

Canadian Army Signals Have Big Job In the Northland with Radio Service

One of the most important jobs carried on by the Canadian Army in years of peace is the 22 station communications network of the North West Territories and Yukon Radio System which serves isolated communities in Canada's vast northwest.

Men wearing blue and white shoulder flashes of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, permanently located in outposts of a developing frontier, keep dawn to dawn vigils on happenings and demands of the rich, rugged, untamed Yukon and Northwest Territories. From the western shores of Hudson's Bay to the Alaska Border, wherever commercial or government activities demand, small crews of Signalmen keep communications open and thus provide the vital service necessary to opening and developing a new country.

The network, linked like a spider-web to the powerful transmitter "VED" at Edmonton, carries all messages in and out for commercial and government agencies. Virtually nothing goes on in the north outside the knowledge of the signalmen, corporals, sergeants and warrant officers who man each powerful transmitter.

Each day, the air is filled with hundreds of Morse-code messages which range from personal greetings and mining operation orders to meteorological reports and bush country flight plans. From the shores of the Arctic ocean to Canada's outside, the NWT & Y Radio System has in its 25 years of development become a part of the north.

Mining in the Mayo district of the Yukon 25 years ago gave the Army its start in northern communications. To supply necessary linkage with the rest of Canada, signallers established a station at Mayo and one at Dawson City which, by means of an existing land line could occasionally relay messages to Vancouver. The army established this small system where other government agencies had declined. It was what might be termed an "accidental start."

Since the hardships of those early days NWT & Y has grown with the country. Mining, trapping, lumbering, navigation, flying and the development of a rich unknown domain has continually demanded wider communications. Where people and industry settled, stations were built and manned.

Today, in the North, in places such as Yellowknife, Norman Wells, Aklavik, Fort Simpson and Fort Smith and 9 other points along the MacKenzie Basin, the navigable route into the North is well guarded by personnel of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals. Along this supply route lie the larger centres of development. Every resident is as close to "outside" Canada as his nearest signals detachment.

Pitchblend at Port Radium, site of Eldorado Mine brought signallers there. The supply of the Yukon and the importance of Whitehorse warranted the establishment of a station at the north end of the White Pass and Yukon Railway. Meteorological data, trapping and mining exploration brought such names as Baker Lake, Brochet and Fort Re-

liance onto the master register of the NWT & Y Radio System.

A community in the north may range anywhere from a few houses grouped together, to a large town such as Yellowknife, but in each community the army man and his family are classed with leading citizens. Not only is he the provider of linkage with the outside, an army man doing a job, but equally important he is a citizen of the community. With special equipment and facilities at his disposal and wide training in his background, he and his family become true northerners in every sense of the word and live up to the northern code "help your fellow citizen." In several cases an army signaller has been elected Mayor of his community.

Military records over the past years have shown a fairly regular pattern regarding northern postings. In many cases soldiers posted to the north before the war have "gone in" simply to get northern service over and done with. It has been found almost without exception that a year or so of service under conditions of the north have brought about a change of heart and that further northern postings were by preference. Today it is a simple matter to find many signallers with 10 to 15 years of northern service under their belts.

All sorts of unique jobs pass through the hands of the northern signal crews. In the early 30's army radios helped Royal Canadian Mounted Police search out the Mad Trapper and two signallers actually took part in the chase. S/Sgt. E. F. Hersey (now Major) who was wounded by the Mad Trapper and QMS R. F. Riddell (now Major) were in the posse which trekked across the snow to finish the killer.

When the "Truculent Turtle" made its history making flight from Hawaii to Egypt following World War II, signallers in Aklavik were giving "met" reports direct before the plane left the airfield. A short time ago Canada's most northern station on the delta of the MacKenzie passed greeting messages to

a party of Australian scientists on Heard Island in the Antarctic. Mounted Police on their rounds, river boats supplying the north, all aircraft, passing overhead as well as mining and trapping reports are logged on the signallers books.

One of today's most important jobs is the gathering and dispatch of meteorological data for world weather forecasts. Every hour, both day and night, signallers versed in "met" methods read atmospheric conditions and forward their hieroglyphics to compilation centres in Canada and the United States. These men of the North give you your daily forecasts.

In the past year three new stations were added to Northwest Territories and Yukon Radio System. Radio men from the training centre at Camp Borden and other points in Canada have gone into the North. New buildings and transmitters have been added to the air-waves. Plans are already on the drafting boards for further expansion of the organization which now serves one and one half million square miles of rich Canada.

A development carried out by RC Sigs since war years is the establishment of radio broadcast stations to serve their areas with regular radio programs. For northern residents within sound of CHAK Aklavik, CFWH Whitehorse, CFNW Norman Wells, CFHR Hay River and CFYT at Dawson City regular broadcasts of favourite programs are providing daily listener interest and helping to ease a natural feeling of isolation.

Today there are about 140 non-commissioned officers and men north of the 56th parallel, an average of about one in every 11,000 square miles. There are their wives and families. In about 1-3rd of the total area of Canada, the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals has become as much a part of the north as the trapper, miner and bush pilot who are widening the vast unknown.