

# Alaska State Legislature

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## Sponsor Statement for HB 246 An Act Naming Certain Bridges and Airports

Cordova is located in the Copper River Valley and its residents have a strong sense of duty. Duty to country and duty to their people. It is that sense of duty that has spurred the people of Cordova to serve in every major war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is also that sense of duty that compelled an Eyak elder to nearly singlehandedly preserve the Eyak language for future generations. It is also this sense of duty that prompted the City of Cordova to ask the state to name 15 of its unnamed Cordova-area bridges after some of their finest residents.

In honor of the brave young men who served and made the ultimate sacrifice for their country, the City of Cordova has requested that 14 of their unnamed bridges be named for each of the sons that they have lost. They are:

### World War I

James Bennet  
William M. Jones  
Steve Green  
Lucian Platt  
Mathew Anderson  
W.H. Mumby  
John W. Jones

### World War II

Patrick B. Burchett  
Norman D. Osbourne  
Leonard F. Olson

### Vietnam

David Henry Elisovsky  
David Allen Lape  
Warren Allen Paulsen  
Michael Dean Banta

The City of Cordova has also requested that the bridge over the Eyak River be named after Marie Smith Jones. Marie Smith Jones was an Eyak elder who worked tirelessly to preserve the Eyak language. She left behind one of the most comprehensive records of any aboriginal language that exists today.

## Airports

### Koyukuk Station Veterans' Airport

The original village of Koyukuk, primarily all Koyukon Athabascan Indians, was established around 1867. It used to be called Koyukuk Station, because a military telegraph line was constructed along the North side of the Yukon, and Koyukuk became

the site of the telegraph station. In naming the airport, the residents also wish to honor the many Native military veterans who have served their country.

The Koyukon Athabascans lived a subsistence lifestyle, moving among seasonal fish and game camps. They moved as the wild game migrated. Most of the people who settled here were from up the Koyukuk River, as far as the Dolbi River, which is close to Huslia. Even when people settled in Koyukuk they continued to travel up the Koyukuk to winter trapping camps and returned in the spring.

The Native name for Koyukuk is, Meneelghaadze T'oh. Meneelghaadze is the name of the mountain at Koyukuk. Madeline Solomon, now deceased Elder from Koyukuk, had said the mountain was named Meneelghaadze, because long ago, the Koyukon people used to go get clay at the mountain and mix with bird feathers to make clay pots. Eliza Jones an Elder from Koyukuk said that in Athabascan, "T'oh" would be added on, meaning at the base of the mountain. Meneelghaadze T'oh means, "at the base of the Koyukuk Mountain."

Today Koyukuk people are still living a subsistence lifestyle. The main employment is the local government, clinic, school, store and any firefighting and construction seasonal jobs.

### Minto – Al Wright Airport

The Wright family lived a subsistence lifestyle. In 1930 the family moved to Minto where his dad tried to start a school. When Al was nine, they moved to Nenana where his father started work in the shipyard.

Al was 15 when he started in construction on defense projects all over Interior Alaska. He had no formal training and learned as he went along. His skills were in high demand on the defense projects, however he wanted to join the Army. The only way he could leave his job was to quit the construction work and get drafted. When he got out of the Army, he found out he could get his pilot's license with the G.I. bill. He originally started for fun, but never got away from flying.

His first plane was a 65 Taylorcraft. One day a man asked to charter him to pick up furs. He said, "boy, this is the way to make money." From then on he started hauling trappers and developing a business. His first charter was \$20.00 an hour with fuel, plane and pilot. He taught himself to fly with floats. With no formal training, his first flight was to pick up a dying man in a Minto fish camp. He flew about 200 hours before he was forced to get an official float rating. He had trouble getting ratings and licenses, because he had little education. He struggled his whole life because he never learned how to read well, write or spell. He quit school after the sixth grade as he took on more seasonal work with the family.

Al started Wright's Air Service in 1950 which continued to grow in Interior Alaska. His focus was on maintaining high standards with maintenance and with his employees. He

was the critical link for scheduled mail and charter flights to about 20 villages. Wright's Air today is a well-known charter operation in the Interior, supporting government surveys, seasonal camps, firefighting, land surveying and hunting expeditions. In 1983 Al sold his airline to long-time friend and pilot, Bob Burcell. Bob continues to run the airline with the same old time values, kindness and respect Al had for his people and villages.

Naming these bridges and airports after some of Alaska's finest residents is the least we can do to thank them for their service and their sacrifice. We urge your support of HB 246.