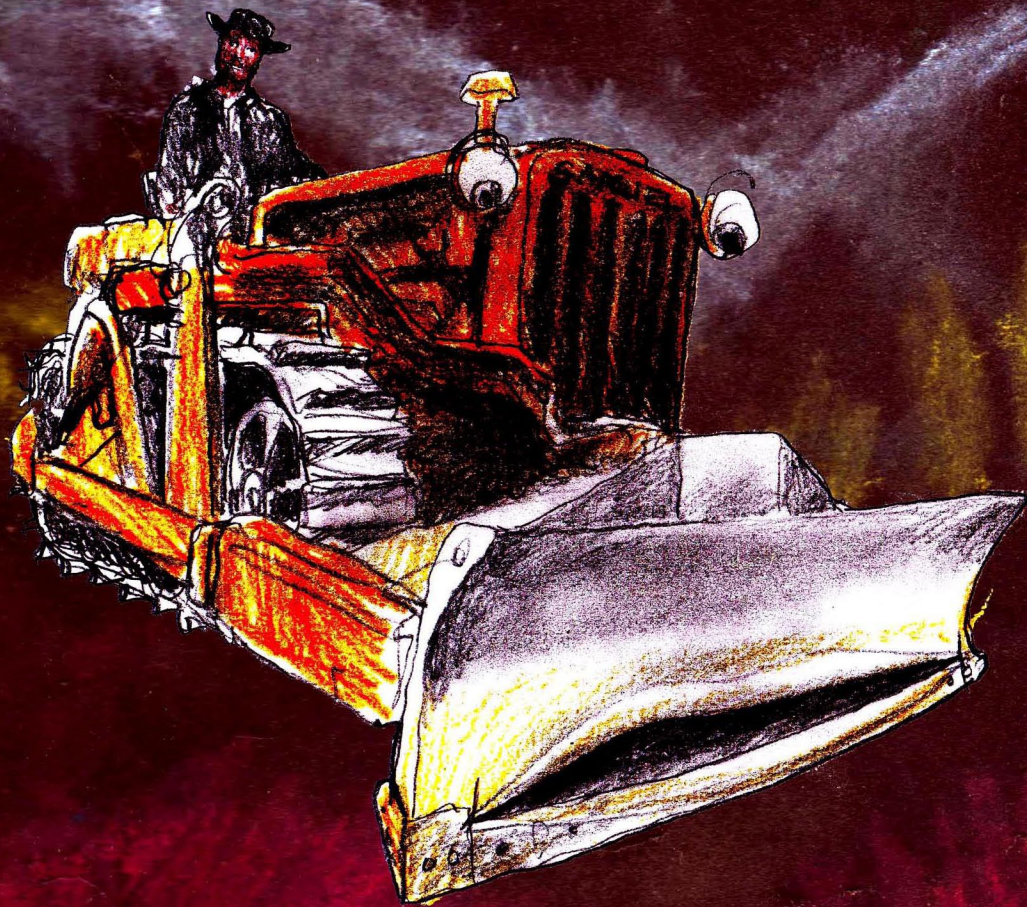


Samuel and Nehemiah

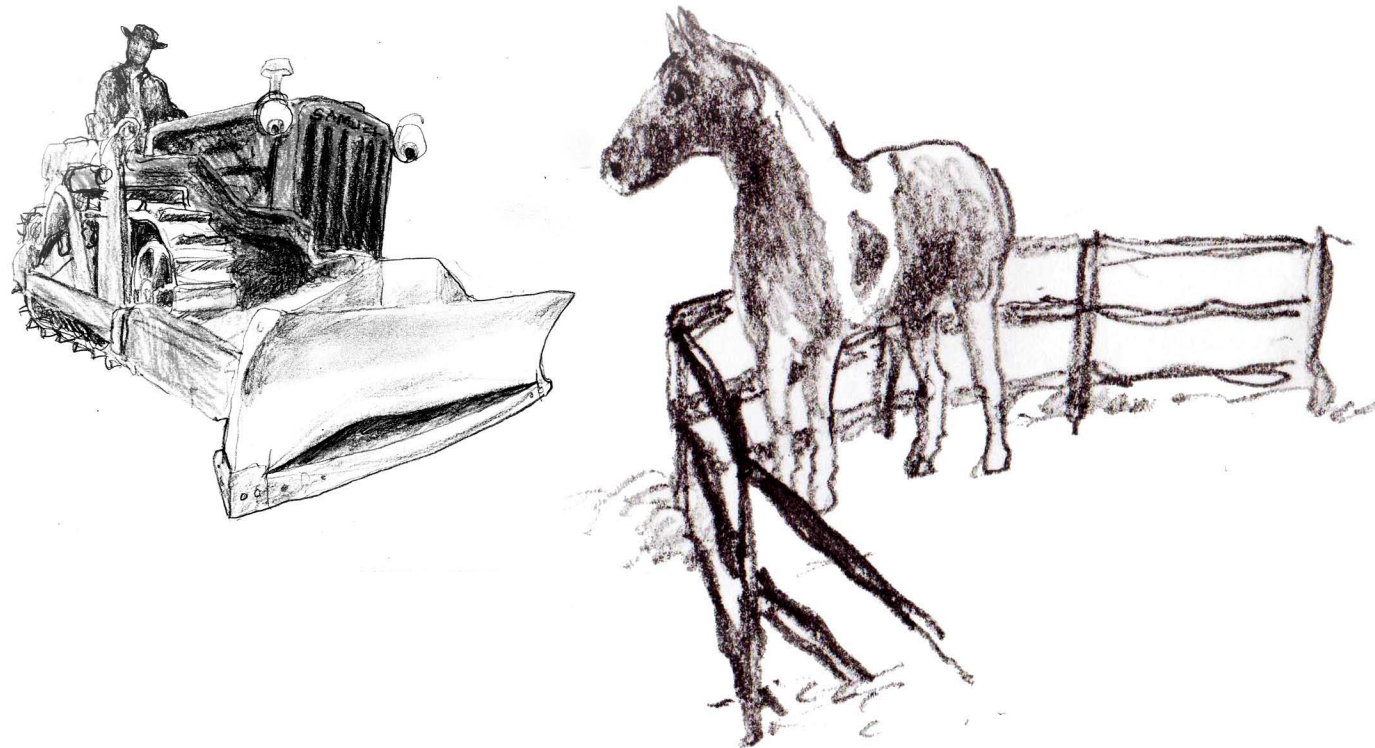


Build the Alcan Highway

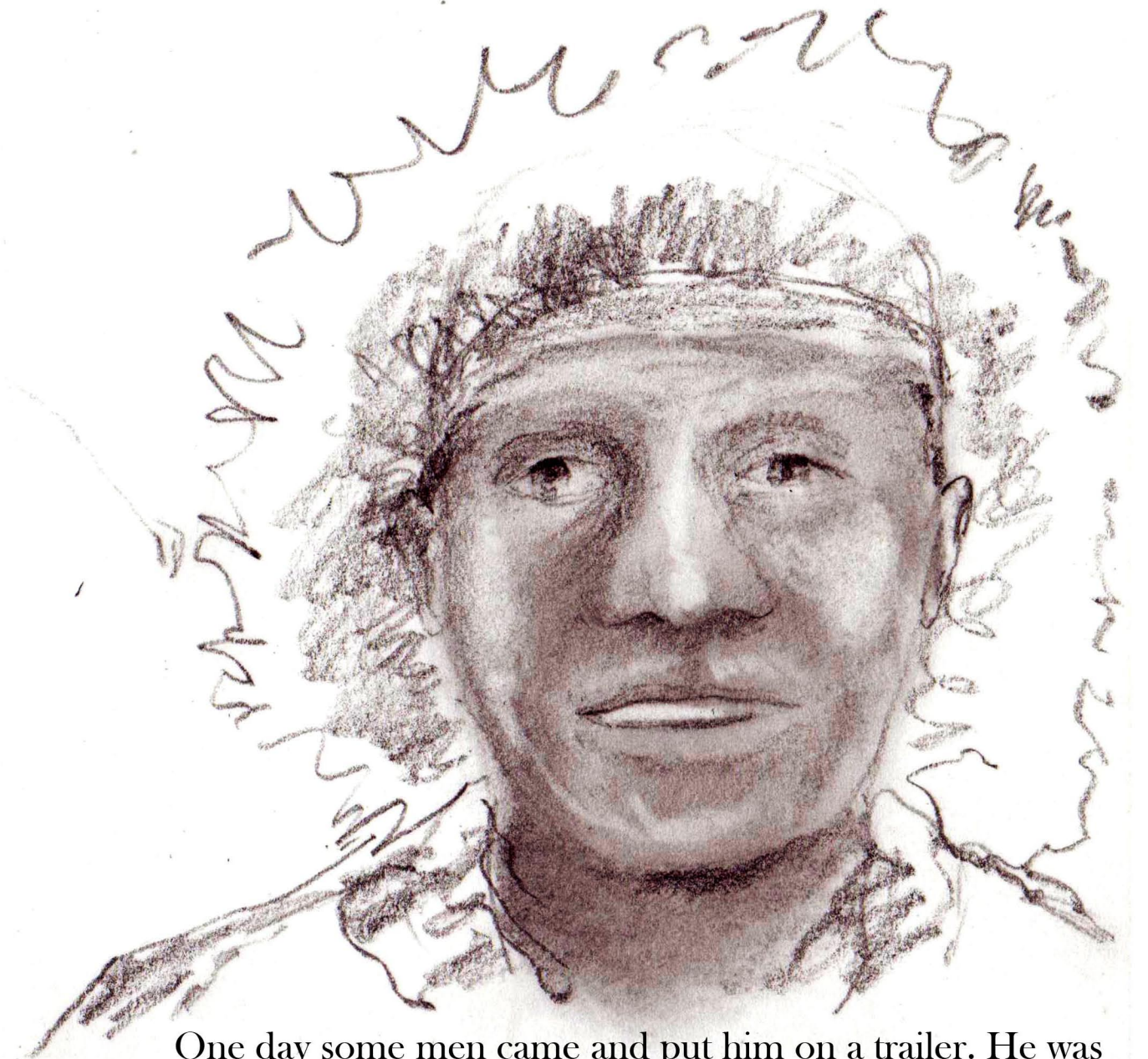
Written and Illustrated by Bob Kirchman

“Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” - Psalms 37:2, 3

Samuel was a little bulldozer. He lived on a farm with his two cousins the big farm tractors. They did most of the heavy work but Samuel loved to build farm roads, silage trenches and even a round pen for the horses! His life on the farm was happy.



But soon the country was at war. The men on the farm went away to fight. Samuel wanted to do his part too, but what could a little bulldozer do? Of course! He could help grow crops to feed the army.



One day some men came and put him on a trailer. He was going away to help build a road the army needed to supply the far off territory of Alaska. The enemy intended to cut off ships from supplying Alaska. The army decided to build a road - the Alcan Highway.

The army really didn't think little bulldozers would be much help. Samuel mostly spent his days in a garage until one night he met a friend. A man named Nehemiah came quietly into the garage and said "hey little fellow, how would you like to be part of a 'midnight requisition.'"

Nehemiah was part of the 97th Engineer Battalion and the 97th hadn't received any mechanical equipment. They had to work by hand felling trees and building road. It was hard work. Nehemiah thought Samuel could help. That is why he 'borrowed' him from a better supplied unit.

Since the other units only wanted the big D-8 bulldozers, Samuel got to live with the 97th. Nehemiah had run printing presses in New Orleans, Louisiana and so he knew how to keep Samuel oiled and in good shape mechanically. He had run a mower tractor working for the city one summer. He taught the men how to operate Samuel.

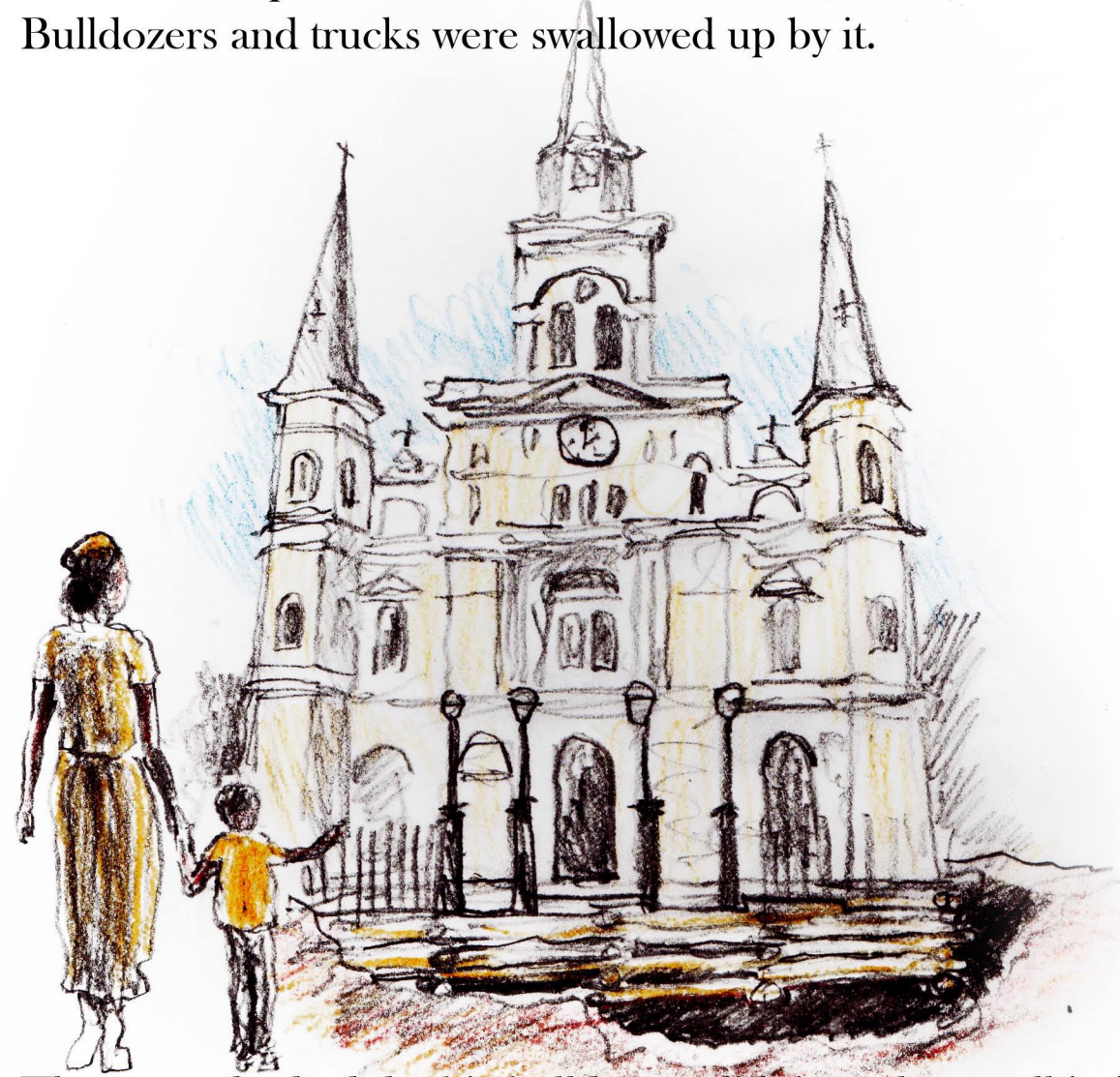
Some of the men of the 97th came from small country towns. They could not read or write. That is why their commanders thought they couldn't operate equipment. Nehemiah and his friend Brentley helped the men write letters home. They taught them to read and write. They now wrote to their wives and children in their own hand!



That night Nehemiah fired up Samuel's engine. The next morning the men of the 97th built three miles of road! They put up a sign that said "Proudly built by the men of the 97th. See what we could do if we had equipment!"



The men all learned to work with Samuel and Bella, the two little bulldozers. Everybody learned how to work together! At first the work went really well. Then the men and dozers came to the country of muskeg. Muskeg was land that was frozen mud and old plants. It turned into mud in the summer. Bulldozers and trucks were swallowed up by it.



The men who had the big bulldozers didn't work so well in it. Even Samuel and Bella would have had trouble too, but Nehemiah remembered some things from his youth in the Deep South. He remembered how the great cathedral in New Orleans was built on a swamp. Its foundations were built on wood 'cribbing' and floated over the swamp. The wood that was underwater never rotted. The cathedral had stood for over a hundred years!

Then Nehemiah remembered the old corduroy roads. They were made of logs laid down in marshy places so that cars and trucks wouldn't sink. The men of the 97th built their own corduroy roads over the muskeg. Then they laid evergreen boughs over the corduroy to keep the muskeg cold.



Samuel and Bella worked together to push dirt and then gravel over the top to make an all-weather road. The small nimble dozers learned to work together so well they outworked the big bulldozers. The road was finished in eight months!

Samuel and Bella went to live in Nunavut and you might see them at work building pads for greenhouse agriculture in native communities. Sometimes they build the ice roads that keep their communities connected to the outside world in winter. Nehemiah went home to New Orleans and taught hundreds of kids to play tennis working for the city recreation department. He and his friend Brentley never lost their love of teaching!

Everybody who built that amazing road learned the value of teamwork and that every member of the team had something to contribute. They carried the lessons of that wonderful road for the rest of their lives!

“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken to me. And they said, let us rise and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.” - Nehemiah 2:18



Just imagine joining the army and finding out that you are going to be sent to one of the coldest places on earth! That is exactly what happened to the men of the 97th Engineer Battalion as they were called upon to build the Alcan Highway. They were one of four all black regiments who worked on the road. Their determination and dedication helped to cement the case for desegregating the United States military during the Second World War.

This little story follows a man from Louisiana, Nehemiah Atkinson, who actually worked on the road. PSALM 37:2,3 was a favorite scripture of his and he actually quoted it when working with young people as a tennis instructor in New Orleans after the war. Atkinson had been a printing press operator before the war so he was indeed familiar with equipment. Here I’ve made a composite story as he certainly might not have been the only person (or the first) to figure out how to build a road over muskeg. Nor is there any record of his actually participating in the “midnight requisition” of a bulldozer, though the 97th certainly ‘borrowed’ such equipment.

Samuel is a D-4 bulldozer, which was one of the types of tractors actually used to build the road though the men generally preferred the lare D-8 traactors. The D-4 is an extremely nimble machine and there are people who have lovingly kept them in operation.

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