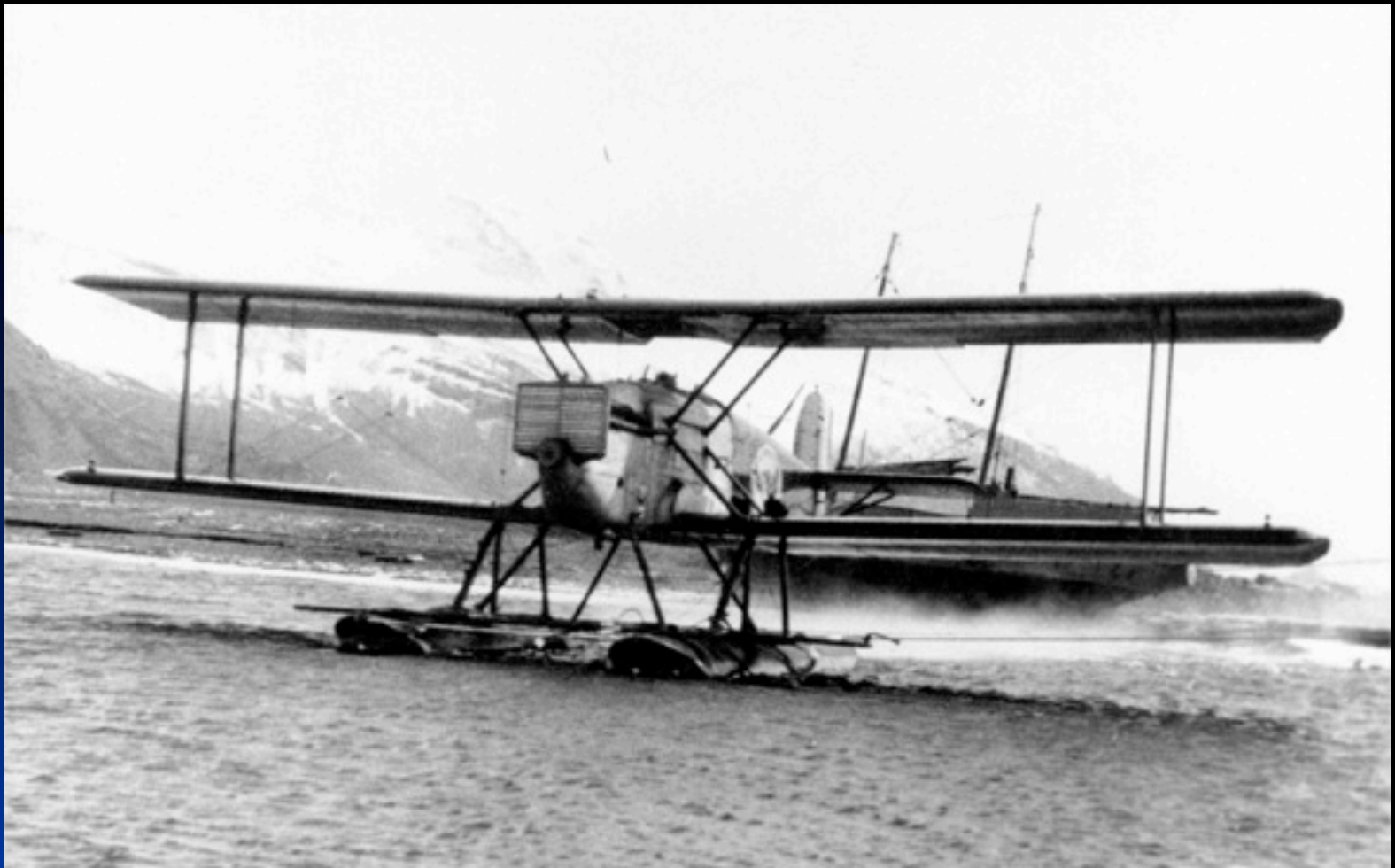
Congressional Inspection Tour of Alaska  
Railroad after completion by the AEC



© Alfred M. Lambert family

1921

Nenana docks on the Tanana River



April 6, 1924

Seattle Douglas World Cruiser in Seward. US Army Air Corps around the world flight. West bound 27,553 mile route took 175 days. 371 hours 11 minutes flight time.



Col. Otto F. Ohlson

Alaska Railroad  
General Manager

August 1928 - December 1945

Retired at age 75



1928 -- 1945



Anchorage Museum of History & Art. Library & Archives.

1930

Snow fleet between Portage and Seward<sub>34</sub>



Sternwheeler River Boat NENANA with military cargo going down the Tanana River. The fleet based in Nenana was Operated by The Alaska Railroad



1931

Lindbergh's Lockheed Sirius on Lotus Lake in China after flying a Great Circle Route from New York to Japan via Alaska



© Carl Freshour

2.5% grades, snow and old bridges in Loop District



1935

Col Otto Ohlson promoted the Matanuska Valley Colony Project which became a source of ready labor.

# Reality check 1937- 40

Japan was occupying Korea, China, Indonesia  
And considering an invasion of Australia.

As of September 1939 Canada was at war with  
Japan and building western defenses.

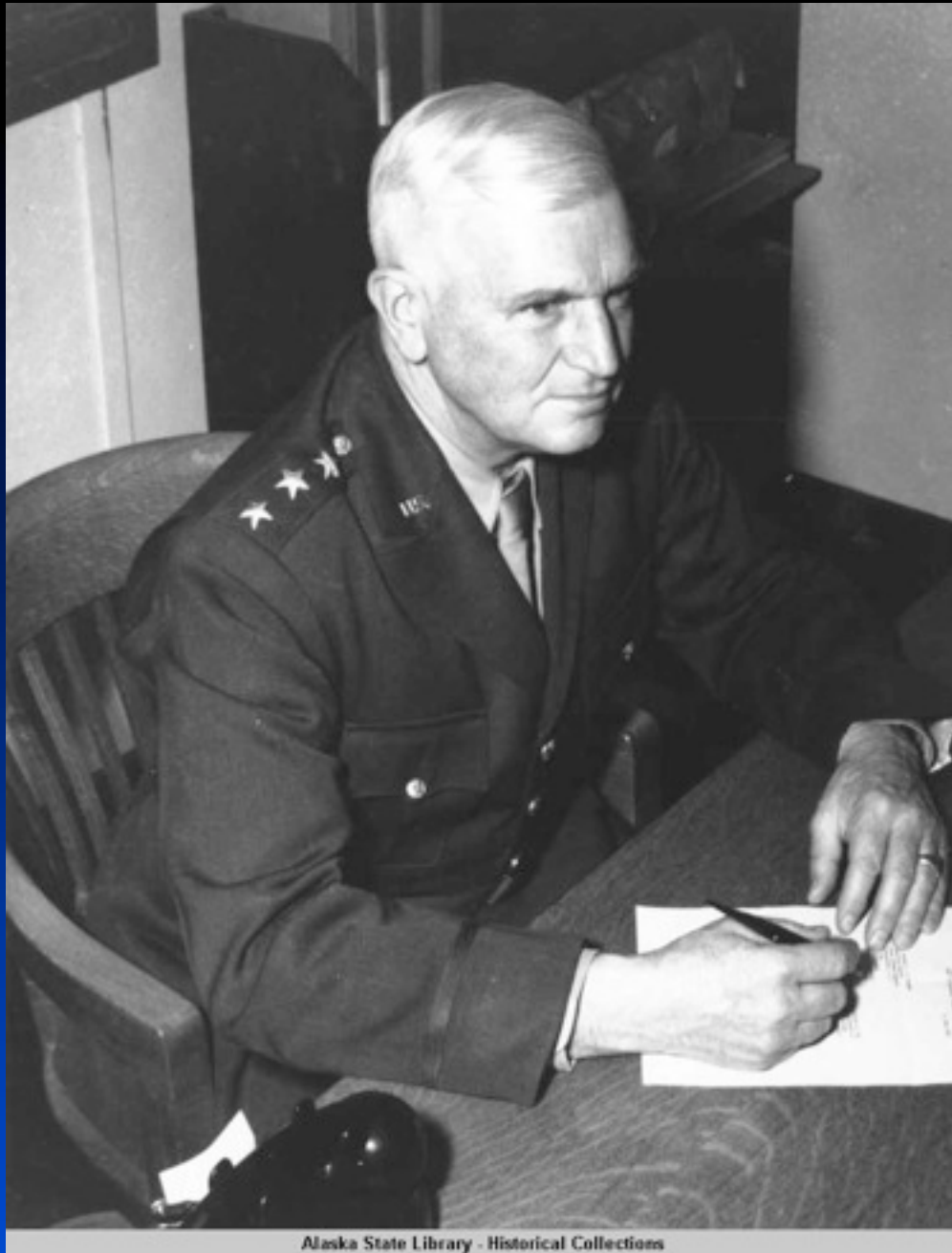
The Canadian – American Permanent Joint  
Board on Defense was created in August 1940.

Territory of Alaska Population 72,524

Seward 949

Anchorage 3,495      Juneau 5,729

Fairbanks 3,455      Kodiak 864



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Lt. General Simon  
Bolivar Buckner, Jr.

July 18, 1886

June 18, 1945

Col Buchner on July 22,  
1940 commanded the  
Alaska Defense Force.

He was promoted to  
Brigadier General, Major  
General and finally  
Lieutenant General by  
May 1943 while he was  
serving in Alaska.





Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

May 1941 Fort Mears and Dutch Harbor Naval Base

# Justify the Portage Cutoff

- Security considerations
- 58 route miles shorter
- Increased productivity
- Lower line maintenance
- Passage Canal is Ice Free
- Tides of 12 feet on Passage Canal
- Railroad and Army control



© Carl Freshour

Snow fleet between Portage and Seward



November 1941

Start of tunnel from Passage Canal

44

# EXTRA!!

## Kodiak Mirror

"News of America's Last Frontier"

VOL. 1

KODIAK, ALASKA, DECEMBER 7, 1941

NO. 48

# U. S. Declares War

## Pearl Harbor Bombed

3:45 Radio bulletin states U. S. has made formal declaration of war, and that South American countries have followed suit.

As yet no word as to whether confirmation was had on first reports that U. S. had declared war. Congress has been called to meet tomorrow, and it is said President Roosevelt would ask for a declaration.

Delicate situation at the east air station will start on a 15-hour day tomorrow.

Communism has been placed on all communications between the U. S. and its possessions. No A. P. bulletins have come through.

Flash—At 5:30 a London dispatch via BBC said a state of war exists between the Netherlands and Japan.

Flash (P)—London—The British Sunday Assembly went to war against Finland, Hungary, Rumania today because they are fighting Germany's side against Russia.

### NOTICE

Night of war must be given extra tracks, equipment and men. Any violation will bring full prosecution.

Signal, Charles Cook  
Chief of Police

### Blackout Tonight

called for 8:00 tonight (Sunday) and will last 15 minutes. All lights must be extinguished, including cars. Power will be shut off at power house. Names will be taken of anyone not complying.

#### BLACKOUT SIGNAL

One long blast fire siren.

#### ALL CLEAR SIGNAL

Short blast fire siren.

Official information has been received by General Curtis commander that Pearl Harbor was bombed Sunday morning. No mention was made in the news of Alaska.

No word has been received from the Associated Press in the morning. The Alaska Commercial system means regular news were being held up at Anchorage by power outages.

General Curtis met with the topmost men of town at the city hall Sunday morning and plans were formulated for steps necessary in case of air raids here. A second meeting was called in the afternoon at 2 o'clock.

Via Radio—a short hit at Pearl Harbor was said to have killed 200 men. Last reports say losses were limited also.

Ray Beards and radio message carrying in distributing this news edition. Lt. Craft announced the blackout at the theatre.

#### Blackout Regulations

Regulations concerning extinguishing of windows and chimneys, and preparations for fire protection, and further notices will be issued later.

#### MEETING

Another public meeting will be held Thursday night at 8:00 at the city hall.

#### Local Situation Tense

Military authorities are working at the town of Kodiak in a tense possibility, but preparations must be made for the eventuality. The main main cause is an danger from fire, and the fact that the lights of the town might mean the signal for violation by the enemy.

Tough's blackout will discuss, state what steps must be taken.

#### Late Bulletins

Japan is reported to have occupied Wake Island, U. S. possession, and to have taken over the American settlements in Shanghai. It is also reported Japan has taken the American godhead Wake.

All military and naval forces on the island are on a war footing.

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December 7, 1941

Japan attacks at Pearl Harbor

45

# December 7, 1941

- Travel by aliens prohibited.
- Photos of infrastructure banned.
- Military policed and inspected all incoming and outgoing passengers.
- Alaska bound travelers screened by the Alaska Travel Control Section.
- All towns had enforced Blackouts.



December 1941

Armed guards on tunnels and bridges. 47



Archives & Manuscripts Dept. University of Alaska Anchorage

1941 US Army Signal Corp crews working for ACS and the Alaska Railroad.





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1941

4<sup>th</sup> Avenue

Anchorage, Alaska

# Anchorage Reality in 1941

- The City ended at 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue.
- Bootleggers Cove was appropriately named.
- Anchorage High and Elementary were In one building on 6<sup>th</sup> Ave.
- Merrill Field was the big airport.
- The Glenn Highway was the only dirt track out of town.



1941

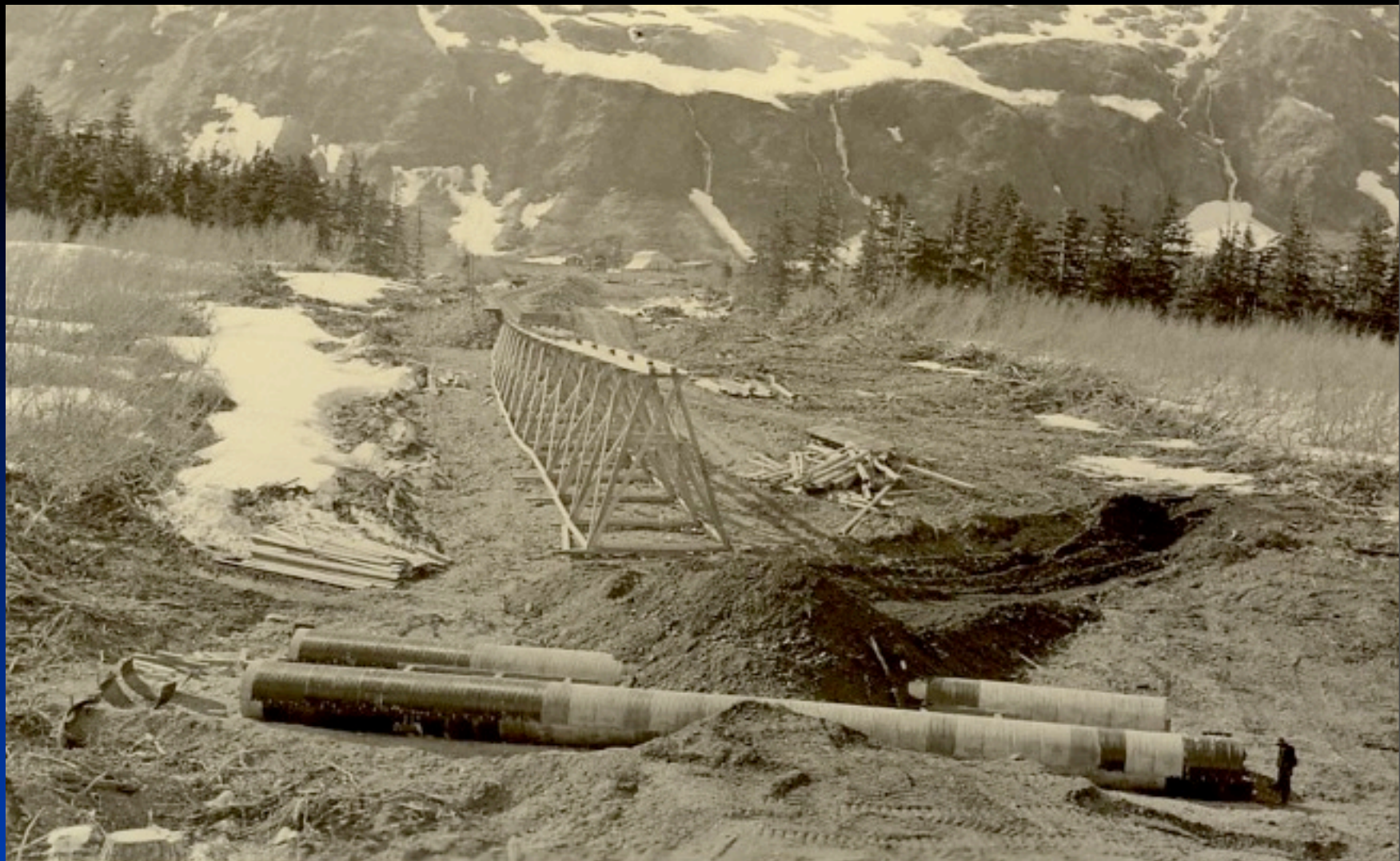
Merrill served military and civilian aviation.



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June 3, 1942

Air attack on Dutch Harbor at Fort Meade



1941

Passage Canal side of tunnel project placing fill.



1942

Diversion channel for Whittier Creek 54



Nov 20, 1942

Whittier Tunnel Holing Through

Major General Simon B. Buchner

Colonel B. B. Talley

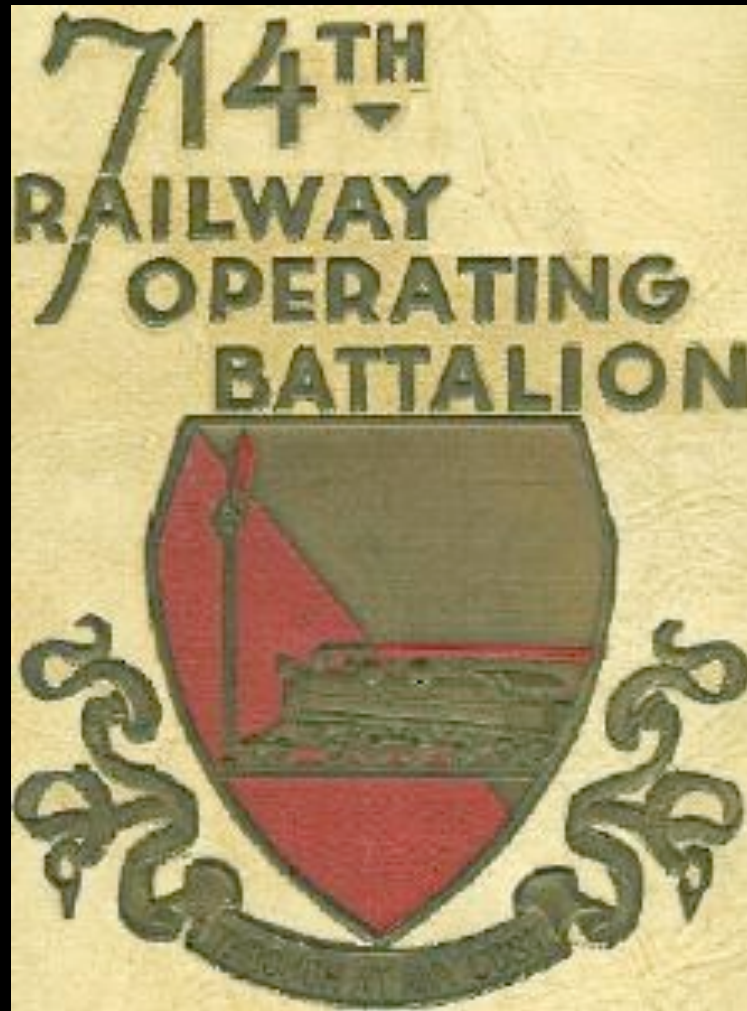


July 1942

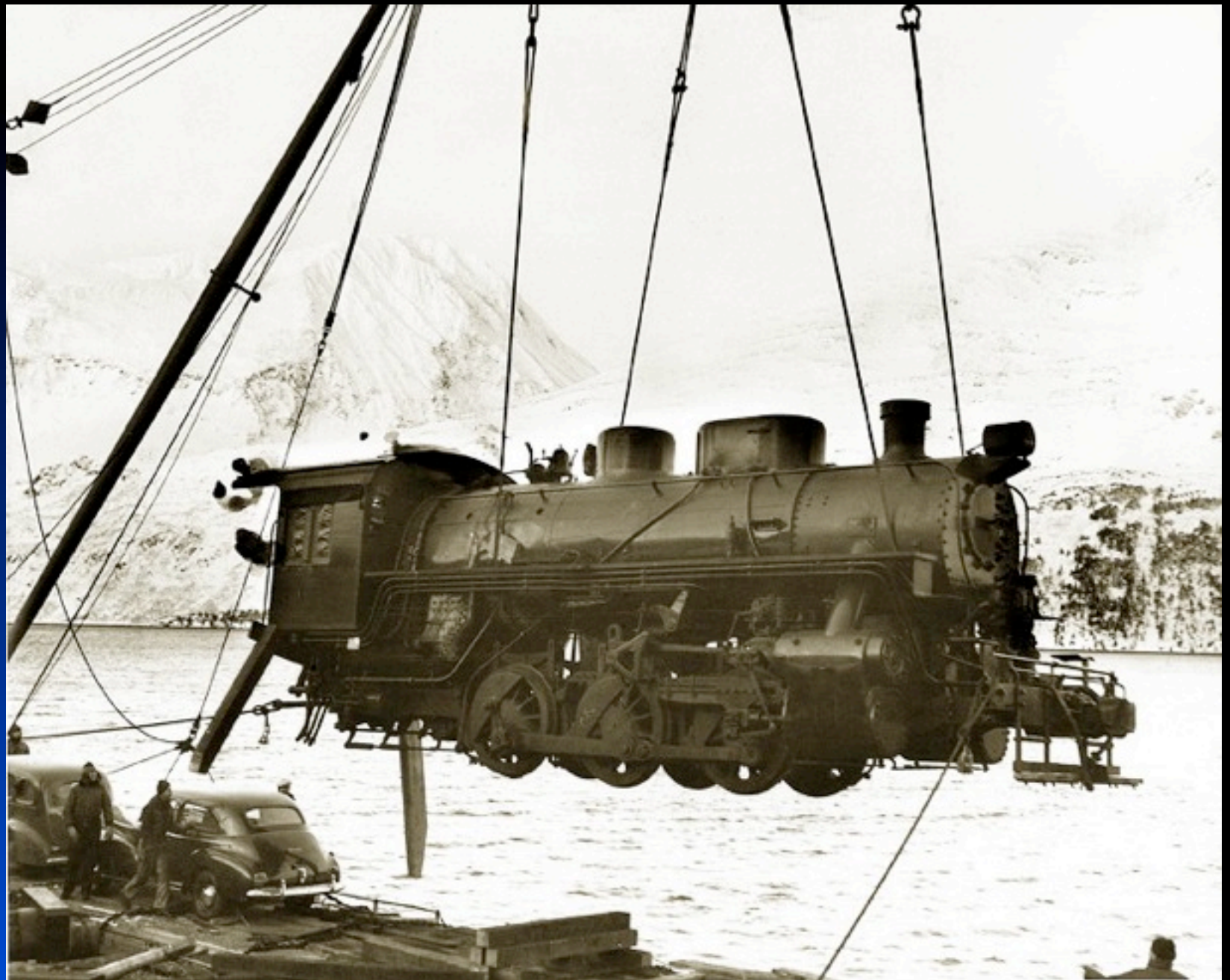
Whittier Railroad Dock being built with materials landed from supply ships and barges entering Passage Canal.







April 3, 1943 US Army Railway Operating Battalion with 25 officers and 1,090 enlisted men arrived to assist.





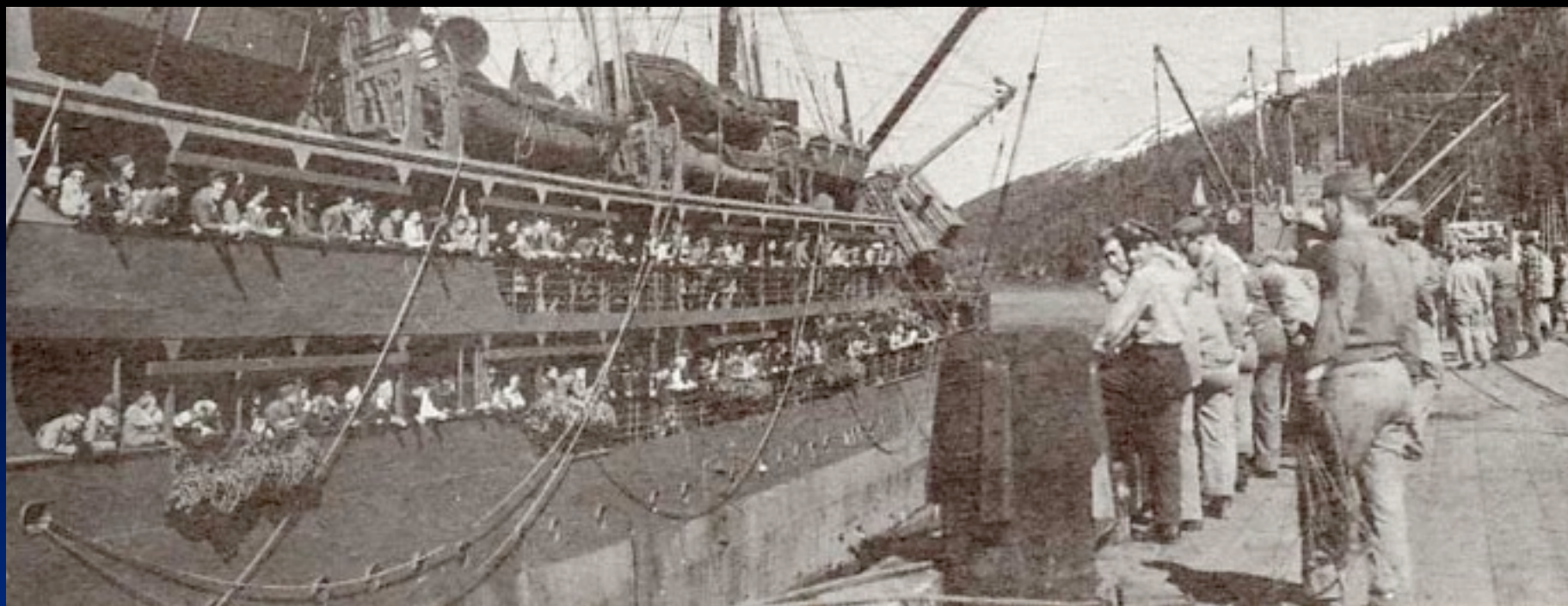
April 1943

714<sup>th</sup> track gang building Whittier spur track.



June 1, 1943

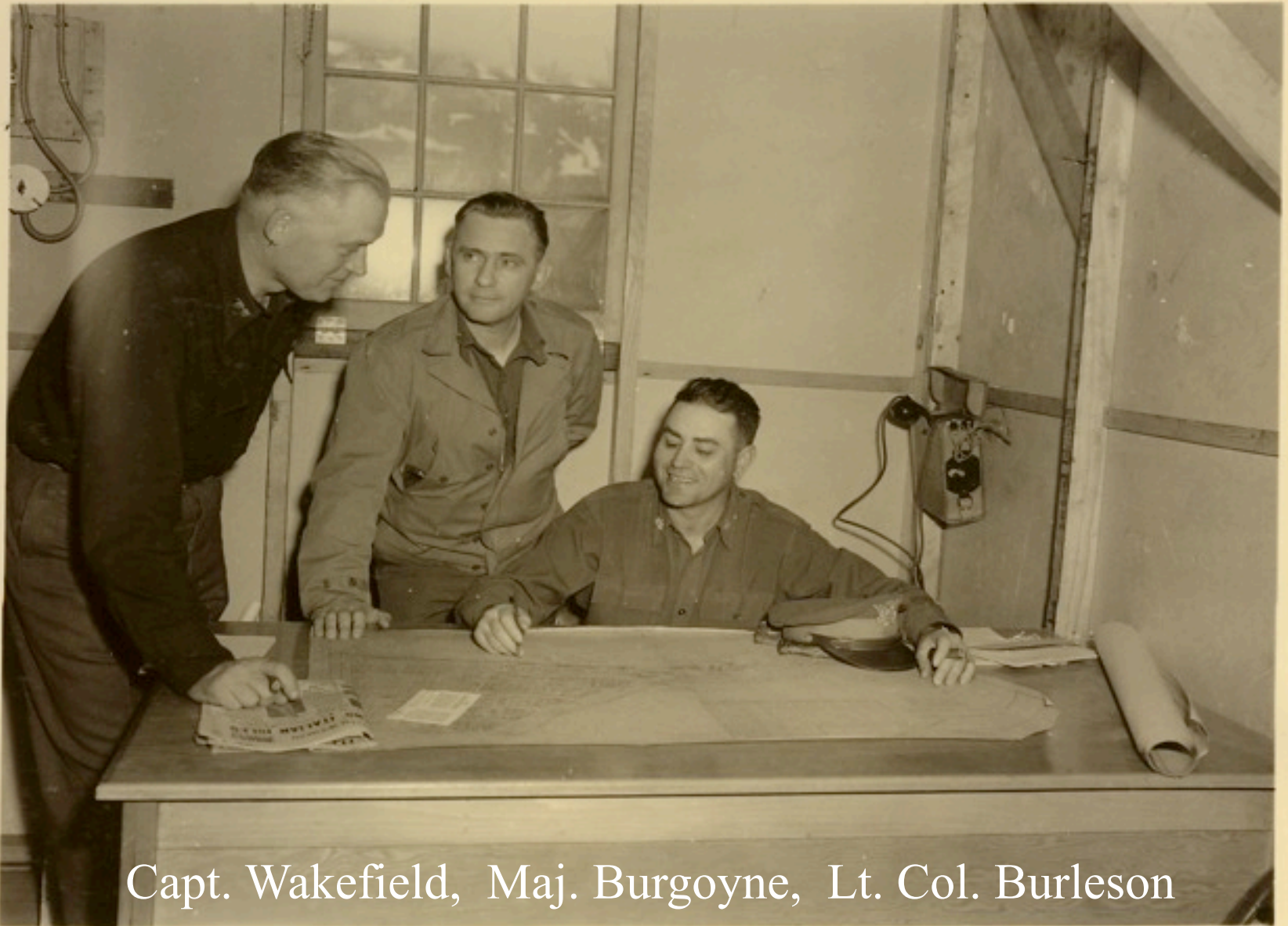
First train into the new Whittier Yard



Military Sea Transport Service Ship  
At Alaska Railroad Whittier dock

June 8, 1943

The first troop transport to call at Whittier



Capt. Wakefield, Maj. Burgoyne, Lt. Col. Burleson

June 11, 1943 U.S. Army Port of Whittier senior staff. 63



1943 Original wood frame garrison construction





June 11, 1943

Port Of Whittier  
Engineer Staff

Jack Felte, Gen Electrical and Mechanical Super  
Al Swalling, West Coast Construction Super  
Lt Col J.M. McGreevy, CO 42<sup>nd</sup> Engineers  
Maj C. B. Burgoyne, Resident Engineer  
Robert W. Craig, Chief Draftsman  
Antone A. Anderson, Chief Engineer<sub>65</sub>



August 1943

New ARR depot near completion



BL79.3.774  
4x5 copy

Railroad yards, looking west from point near dock approach. Depot site in foreground. Whittier, Alaska.

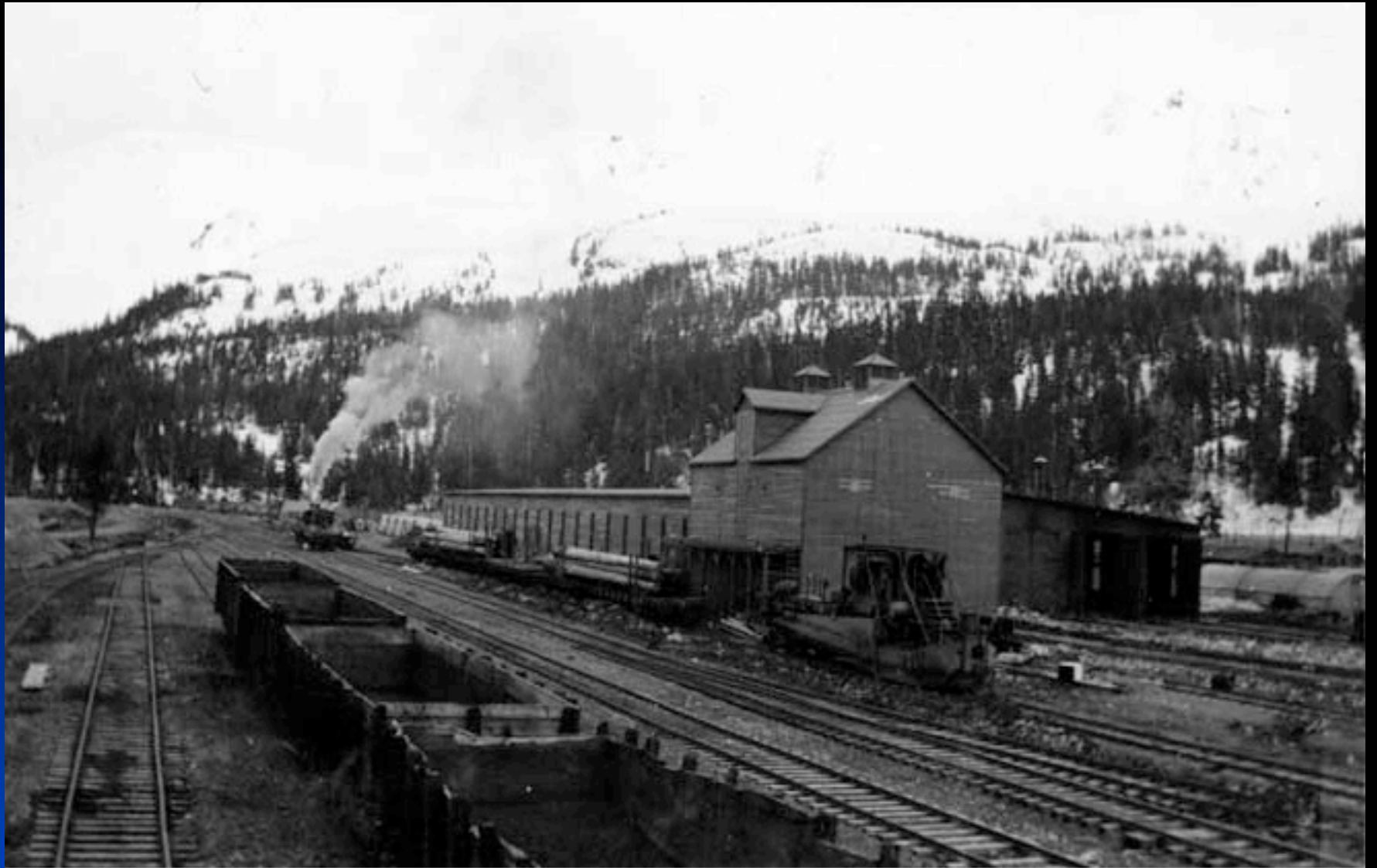
6-8-43

*Downgraded to unclassified  
CO POW - 18 Mar 57 - PULL*

323

June 8, 1943

Photos of this era were classified SECRET



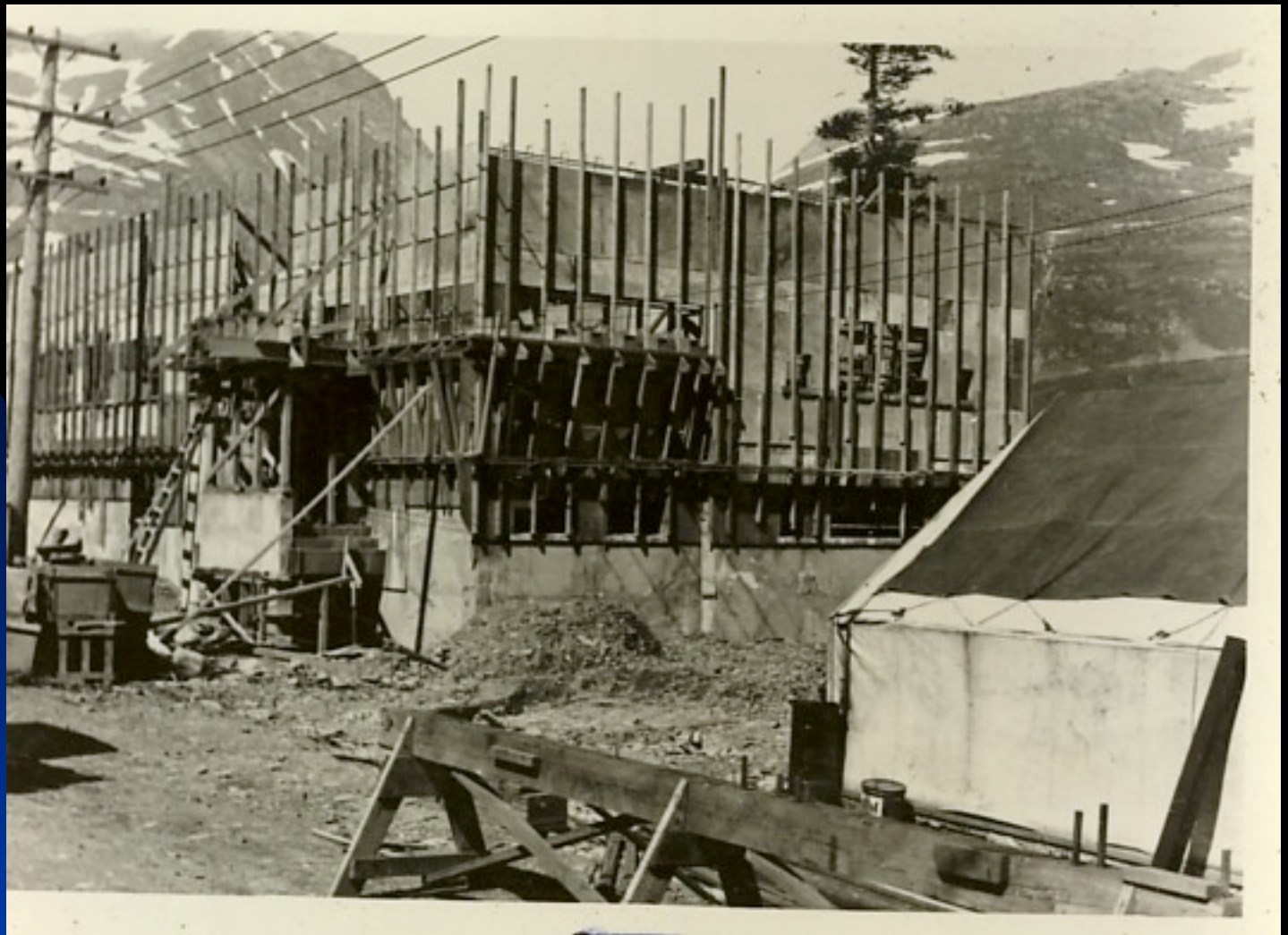
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1943

ARR infrastructure still under construction



1943 Army motor pool, cold storage, laundry, etc.



1943

Alaska Communications System Building  
The first permanent concrete structure in W



ACS building was a self contained secure site for classified communications and Post Censors Office.

October 1943

The oldest surviving building in Whittier



June 15, 1944 First Diesel locomotives on the Alaska Railroad





The 714th Christmas Special.



Dec. 24 & 25 1944

714<sup>th</sup> Christmas Special Train traveled from Seward all the way to Fairbanks.

# August 15, 1945 Victory Over Japan Day

- Hostilities end.
- Military draw down starts.
- Restrictions on travel are lifted.
- Alaska's strategic military location on the globe has been proven.
- Alaska Railroad's infrastructure other than Whittier is worn out.



858

(L to R) G. Snell, traveler and lecturer;  
Col. O. F. Ohlson, General Manager, Alaska Railroad,  
and Col. L. P. Hunt.

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1945 Col. Otto Ohlson retired. His green suits, hat and black sedan rail inspection car were trademarks.



Col. John P. Johnson  
ARR GM Jan 1946 – Oct 1953



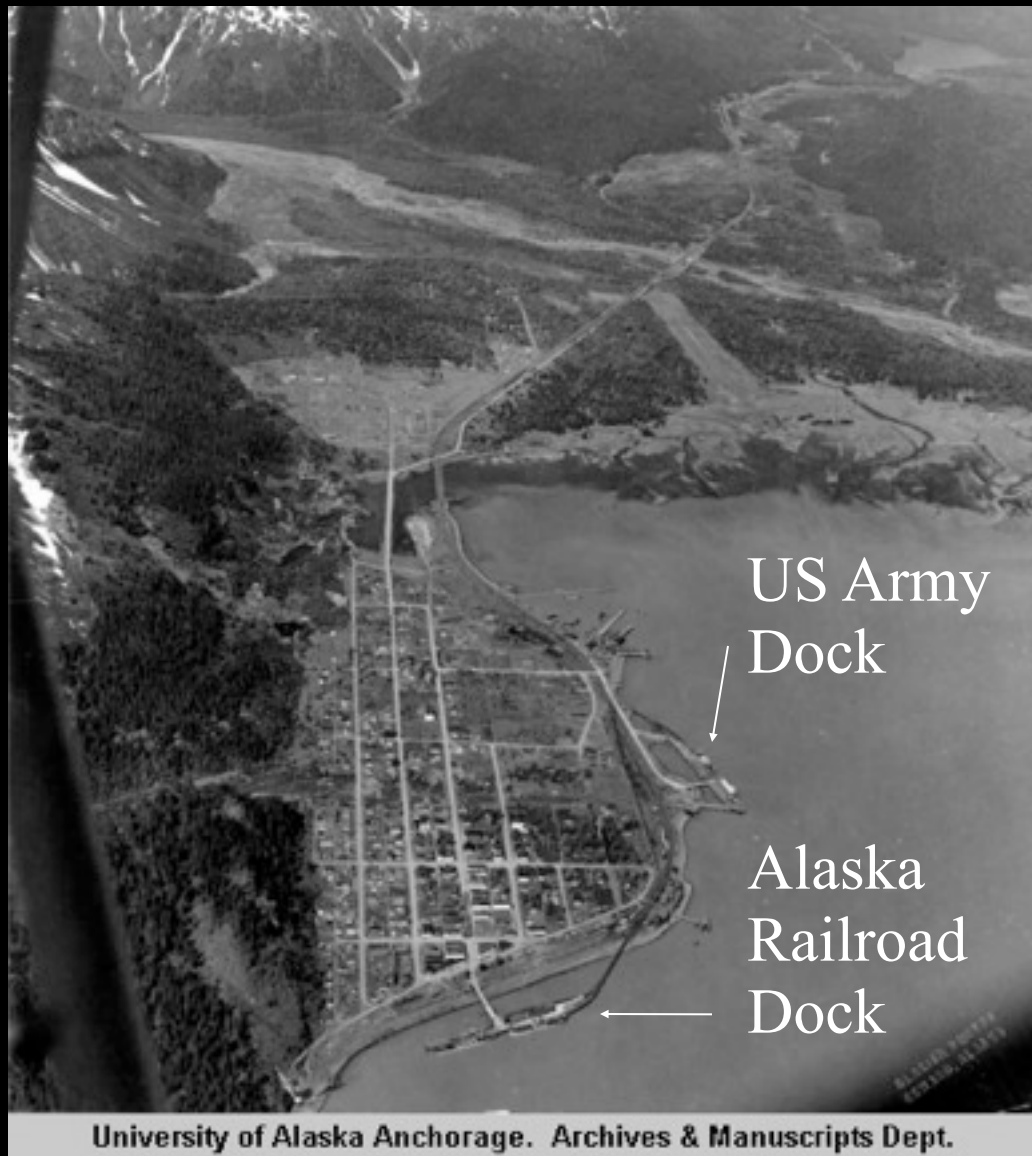
January 9, 1946

Wind removed the deck of Bear Valley Bridge



March of 1946

Port of Whittier is closed and turned over to the Alaska Railroad for operation.



1946

Seward on Resurrection Bay



September 12, 1946

USNS Gammon discharging at Whittier Dock





## Alaska Railroad Relief Convoy of 1946

Left Seattle November 24  
Arrived Anchorage December 19

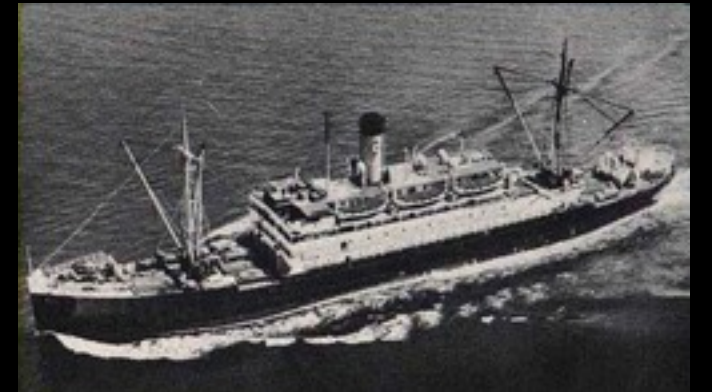
18 trucks with 29 men

Traveled 3165 miles in 25 days



Dec 20, 1946

Maritime strike of 5 months ended with arrival of the SS Alaska in Seward.



May 21, 1947  
U.S. vessels were  
returned to private  
civilian control.

Aleutian  
Baranof  
Denali

Passenger Service resumes to Alaskan ports

EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 1948  
PACIFIC NORTHERN AIRLINES  
**ALASKA  
SERVICE**

**PNA**

only PACIFIC NORTHERN offers  
both NON-STOP to ANCHORAGE  
and the famous INSIDE PASSAGE ROUTE  
to ANCHORAGE - KETCHIKAN - JUNEAU



**FLY**



PACIFIC NORTHERN AIRLINES  
*The Alaska Flag Line*

Fly over the weather  
and the Pacific Ocean

An advertisement for Northwest Airlines' Orient Service. It features a globe with a Northwest Airlines airplane flying over it. A sign on the globe reads 'NORTHWEST PASSAGE COAST-TO-COAST... SEASIDE... AND DIRECT'. Below the globe, the text reads 'ORIENT SERVICE BEGINS JULY 15' and 'Three Round Trips Weekly'. At the bottom, it says 'NORTHWEST AIRLINES'.

October 1947

Commercial Air line service expands.

# Territory of Alaska

## War time population Flux

■ Year	Total population	Military
■ 1940	75,000	1,000
■ 1943	233,000	152,000
■ 1946	99,000	Post war drop
■ 1950	138,000	Cold war



Whittier, Alaska

Alaska Railroad Dock

Union Oil

Columbia Lumber

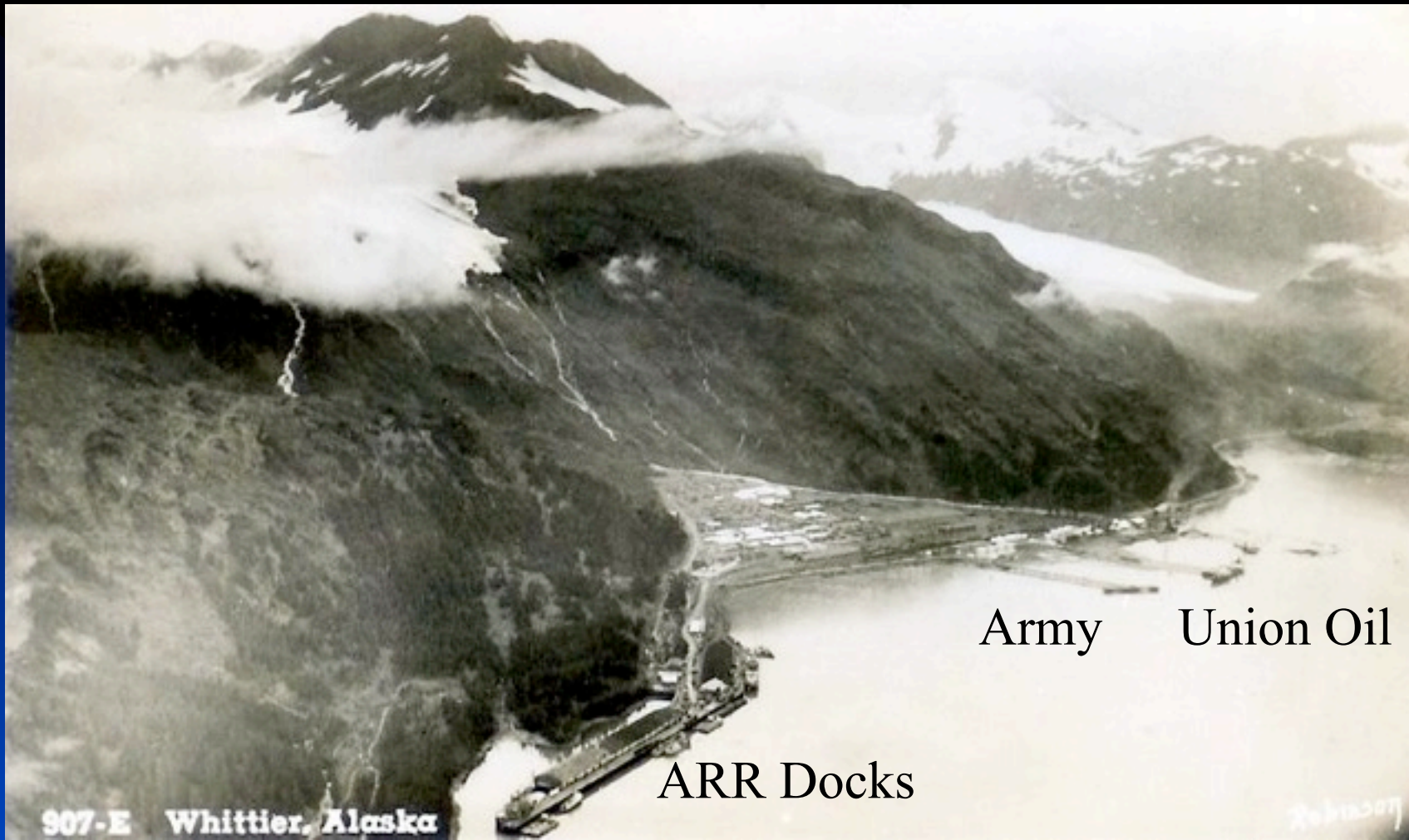
1947



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1947

Columbia Lumber Company mill and yard



1950

Whittier Port Facilities



# Reality Check for 1951

- All fuel except coal was imported.
- Seward Highway was dedicated.
- IBM installed the first computer center in Alaska at the payroll and accounting department of the Alaska Railroad in Anchorage.



June 17, 1952

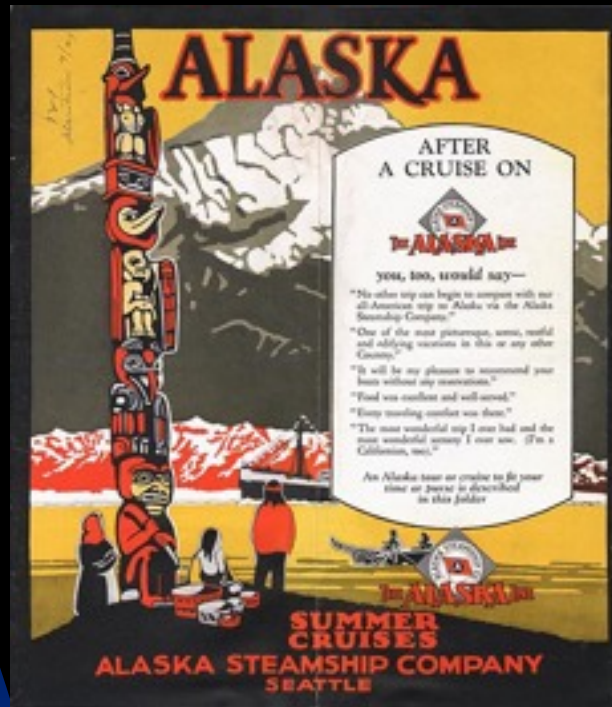
Fire destroyed the Whittier Railroad Dock



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1954

Buckner building, largest structure in Alaska



Alaska Steam Ship Passenger Service was discontinued in October 1954. Commercial aviation had come of age with large comfortable pressurized aircraft now flying above the worst Alaskan weather.

1954

Pacific Northern Airlines PNA

Northwest Orient Airlines

Pan American World Airways

Alaska Airlines



August 1955

USNS Frederick Funston being assisted  
to Whittier dock by resident Army  
Transportation Corps Tug



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1957

Hodge Building named in honor of  
Colonel Walter William Hodge, CE



1957 Last of temporary housing in Whittier.



1956

ARR Marginal Wharf at Whittier







July 1956

East end of Marginal Wharf, Whittier



Winter 1956/57

Record snow fall total 72 feet.



April 1957

Record annual snow fall of 72 feet is melting. Photo from front door of Durand family home. The military material in the background would have made this photo subject to censorship.



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1957

Ice Worm shuttle service Portage to Whittier



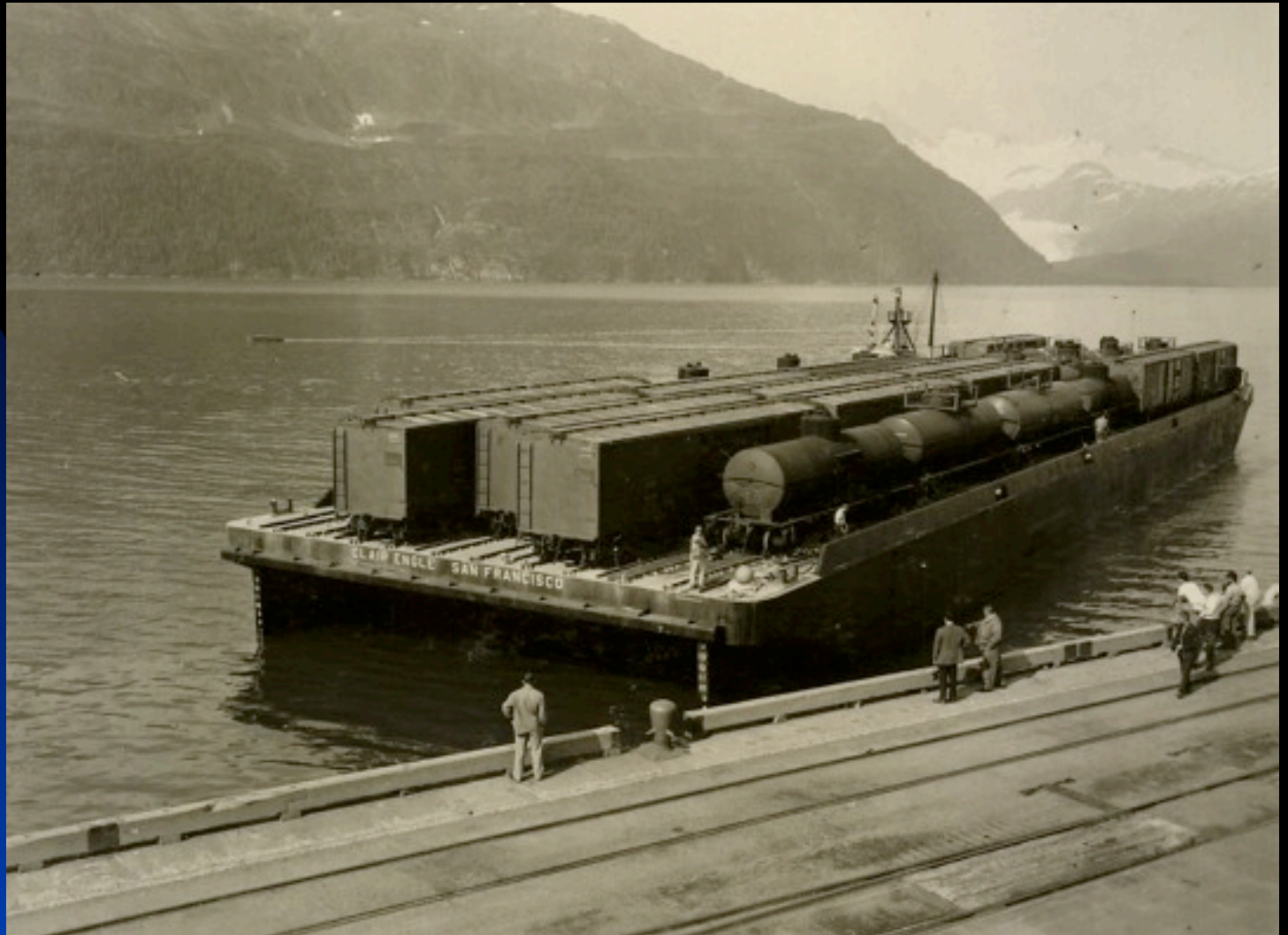
Archives, University of Alaska, Fairbanks

January 3, 1957

Alaska became the 49<sup>th</sup> State of the Union



John E. Manley ARR General Manager  
March 2, 1962



May 18, 1962

First roll on roll off rail barge arrived Whittier





August 10, 1963 Clair Engle began service with 30 cars



Trailers and road vehicles on the top deck

Railroad Cars below.



1963

HydroTrain Roll on Roll off Service



Barge slip connection at Whittier



500 roundtrips in  
10 years of service  
---- between ----

Westminster B.C.  
&

Whittier Alaska

Capacity was  
58 railcars



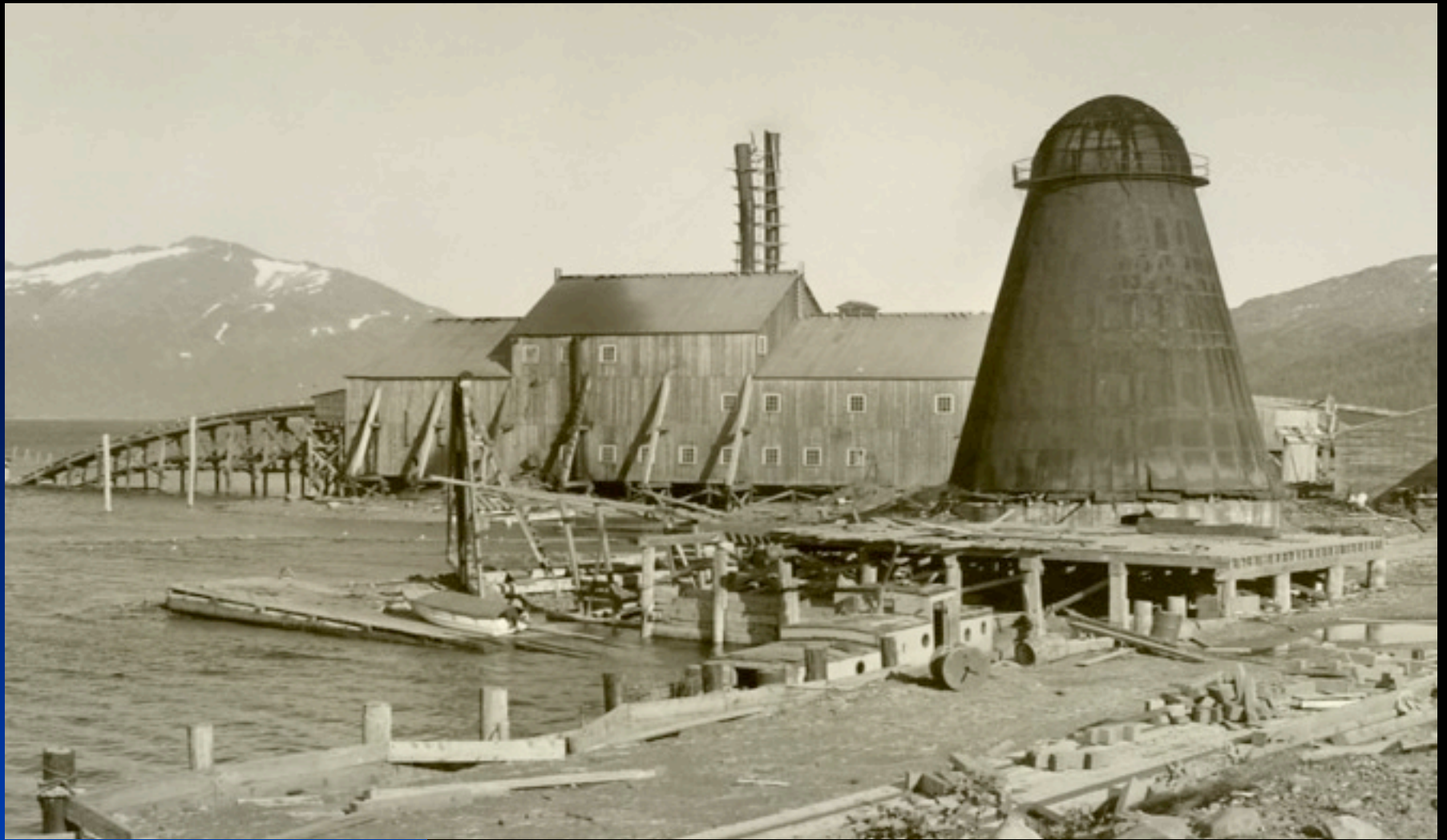
1963 - 1974

Alaska Steamship Co. S. S. Alaska III



Pre 1964

Union Oil and US Army POL finger piers  
Hodge Building in foreground.



Pre 1964

Columbia Lumber Company at Whittier Creek



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After  
March 27, 1964

Only the foundations of the slash burner and  
power house chimney remain after three tidal  
waves washed over the mill site.



Post Earthquake

March 27, 1964

Ferry Slip destroyed Union Oil and  
Army POL piers gone.





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Post Earthquake  
March 27, 1964

Rail yard was covered in debris but still in place and serviceable.



Post Earthquake  
March 27, 1964

Damage to Alaska Railroad Depot



Post Earthquake  
March 27, 1964

Marginal Wharf damaged but in service.



Post Earthquake  
March 27, 1964

Former Colombia Lumber and Union Oil



10,000 gallon USAX tank cars used between Whittier, Anchorage and Fairbanks to supply military fuel needs.

1945-1968

Fort Richardson POL Terminal



1969

MV Bartlett with service to Valdez and Cordova connecting with ARR shuttle at Whittier<sub>18</sub>



Alaska State Ferry Taku at Whittier Slip



1968 ARCO  
Prudhoe Bay  
State # 1

Transportation support for the North Slope Oil  
Field development provided a boom in traffic  
for the Alaska Railroad.





1969

Whittier incorporated as a 2<sup>nd</sup> class City.



1976-78

Rhapsody provided Tourist Cruise service with transfer to trains at Whittier for two seasons.



1976 TAPS pipe loading in Valdez for rail barge shipment to Whittier. 1300 car loads made the ocean trip 90 miles across Prince William Sound.



1986

The Alaska Railroad was transferred from the US Department of Transportation to the State of Alaska for \$26 million.

The salvage of the  
vessel prevented  
a far larger spill



Bad Friday  
March 24, 1989

EXXON Valdez oil spill cleanup  
support from the Port of Whittier.



2000

Bear Valley entry to Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel. 13,300 foot tunnel accommodates both Alaska Railroad trains and highway traffic.



1998 Construction started on Anton Anderson Memorial tunnel under Maynard Mountain

2000



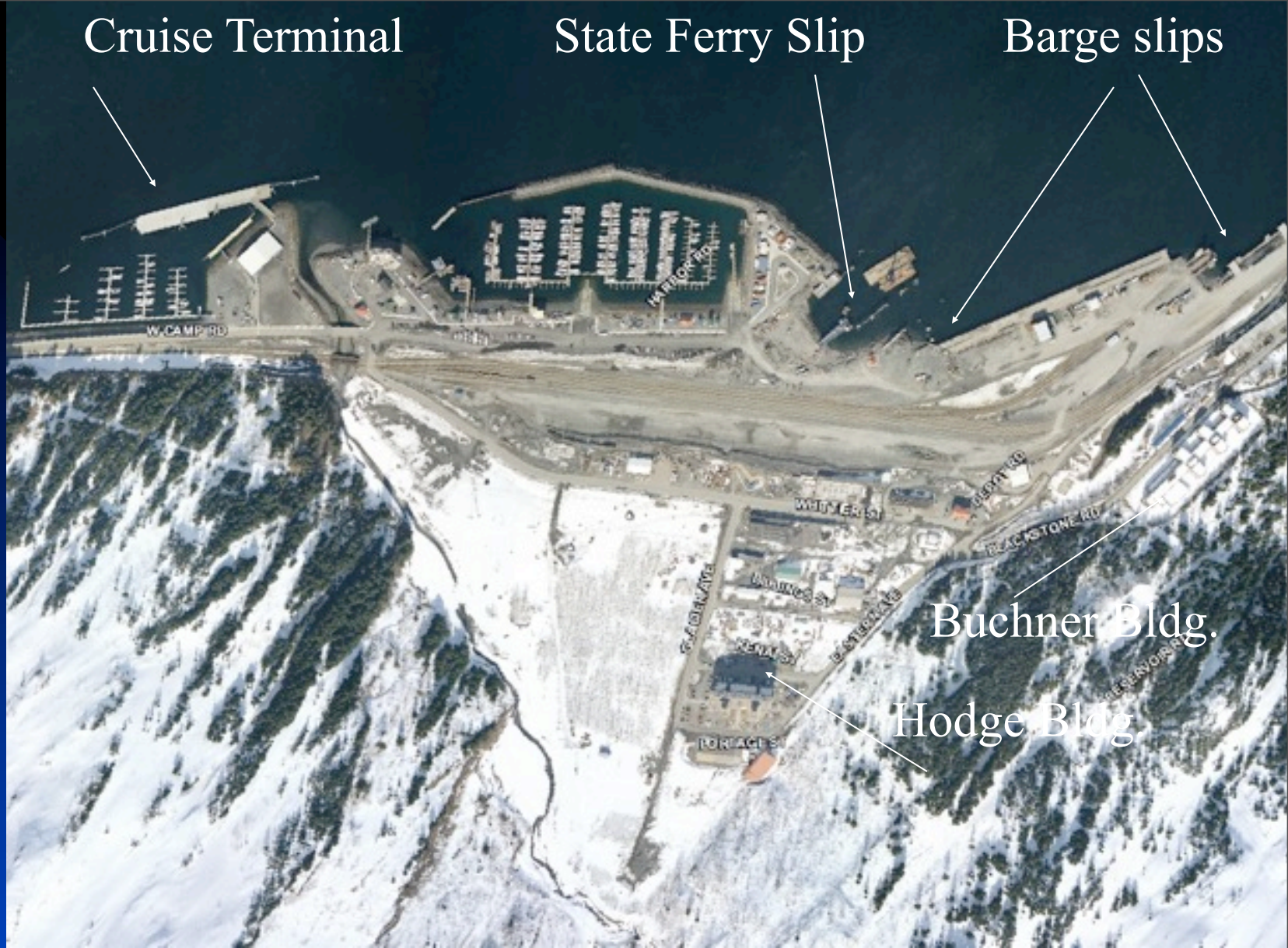
Road way and rails in the longest combined tunnel in America at 13,300 feet.





© Robert Krol

2005 Cruise Ship Terminal Whittier, Alaska



Cruise Terminal

State Ferry Slip

Barge slips

Buchner Bldg.

Hodge Bldg.

2004

Whittier port facilities and rail yard.

130



2005 Alaska Railbelt Marine barges by Lynden Inc.  
Serviced by Alaska West Express in Whittier.



2005

Barge loaded in Seattle bound for Whittier



2004

Stacker reclaimer for loading coal on ships.  
Cruise ships tie up next door at the Alaska  
Railroad Dock in Seward Alaska.



1975 – 2006

TOTE Totem Ocean Trailer Express ships with hardened hulls call twice a week at Anchorage from Tacoma.



2006

Whittier is at the heart of marine and land transportation in Alaska



Visions of Whittier

1951

2001

The only constant is change.



# Whittier 2011



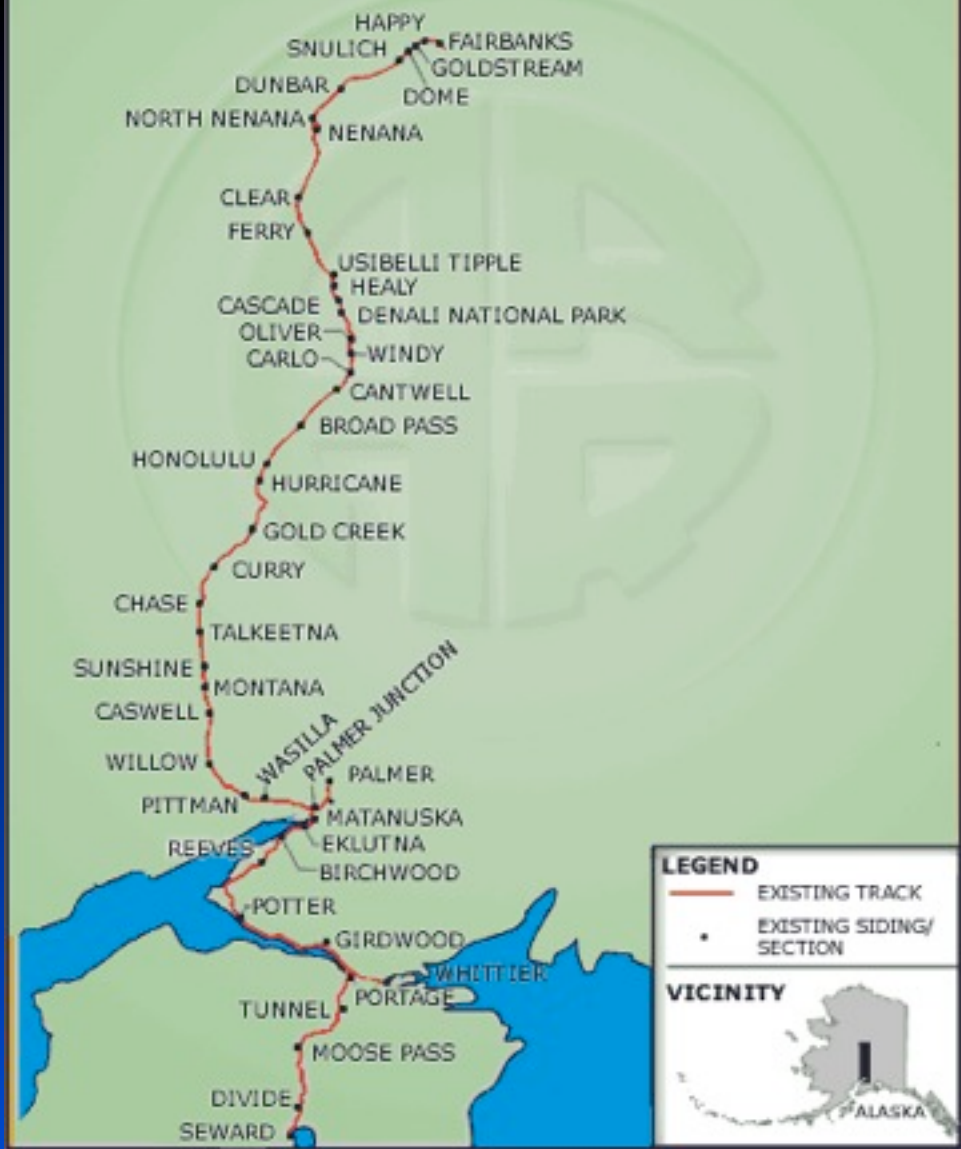




# Reference Sources:

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- THE ALASKA RAILROAD by Prince
- GET MEARS by Kit Crittenden
- THE FORGOTTEN WAR Series by Cohen
- GEOLOGY OF THE PORTAGE PASS AREA
  - Geological Survey Bulletin 926-D
- Museum of Alaska Transportation & Industry Archive
- Anchorage Historical and Fine Arts Museum Archive

# ALASKA RAILROAD ROUTE MAP





1998

Whittier prior to opening the tunnel to highway traffic.



© John Combs