

SPECIAL MEMORIAL DAY EDITION SALUTING OUR VETS

2023 SPECIAL EDITION
SALUTING OUR VETS



USA TODAY

INSIDE

- HONORING HISTORY & HEROES
- CARING FOR THOSE WHO SERVED
- CREATING CAREER OPTIONS

\$4.95

89505-100018-0

20

CONTENTS



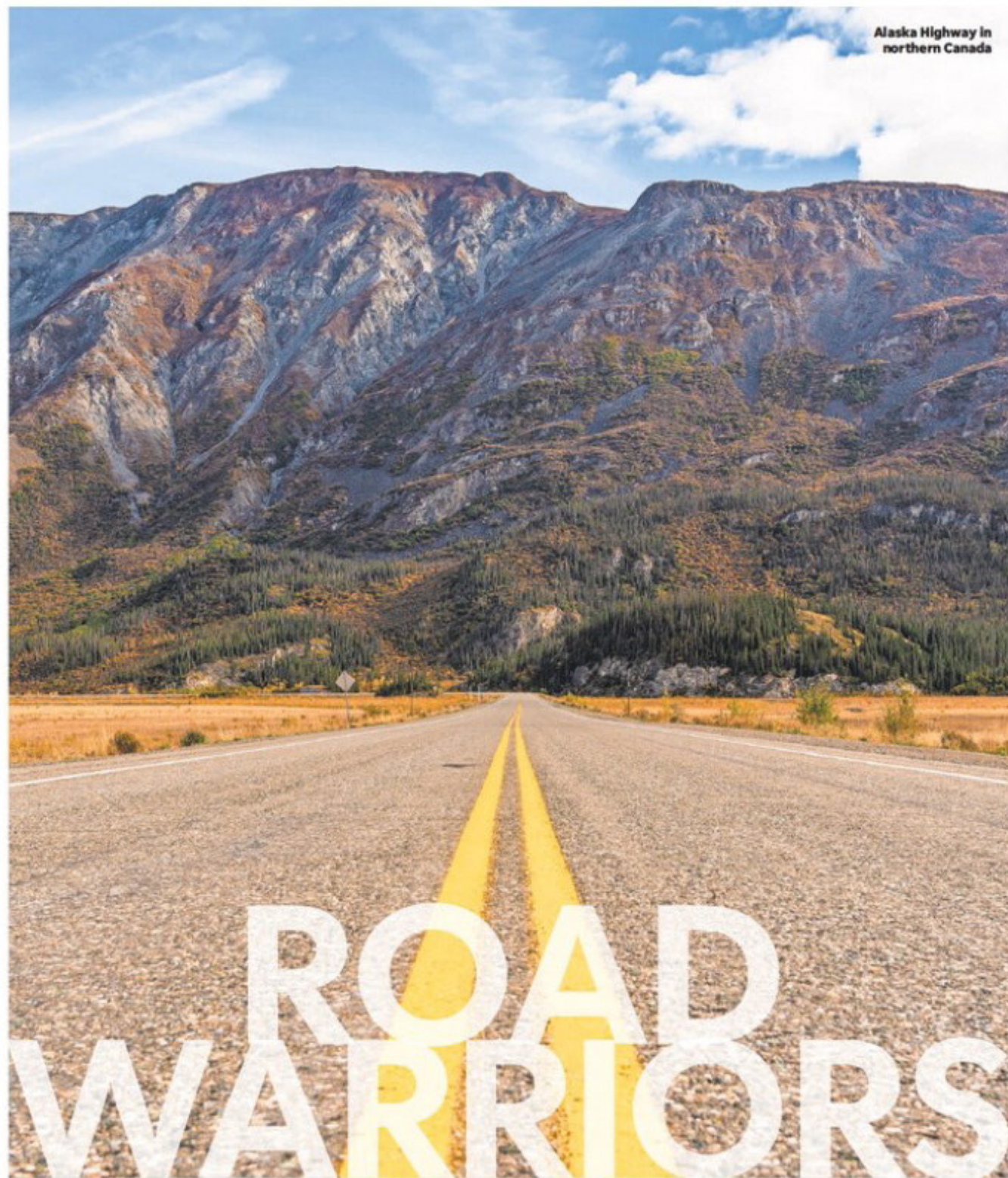
U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS OFFICE OF HISTORY

FEATURES

38 **SOLDIER SONGS**
AHERO Records is giving voice to veterans



42 **DEAR DIARY**
The journey to return a Vietnamese soldier's notebook



Alaska Highway in northern Canada

Black regiments helped build the Alaska Highway and pave the road to desegregating the military

By Kit Bernardi

THE 1,387-MILE ALASKA HIGHWAY traversing rugged Alaska and Canada wilderness ranks as one of the ultimate road trips. But the two-lane, paved highway through the remote sub-Arctic territory's northern prairies, boreal forests and river valleys is much more than a stunning scenic drive.

The Alaska Highway is also an insightful journey through World War II national defense strategy and military service history.

The military called the pioneer road it built the ALCAN, short for Alaska-Canada highway. From south to north it travels from Dawson Creek, British Columbia, through the remote Yukon, across the Canada-United States border into Delta Junction, Alaska, and Fairbanks beyond.

In just eight months from March through October 1942, 10,607 soldiers from seven U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regiments, two engineer topographic battalions and two engineer companies blazed a road through seemingly impenetrable wilderness at blistering speed. In addition, the work of 3,695

African American engineers in the segregated 93rd, 95th, 97th Engineer General Service Regiments contributed to desegregation of the United States military in 1948.

"The engineers' work, alongside that of more African American units fighting in World War II and other 20th century conflicts, showed that African Americans were more than capable, competent and every bit equal to white soldiers in performing their duties," says Eric Reinert, curator of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Office of History.

JAPANESE THREAT TO ALASKA

Prior to World War II, the only way to travel from the contiguous United States to what was then the Alaska Territory was by charter flights and ships.

But when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941, building a supply road to defend Alaska's coastline became a top priority. With the Japanese Navy patrolling the Pacific Ocean and Gulf of Alaska, shipping war equipment by sea convoy was too hazardous.

"Immediately after Pearl Harbor, a series of military disasters in the Pacific heightened the sense of

urgency among military and political leaders. The Japanese defeated American troops in the battles of Guam, Wake Island and Bataan in the Philippines and captured all that territory," Reinert says.

On Feb. 11, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt approved punching a road through the wilderness to transport fighter planes, tanks, jeeps, trucks and supplies for Alaska's defense. In March, Canada agreed to allow the project in their territory.

With American troops

CONTINUED »



GETTY IMAGES; U.S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS; U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS OFFICE OF HISTORY; U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS OFFICE OF HISTORY VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

At the outset of World War II, approximately 3,700 segregated Black soldiers helped build nearly 1,400 miles of highway across Alaska and Canada. On Oct. 25, 1942, Cpl. Refines Sims Jr., left, and Pvt. Alfred Jalufka shook hands at the "Meeting of Bulldozers" in Beaver Creek, Alaska.