History and Military Significance of Whittier Alaska

Patrick Durand
1895  Communities with settlers of European decent.
1898  Coastal transport  OLGA
April 1898

War Department and USGS survey parties on beach at Valdez with supply stockpile.
1898

Glenn party on Portage Glacier looking down toward Turnagain Arm.
1898

Glenn Camp at Portage near Turnagain Arm
1903  John E. Ballaine founded the City of Seward and started building the Alaska Central Railroad.
The Alaska Northern advanced to Kern Creek and went bust in the recession of 1906.
Lt. Fredrick Mears, Construction Manager
Thomas Riggs, Member
Chairman, William C. Edes

Alaska Engineering Commission

AEC created
March 12, 1914
1914  AEC US Army Survey Crew on Portage Glacier
1914

Portage Glacier from moraines in Bear Valley
1914 Samples of Chickaloon coal delivered by dog team at Knik for US Navy steaming test.
Reality Check for 1914

Anchorage did not exist!

The only land route to interior Alaska was the dirt track called the Richardson Highway between Valdez and Fairbanks.

The Copper River & Northwestern Railroad connected to that road at the town of Chitina.
1915 Ship Creek anchorage
1915  
4th and F street first year of Anchorage
1917  Laying 12’ concrete sidewalks on 4th Avenue
1917  Ship Creek & Anchorage
1917 The Alaska Railroad reached Chickaloon Navy coal mines and began hauling coal for domestic use and export.
January 1918  Major Mears departs for Europe
1916

Capt Frederick Mears  William Edes
September 17, 1918  The line along Turnagain Arm was opened finally connecting Anchorage and Seward by rail.
August 1919

Col Mears returns as Chairman of the AEC

Here on the rear of business car A-1 the Colonel and his family often entertained visiting dignitaries during inspection trips.
Feb 9, 1923  First train over the Tanana River Bridge. At 704 ft. the world’s longest single span bridge.
President Harding driving Gold Spike

July 15, 1923
1923

Congressional Inspection Tour of Alaska Railroad after completion by the AEC
1921

Nenana docks on the Tanana River
April 6, 1924

Seattle Douglas World Cruiser in Seward. US Army Air Corps around the world flight. West bound 27,553 mile route took 175 days. 371 hours 11 minutes flight time.
Col. Otto F. Ohlson
Alaska Railroad
General Manager
August 1928 - December 1945
Retired at age 75

1928 -- 1945
1930  Snow fleet between Portage and Seward
Sternwheeler River Boat NENANA with military cargo going down the Tanana River. The fleet based in Nenana was Operated by The Alaska Railroad.
Lindbergh’s Lockheed Sirius on Lotus Lake in China after flying a Great Circle Route from New York to Japan via Alaska.
2.5% grades, snow and old bridges in Loop District
Col Otto Ohlson promoted the Matanuska Valley Colony Project which became a source of ready labor.
Reality check 1937-40

Japan was occupying Korea, China, Indonesia
And considering an invasion of Australia.

As of September 1939 Canada was at war with Japan and building western defenses.

The Canadian – American Permanent Joint Board on Defense was created in August 1940.

Territory of Alaska Population 72,524
Seward 949
Anchorage 3,495 Juneau 5,729
Fairbanks 3,455 Kodiak 864
Lt. General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr.

July 18, 1886
June 18, 1945

Col Buckner on July 22, 1940 commanded the Alaska Defense Force.

He was promoted to Brigadier General, Major General and finally Lieutenant General by May 1943 while he was serving in Alaska.
May 1941

Fort Mears and Dutch Harbor Naval Base
Justify the Portage Cutoff

- Security considerations
- 58 route miles shorter
- Increased productivity
- Lower line maintenance
- Passage Canal is Ice Free
- Tides of 12 feet on Passage Canal
- Railroad and Army control
Snow fleet between Portage and Seward
November 1941      Start of tunnel from Passage Canal
December 7, 1941

Japan attacks at Pearl Harbor
December 7, 1941

- Travel by aliens prohibited.
- Photos of infrastructure banned.
- Military policed and inspected all incoming and outgoing passengers.
- Alaska bound travelers screened by the Alaska Travel Control Section.
- All towns had enforced Blackouts.
December 1941

Armed guards on tunnels and bridges.
1941 US Army Signal Corp crews working for ACS and the Alaska Railroad.
Anchorage Reality in 1941

- The City ended at 15th Avenue.
- Bootleggers Cove was appropriately named.
- Anchorage High and Elementary were in one building on 6th Ave.
- Merrill Field was the big airport.
- The Glenn Highway was the only dirt track out of town.
Merrill served military and civilian aviation.
June 3, 1942  Air attack on Dutch Harbor at Fort Meares
1941 Passage Canal side of tunnel project placing fill.
1942 Diversion channel for Whittier Creek
Nov 20, 1942

Whittier Tunnel Holing Through

Major General Simon B. Buchner

Colonel B. B. Talley
Whittier Railroad Dock being built with materials landed from supply ships and barges entering Passage Canal.
April 3, 1943  US Army Railway Operating Battalion with 25 officers and 1,090 enlisted men arrived to assist.
April 1943

714th track gang building Whittier spur track.
June 1, 1943  
First train into the new Whittier Yard
June 8, 1943

The first troop transport to call at Whittier
Capt. Wakefield, Maj. Burgoyne, Lt. Col. Burleson

June 11, 1943  U.S. Army Port of Whittier senior staff.
1943 Original wood frame garrison construction
June 11, 1943
Port Of Whittier
Engineer Staff

Jack Felte, Gen Electrical and Mechanical Super
Al Swalling, West Coast Construction Super
Lt Col J.M. McGreevy, CO 42\textsuperscript{nd} Engineers
Maj C. B. Burgoyne, Resident Engineer
Robert W. Craig, Chief Draftsman
Antone A. Anderson, Chief Engineer
August 1943

New ARR depot near completion
June 8, 1943

Photos of this era were classified SECRET
1943

ARR infrastructure still under construction
1943  Army motor pool, cold storage, laundry etc.
1943

Alaska Communications System Building
The first permanent concrete structure in Whittier
ACS building was a self contained secure site for classified communications and Post Censors Office.

October 1943

The oldest surviving building in Whittier
June 15, 1944

First Diesel locomotives on the Alaska Railroad
Dec. 24 & 25 1944

714th Christmas Special Train traveled from Seward all the way to Fairbanks.
August 15, 1945
Victory Over Japan Day

- Hostilities end.
- Military draw down starts.
- Restrictions on travel are lifted.
- Alaska’s strategic military location on the globe has been proven.
- Alaska Railroad’s infrastructure other than Whittier is worn out.
1945 Col. Otto Ohlson retired. His green suits, hat and black sedan rail inspection car were trademarks.
Col. John P. Johnson
ARR GM Jan 1946 – Oct 1953
January 9, 1946    Wind removed the deck of Bear Valley Bridge
March of 1946

Port of Whittier is closed and turned over to the Alaska Railroad for operation.
1946

Seward on Resurrection Bay

US Army Dock

Alaska Railroad Dock
USNS Gammon discharging at Whittier Dock

September 12, 1946
Alaska Railroad Relief Convoy of 1946

Left Seattle  November 24
Arrived Anchorage December 19

18 trucks  with 29 men

Traveled 3165 miles in 25 days
Maritime strike of 5 months ended with arrival of the SS Alaska in Seward.
May 21, 1947
U.S. vessels were returned to private civilian control.

Passenger Service resumes to Alaskan ports
Fly over the weather and the Pacific Ocean

October 1947

Commercial Airline service expands.
Territory of Alaska
War time population Flux

- Year     Total population  Military
- 1940     75,000             1,000
- 1943     233,000            152,000
- 1946     99,000             Post war drop
- 1950     138,000            Cold war
1947 Columbia Lumber Company mill and yard
1950  Whittier Port Facilities

Army  Union Oil

ARR Docks
Reality Check for 1951

- All fuel except coal was imported.
- Seward Highway was dedicated.
- IBM installed the first computer center in Alaska at the payroll and accounting department of the Alaska Railroad in Anchorage.
June 17, 1952

Fire destroyed the Whittier Railroad Dock
1954 Buckner building, largest structure in Alaska
Alaska Steam Ship Passenger Service was discontinued in October 1954. Commercial aviation had come of age with large comfortable pressurized aircraft now flying above the worst Alaskan weather.

Pacific Northern Airlines  PNA
Northwest Orient Airlines
Pan American World Airways
Alaska Airlines
August 1955

USNS Frederick Funston being assisted to Whittier dock by resident Army Transportation Corps Tug
Hodge Building named in honor of Colonel Walter William Hodge, CE
1957 Last of temporary housing in Whittier.
1956

ARR Marginal Wharf at Whittier
July 1956

East end of Marginal Wharf, Whittier
Winter 1956/57

Record snow fall total 72 feet.
April 1957

Record annual snow fall of 72 feet is melting. Photo from front door of Durand family home. The military material in the background would have made this photo subject to censorship.
1957

Ice Worm shuttle service Portage to Whittier
January 3, 1957

Alaska became the 49th State of the Union
May 18, 1962

First roll on roll off rail barge arrived Whittier
August 10, 1963  Clair Engle began service with 30 cars
1963 HydroTrain Roll on Roll off Service

Trailers and road vehicles on the top deck

Railroad Cars below.
Barge slip connection at Whittier
500 roundtrips in 10 years of service between Westminster B.C. & Whittier Alaska

Capacity was 58 railcars

1963 - 1974

Alaska Steamship Co. S. S. Alaska III
Pre 1964

Union Oil and US Army POL finger piers
Hodge Building in foreground.
Pre 1964  Columbia Lumber Company at Whittier Creek
Only the foundations of the slash burner and power house chimney remain after three tidal waves washed over the mill site.
Ferry Slip destroyed Union Oil and Army POL piers gone.
Post Earthquake
March 27, 1964

Rail yard was covered in debris but still in place and serviceable.
Damage to Alaska Railroad Depot

Post Earthquake
March 27, 1964
Post Earthquake
March 27, 1964

Marginal Wharf damaged but in service.
Post Earthquake
March 27, 1964

Former Colombia Lumber and Union Oil
1945-1968

10,000 gallon USAX tank cars used between Whittier, Anchorage and Fairbanks to supply military fuel needs.

Fort Richardson POL Terminal
1969

MV Bartlett with service to Valdez and Cordova connecting with ARR shuttle at Whittier
Alaska State Ferry Taku at Whittier Slip
Transportation support for the North Slope Oil Field development provided a boom in traffic for the Alaska Railroad.
1969

Whittier incorporated as a 2nd class City.
Rhapsody provided Tourist Cruise service with transfer to trains at Whittier for two seasons.
1976

TAPS pipe loading in Valdez for rail barge shipment to Whittier. 1300 car loads made the ocean trip 90 miles across Prince William Sound.
The Alaska Railroad was transferred from the US Department of Transportation to the State of Alaska for $26 million.
The salvage of the vessel prevented a far larger spill.

Bad Friday
March 24, 1989

EXXON Valdez oil spill cleanup support from the Port of Whittier.
Bear Valley entry to Anton Anderson Memorial Tunnel. 13,300 foot tunnel accommodates both Alaska Railroad trains and highway traffic.
1998

Construction started on Anton Anderson Memorial tunnel under Maynard Mountain
Road way and rails in the longest combined tunnel in America at 13,300 feet.
2005 Cruise Ship Terminal Whittier, Alaska
2004 Whittier port facilities and rail yard.
Barge loaded in Seattle bound for Whittier
2004

Stacker reclaimers for loading coal on ships. Cruise ships tie up next door at the Alaska Railroad Dock in Seward Alaska.
1975 – 2006

TOTE  Totem Ocean Trailer Express ships with hardened hulls call twice a week at Anchorage from Tacoma.
2006

Whittier is at the heart of marine and land transportation in Alaska.
Visions of Whittier

1951

The only constant is change.

2001

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- THE FORGOTTEN WAR Series by Cohen
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1998 Whittier prior to opening the tunnel to highway traffic.