

## LIFE ON THE ALCAN HIGHWAY

by

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On March 15, 1943, I arrived at Dawson Creek B.C. The weather was about 70° zero. I had been told previously that I was a pioneer, as I was going to be the first Negro woman to go to that section of the country, and believe me, I felt that pioneering spirit when I was met by the Assistant Field Director, Mr. Hubert Puttman, and about thirteen hundred men. The expression on their faces exhibited tension, anxiety and a grand appreciation for a Negro woman. They had been up in the woods working on the Alcan Highway for one and one half years and had not seen a Negro woman during that time.

We rode over a dirt road in an army car to the 95th Engineer Army Post. My room was located in a one-story, wooden hut, known as the Recreation Club House for the Negro soldiers. To my happy surprise the men had made a dressing table, wash stand, and a chest of drawers from odd pieces of wood for my convenience and comfort. They had placed a note on the dressing table that read: "To the First Lady of the Alcan, we are pleased to have you and hope that you will enjoy the use of this furniture as much as we have enjoyed making it for you. You are brave and have done a fine thing to leave all the comforts of civilian life to come to us and may God guide you and keep you always. We feel as if this war is really worth fighting for now that you have come to us, and I know we will win this war." After reading this note, I retired determined more than ever to work very hard to aid in the winning of this war. I, too, feel as if our democracy is truly worth fighting for.

I had been instructed, before leaving the Pacific Area Office of the American Red Cross at San Francisco, California, that the Recreation Club should open on March 19, 1943, so the following days were spent in sewing curtains, cleaning windows, arranging furniture, besides the work of having interviews with soldiers concerning their many social, recreation and welfare problems. The enlisted men were very kind and eager to help make the Club opening a big success so, of course, on their days off, they would rush over to their "Home away from Home"--the Red Cross hut--and aid me in making curtains and placing of Negro girls' pictures on the walls, which was one of their main interests in view of the fact that they had not seen any Negro women or pictures of them during their stay there. I immediately sent to the States to collect pictures from friends of mine that might be used as a picture display. The folk back home should have seen them stand for hours at a time, staring at the pictures.

The next scene of interest is found on the right of the door as one enters the Club, known as the "snack bar." On Sunday and Wednesday nights we served sandwiches, made of minced ham, cheese and potted meat. The men liked these very much because they reminded them so much of sandwiches eaten at home.

There is a bulletin board entitled, "Have a Grin," on which are found jokes and readings of amusement cut from magazines and books donated by the American Red Cross. In the center of the floor there are two pool tables and two ping pong tables which are in use daily from 12:00 a.m. until 10:45 p.m. On the wall next to the tables scores are kept of tournaments and the winners