

Alaska Highway Testimony

March 20, 2017

To: Gary Zepp and other Legislators

Re: Senate Bill 46 (Refers to African America Soldiers' Contributions to Building the Alcan Highway)

My name is Claudia Beverly Rollins and I am the daughter of Mr. Reginald Beverly who lives in Ruther Glen, Virginia. My dad is one of over 4,000 black soldiers who built the Alaska Highway in 1942. He is now 102 years old. Throughout my lifetime, he has shared many of his experiences with my sisters and me.

When he went to build the Alaska Highway, he was a rarity because he was a black recruit with a university degree. He said, "I was drafted December 5, 1941, two days before Pearl Harbor. I was a high school math teacher. Once drafted, I only had time to report to school the next morning, call the class roll and bid my students and administration goodbye. From there, I traveled two miles to Bowling Green, Virginia to catch the bus to go to Fort Meade, Maryland. I was twenty-six years old."

My Dad, Mr. Beverly had received a Bachelor of Science Degree from Virginia State University, one of the first fully state-supported four-year institutions of higher learning for blacks in America. He was assigned to the 95th Regiment.

While serving in Alaska as a regimental surveyor building the Alcan Highway, Mr. Beverly had to endure the treacherous weather while living in substandard conditions such as living in tents with ice approximately one inch thick on the inside while white soldiers lived in actual buildings.

During this time, while instructing other soldiers using his surveying skills and sophisticated instruments, Mr. Beverly had no stripes while white soldiers that he was instructing wore strips. When a Colonel Thompson saw Sargent Beverly and observed that he no stripes, he said, "Give that man some stripes!" Mr. Beverly said stripes were delivered to him on the very next morning!

I do approve Senate Bill 46. I support this Bill to recognize the contributions of African American Soldiers who worked extremely hard on the Alcan Highway and completed this task in record time! I also support making October 25th of each year the official "Alaska African American History Soldier Contribution Day." This day is befitting since this was the day that a Black Soldier and white soldier shook hands upon completion of such a tremendous project!

Thank you Gary Zepp and Legislators for giving me this opportunity to communicate with you in support of Senate Bill 46.

Claudia Beverly Rollins