

DEC 21 1943

F. D. Defends Canal Project As Justified by War Needs

President Roosevelt said today that he was fully aware of the Canol oil project in Canada at the time that its exploration was first proposed.

This project, which cost \$100,000,000, and has been much criticized is now under investigation by the Senate Truman Committee.

Mr. Roosevelt told his news conference there was plenty of reason for doing something about getting oil out of the ground in that part of the world because at the time it seemed highly likely that there would be a great deal of fighting in the Aleutian Island area. He also said that anything that could be done to provide oil from a nearby source to supply the war needs in the Aleutian area was well worth-while.

He emphasized that this was an emergency war project and fully justified by war necessity.

Project which has been denounced in Congress as an example of military waste, was labeled essential to the success of the United Nations' offensive strategy, in testimony of Lieut. Gen. Brehon Somervell, chief of the Army Service Forces, before the Truman War Investigating Committee yesterday.

Somervell accepted all responsibility for the "Canol" development at White Horse in northwest Canada. He spent five hours, part of them in secret session, lauding the construction of 600 miles of pipeline and a refinery in the wilderness, concluding with this admonition:

Confidentially Explained

"It would be the height of folly to abandon it when so great a prize, as I explained to you confidentially, is within our grasp. The chiefs of staff have considered the position of the Northwest in our future strategy. They have decided this project is essential and review with our allies in the last month has served to strengthen that decision.

"It would be a very reckless man indeed who would question the strategy that has led to an almost unbroken series of successes and will lead to victory."

Flanked by four brigadier generals, three colonels, three captains and 3 mere lieutenants, the latter being used to carry huge colored charts to buttress the general's arguments, Somervell reviewed the considerations which led him on April 29, 1942, to authorize the "Canol" project.

"The enemy was at the door," he declared. "A Jap submarine had shelled California refineries in February. Tankers were being sunk at a rate far exceeding construction. Gasoline was absolutely necessary for the defense of Alaska. Our backs were to the wall."

Deemed "A General's Whim"

Senator Harley M. Kilgore (D.), of West Virginia, noted that the original Army estimate of time required to complete the project was only six months. This was "over optimistic," Somervell admitted. The present scheduled completion date is March, 1944.

"Had you known then that it would be two years instead of six months before the project would be completed, would you have approved it?" Kilgore asked him.

"I doubt it," said Somervell.

The witness was indignant at references in congressional debate to the project as "a general's whim."

"Any inference that the matter was handled in a cavalier fashion without consulting my associates or the general staff is utterly without foundation," he asserted.

Somervell said the Army not only intended completing the project, but would be before Congress shortly, asking for funds to expand it. He said President Roosevelt had approved the original project. The Navy, War Production Board and other Government agencies recently advised the committee they favored abandonment of the project.