

The Big Picture – Inland Waterways

Master Sergeant Stuart Queen: What do you think of when you hear the word Alaska? Chances are you think of cold, ice, snow, a bleak wind-swept area over which arctic winds howl in frigid fury. And when you hear about American soldiers stationed there, you think of them in heavy parkas mushing through heavy drifts of snow, fighting the freezing temperature at every step.

But there is another side to Alaska, a warmer side, when snow and ice melt under the summer sun and become rushing streams, heading to the seas. These streams and rivers are of critical importance to the soldier in Alaska.

Recently we sent a *Big Picture* camera crew to Alaska to accompany a small combat unit on an unusual training mission, along some of these inland waterways of the land of the midnight sun.

Narrator: Our story begins a few months before the mission took place, the day we arrived in Alaska. From a ship we went right aboard a train speeding us through rolling country at first speckled with white, then all white except for the moose during alarm trying to keep pace with us.

From the moment we arrived at the post, one point was clear – if you're stationed in Alaska, you must know how to ski. So we were soon waxing those skis, like old hands ready for a weekend at Stowe or Aspen, but there the resemblance ended. Most of us had never touched skis before...