



Behind the

# Trans-Alaska PIPELINE

It takes a certain kind of landman to venture into new territory

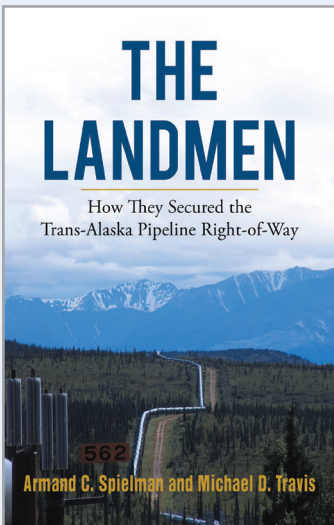
BY ARMAND SPIELMAN AND MICHAEL TRAVIS

In a new book, *The Landmen: How They Secured the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Right of Way*, the reader gets a glimpse behind the scenes of securing the land for the pipeline footprint.

In 1969, Armand Spielman of Atlantic Richfield took the assignment as landman to acquire the right of way for the 800 miles needed for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. But he couldn't do it alone, so he recruited his friend Jay Sullivan. Jay hired untested and young men, including Dan Beardsley (who would later become president of IRWA) and Robert Ylvisaker, also known as Silver Salmon. Spielman and his crew set out to move mountains to get the right of way.

But mountains would have been easier to move than some of the miners and homesteaders in the projected path. The sheer enormity of the project—which has been called one of the seven engineering wonders of the modern world—boggled the mind and overwhelmed available facilities in the Last Frontier, barely 10 years into statehood, as the following excerpt shows.

We take up the story as Armand Spielman and Harry Brelsford, Associate General Counsel, prepare to submit the right of way application and required plats to the Anchorage office of the Bureau of Land Management. Harry has just asked Armand about the plats.



“Where are these?” asked Harry.

“You mean the attached survey plats? Right here,” replied Armand as he pointed to the stack of rolls along the whole length of the back wall.

“Oh my,” muttered Harry under his breath. “Why so many?”

Armand smiled and answered, “Because the BLM requires plats scaled to one-inch-equals-a-hundred-foot. At that scale, eight hundred miles of right of way generates a lot of rolls.”

Harry nodded and asked, “How were you going to get them to the BLM?”

“Rent a truck,” replied Armand. “We don’t have a company pickup and these rolls certainly won’t fit in a car.”

Harry sucked in his breath and said, “OK. I’ll rent it. Let’s plan on delivering the package first thing tomorrow morning.” Harry went silent for a moment as he contemplated the enormity of the package and then continued, “You know, Armand, I’ve never been involved in something so big.”

Armand nodded as he too looked upon the plats and replied, “Nobody has, Harry.”

Early the next morning, Harry drove the rented pickup to the BLM office at 555 Cordova Street. Armand navigated and suggested a direct route down Sixth Avenue so that they could park in the loading zone directly in front of the building. The rolled survey plats filled the truck bed.

“OK, we’re here,” said Armand as he pulled a large manila envelope from his satchel. “Let’s go in and register our application.”

“What about the plats?” asked Harry.

Armand laughed as he replied, “Oh, I imagine that we’ll have to carry them in when the time comes. They’ll let us know.”

Armand and Harry walked through the front double doors. The clerk’s office was immediately to the left. Armand approached the window, which was really a half door with a small wooden counter, and caught the attention of the woman working at her desk. She took off her reading glasses and let them dangle on a beaded tether around her neck. “Yes? How may I help you?”

All business, thought Armand. He gave her his most charming smile and said, “We want to file a right of way request on behalf of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System.”





The clerk gave Armand a frown of uncertainty as she stiffly stood and walked to the window. “May I see your application?” Armand carefully opened the envelope and handed her the letter and a fifty-dollar check. The clerk put on her reading glasses and carefully read the letter while Harry and Armand stood in front of her. After an uncomfortable five minutes, she put down the letter and scrutinized the check. “Very well,” she finally said, “everything appears in order. Where are the plats referenced in the letter?”

Armand jerked his thumb to the doors and said, “Right outside. Would you like us to bring them inside?”

The clerk took off her glasses and answered, “Yes, please. You may hand them to me.”

Armand turned so she couldn’t see his devilish grin as he replied, “Yes, ma’am. Back in a jiffy.”

Harry and Armand blocked the front doors open and began carrying the rolls, two at a time, inside and passing them to the clerk through the window. Within thirty seconds, she was overwhelmed and began stacking the rolls along the wall.

“This is highly irregular!” she gasped. “How many more rolls do you have?”

“Oh, we just started,” replied Armand. “We have a whole pickup-load.” The clerk immediately called upstairs for help. Two men appeared shortly and assisted Harry and Armand with unloading the truck.

When the unloading was completed, Armand calmly walked back to the clerk, who stood appalled as she looked upon her devastated office. “May I trouble you to date-stamp the front page and give me a receipt for the check?” he asked sweetly.

The clerk raked Armand’s throat with a cutting glare. Then she calmed herself. “Yes, of course,” she replied with a forced steadiness. “One moment, please.” She found her stamp on the floor among other knocked-over items and punched the ink onto the first page. Then she fired up the thermocopier and burned Armand a copy. With the remainder of her professional resolve, she wrote out a receipt and gave it to Armand.

Armand politely bowed and said, “Thank you, ma’am. If the Land Office has any questions, please refer them to me.”

“You can be sure of it,” she replied curtly. ☹️



*Armand Spielman, the Landman himself, passed away February 17, 2016, but his co-author, Michael Travis, got a proof copy into his hands before he died. Travis is the principal of Travis/Peterson Environmental Consulting, Inc., in Anchorage, Alaska. The Landmen, How they Secured the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Right of Way, by Spielman and Travis was published earlier this year.*