

HEROES OF THE LAST FRONTIER

Volume 1

RISE UP AGAINST RACISM

**THREE EPIC TALES
ABOUT TROUBLES AND TRIUMPHS**

Based on True Stories

ABOUT THE ARTIST



This book was written, illustrated, and laid out by:

Elysian World Editing

ElysianWE.com

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She has worked professionally as a published illustrator and graphic designer since 2006. Her recent works range from Alaska flora and fauna to children's book illustrations and learning activities. She resides with her husband and daughter - her inspiration - with the great Alaskan outdoors in her backyard.

She loves to hike, camp, and alpine ski with her family.

*Elyse would like to thank the following individuals
for helping make this publication possible:*

**Ben and Artemis Applegate, Rob Corbisier,
Alexander Roider, Keoki Kim, "Betsy" Peratrovich,
and Blair M. Paul.**

DID YOU KNOW?

**IN ALASKA, IT IS ILLEGAL TO DISCRIMINATE IN EMPLOYMENT,
PUBLIC PLACES, PROPERTY SALE AND RENTAL, FINANCING,
AND PRACTICES BY THE STATE BECAUSE OF RACE, COLOR,
RELIGION, SEX, NATIONAL ORIGIN, OR PHYSICAL OR MENTAL
DISABILITY, AND SOME INSTANCES OF AGE, MARITAL STATUS /
CHANGES, PREGNANCY, PARENTHOOD, OR SEXUAL
ORIENTATION / GENDER IDENTITY OR EXPRESSION.**

NEED HELP?

Alaska State Commission for Human Rights: (907) 274-4692

Anchorage Equal Rights Commission: (907) 343-4342

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1-800-669-4000 | eeoc.gov



WHAT IS THE U.S. EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION?

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is responsible for enforcing federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or employee because of a person's race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or genetic information.

AUTHORITY AND ROLE:

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has the authority to investigate charges of discrimination against employers who are covered by the law.



Alaska State Commission for Human Rights

(907) 274-4692 | humanrights.alaska.gov

WHAT IS THE ALASKA STATE COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS?

The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights has statewide powers and investigates discrimination complaints to help defend and protect individuals.

VISION STATEMENT:

An Alaska free of discrimination.

Anchorage Equal Rights Commission

(907) 343-4342 | muni.org/departments/aerc



WHAT IS THE ANCHORAGE EQUAL RIGHTS COMMISSION?

The Anchorage Equal Rights Commission is the municipal agency that provides free and confidential assistance with discrimination and sexual harassment problems.

VISION STATEMENT:

Justice delayed is justice denied.

CONTENT WARNING

**THE FOLLOWING READING ADDRESSES THE HARSH
TREATMENT EXPERIENCED BY ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES
POST-RUSSIAN COLONIZATION (CHAPTERS 1 AND 2)
AND AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS DURING
WORLD WAR II (CHAPTER 3).**

This content includes themes relating to:

RACISM

HATE SPEECH

DEATH

**READERS WHO MAY BE SENSITIVE TO
THESE ELEMENTS PLEASE TAKE NOTE.**

SUICIDE AND CRISIS HELP

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS STRUGGLING:

Call or text the
National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at
988.

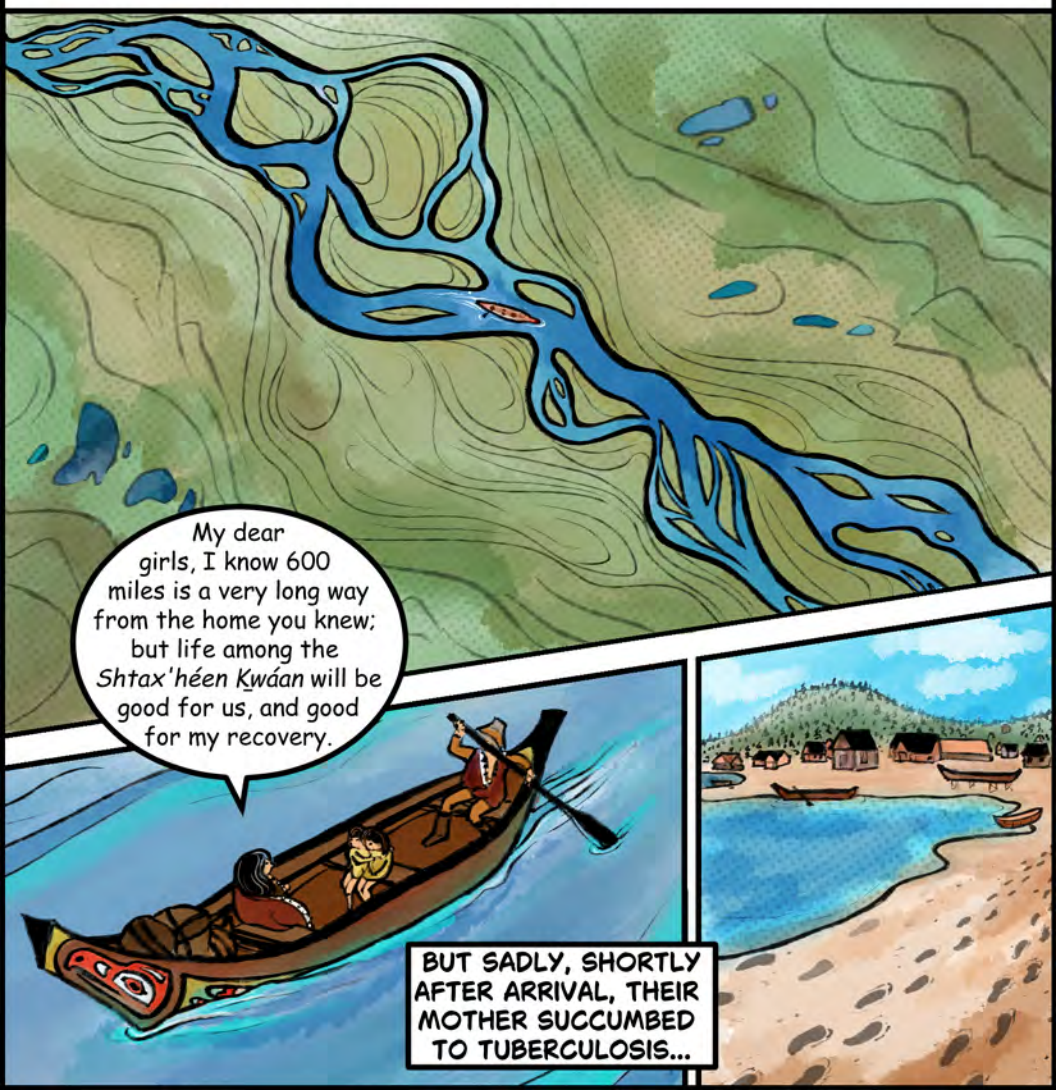
If you are feeling suicidal, sad or depressed,
or you just need someone to talk to, call the
Careline at 877-266-HELP.

CHAPTER 1: TILLIE AND WILLIAM PAUL

THIS IS A STORY THAT SPANS GENERATIONS,
A STORY OF A WOMAN'S STRUGGLE,
AND HER SON'S AMBITIONS.

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT A FAMILY WHOSE
LIVES WERE SOMETIMES TORN, BUT WHOSE
LEGACY BROUGHT PEOPLE TOGETHER
AND ULTIMATELY GAVE RISE TO...

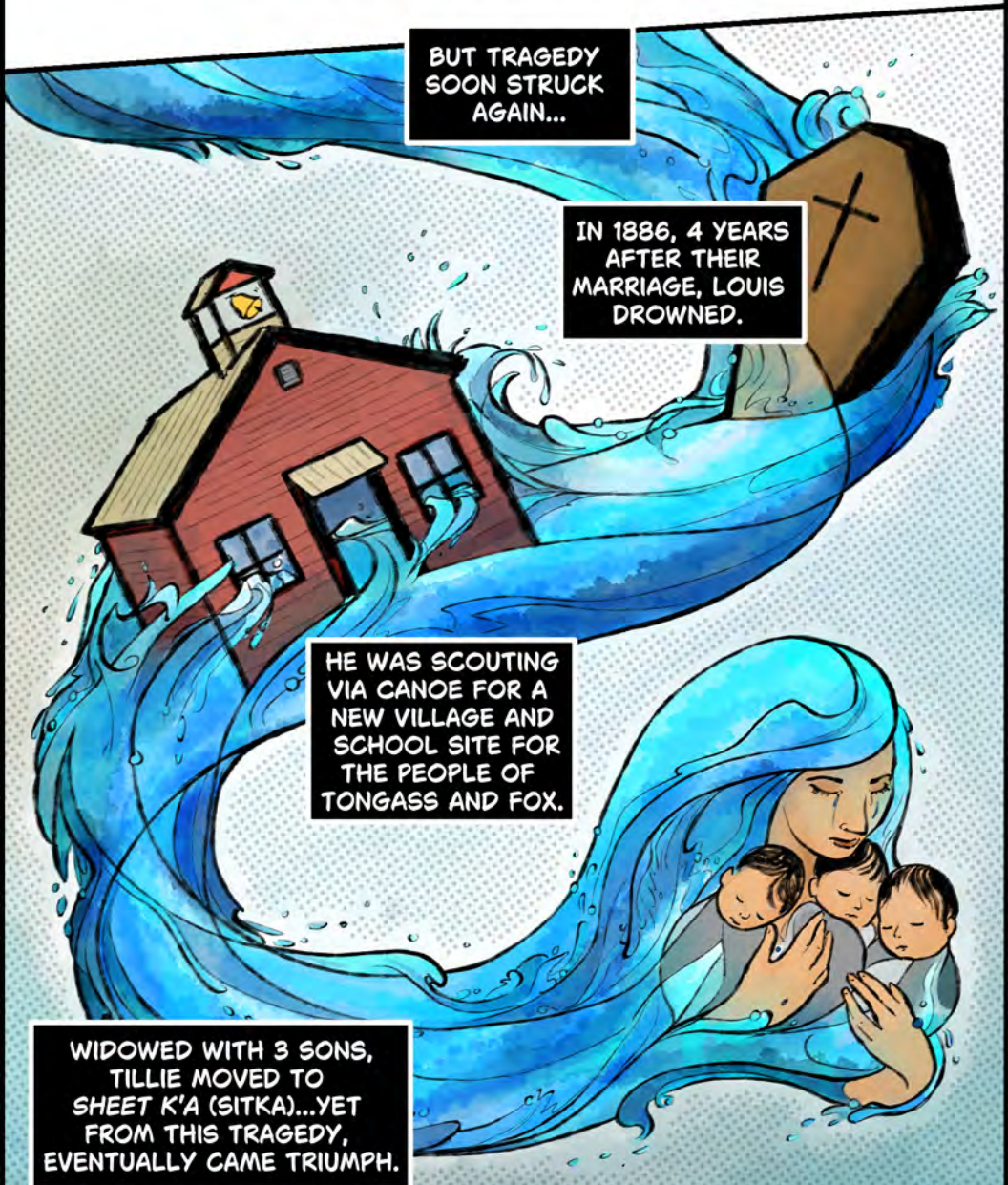
NATIVE RIGHTS IN ALASKA AND BEYOND.



THEIR MOTHER HOPED FOR HER DAUGHTERS TO LIVE VIBRANT TLINGIT LIVES IN KAACHXANA. AAK'W (WRANGELL), AND FOR A WHILE, MARGARET (TSOONKLA) AND MATILDA (KAHTAHAH, AKA "TILLIE") DID!

UNFORTUNATELY, TILLIE WAS AGAIN WHISKED AWAY FOR AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE - AT AGE 12! TILLIE REFUSED THE MARRIAGE AND ESCAPED BY BOAT TO RETURN TO WRANGELL TO ATTEND THE PRESBYTERIAN SCHOOL.

TILLIE EVENTUALLY GREW UP AND CHOSE A MAN SHE WANTED TO MARRY - LOUIS FRANCIS PAUL SR. - AND THE TWO OF THEM LED HAPPY LIVES AS TEACHERS AND MISSIONARIES.



BUT TRAGEDY
SOON STRUCK
AGAIN...

IN 1886, 4 YEARS
AFTER THEIR
MARRIAGE, LOUIS
DROWNED.

HE WAS SCOUTING
VIA CANOE FOR A
NEW VILLAGE AND
SCHOOL SITE FOR
THE PEOPLE OF
TONGASS AND FOX.

WIDOWED WITH 3 SONS,
TILLIE MOVED TO
SHEET K'A (SITKA)...YET
FROM THIS TRAGEDY,
EVENTUALLY CAME TRIUMPH.

TILLIE WENT ON TO HELP
FOUND THE ALASKA
NATIVE BROTHERHOOD
(ANB) AND THE ALASKA
NATIVE SISTERHOOD (ANS).



TWO OF TILLIE'S THREE
ACCOMPLISHED SONS
EVENTUALLY BECAME ANB
LEADERS...THIS STORY NOW
TURNS TO ONE OF HER SONS
WILLIAM PAUL SR. (SHK'WINDI).



...ONE TIME HE MISUSED MONEY
FROM A CANNERY SETTLEMENT...
BUT BEING AN ALASKA NATIVE
ATTORNEY IN A RAPIDLY GROWING
ALASKA FILLING WITH NON-
NATIVE PEOPLES LED TO MANY
ENEMIES. TOO MANY ENEMIES MAY
HAVE BEEN THE REAL REASON
BEHIND WILLIAM'S DISBARMENT.

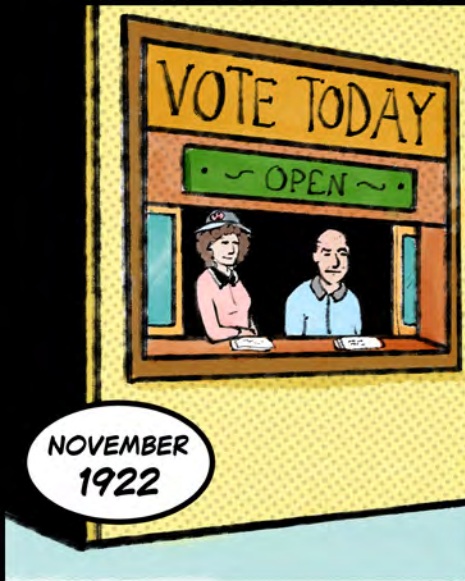


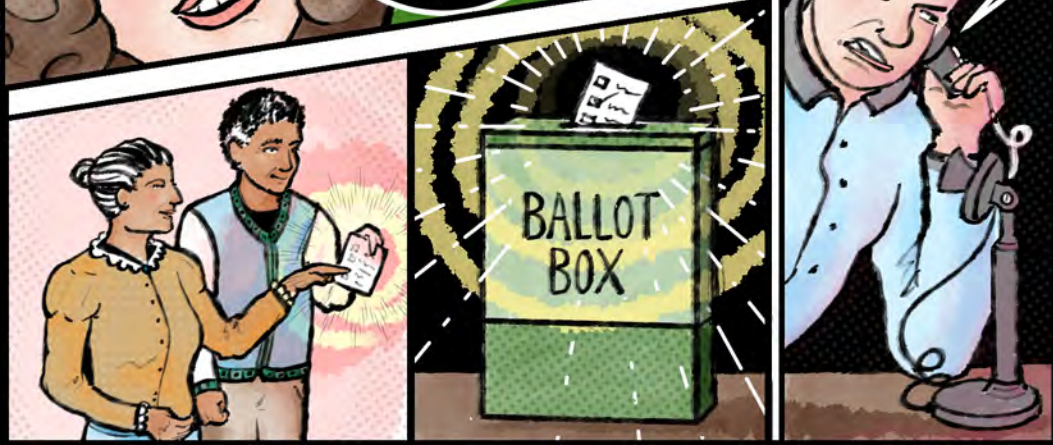
BUT LET'S GET BACK
TO IT: HOW DID TILLIE
AND WILLIAM EARN
ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLES
THE RIGHT TO VOTE?!



WILLIAM WAS THE
FIRST ALASKA
NATIVE ATTORNEY
AND THE FIRST
ALASKA NATIVE
TO HAVE A SEAT
IN THE ALASKA
TERRITORIAL
HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES.
HE DARED TO
CHALLENGE THE
NEW POWERS OF
ALASKA - EVEN USING
HIS NEWSPAPERS
TO ATTACK THE MANY
CANNERIES TAKING
OVER FISHERIES AND
DECIMATING THE WILD
SALMON POPULATION.
UNFORTUNATELY...HIS
BOLD APPROACH GOT
HIM DISBARRED FOR
22 YEARS...HOW?!







A FEW MONTHS LATER...



RING
RIIING
RING-A-LING
RIIING
RING



William!
Your mother and
your Uncle Charlie
were arrested!
Can you get to Ketchikan?
They could really
use your help!

YES. You can
bet your hide -
I WILL BE
THERE.

KICHXÁAN
1923



KETCHIKAN
COURTHOUSE

ON OCTOBER 9, 1923,
A GRAND JURY IN
KETCHIKAN INDICTED
CHARLIE JONES FOR
"FALSELY SWEARING
TO BE A CITIZEN," FOR
"ILLEGAL VOTING,"
AND TILLIE PAUL FOR
"INDUCING AN INDIAN
TO VOTE."

WILLIAM PAUL
BRAINSTORMED WAYS
TO PROVE THAT
CHARLIE JONES WAS
A CITIZEN. THIS WAS
WILLIAM'S "TOILET
PAPER" DEFENSE.





Interesting.
Does donating to
the Red Cross
count?

And,
owning a
home?



Uh -
of course.

Definitely!

Yes!



I would
like to call
Charlie Jones
to the stand.



I'll
allow it.



Mr. Charlie,
you are accused
of falsely swearing
to a be a citizen
so you could
vote.

- And
Ms. Tillie
assisted you
with this -
right?

But I **AM**
a citizen! I mean,
I'm a Tlingit Elder
and I have voted
before.

Can you prove
you are a citizen?
...Perhaps tell us
about you and
Red Cross.

Well, I have
donated to the Red
plenty - on behalf
of myself, my wife,
my son, and
even my little
dog, Captain
Wilson.

Then, I imagine
you also own a home, pay
taxes, and use toilet paper
like the rest of the
civilized folk?

- Yes -
to all those
things.



I have proven
Mr. Charlie's citizenship
- AND - I have provided
evidence that he is not simply
a citizen, but a law-abiding and
respectable example of what
a citizen should be.
**HE WAS WITHIN
HIS RIGHT TO
VOTE.**

Ms. Tillie
simply assisted
him in exercising
this right -

- THE
ALASKA NATIVE
PEOPLES' RIGHT
TO VOTE.

IN 1924, THE INDIAN
CITIZENSHIP ACT
GRANTED CITIZENSHIP
TO ALL NATIVE
AMERICANS BORN
WITHIN THE U.S. AND
ITS TERRITORIES,
MOSTLY ERADICATING
FURTHER ATTEMPTS
TO LIMIT NATIVE
AMERICANS' RIGHT
TO VOTE.



What does
the Jury
think?

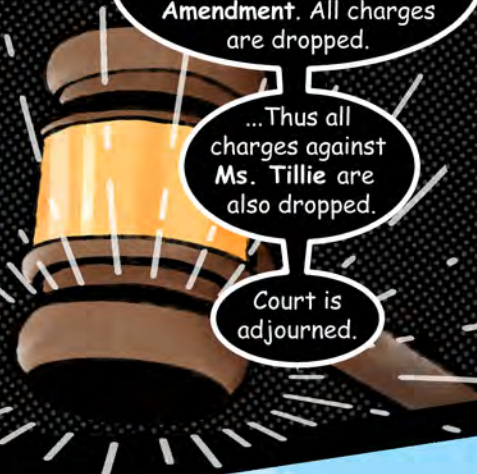


Charlie and
Tillie are not
guilty!

The court finds
Mr. Charlie's right to vote
is protected by the 14th
Amendment. All charges
are dropped.

...Thus all
charges against
Ms. Tillie are
also dropped.

Court is
adjourned.



My dear son,
I am so very
proud of
you!





Matilda "Tillie" Paul Tamaree
"Kahtahah," "Kah-tli-yudt,"
 Tlingit, Teeyhíttaan Clan
 ("Tlingit & Haida Hall of Fame," 2024),
 and her son, **William Paul Sr.**, 1902
 (based on portrait published in
"We Are Alaskans," 1931).

WHO WERE TILLIE AND WILLIAM?

The tales within these pages are based on true stories - incredible stories about incredible people who made the world a better place! You can learn a little more about the Paul family below.

TILLIE (1862 - 1952)

Tillie was a woman of intelligence, determination, and assertiveness. She is recognized as one of the most influential Native women in Alaska. She worked to preserve Tlingit traditions in the face of hypocrisy and resisted attempts to repress Tlingit culture and deny Alaska Native civil rights, including voting.

In 1905, Tillie founded the New Covenant Legion, which later inspired the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB). In 1920, she organized the formation of the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS), these advocacy organizations - to this day - continue to fight for Alaska Natives Rights. Tillie's achievements are too numerous to list here!



William L. Paul Sr., *"Shk'windí,"*
 Tlingit, Teeyhíttaan Clan
 (based on portrait published in
"Tlingit & Haida Hall of Fame," 2024).

WILLIAM (1885 - 1977)

Like his mother, brothers, and sons Fred and William Jr., William's accomplishments were many. He is considered the father of Alaska Native land claims due to his pivotal Central Council victory in 1959 that paved the way to the *Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act* (ANCSA) in 1971.

Paul's powers of persuasion and his aggressive style led to many political wins, if not popularity contests. He never gave up, and was never afraid to defend what he believed in or fight for what was right for Alaska Natives.

CHAPTER 2: ELIZABETH PERATROVICH

ON JULY 4, 1911, A BEAUTIFUL BABY GIRL WAS BORN IN
GÁNTI YAAKW SÉEDI (PETERSBURG), ALASKA.

ADOPTED WITHIN DAYS OF BIRTH, SHE WOULD GROW UP TO BECOME
ONE OF THE STRONGEST ADVOCATES FOR EQUAL RIGHTS IN ALASKA.

HER NAME IS ELIZABETH (OR KAAXGAL.AAT).
SHE IS OF THE TLINGIT LUKAAX,ÁDI CLAN
AND THE RAVEN MOIETY.

SHE WOULD CHANGE THE WORLD.





ANDREW AND JEAN WANAMAKER ADOPTED ELIZABETH THROUGH THE SALVATION ARMY. THEY TOOK THEIR NEW DAUGHTER TO THEIR HOMETOWN OF SHEET'KÁ (SITKA), ALASKA.

GROWING UP, ELIZABETH LOVED HER TLINGIT LIFE. SHE PICKED BLUEBERRIES, SALMONBERRIES, AND CRANBERRIES, DUG CLAMS AND FISHED FOR SALMON, HALIBUT AND EULACHON (CANDLEFISH). HER FATHER TOOK HER HIKING AND TAUGHT HER HOW TO HUNT.

SHE DANCED TLINGIT DANCES, AND HER MOTHER - A RENOWNED WEAVER - TAUGHT ELIZABETH HOW TO DIG, DRY AND WEAVE SPRUCE ROOTS INTO BEAUTIFUL BASKETS.

EVERYTHING SEEMED PERFECT.
BUT THE REALITY WAS IMPERFECT AND CRUEL,
AS ELIZABETH LATER LEARNED.

COMMERCIAL WHALING

THE TERRITORY OF ALASKA WAS RAPIDLY CHANGING

GOLD RUSH

FUR TRADE

CANNERIES

IN 1700, THE FUR TRADE BEGAN THE RUSSIAN COLONIZATION OF ALASKA. THE RUSSIANS KIDNAPPED, ENSLAVED, AND KILLED ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE. THEY OVERHUNTED SEALS AND OTTERS; BY 1911, LESS THAN 2,000 SEA OTTERS REMAINED.

BETWEEN 1848 AND 1852, 220 COMMERCIAL WHALING SHIPS KILLED THOUSANDS OF BOWHEAD WHALES, REDUCING THE POPULATION FROM ~27,000 TO ONLY ~1,500 WHALES.

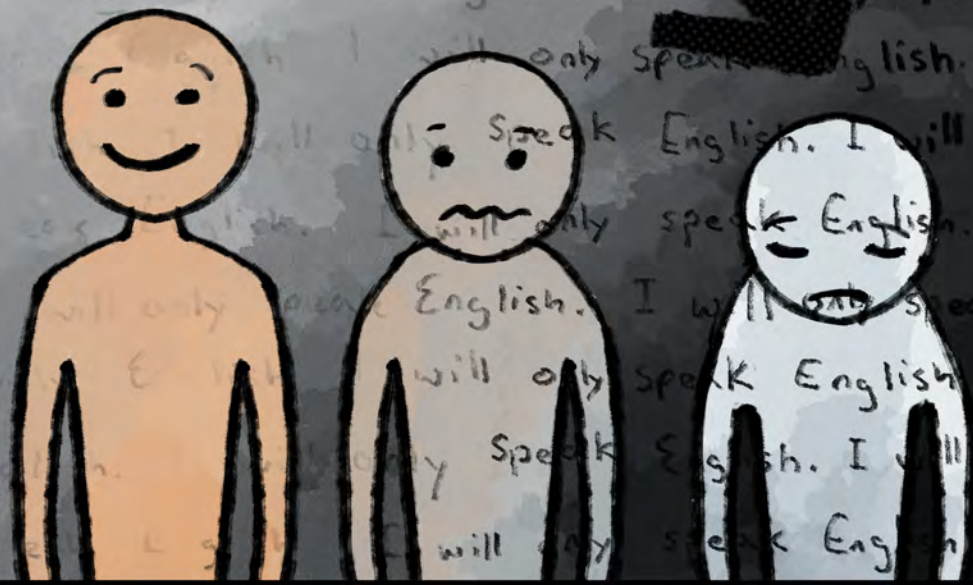
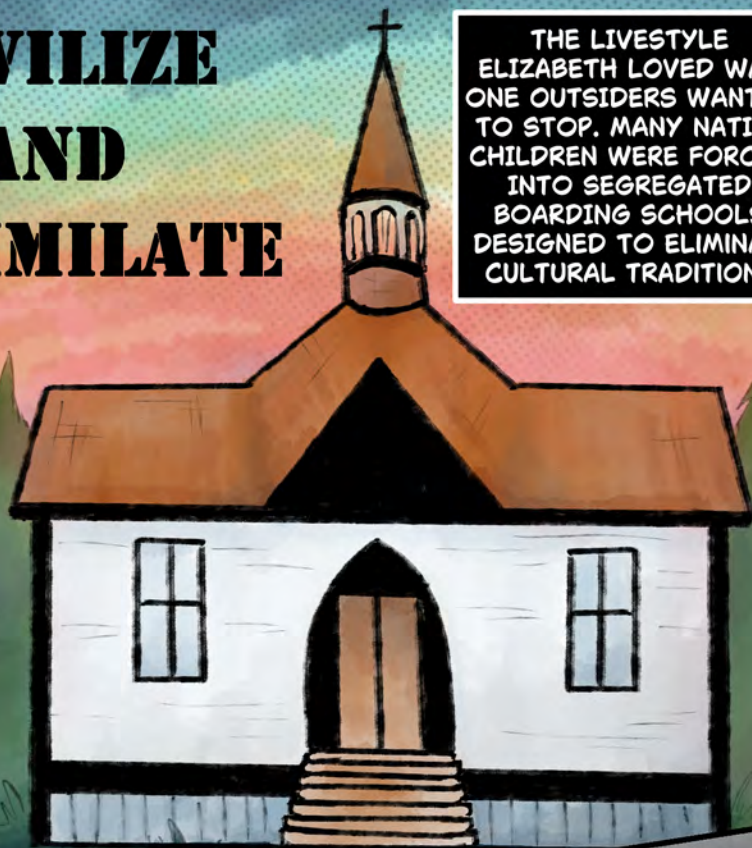
IN 1878, THE FIRST CANNERY OPENED IN LAWÁÁK (KLAWOCK) TO CAPITALIZE ON ALASKA SALMON. THE CANNERY WAS CONSTRUCTED ON FISHING GROUNDS OWNED BY THE TLINGIT AND HAIDA.

IN 1896, THE KLONDIKE GOLD RUSH SPARKED AN INFLUX OF SETTLERS SEEKING PROFIT AND MAKING CLAIMS TO LANDS EITHER ALREADY OWNED, OR HISTORICALLY USED, BY ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE FOR HUNTING AND FISHING.

BY 1949, 134 CANNERIES WERE BUILT IN ALASKA; 65 OF THEM BURNED BY 1950. OPERATORS BELIEVED THE SALMON SUPPLY WAS ENDLESS AND GREW WASTEFUL - IN 1958, 7 MILLION POUNDS OF FISH WERE THROWN AWAY! CANNERIES NOT ONLY OVERFISHED SALMON, THEY ALSO DISRUPTED LONG-HELD NATIVE FISHING RIGHTS.

CIVILIZE AND ASSIMILATE

THE LIFESTYLE
ELIZABETH LOVED WAS
ONE OUTSIDERS WANTED
TO STOP. MANY NATIVE
CHILDREN WERE FORCED
INTO SEGREGATED
BOARDING SCHOOLS
DESIGNED TO ELIMINATE
CULTURAL TRADITIONS.





NEVERTHELESS,
ELIZABETH APPROACHED
SCHOOL WITH GREAT
COMMITMENT.

...AND NURTURED A
COURAGEOUS SPIRIT
THAT KEPT HER AND HER
FRIENDS GOING
THROUGH THE MANY
TOUGH TIMES THEY
FACED.



You shouldn't worry...
You're the girl you have
to live with. **BE YOURSELF**
And treat 'em "ruff!"





ELIZABETH MET ROY PERATROVICH SR. (LK'UTEEN) DURING GRADE SCHOOL IN KLAUOCK. LATER, THEY BOTH ATTENDED BELLINGHAM NORMAL SCHOOL IN WASHINGTON; THEY WANTED TO BE TEACHERS.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE ONSET OF THE GREAT DEPRESSION FORCED ELIZABETH AND ROY BACK TO KLAUOCK. BUT NOT BEFORE THEY MARRIED IN BELLINGHAM - A PERFECT MATCH!

OVER THE NEXT FEW YEARS, ROY AND ELIZABETH JOINED THE ANB AND ANS. THEY DEDICATED THEMSELVES FULLY TO HELPING ALASKA NATIVE PEOPLE, INCLUDING FIGHTING FOR EQUAL RIGHTS.



...AND THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

WHOA! HOLD ON!

THIS IS NOT WHERE ELIZABETH AND ROY'S STORY ENDS.
THERE IS A LOT MORE TO TELL!

...BUT, LET'S TAKE A LITTLE BREAK IN SITNASUAQ (NOME), ALASKA,
TO SEE WHAT ANOTHER COURAGEOUS ALASKA NATIVE WAS UP TO...

SITNASUAQ
1944



DREAM THEATER





**THIS
SECTION
FOR WHITE
PATRONS
ONLY!**



Who does
that Native
think she is?!

Hey!
Can't you
read?!

This
section is for
white people
only. Not you!

I don't
want to sit
near a Native,
they smell!

Call the
police!

WHO DO YOU THINK
YOU ARE - SITTING IN THE
WHITE SECTION - ACTING
LIKE YOU OWN THE PLACE?!

I am ALBERTA
SCHENCK. I used to
work here! I paid the
same price for my
ticket - just like YOU.
Why should I have
to sit in the
back?!



Roy,
all of our hard
work and still,
so much
hate!

Maybe
we should meet
with Governor
Gruening
again?

DZÁNTIK'I
HÉENI
1944

THE PERATROVICH
FAMILY'S HOME IN
JUNEAU, ALASKA

I'm not
sure. We need
support from all
over - not just
Juneau.

To get this
Anti-Discrimination
Bill passed, we have
to travel and spread
the word. But how?
The kids...and
the money...

Elizabeth - we
fought for our housing, we fought
for our kids' education, we are Alaska
Native Brotherhood and Alaska Native
Sisterhood leaders. **WE CAN DO THIS.**
We will do it together - like we always
have and always will!

**AND SO, ELIZABETH ARRANGED
TO MEET ALASKA TERRITORIAL
GOVERNOR ERNEST GRUENING
AND EXPLAINED HER IDEAS.**

You're in luck!
I have a friend - Shell
Simmons - who operates
a sea plane. You can
ride for free when he
has a seat open!

**THAT SUMMER, GOVERNOR GRUENING WORKED TO ADD
NEW SEATS TO THE TERRITORIAL LEGISLATURE FOR
NATIVE CANDIDATES TO FILL. MEANWHILE, ELIZABETH
TRAVELED AROUND ALASKA URGING OTHERS TO
SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHTS, RUN FOR OFFICE AND VOTE.**

THE LEGISLATURE
WOULD SOON HOLD
A HEARING ON THE
ANTI-DISCRIMINATION
BILL.

ELIZABETH AND
ROY PERATROVICH
KNEW IT WAS THEIR
BEST CHANCE TO
MAKE A CHANGE.

THEY WORKED MANY
LONG NIGHTS
DEVELOPING A CLOSING
PRESENTATION FOR
THE HEARING...



FEBRUARY 5,
1945

THE ALASKA
TERRITORIAL SENATE
IS IN SESSION.
WILL THEY APPROVE THE
ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL?



It is the
mixed breed who
is not accepted by
either race who
causes the
trouble!

This bill
will create
hard feelings
between whites
and Natives!



...IT SEEMED UNLIKELY...



Hrrmph!

As a senator of Juneau,
I, **Allen Shattuck**, believe...

Far from being brought closer
together, which will result from this
bill, the races should be kept further
apart! Who are *these people*, barely
out of savagery, who want to associate
with us whites with *five thousand*
years of recorded civilization
behind us?!

Well, now
that this farce is over,
does anyone have closing
remarks?

ELIZABETH SET DOWN HER KNITTING...THIS MOMENT
WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING...

Deep breath...
For my husband, my
children, and all Alaska
Native peoples.



YES. I HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY.

"I would not have expected, that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with five thousand years of recorded civilization behind them of our **BILL OF RIGHTS.**

When my husband and I came to Juneau and sought a home in a nice neighborhood where our children could play happily with our neighbors' children, we found such a house and arranged to lease it. When the owners learned that we were Indians, they said no.

Would we be compelled to live in the slums?

There are three kinds of persons who practice discrimination against the Indians and other Native people. **First**, the politician who wants to maintain an inferior minority group so that he can always promise them something. **Second**, the Mr. and Mrs. Jones who aren't quite sure of their social position and who are nice to you on one occasion, and can't see you on others, depending on who they are with. **Third**, the great superman who believes in the superiority of the white race...

...assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

THANKS TO ELIZABETH'S SPEECH, THE ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL PASSED WITH A VOTE OF 11 TO 5! ON FEBRUARY 16, 1945, GOVERNOR GRUENING SIGNED THE NATION'S FIRST ANTI-DISCRIMINATION BILL INTO LAW.

WHO WAS ELIZABETH PERATROVICH? (1911 - 1958)

Elizabeth Peratrovich was a woman of remarkable strength and perseverance. Even in her early years, she refused to give into to the overwhelming prejudice against Alaska Native peoples at the time.

In 1940, her husband, Roy, was leader of the Alaska Native Brotherhood (ANB) and by 1945, Elizabeth was Grand President of the Alaska Native Sisterhood (ANS). The couple's campaign for Native rights garnered statewide support - and - with backing from ANB, ANS, and Governor Gruening, the campaign was finally successful! Because of her speech, Elizabeth is now one of the most well-known advocates for equal rights.



WHO WAS ALBERTA SCHENCK? (1928 - 2009)

In 1944, Alberta Schenck was fired from the Dream Theater in Nome for speaking out against the segregated seating. In response, she wrote to the editor of the *Nome Nugget* about the theater's racist seating policy. Thereafter, she returned to the theater and was arrested and jailed after sitting in the white only section.

17-year-old Alberta was no push-over; she wrote to Governor Gruening to amass support against Alaska's discriminatory practices. Governor Gruening worked with Roy and Elizabeth Peratrovich to draft the Anti-Discrimination Bill in 1943. It failed to pass but was reintroduced in 1945, at which time Alberta's story was told during the same debate as Elizabeth's famous speech.



LEFT TO RIGHT: Elizabeth Peratrovich "Kaaxgal.aat"

Andrew Wanamaker "Chalyee Éesh,"
Jean Wanamaker "Shaaxaatk'i,"
("Tlingit & Haida Hall of Fame," 2024),
based on family portrait courtesy of
"betsy" Peratrovich)

DID YOU KNOW?

The 2020 Native American \$1 coin represents Elizabeth Peratrovich's contributions to the passage of the 1945 Anti-Discrimination Law by the Alaskan Territorial Government. See [usmint.gov](https://www.usmint.gov).

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

In 1988, the State of Alaska designated February 16 as "Elizabeth Peratrovich Day." In 2023, the U.S. Senate made it "National Elizabeth Peratrovich Day!"

CHAPTER 3: THE 97th REGIMENT

THIS IS A STORY HISTORY BOOKS ONCE OMITTED - ONE OF
SEGREGATION AND TRIUMPH - STARRING INDIVIDUALS
WHO HISTORY, FOR A LONG TIME, SIMPLY IGNORED.

ARMED FORCES SEGREGATION AND RACISM WAS RAMPANT DURING WWII.
FOR THE AFRICAN AMERICAN TROOPS WHO BUILT THE PIONEER ROAD
(AKA ALCAN HIGHWAY OR MODERN-DAY ALASKA HIGHWAY),
THIS DISCRIMINATION WAS AMPLIFIED BY ISOLATION
AND EXTREME ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS.

HISTORY NOW RECOGNIZES THESE UNSUNG HEROES...

THE MEN WHO BUILT ALASKA'S PIONEER ROAD.

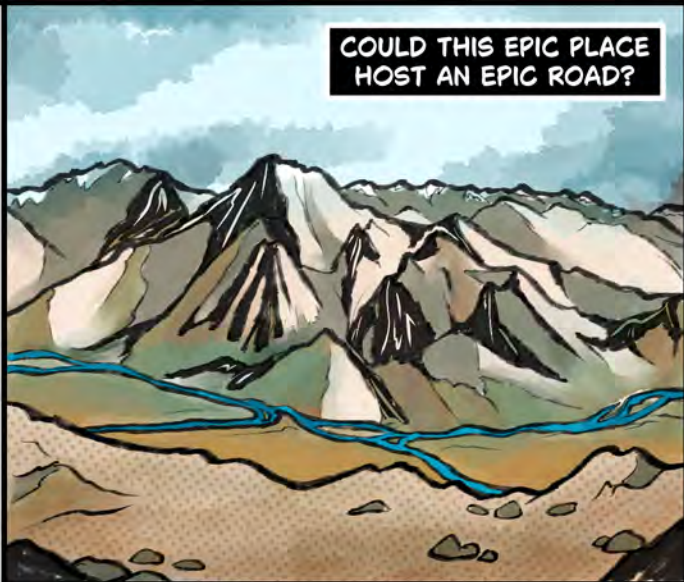


IN THE 1930'S, NO ONE BELIEVED IT COULD BE DONE...BUILD A ~1,500-MILE ROAD LINKING ALASKA TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD?

BUT WHEN WWII BROUGHT JAPANESE TROOPS TO U.S. SOIL, THE ALCAN HIGHWAY BECAME A REALITY IN IN JUST 8 MONTHS AND 12 DAYS!

BUT HOW?!

COULD THIS EPIC PLACE HOST AN EPIC ROAD?



THE MILITARY ASSIGNED 7 ENGINEER GENERAL SERVICE REGIMENTS TO THE TASK; 4 OF THESE WERE SEGREGATED REGIMENTS COMPOSED OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS - THE 93rd, 95th 97th, AND 388th. OF THOSE 4, ONLY THE 97th WAS ASSIGNED TO BUILD ALASKA'S SIDE OF THE PIONEER ROAD.

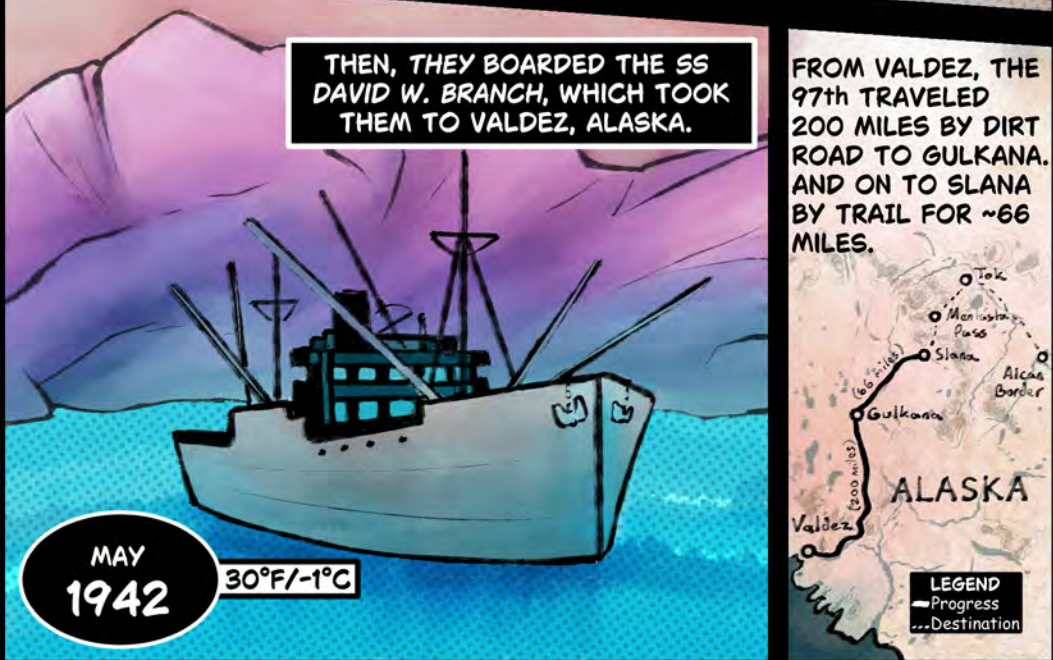
97th ENGINEER
BATTALION
UNIT CREST

THE 97th WAS ORIGINALLY ASSIGNED TO BUILDING WARTIME RUNWAYS AT EGLIN FIELD IN VALPARAISO, FLORIDA.

UNTIL ONE DAY...

FLORIDA
1941





THE NEXT ~78 MILES WERE FAR WORSE. THE 97th HAD TO CUT A NEW TRAIL FROM SLANA TO TOK.



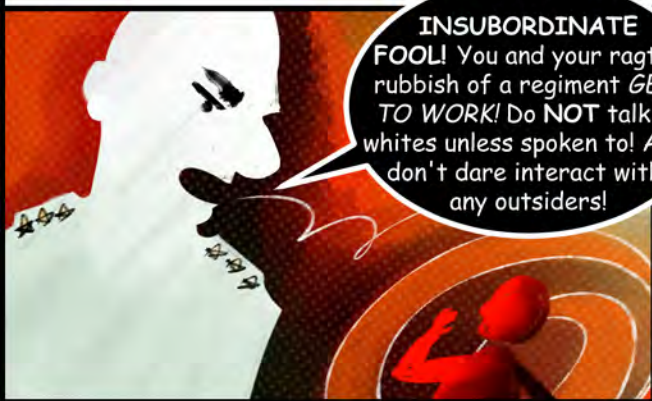
AUGUST 1942

45°F/7°C



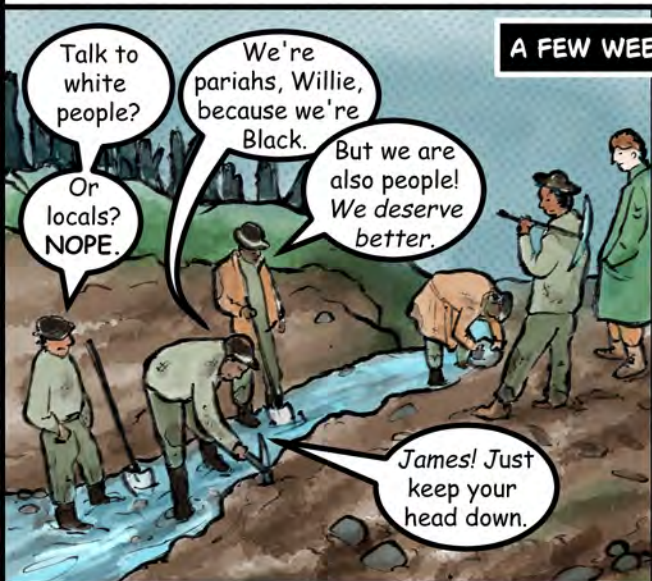
Someone explain WHY it took this useless regiment nearly 4 MONTHS to get here?!

General Hoge, sir, we arrived in Alaska in April, but building a new trail from Slana through the Mentasta Mountains slowed us down - we worked very hard to get here.



INSUBORDINATE FOOL! You and your ragtag rubbish of a regiment **GET TO WORK!** Do NOT talk to whites unless spoken to! And don't dare interact with any outsiders!

THE STAGE WAS SET AGAINST THE 97th FROM DAY 1. ROAD BUILDING WAS PAINFULLY SLOW GIVEN THE MUSKEGS AND MOUNTAINS. IN 23 DAYS OF ARDUOUS WORK, ONLY 6 MILES OF THE PIONEER ROAD WAS COMPLETED THUS FAR.



A FEW WEEKS LATER...



Talk to white people?

Or locals? NOPE.

We're pariahs, Willie, because we're Black.

But we are also people! We deserve better.

James! Just keep your head down.

The bulldozer is stuck - unstick it!

A FEW DAYS LATER...



Our trailer flipped - unflip it!

A FEW HOURS LATER...



The excavator fell - unfell it!

A FEW MINUTES LATER...



Our truck sank - unsink it!



I don't know what's worse! The swarming insects or the incessant abuse!

39°F/4°C

SEPTEMBER 1942

DESPITE ALL THE SETBACKS AND FRUSTRATIONS, THE 97TH REALLY HIT THEIR STRIDE!



Man! This better be the last bridge we have to build on this road!

Yeah! This water is frickin' freezing!

25!

I've lost count of how many bridges we've even built!

...AND WITH WINTER AT THEIR TAILS, THE 97th RACED FOR THE BORDER...

ON OCTOBER 25, 1942, THE 97th MET THE 18th AT THE BORDER OF ALASKA AND CANADA, COMPLETING THE PIONEER ROAD, WHICH THEREAFTER BECAME KNOWN AS THE "ALCAN HIGHWAY."

27°F/-3°C

OCTOBER
1942

CORPORAL
REFINES SIMS
JR. FROM
THE 97th,
SHOOK
HANDS WITH
PRIVATE
ALFRED
JALUFKA,
FROM THE
18th, WHEN
THEY MET
AT THE
BORDER.



IT TOOK
11,782 SOLDIERS,
4,100 PUBLIC ROAD
ADMINISTRATION
(PRA) ENGINEERS,
AND 6,000 CIVILIAN
WORKERS TO BUILD
1,619 MILES OF
ROAD, 162 MILES
OF TRAIL, AND 133
BRIDGES - ALL IN
8 MONTHS AND
12 DAYS!

Snow!
We don't get
that in Florida!
Good thing we are
done with the
road.

I wonder
where they
will send us
next?

I hope it is
some place
FAR SOUTH
from here!

I've had
enough NORTH -
mosquitos, mudslides
wash-outs, and
COLD - to last a
lifetime!



THE 97th HAD GOTTEN SO GOOD
AT BUILDING ROADS, THEY BUILT
ANOTHER 20 MILES IN CANADA.
...BUT LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, THEY
WERE READY TO GO BACK SOUTH.



...BUT THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY, OR THE 97th's ASSIGNMENT TO ALASKA. WILLIE, JAMES, AND LEE WOULD SOON DISCOVER THAT THEIR HARDSHIPS WERE ONLY BEGINNING.



...Get ready to resuscitate Lee, because he's about to have a heart attack!

James....
Tell me I'm hearing this wrong...

Shhh Willie!
I think he's telling us we're gonna be stuck here!



NOVEMBER -10°F/-18°C
1942

Meh. If I freeze to death in my sleep, don't wake me up...I'll be better off than the rest of y'all stuck in the cold.



-37°F/-38°C
DECEMBER 1942

Well, to look on the bright side, it's a white Christmas.

Merry Christmas, Willie. Let's hope we survive until the next one.



I guess I'll see you next year. Good luck!

Now, it says here that you boys - the 97th Regiment - are hereby assigned to keeping the Alcan Highway open for winter supply lines.



JANUARY
1943

-50°F/-45°C



FEBRUARY
1943

-64°F/-53°C



WIND CHILL = -71°F/-57°C

James, Can I have my turn with the puffy coat next?

Maybe we should try hunting?

We are running really low on supplies guys...

MARCH 29
1943

-34°F/-36°C

LIEUTENANT DEWITT C. HOWELL ORDERED 10 97th MEN INTO THE BACK OF AN UNHEATED TRUCK FOR A 130-MILE TRIP TO FAIRBANKS. IF THE TRUCK TRAVELED AT 25 MPH, THE WIND CHILL WOULD CAUSE FROSTBITE WITHIN 5 MINUTES!

Sir, I think I speak for all of us when I humbly say we can't ride in the back of that truck. The trip would surely kill us in this cold!



MUTINY!
MUTINY ALL
OF YOU!!!

AND SO IT WAS. THE 10 "MUTINEERS" WERE ARRESTED AND SENT TO A STOCKADE IN WHITEHORSE, YUKON (CANADA) FOR 3 MONTHS, THEY WOULD FACE COURT MARTIAL IN JUNE, 1943.





1 OF THE 10 "MUTINEERS" - WILLIE CALHOUN - (NOT "OUR" WILLIE, KEEP READING...) WAS IMMEDIATELY ACQUITTED.

1 MONTH LATER, 4 OF THE 9 REMAINING "MUTINEERS" (EUGENE FULKS, WARREN LINDSEY JAMES HOLLINGSWORTH - NOT "OUR" JAMES - AND JOSH WEAVER) WERE ALSO ACQUITTED AND RETURNED TO DUTY.

UNFORTUNATELY, OUR 3 HEROES - WILLIE HOWELL, LEE RATLIFF, AND JAMES HEARD - ALONG WITH 2 OTHER "MUTINEERS" (ROBERT RUCKER AND SIM BRIDGES) WERE SENTENCED TO HARD LABOR AT A REHABILITATION STOCKADE.

WILLIE RECEIVED A 5 YEAR SENTENCE; LEE WAS SENTENCED TO 12 YEARS. WORST OF ALL, JAMES RECEIVED A 20-YEAR SENTENCE!

JUNE
1944

ONE YEAR LATER, THE REHABILITATION STOCKADE DETERMINED THE REMAINING "MUTINEERS" - SIM BRIDGES, ROBERT RUCKER, AND OUR 3 HEROES, JAMES HEARD, WILLIE HOWELL, AND LEE RATLIFF - WERE SUFFICIENTLY "RETRAINED" ENOUGH TO RETURN TO ACTIVE DUTY.

THEY WERE FREE!

Today is a good day. We've built runways, highways, bridges, and friendships. What's next?

Heck if I know! Let's get out of here and start a new adventure?

James is right - today's a good day. But, maybe tomorrow's adventure can be a bit easier and warmer? I hope so!

ON JULY 26, 1948, PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN SIGNED EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981, BANNING SEGREGATION FROM THE ARMED FORCES, AND ORDERED FULL INTEGRATION OF ALL BRANCHES. THE 93rd, 95th, 97th AND 388th ARMY CORPS ENGINEER GENERAL SERVICE REGIMENTS WOULD NO LONGER BE SEGREGATED UNITS.

JULY 26
1948

WHAT WAS THE 97th? (1933 - 1971)

The 97th battalion dates back to 1933. Between 1942-1946, the battalion was designated the 97th Engineer General Service Regiment. The 97th served in the US, New Guinea, France, etc., and went on to earn many honors before final inactivation in 1971.



The 97th Engineers Battalion before it expanded to become a regiment, ~1941 (based on photo taken by William E. Griggs, published in "The World War II Black Regiment That Built the Alaska Millitary Highway," 2002).



The Gerstle River Bridge was renamed the Black Veterans Memorial Bridge in 1993 to honor the 3,695 African American soldiers who helped build the Alaska Highway.

JAMES HEARD

(1923 - 1972)

After serving his time in the rehabilitation system, James went on to join the Honor Company at Camp Phillips and returned to duty in 1944. He was discharged in 1946 and disappeared from history.

James is but one example of many dedicated African American troops who endured racism but peserved. James is remembered here as a courageous friend, devoted to those who mattered to him most.

WILLIE HOWELL

(1918 - 2003)

Like James and Lee, Willie served his time in the Service Command Rehabilitation Center and also made the Honor Company at Camp Phillips, and returned to duty in 1944. After WWII, Willie returned to Madison County, Georgia and married Bertha Carter. Together they raised 5 kids.

DID YOU KNOW?

Starting in 2017, October 25 became African American Soldiers' Contribution to Building the Alaska Highway Day.

LEE RATLIFF

(1922 - 2000)

The same as James and Willie, Lee served his rehabilitation time, made the Honor Company at Camp Phillips, returned to duty in 1944, and was discharged in 1946.

Lee returned to Stanley County in North Carolina and went on to lead a successful career at Young Manufacturing. Those who knew Lee found him to be an exceptionally responsible individual while raising his 4 children as a single father.

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GET READY FOR 3 HISTORICAL ADVENTURES!

CHAPTER 1

Tillie and William Paul

What was it like for little Tillie to be whisked away on a 600-mile canoe trip to a place she didn't know? Or to be betrothed at age 12? Her adventure eventually leads to an arrest, and a court trial where she is represented by her own controversial son, William Paul Sr., using his famous "Toilet Paper" defense.

CHAPTER 2

Elizabeth Peratrovich

Elizabeth Peratrovich is one of the most pivotal Native rights activists in Alaskan history. Though Elizabeth endured the many horrors of racism and witnessed how it affected Alaska Native Peoples throughout Alaska - she didn't take it sitting down! How did she become the historical figure the world knows today?

CHAPTER 3

The 97th Regiment

When three southern African American teens find themselves on a boat to Alaska, they have no idea what they are in for. As their Army regiment breaks trail to build the Alcan (Alaska) Highway, they endure isolation, hatred, and killer cold. How do they survive, only to find themselves court martialed?

THIS GRAPHIC NOVEL IS MADE POSSIBLE BY:



Written and illustrated by Elyse Applegate