

Part 2 Alcan Highway AKA Anchorage to Naples

To reorient you to the flow of events, remember what has just happened. We have just finished a 3 week trip down the Yukon river, have flown in a pontoon plane to three towns including McGrath, and finally, taken the weekly DC-3 from McGrath down to Anchorage. That's where this volume begins, Anchorage, leaving Alaska permanently.

We had parked our car in someone's driveway in Anchorage until we finished the river trip. Everything in Seward had already been sold off or given away, other than the small amount of stuff that was packed into the 1951 Chevrolet half-ton pick-up that Mary Someone, an Amazon of a woman, had driven for us out to Great Falls, Montana. This giant woman needed a cheap ride out and we needed a cheap driver so the deal was worked out. Great for both of us. So when we flew back into Anchorage from McGrath, all we had left in Alaska was what we had in our hands and what was stowed in the 1953 Chevy.

This is the car we made that final expedition in. Mom and dad bought this 1953 Chevy in 1953, the first time we had ever had a new car so it was pretty exciting. It was light tan on the top and brown on the bottom, sitting here over at Clam Gulch near Ninilchik where we dug giant razor clams. If you weren't there, you wouldn't know that charcoal grey and pink were the colors of the years. I had a charcoal gray shirt with small pink medallions scattered over it. I figured I was pretty darn handsome when I wore that shirt to dances and parties. Funny that particular colors would be preferred that way. The brown and tan was the color combo for cars that year. When we bought the 1956 Chevy, the color combo of the year was white on top and turquoise - that was the color combo mom and dad picked.



I don't have much memory of the return to Anchorage after the river trip, just that we were feeling pressure. When dad negotiated with Harvard to take the job, he had to work out a deal with them. They were headed on an expedition

in early June up to Nova Scotia and wanted him along. He wanted to take this trip down the Yukon so the parties agreed that he could delay his start three weeks. That was the time we had planned for the river trip. The 3 weeks had passed now and we still had close to a week to back to Naples after which he was to fly back to Boston and on up to Nova Scotia. We probably spent only a night there to rest up after which we jumped in this car and started on the long drive. I checked Mapquest to get the mileage from Seward to Naples and am surprised to find it is know it is 3,339. The distance from Seward to Waltham is 4,600.

All the roads were unpaved so travel was slower than any you kids have done as I hauled you around the countryside. Back to World War II again. It was just part of my childhood. This country found itself unexpectedly -due to the naivete of certain politicians regarding Stalin's real motives- in what was termed the "Cold War" wherein the west confronted the east over the "Iron Curtain", democracy confronted communism, or however you would like to characterize it.

As a result of the worsening of the US prospects for peace on the continent, the federal government embarked on what has to be perhaps the hughest construction project of all time. You've used it all your lived and probably don't realize what it was: the national interstate highway system. It was created as a way to deal with possible bombing attacks in any part of the country, to provide exit routes for people and materiel to flow as needed. Well, it just so happened that this long trip in the US took place where some of the massive construction was taking place. We waited hours some places for dynamite blasting to be finished and a road cleared. The blasts were impressive, shaking the whole ground with a powerful, muffled 'whoomp'. Then we got to drive by the blast site and see the results.

Alcan Highway & World War II

Do you remember the story of the Alaska-Canadian Highway? It bears repeating to be sure you do. In a single sentence, it was built during World War II by Canada and the US in anticipation of a Japanese invasion of Alaska and Canada. Please forgive me if I bore you here, but I am so distressed at how the modern media in general and educators of all ilk -remember, I spent my entire life from age 14 around universities so I'm not an entirely uniformed commentator about education in the good ol' US of A- have revised the history of WW II that I am going to launch another of those (probably boring) educational sessions here.

The fundamental objective of my lectures about WW II is to provide you information about the entire picture as best I can so that you will understand that while mistakes were made as they always are by politicians and warriors who engage in the obscene activity called war, the US did the best it could have done - and better than most would- under the circumstances. You need to take a balanced view of things and you need to take into account a wide range of information - and you need to NOT use the retrospectroscope.

So the reason that a road was built across virgin territory as desolate and difficult as any in the lower 48 was the developing hostilities with Japan. Do you remember that Japan had embarked on a series of invasions in the 1930's, which was just a few years before WW II got under way? Those nice Japanese people had invaded Manchuria way way way up in China. Look it up on a map. It wasn't just across a narrow gulf. It was an enormous undertaking and demonstrates clearly that the Japanese were determined to conquer and occupy. They developed the resources, they planned and they attacked. Remember the Rape of Nanking"? 300,000 thousand unarmed, defenseless people slaughtered in 18 months! This is part of the story, then, the ruthlessness, the calculatedness, the planning, the invasiveness. Here's that photo I used previously taken during the rape of Nanking. We had reason to fear this enemy.

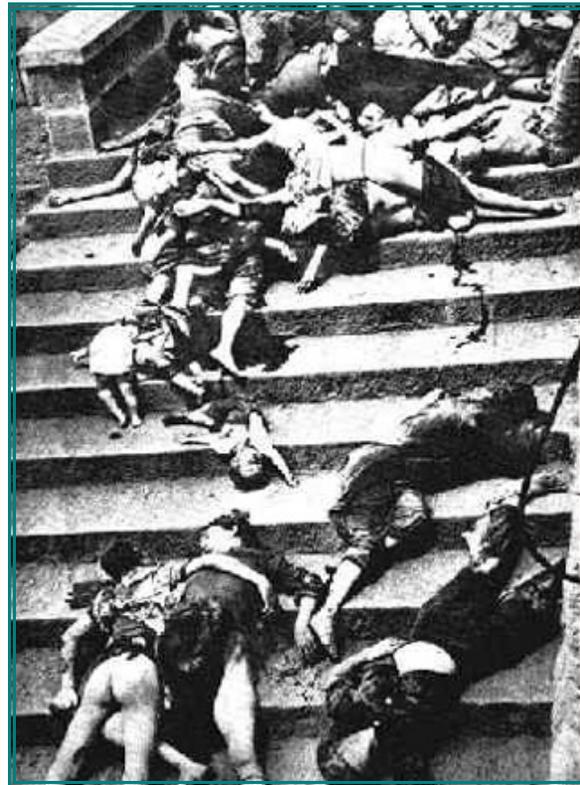
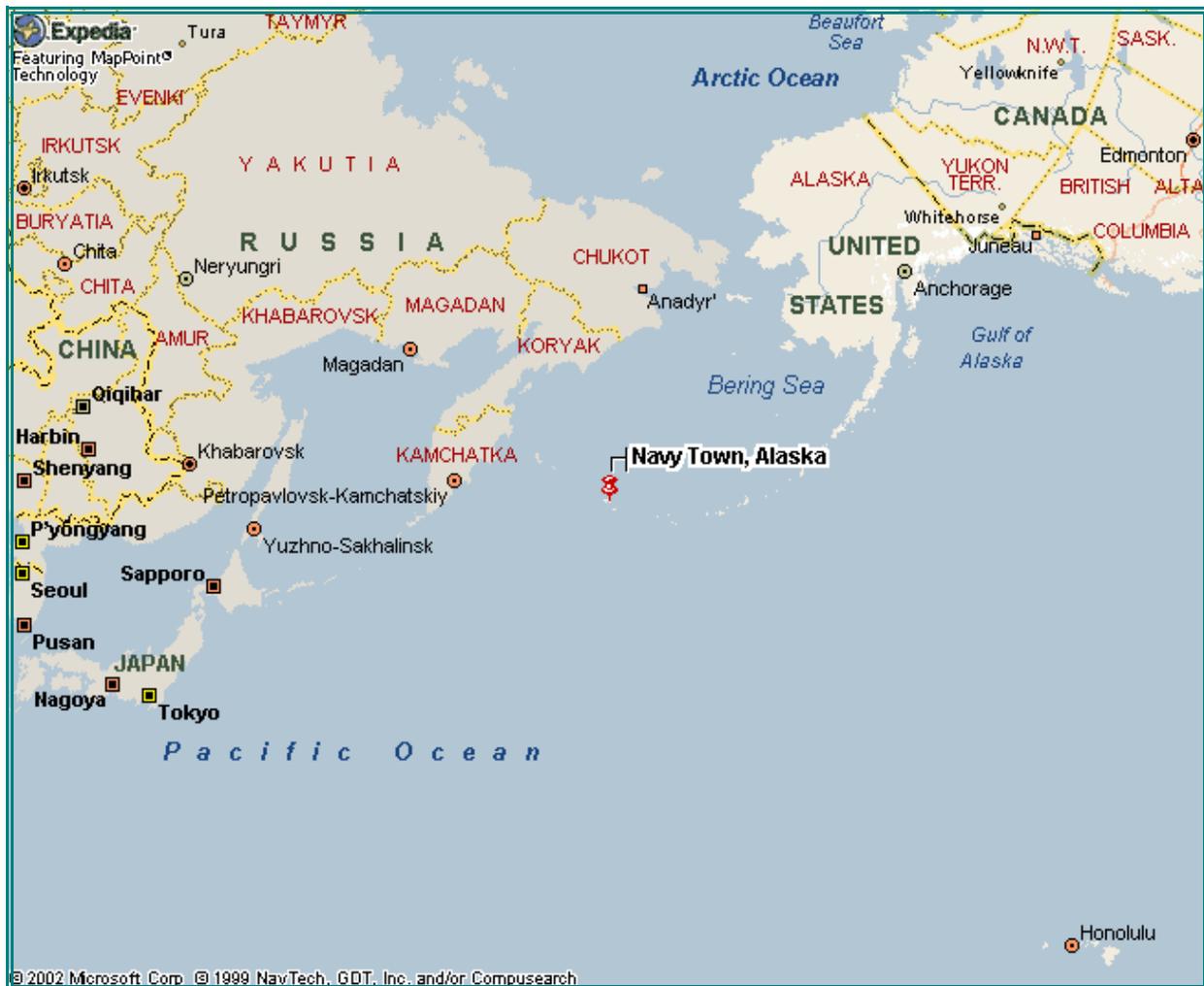


Figure 2 Rape of Nanking -
women and children

I know it will be easy for you to look at this photo and my version of history and say that I am too histrionic about this matter, that I am tied to a single version of history that is not reliable. I am not histrionic and just happened to be alive during some of it, so I have personal knowledge of some things and have studied history of this part of World War II. I suppose, in the end, is that all I ask is an audience for this version of history that I know you have not been exposed to during your growing up. The edited, skewed white-washed, self-righteous versions of history that you were exposed to are just that. Choose to

believe them if you wish but if you do, you will never be able to understand what the US did or why it did what it did. I suppose that's really what I am wanting to put across to you. I'm not trying to argue that the US was pure, that it was honest and fair. It wasn't. But it was also not the wanton, ruthless, arrogant power it is painted to be by those who want for their own reasons to tear down the United States of America. Just get it that the US acted as honorably as any nation involved in WW II and better than you kids have been lead to believe I suspect.

In terms of invasions, here's a map that shows what a tidy little ladder the Aleutian Chain was for the Japanese if they should elect to use it. Doesn't that boggle your mind? A chain of islands starting from "Navy Town" half way between



Alaska and Canada that leads conveniently like ladder rungs up to the body of

Alaska which just happens to lead to Canada.^[1]

Go back to the map a minute. See Tokyo at the bottom left? Now find Shenyang in China right on the left margin. Manchuria is **north** of Shenyang. So was it just a Sunday Drive to mosey over and just attack Manchuria a little bit? And Nanking? Nanking isn't even on this map. It's west of Seoul. So was Tokyo a kind and peaceful nation minding its P's and Q's (or Kanji equivalents)? If anyone suggests that to you, just feel sorry for their ignorance or willful lie. The Samurai spirit will rise again. Just you wait.

And look way down there in the lower right corner. Who's that. Honolulu. Was Japan willing to attack anywhere? Yep, and that's precisely why the US and Canada decided to cooperate and construct a highway that ran from the Lower 48 up into Alaska because it was predictable that the Japanese might walk up the Aleutian Chain and attack through Alaska conceivably venturing over into Canada on its way down to the island. In that case, enormous depots of war materiel were needed in Alaska. There were none of the enormous Starmaster cargo planes so ground and sea were the only way to get supplies into Alaska in sufficient quantity.

Find the letter "A" for Anchorage? That's where Seward is, on the Kenai Peninsula, right between the legs of the "A".

Here's the first fascinating aspect of the AlCan highway that I haven't mentioned so far: Canada and the US formed a Permanent Joint Board to develop plans for mutual defense in August 1940. Remember when Pearl harbor was? December 07, 1941. So we were getting pretty uneasy way back when. Keep remembering Manchuria and Nanking as part of the background for that -as well as the important little fact that France fell in June 1940 to Germany who was allied with Japan. Even Einstein had done his duty to persuade the president of the US to start work on the Atom Bomb -to beat the Germans to the punch- in 1939! War was afoot. Anyone who suggests to you that the US was just peacefully picking dandelions up to 12-07-41 has been smokin' some serious stuff.

Second point: as politicians could see the possibility that Alaska might be overrun, a bill was introduced in the US congress in February 1941 to build a highway from the Lower 48 across Canada into Alaska. Again, remember when Pearl Harbor was - Dec. 1941. Canada and the US were already moving onto a war

¹Observation about this map in case it looks funny to you. Most maps of the world are drawn as if the artist was in space directly above the equator which always distorts the upper part of the maps. Well, in this map, the artist is positioned closer to the north pole than to the equator. That way you get a more accurate representation of the sizes and positions of land masses vis-a-vis each other. Which is why Siberia on the left looks so small and puny compared to most maps you've seen of it.

footing BEFORE Pearl Harbor, and Japan was the focus of their anxiety on the west coast. Also remember, please, Manchuria and Nanking as part of the historical factors driving the anxiety in North America.

Might as well orient you again to your grandparents activities at the time: Dad had gone to Seward around August 1940 and mom went up in May 1941. In June 1941 the army started construction on Fort Raymond in Seward which is why dad stopped working for the Alaska Railroad and went to work in construction. Then mom left in November 1941 to be home to Naples in time for Christmas. The Japanese bombed Pearl on December 07th and dad returned to Naples on Christmas Day that same month.

So the Alcan highway was started jointly by the US and Canada in early 1942 -to celebrate my birthday- at three points, not just the ends, to accelerate completion: from Big Delta (site of a military base) in Alaska, two direction from White horse in Northwest Territories, and two directions from Dawson Creek in British Columbia. Seven US battalions moved into Canada to assist, four major civilian management contractors were hired along with 47 Canadian and American civilian contractors. The route chosen followed the primitive air route that had been laid out a year before to take advantage of that meager resource.

The two ends of the highway contacted each other in October 1942, 7 months after I was born, and the highway was finished in 1943. The number of men working on this phenomenal project was as high as 16,000 at a time. The conditions in the winters were terrible as was the terrain. Muskeg which is sort of like a swamp of moss and mud and low shrubs moved under the road and so on. It was an arduous task to put the thing in place but it had to be done because the risk of leaving Alaska and than Canada unsupplied and undefended was too great.



Japanese Invasion of Aleutians

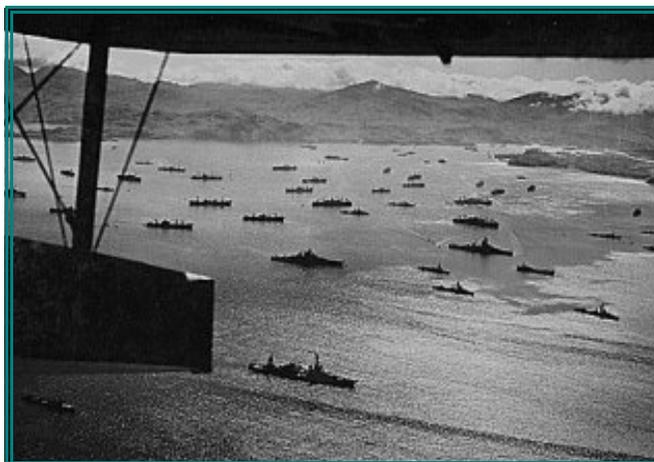
So, you ask, did it turn out to have been a wise decision after all? I say, "Yes." The Japanese did invest the tip of the Aleutian chain and I doubt that they did that as an overnight camp-out. They were going to walk right up the chain if they felt they needed to do it. Here a list of the four Islands in the Aleutian Archipelago that were occupied by the Japanese:

1. Attu
2. Adak
3. Kiska
4. Dutch Harbor

Hardly a trivial enterprise.

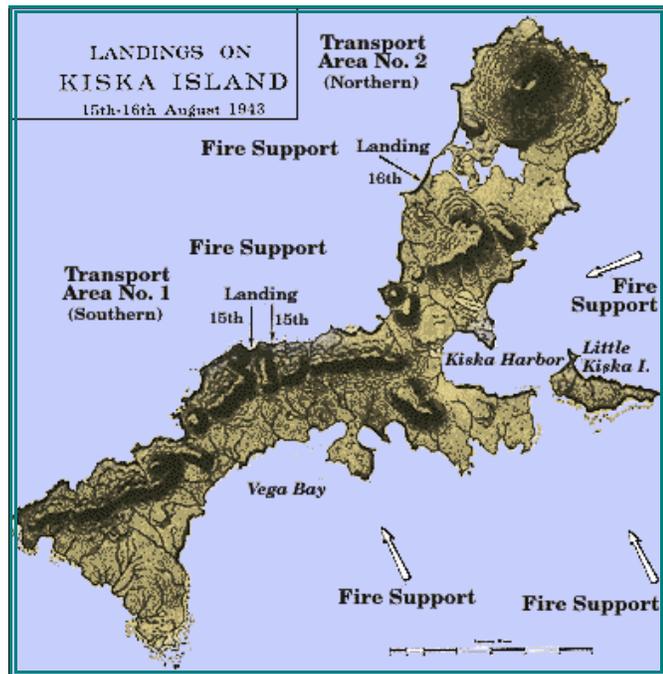
Documents have revealed that the Japanese had a secondary purpose to at least part of these invasions. At the time they were preparing to attack at Midway, the Japanese intended to take complete control of the Pacific by destroying what remained of the US Navy after Pearl Harbor. In order to annihilate US navy, the Japanese staged what they viewed as a diversionary attack, against the Aleutians with the expectation that the US would divert its navy up from the central Pacific and follow the Japanese forces that were sent up to the Aleutian chain. The US wasn't diverted, however. The US is always a maverick and doesn't do what it's expected to do. So while the US was alarmed at the attack on the Aleutians, and did deal with it, the main body of the navy remained behind on the chance that the Japanese had something big planned. They did.

When the Japanese unleashed their major assault at Midway, the US was there, and ultimately kicked the Japanese butt all over the place. The US lost substantial forces in this pivotal engagement, but the Japanese lost more both in terms of materiel, and for the first time, morale. Four of the treasured Japanese air craft carriers were sunk at Midway which was the turning point of the war in the Pacific. So the Aleutian Diversion failed. But



that's not to say it was taken lightly either. This photo shows a portion -only a portion- of the naval forces when the US counter-attacked at Adak alone. Not a trivial exercise. I count about 50 vessels here and that was only a portion of the force thrown against the Japanese.

You can see by that photo that the Japanese forces were dug in deeply. Similarly at Kiska there was a pitched battle. This map shows the order of battle which surrounded the entire island, requiring a similarly large force. The date on the map is August 15-16, 1943, which was about the time the Alcan Highway was actually completed. There are more photos and stories to tell but I won't take the time or space. You can dig them up if you're interested. So yes, the Alcan Highway did turn out to be an essential element in the US response to WW II. I just don't want you kids to go through life believing the biased, inaccurate, incomplete reports about the US in WW II.



Opening of Alcan Highway

On November 02, 1942, the Alcan Highway was officially opened at Soldier's Summit. We passed this site three time during our stay in Seward. Pretty uninhabited looking place, isn't it. The drive was five days and boring as it could be, sitting there inside the car with no video



games or Cd players or DVD players, etc. Comic books and each other was the whole deal.

Canadian Customs

This was my first contact with Customs. We had passed Customs on our 1953 round-trip but this time we had to stop and do something. Dad had his old muzzle-loading musket and all firearms had to be 'declared' at Customs. I thought that was pretty funny "Declaring" that "this is a firearm", as if it wasn't obvious. In any event, as a result of admitting he had the darn thing, which was pretty honest of him, it had a twisted hairy string tied around the hammer and through the trigger guard that kept him from loading and firing it.



He was dangerous, you know and might just take a wild shot at a swamp spruce. To make sure he didn't untie the hairy string, the customs officer put a lead seal over the ends. Dad was likely to just take it off apparently. Actually, he was. Chuckle.

I see later that everyone is treated that way but at the time I had to wonder just why dad was being treated like a dangerous man. I knew he was mean but didn't think it showed! All the officer had to do was tell him not to use it and he wouldn't have used it. That simple. I was simple.

The flag was interesting with two emblems on it. The light was apparently bright because I shaded my eyes. Go back to the preceding photo and look at the trees by the Custom House. Those are swamp spruce and that is all there was in the Northwest Territory. Imagine sitting inside a car for 2 days seeing nothing but



those miserable little trees along the road, where there were no signs, no mile posts, rare houses, rare businesses. It was just plain boring so we were always getting into fights in the back seat.

Caterpillar crash

Somewhere along the way we had to stop and wait for a long time. I don't remember how long, just that we were held up for a long time by this accident. This large cat must have not been tied down securely enough for the rough roads. Or the driver didn't confirm often enough that his come-along's were tight. The vibration obviously allowed the cat to turn on the low-boy sufficiently that the blade caught one of the members of the bridge.



This is how it looked from the other end. It was fortunate that the driver was able to stop the truck before the cat was pulled off the low boy onto the bridge because its back was broken at that point and the weight of the cat impacting at that spot would probably have broken the bridge.



This image suggests that the only reason it didn't fall off is the fact that the cat was lodged between vertical supports on both sides so they were holding it in place. There is no doubt that if a cat had been pushed that far back on a low boy out in the open that it would crash down onto the ground.

The odd thing about the crash was that the driver was headed up off the bridge at the time the accident happened. You can see in these photos that the tractor was starting off the bridge and that it had cleared all of the lateral structures. He must have moved a bit too close to the right side so that the blade struck the bridge.



Haines Junction

I'm going to throw in the rest of the photos that dad took of our last trip, but have to tell you that they are probably out of order. But since you won't be going there and it doesn't matter much anyway, I'm just going to proceed to put them together in whatever order they appear. Don't mean no disrespect of you! If you want me to sort them out into the proper order, just tell me and I will.



This was a church that caught dad's attention, probably because it was an old army Quonset hut converted into a church by the simple expedient of adding a false front with a Madonna and cross. Note: this Quonset hut is doubtless a relic of the highway construction 10 years earlier. Amazing how everything fits together isn't it.

Whitehorse

As you remember from above, this was one of the seed-points for the Alaska Highway. But its really interesting claim to fame as far as I was concerned was its relationship to the Gold Rush. This was one of the objectives of men who started the trek to the gold fields from out in Nome which is a heck of a long ways away.

The Gold Rush is the reason that the Yukon became frequently traveled by stern wheelers. After the Gold Rush was over and technology had changed, a bunch of these creatures were hauled out of the river in Whitehorse and set up on blocks. To die. It was sad to see.

These are the only 3 photos and they are out of focus because it was late in the day when he took them and he didn't have a tripod to stabilize the camera. I include them for the same reason he took them: to commemorate a historical event, the death of a bunch of stern wheelers from a famous era. They had no value so were left to decay and rot.



Dawson Creek

This was one of the three seed-points set up as part of the construction of Alaska Highway. As a result, it was one of the most developed things we encountered, along with Whitehorse. They are basically artifacts from the highway construction that were able to take hold and survive but you can see that they weren't much at the time. Mom's standing by a milepost - notice how far away it is from things.



Whitehorse up the road, from whence we had come, was 918 miles away! We had just gone from one province to another and had traveled a thousand miles. And Fairbanks was 1,523 which means that Seward was probably closer to 2,000 miles at this point.

There was a car dealer that caught dad's attention with an old Oldsmobile. That's why it's called 'old..' Gag. BTW: see mom's checked shirt reflection in the window? Which way is the window slanted because it isn't square with the building.



Muncho Lake

This was a bizarre story. We had finally arrived in the Canadian Rockies and enjoyed their beauty after the tundra and muskeg. Dad stopped to take this photo looking down the dirt road to Muncho Lake that we had all agreed to stop at for a break. The mountains really were impressive even though we had lived on the feet of mountains for years.

We reached the lake and stopped for lunch. It was a beautiful setting and we were all so tired of sitting in the car that we wanted to get out and stretch our legs instead of eat while traveling. Dad had time to get his camera out and take this picture while mom opened the trunk to set out lunch. One of us and then another complained about being bitten by a huge horse fly. In short order we discovered that there were dozens of large, ravenous horseflies that also wanted lunch. We couldn't get back in the car fast enough. The time it took you to read this paragraph isn't much longer than our stay at this spot.



Getting through the Northwest Territories to the Rockies was grim. Here's more of the swamp spruce and underbrush. Imagine sitting in a car bumping over a dusty unpaved road for 2 days. Get the picture? Horrible. The sign points to Steamboat something and Muskwa Valley that I can make out because I remember it. Rare that dad would let us ham it up when he took our pictures. Notice the road? Pretty rough isn't it. And notice the scruffy scrub spruce. That was the scenery for hundreds of boring desolate miles. This was no Sunday Afternoon excursion.



Gotta spanner?

We came across a car that was pulled to the side of the road. Seeing any cars was unusual for most of the trip so living human beings were interesting creatures that we were interested in. The car was jacked up and a man was obviously trying to remove the tire. We stopped to see what was going on and to offer help if necessary we could. The memorable part of the situation was the request of the man for a "spanner".

After stopping and getting out of the car, dad went over to the man and started chatting about things in general. The man said he was in fact having difficulty. He had searched his trunk and car without success. When dad asked if there was anything he could do, the man replied with the questions, "Gotta spanner?" That stopped dad. What was a spanner? After sorting out the confusion, dad opened our trunk and pulled out our star wrench that the man used to remove his lug nuts. After the tire was repaired and replaced, the man returned the spanner to us and we went our separate ways.

Helicopter Crash

Somewhere in the Rockies in Alberta we came across a crashed Canadian Helicopter. We were pretty desperate for entertainment and would stop at anything. We spent 10 minutes or so looking and wondering about this thing. Both rotors are mangled, yet the hull is undamaged. Go figure. How does one chew up both rotors that badly and not damage the hull and manage to get it back on the ground without damaging it. The only visible damage was to the read landing gear.



How did they manage to land it and also position it in the barrow pit to not obstruct traffic, such as it was?

Here's a shot that shows more clearly the extent of the damage to the rotors. Remarkable that they could sustain such damage without the rest of the ship being damaged. It was like something hard had hit the blades though we hadn't a clue about what that might have been.

Notice how low the car sits on its rear tires. It was loaded heavily. And it has skirts. Dad loved those things.



Peace River Bridge

There were two memorable things about the Peace River: first, was the bridge itself and second, was the fruit. There was fresh fruit grown in the valley. I don't remember what the fruit was but I do remember that mom bought some and we ate it in the car after we went on our way. It was a beautiful bridge and impressive since it was half a mile long.



Notice two identical uniforms down to the high-top black sneakers. Shirts, levis, belts, underwear, socks. Identical. What was that all about? Tell me if you ever figure it out.

Montana

We stopped first in Great Falls because dad had some business there, in a mortuary of all places, an appropriately garish decor that seemed as much bordello as mortuary though I wouldn't really know.

Then we stopped for breakfast in Butte a treat for all of us, especially for mom because she didn't have to break out the bisquick and water and fire up the Coleman stove. The restaurant was actually a saloon along the highway that advertised breakfast. Now, for me that was a wonderful adventure to go into a den of iniquity that sold ol' devil rum, where unspeakable deeds were



done - like playing pool.

This saloon had a hitching post in front and reeked of tobacco smoke -which I always guiltily found pleasingly exotic- mixed with the strong pungent odor of coffee and the smell of fried bacon or ham. We got to go in there for breakfast but only because we were "protected" by mom and dad. There were no fast food places in those days, no McDonalds, no Burger King, only a few Dairy Queens and A&W's none of which were open at that early hour because they didn't serve breakfast.

We had been on the road 5 or 6 days coming down through the Yukon Territory and Alberta, and by the time we got to this saloon, we hadn't bathed so we smelled like a herd of smoky billy goats. But we fit right in. No one in the place noticed. Their own weathered levis, sweat-stained shirts and cowboy boots carried the strong spice of horses and cowpies, familiar scents to us.

I was so shy that ordering was painful but I ordered what I wanted: silver dollar pancakes and a glass of milk. Now, to a kid today, who has never seen a silver dollar, the name is probably a curiosity. To me, it was reality. Small pancakes the size of silver dollars, spread with butter and hot syrup. A single bite for each one if I could get away with it. Dad wouldn't mind, but mom would.

Open Pit Mine

Dad was a miner if you recall Volume 4 - Mercur. If you don't, you should. It was inevitable that we would take one of his side trips to look at something like an open pit mine both because he mined and because he was a geologist. It was interesting to watch the thing in operation and I was in love with those huge trucks, called "Eukes" for Euclid. They hauled several cubic yards each. Look at the Euke in the distance and compare its size to the vehicles up on the road above it. They were enormous.



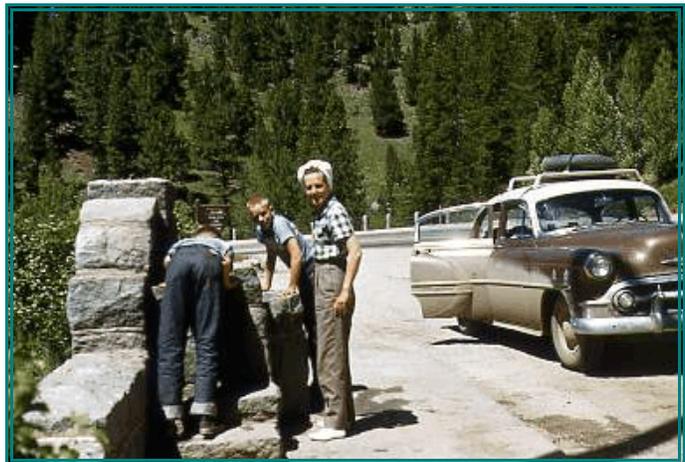
We got out and examined the rocks - 'ore' he called it. The trusty fedora, he always traveled with his hat and wore it whenever he got out of the car.



As we drove through the state we enjoyed the greenness and the large trees. Along the way there was a free flowing water fountain. We stopped where dad took this shot of our little expedition consisting of the overloaded 1950 Chevrolet half-ton pickup and 1953 Chevrolet car.



Dad took another photo of the three of us getting our last drink before we piled back into the vehicles. After we picked up the truck in Great Falls, one of us rode with mom and one with dad and we changed off at the next stop that way. Mom wasn't much bigger than we were by that age. I was 14. See the extra tires on the roof rack?



The other memorable thing about Montana was that when we stopped to shop one time, Dick and I hassled mom and dad to buy us some sherbert. We didn't really know much about the stuff but it sounded exotic and wonderful. In the end, we persuaded them -probably a reflection of their relief at being out of the desolateness of Canada- so they bought us some. A pint a piece with the usual order, "Eat it all." (Your dad used to say the same thing, "Order what you want, eat what you order.") Which was a stretch and made me sick.

As we left the state, dad took one more photo, showing the beautiful clear sky. And we felt we were closing in on Utah. We drove the next day until we were in Utah. We did not stop until we got into Utah which was 9-10 pm. At that point we pulled off into a turn-out to sleep.

There are two memorable things about the place we chose to sleep. First, there was an enormous black stink bug between our sleeping bags in the morning but we didn't see him until we woke up. Second, we had chosen a turnout from the highway -paved- that was next to a train track that we didn't know was there until at train went by and woke us up, thundering a few feet away from our heads.

At last, we were in Utah and on our way to Naples. We stopped in Bountiful and bought more fruit and headed east. We stopped in SLC shortly to see Viola and Conrad and then proceeded on to Naples where three of us spent the summer.

