

HOW DEADHORSE GOT ITS NAME

I was recently invited to a gathering at which several people associated with the North Slope were present. During conversations about the North Slope, different stories were related as to how Deadhorse got its name. I was amazed at the diversity of the explanations given by persons supposedly with inside knowledge of just how the name Deadhorse originated. None were correct.

Since I was with Burgess Construction Company at the time the initial construction of the Deadhorse Airport occurred, I have particular knowledge of how the name Deadhorse came into being—first for the airport and later for the general area around the airport.

The owner of Burgess Construction Company was Lloyd Burgess who founded the company in Astoria, Oregon soon after his discharge from the U.S. Navy "Sea Bees" at the end of World War II. In 1951 he moved the company from Astoria, Oregon to Fairbanks, Alaska and pursued the construction of buildings primarily in the Fairbanks area.

As an interesting sidelight, another Fairbanks construction company, Reed & Martin Construction Company, was owned by Lloyd Martin. Both Burgess Construction Company and Reed & Martin Construction Company did well, and their owners were hence locally referred to as "Lloyds of Fairbanks," an obvious parallel to the status of Lloyds of London.

In the mid 1960s Lloyd purchased Wright Truck and Tractor Company in order to enlarge his business to include heavy construction, as well as building construction. At the same time he employed George MacClanahan to head up the enlarged company.

Soon after George's employment and the diversification of the company into the heavy construction area, the need to acquire a trucking permit from the regulatory Alaska Transportation Commission (ATC) became apparent. At the time, obtaining an ATC permit to haul commodities on Alaska's highways was a time-consuming, long-term venture, especially for the hauling of gravel which was the primary commodity of interest to Burgess Construction.

An obvious means to a quick solution was, of course, to purchase a company which already had an ATC permit for gravel hauling. A market search disclosed that a local trucking company was in financial difficulty and was for sale. This company was of particular interest to Burgess for two reasons.

1. It owned an ATC permit allowing gravel haul.
2. Its deficit financial position provided for a loss carry forward which complimented Burgess' tax position substantially.

The name of the company was Dead Horse Haulers and was owned by four men from well-to-do east coast families.

Henry D. Tiffany, III
Howard S. Bass
Roscoe Bicknell, III
Edwin Tiffany

The Tiffanys were brothers from New York City and related to the Tiffanys who had extensive holdings in New York City on Manhattan Island. Howard Bass was related to the Bass industrial family of Philadelphia. Roscoe Bicknell was from a family engaged in the production and sale of lumber in Massachusetts.

Originally, Henry and Howard had come to Alaska after college to make their fortune (like a lot of us misplaced easterners) and lit in Fairbanks. An initial venture was the financing of new trucks for a local hauler, Neal & Sons, for work on the Chena Hot Springs Road. Neal & Sons did not do well and could not pay for the trucks, and Henry and Howard repossessed them. Basically, they had two options:

1. find a buyer for the trucks; or
2. operate the trucks themselves.

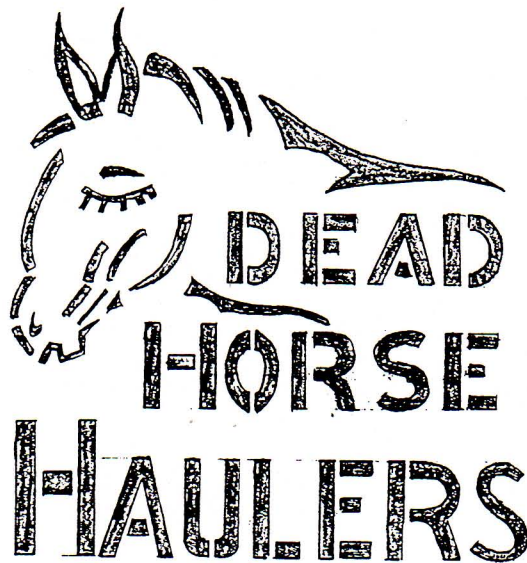
They decided to go into the hauling business and Henry sent for his younger brother, Edwin, and his friend, Roscoe Bicknell, III, to complete the group that founded Dead Horse Haulers.

Dead Horse Haulers was incorporated in Fairbanks, Alaska in September 1962. Howard Bass suggested the name of Dead Horse Haulers. It was rumored that he came up with this name after spending a night with one of Fairbanks' less attractive ladies.

Roscoe Bicknell, however, discounted this rumor because, according to Roscoe, Howard was a real class act with the ladies and was very selective of whom he socialized with and that any of his selections could have been candidates for a Playboy centerfold.

Roscoe noted that Howard, among other things, was involved in making nature movies in Alaska and had previously filmed the famous White Pass gold rush trail northerly from Skagway. Along this route is an area known as Dead Horse Gulch where many of the pack horses ended their careers during the infamous Gold Rush. Roscoe believes that Dead Horse Gulch was the real source of Howard's brainstorm. I agree with Roscoe primarily because I never met an unattractive lady during the years I lived in Fairbanks.

A logo was developed by Roscoe Bicknell's father and was emblazoned on the trucks repossessed from Neal & Sons.



Note: From original stencil used to identify Dead Horse trucks.

Over the next three years the company engaged in trucking on various construction projects, and consistently lost money. Howard Bass provided more money each year and took stock as payment, so he became the major stockholder.

By the end of 1965 it was apparent that the company would not survive, and Howard Bass was not eager to provide additional monies. At the last Board of Directors meeting on September 9, 1965, the following entry occurs in the minutes of the meeting:

“Decided to sell out... If a good sale can be found and all matter(s) cleaned up, we could then decide not to get more equipment and find something else to do, like fishing, kayaking, flying, etc.”

One could get the idea, from this statement and the company name and logo, that the Dead Horse Haulers venture was not a very serious one for its young eastern operators.

In February 1966 an agreement was reached between Lloyd Burgess and the owners of Dead Horse Haulers for the purchase of the company. The trucks owned by Dead Horse Haulers, complete with logo, became the property of Burgess Construction Company.

With the explosion of exploratory activity on the North Slope, the demand for earth moving contractors to build roads, pads, and other structures on the North Slope intensified. At that time, the “oil patch” was non-union and the owners endeavored to keep it that way. Burgess was a union contractor, so, in order to obtain non-union work, he formed a non-union subsidiary called Spruce Equipment Company headed by James P. (Buck) Allen. Buck had been with Wright Truck and Tractor (owned by five Wright brothers from Nenana) and, after a short stint with Peter Kewit Sons Co., Buck joined the Burgess group.

In the spring of 1968 Burgess Construction, through the Spruce Equipment Company, under MacClanahan’s and Allen’s direction, decided to join the activity on the North Slope and with the help of Jim Dalton selected a winter route between Livengood and Sagwan over which cat trains would move equipment to the North Slope area. Several Burgess trains negotiated the route under the leadership of John Clark. These trains consisted of tractors, loaders, trucks, and portable camp units, along with support equipment. Included in the trains were several of the Dead Horse Haulers trucks still bearing that name and logo. The trains moved north over frozen ground in early 1968 and stopped at Sagwan, which at that time was an airport and supply base for the North Slope oil exploration activity.

In 1968, the Spruce operation moved northward to construct a temporary runway for Standard Oil Company of California (SOCAL) in the Sag River just east of the present

Deadhorse Airport. this runway was to be used to support a drilling operation. Much of the move was accomplished by using Interior Airways' Herc. After the move and runway construction, Spruce established a construction camp just east of SOCAL's drilling site.

With the discovery of the Prudhoe oil field in 1968, SOCAL decided to build a more permanent airstrip and contracted with Spruce to construct a longer, wider strip early in 1969. By this time, however, Spruce's construction equipment was in high demand by other oil companies as the need for pads and roads was urgent now that oil had been discovered. A contract was executed between Spruce and SOCAL in early 1969 for the new runway construction. The "drop dead" completion date was March 31, 1969. All construction had to be completed on the runway on or before that date.

In Alaska, the SOCAL operation was run by "Chat" Chatterton (later an Anchorage legislator), and the engineer in charge of the development activities was Joe Dremer. Dremer visited the North Slope sometime in mid March and discovered that Spruce had not even begun on the SOCAL runway. Needless to say, Joe was very unhappy but could do nothing until March 31st. He told Buck Allen that he would be back on March 31st and the runway had better be completed or else!!!

Spruce, in the meantime, was working two 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, doing jobs for ARCO, B.P., and others. On about the 22nd of March Spruce finished other work and threw all its equipment into the gravel haul from the Sag River to the SOCAL runway construction. This, of course, included the trucks with the Dead Horse logo still emblazoned on their sides.

Late on March 31st, true to his word, Dremer flew into the SOCAL area and deplaned. Spruce had nearly completed the runway work and only a few loads of gravel remained to be placed. Dremer had come to the North Slope for the single purpose of reading the riot act to Spruce, but was obviously disappointed as the runway was about to be completed on March 31, 1969 as agreed in the contract. As Dremer stood and watched the last few loads arrive, one of the trucks was a Dead Horse truck still with its logo in place.

As the Dead Horse truck went by, Joe saw the logo and said "Dead Horse, that's a damn good name for this place." The name stuck and from then on, it was known as the Dead Horse Airport. Pilots and ground-based radio operators quickly picked up

the name as it was essential to have a positive name identification since there were several small airstrips in the area.

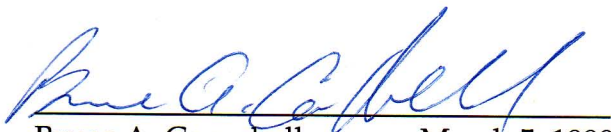
Later, the name Dead Horse sort of accrued to the surrounding area now known as Deadhorse. The original name consisted of two words, Dead Horse, but has since been shortened to a single word, Deadhorse, through usage.

The State acquired the SOCAL Deadhorse Airport in about 1970, after a heated debate between Rivers Constructions and Burgess Construction. Guy Rivers wanted the State airport at "Service City" which he owned, on the Kapurak River. Lloyd Burgess favored Dead Horse. Lloyd, however, was the Republican National Committeeman for Alaska and there just happened to be a Republican governor in Juneau. Dead Horse won.

By the time the FAA entered the picture, the Dead Horse name was fully entrenched and it had no real choice on name selections for the now main airport on the North Slope, and it was official identified as the Dead Horse Airport on FAA charts.

The frantic activity that occurred on the North Slope immediately after the discovery of oil is another story, but Burgess' camp, which at times resembled the Titanic abandon ship operation, acquired the name of Crazyhorse Camp, probably thanks to a surveyor named Siverly (Crazyhorse no longer exists).

The origin of the Dead Horse name goes to the original incorporators of Dead Horse Haulers, the Tiffanys, Bicknell, and particularly Bass. Burgess, MacClanahan, and Allen, through Spruce Equipment Company, created the circumstances, but the credit for the actual naming of Dead Horse goes to Joe Dremer, the SOCAL engineer in 1969.



Bruce A. Campbell March 5, 1999
Executive V. P. Burgess Construction (in 1969)

Where are the players now?

Lloyd Burgess – Seattle, Washington
George MacClanahan – California
James "Buck" Allen – Nenana, Alaska
Henry Tiffany – Douglas, Alaska
Edwin Tiffany – New York City

Roscoe Bicknell – Juneau, Alaska
Howard Bass – Deceased
"Chat" Chatterton – Deceased
Joe Dremer – Salem, Oregon