

# SHAPING

## Attention from Car

TESSA HOLLOWAY  
ALASKA HIGHWAY NEWS

Fighting a strong headwind and two-foot high waves, Don Smethurst of the 74th Engineers was fixing a gas leak when tragedy struck on Charlie Lake on May 14, 1942.

"I then heard a shout that we were sinking and seeing that was so I jumped clear. The pontoons were out of sight when I broke the surface. I was rescued, with another, by a trapper living (north) of the lake," Smethurst wrote in his testimony after the accident.

The trapper was Gus Hedin. He managed to save five men over several rescue attempts in a rowboat, while another 12 died. All men involved will be remembered May 21 in a ceremony to dedicate a memorial.

It's a story that Daniel Turvey of Michigan, son of Major John M. Turvey who drownd that day, knew nothing about until recently.

"When (my father) passed away I was five. I was kept in the dark about it all the time," he said. "I don't even remember him."

He said the U.S. military didn't explain what happened to the families, except that the soldiers drowned. Only after researching the incident on their own, the Turvey family went to Charlie Lake two years ago to see where the barge sank.

There they connected with Roger Gregoire of the Northern Trails Historical Society, who over the years had heard many of the stories of the sinking. His interest peaked, Gregoire started researching the incident. It took him five years to compile the story, and he brought it to the attention of Fort St. John council last November.

Mayor Jim Eglinski said he valued the proposal from the start, adding it would be a stop of interest along the Alaska Highway for decades to come.

"It's really emotional," he said, "and it's going to be a focal point for tourists travelling through."

Twelve pillars have already been installed in Rotary Park, next to Charlie Lake, where the pontoon set off 66 years ago this month. On Saturday, they will be joined by a monument with last-minute landscaping to

# LIVES

Community comes together in seven months to recognize a nearly 70-year-old tragedy at Charlie Lake

Canada, U.S. focuses on the region next week for ceremony



MAY 15, 2008

Tessa Holloway/AHN

**Dave Diehl, owner of Arctech Welding, welds the letters onto the side of the memorial that recognizes 12 soldiers who lost their lives when a pontoon sank in Charlie Lake during the construction of the Alaska Highway. His company was one of many that donated to the monument, which required 200 hours of design and construction.**

prepare it for the unveiling on Wednesday, when local dignitaries will be joined by some family members and U.S. Ambassador to Canada David Wilkins.

"This is a story that over six decades or more has not died," said Wilkins,

adding it epitomizes the partnership between Canada and the U.S.

But the real guests of honour, say local organizers, are the families of the victims.

Daniel and Mary Turvey admit when this process started, they didn't expect

to see it finished so soon.

"We feel honoured, absolutely honoured, that the Canadian government would actually do something like this," Daniel Turvey said. "We think so much of it that nine of our family are coming up there."