

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE ZACK FIELDS

Fairview • South Addition • Government Hill • Downtown • Eastridge

2/28/2022

HB 352 Sponsor Statement

The Glenn Highway runs 135 miles from Cook Inlet to the Copper River Valley. It was completed in 1942, during the effort to shore up the Territory of Alaska's defenses in World War II against invasion. It was subsequently named for Edwin Glenn, a judge advocate and captain in the 25th Infantry of the US Army who commanded the initial expeditions charting the area as they searched for an Alaska route to the Klondike Gold Fields. Glenn would later be deployed to the Philippines, where his role as judge advocate meant he oversaw interrogations and tortured suspected Filipino insurgents. Glenn was convicted and court-martialed.

The trail that predated the Glenn Highway was long used as a portage for Dena'ina, Knik and Eklutna tribes for trade and commerce, described to Western explorers as a 12 day portage. Much of the expedition's work would be undertaken by two lieutenants under his command, Hendy Learnard and Joseph Castner. Glenn later followed Castner up the Matanuska River valley but they were later forced to turn back due to declining weather. Castner would later embark with a smaller party that made it all the way to Circle City, Dawson City and then down to Skagway via the Yukon Territory.

Historians have documented that Castner, not Glenn led soldiers on the trail to establish the route, which had been used for millennia by local Alaska Natives. Further, Glen's conviction as a war criminal should disqualify him on being the namesake for one of Alaska's longest highways.

Alaska has more Native American language speakers than any other state, and over 200 existing languages today. In combination with precedent in state and federal law for tribal consultation, the State should consider consulting with local communities and tribes along the highway to consider a more appropriate name for the Alaskans who live there.