

STATIONS OF THE N W T & Y RADIO SYSTEM: II

FORT SMITH, N.W.T.

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THE original planners of the RC Signals station at the northern outpost of Fort Smith, NWT, and the first crews to operate there, can rest assured that the records they set and the systems they instigated are without doubt responsible for the modern station that is to-day the pride of the growing community. They rank in importance in the history of the district with such time-honoured establishments as the Hudson's Bay Company and the Missions, no less with the old time trappers and traders who first pioneered the Slave and MacKenzie valleys and opened their waterways to modern trade.

The settlement of Fort Smith plays an important part in the present scheme of development, which sees tons of freight go "down north" each year. Roughly ninety-eight percent of all surface-carried freight is portaged through the settlement, for northern points.

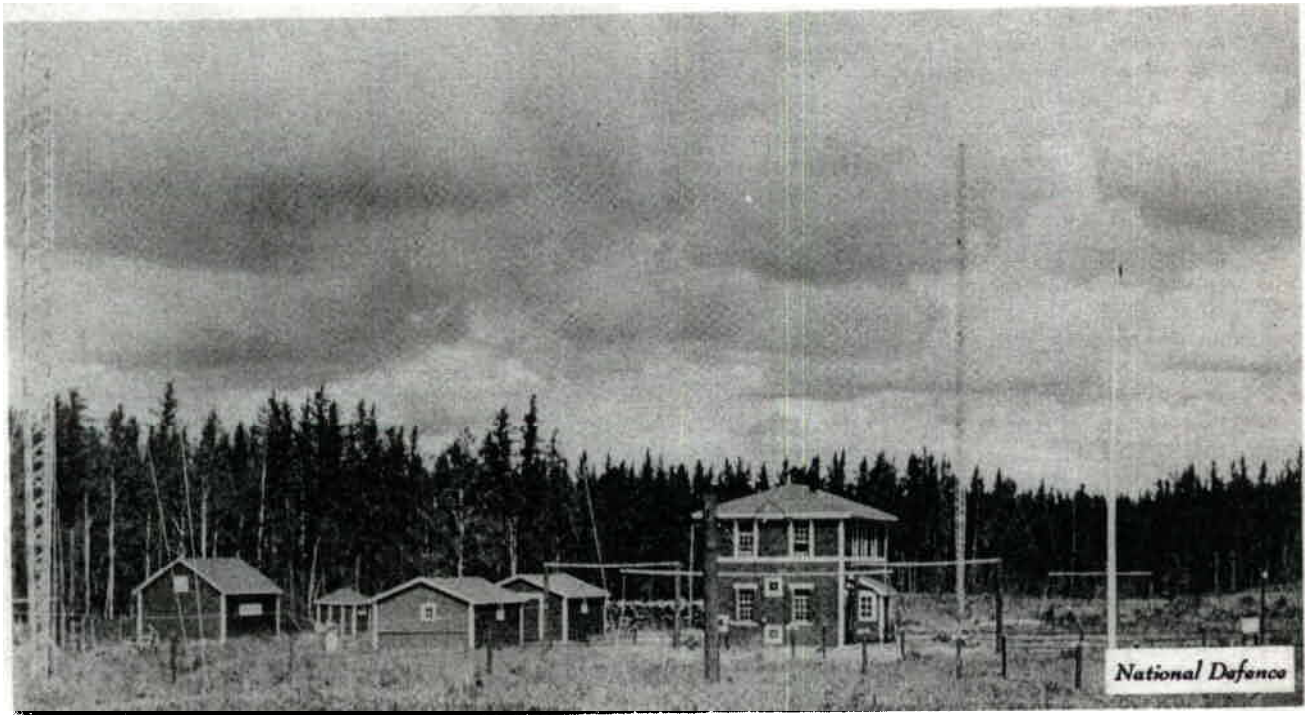
From Waterways, all river traffic stops at Fort Fitzgerald, Alberta, some fifteen miles south of Fort Smith, and from there all freight is trucked either to Smith or to Bell Rock, seven miles down river, for onward shipment. This is necessitated by a series of rapids created in the Slave River by a hundred-foot fall in the river within fifteen miles. Fort Smith is situated on the west bank of the river, opposite what is known as the Rapids of the Drowned, or Deadman's Rapids, probably named as a reminder of some long-forgotten tragedy.

The originators of the station must have had considerable foresight to enable them to realize the part that Signals would play in the development of the country and the movement of freight through this settlement. In 1925 they opened the first station at Fort Smith with Lt. Hastings in charge, QMS Bill Lovelock as the guiding warrant officer, with Cpl. Aubrey Griswold and Sigm. Joe Dexter sharing operating, clerking

and technical duties. A single-cylinder Delco plant and the inevitable battery bank first brought a touch of modern civilization into the community and a spot of luxury for the boys, whose original quarters are now a mute example of the ingenuity that is necessary in the maintenance of these stations, being a very comfortable and modern married quarters.

In those days, Smith was part of the network Simpson-Dawson-Edmonton and considerable traffic was involved in the operations. Prior to the opening of the Signals station, the Sisters of the RC Mission did extra duty in reporting weather and logging winds and temperatures. Rev. Father Mansoz of the RC Mission recalls, and points out with pride, the original RC Church in Fort Smith and his memory serves him back to 1880 but on his frequent visits to the present station he shakes his head with incredulity at the progress that is evident. With the present day FM radiophone to a well-established weather observation station at the airport, two miles away, he undoubtedly compares some of the difficulties encountered in the early days at the Fort.

The fifth year of this station's history saw the "SS Distributor" and the "SS Liard River" plying all out on the stretch from Waterways to Fitzgerald under the flag of the Alberta and Arctic Transportation Company, later to become the MacKenzie River Transportation Company under the Hudson's Bay flag. The traffic during those days carried signatures such as those of Col. J. K. Dornwall and A. L. Waule of the Northern Trading Company, later to become the Northern Transportation Company, whose "Northern Trader" was one of the first screw-propelled vessels on the river. The "Pioneer" of the same company is credited with being the first diesel-engined craft on the MacKenzie River and Signals are believed to have carried traffic in 1925 tel-



The RC Signals Station at Fort Smith was established in these buildings, in 1925.

ling of the wreck and burning of this craft at Burnt Island on Slave Lake. The present day communication system that is maintained with the river boats helps to minimize the chances of such events recurring.

With a view to later expansion and improvement, the station was built in the settlement, for remote control operation of the transmitter site about half-a-mile away. The sixteen-pair cable, the twin Listers and the 100-foot mast installation spoke well for the ingenuity of Ross Gourley, now Lt-Col. A. R. Gourley, retired, and of Major Pearson who relinquished the station to Pat Coombes, now Major M. I. Coombes, MBE, Officer Commanding No. 1 Army Signal Squadron at Ottawa.

Plans were laid during Major Coombes' administration for the present modern married quarters, additions to the single men's quarters and for what is generally regarded as one of the best transmitter sites on the system, four miles from the settlement. The crew responsible for carrying out these plans was directed by SM Jack Reid for signals and QMS Kuske, RCE, who worked together under wartime difficulties to complete the present installation. The old one-kilowatt and the Marconi 400-watt transmitters gave way to the present deluxe RCA 10-kilowatt long-wave transmitter; the CSEE M-17, the C33 and the PV-500 supplementing the Marconi M-26 to complete a communications equipment list

that enables working of two CW networks, the river boats, and any stray aircraft all at the same time, and all by remote control.

Much of the credit for the installations now to be seen at the present site devolves upon Staff Sergeant Tomlinson. The engine room houses three D-4600 Caterpillars, with diesel generators to provide 37.5 KVA, the output of which is pole-lined to the settlement at 2400 volts and distributed through a very modern Northern Electric distribution panel that would be a credit to any power company.

The signals station has kept pace with the increase of freight tonnage by receiving some of the heaviest shipments ever sent into the Northwest, when there arrived in 1944 two 300-foot towers for the ten-kilowatt aerial, similar to those in Simpson, Edmonton and Norman Wells. That was the year that saw 1700 of our South-of-the-Border friends in Fort Smith, the 89th Field Engineers and others of the US Army. It is hoped that the friendship which developed between RC Signals and the US Army during the war here will last for many years to come, as a reminder of the way we surmounted mutual difficulties during the war. That year also saw the US Army engineers finish the airstrip started earlier by the well-known A. M. "Matt" Berry with the aid of one Allis Chalmers tractor. The present day traffic at the airport serves well to prove the efficiency of the original installations.

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The present-day telephone installation and Jeep message delivery service has superseded the days when it was necessary to climb the 100-foot hill behind the station to deliver traffic to the Government Dock. It is doubtful whether the present traffic of some 200,000 words per month during the busy season is very much greater than that handled at any other time during the station's twenty-five odd years, but there is no doubt that the present methods of traffic handling had their inception in the minds of the original operators and administrators, many of whom are still active.

Lt. Hastings and QMS Lovelock will be remembered as being radio operators and technicians aboard the "SS Distributor" during the 1925 trip to Aklavik by Lord Byng of Vimy, then Governor General of Canada, speaking well for the training received in the Corps, even in its earliest days. Those of us who recall "old time days" only from the start of the Second World

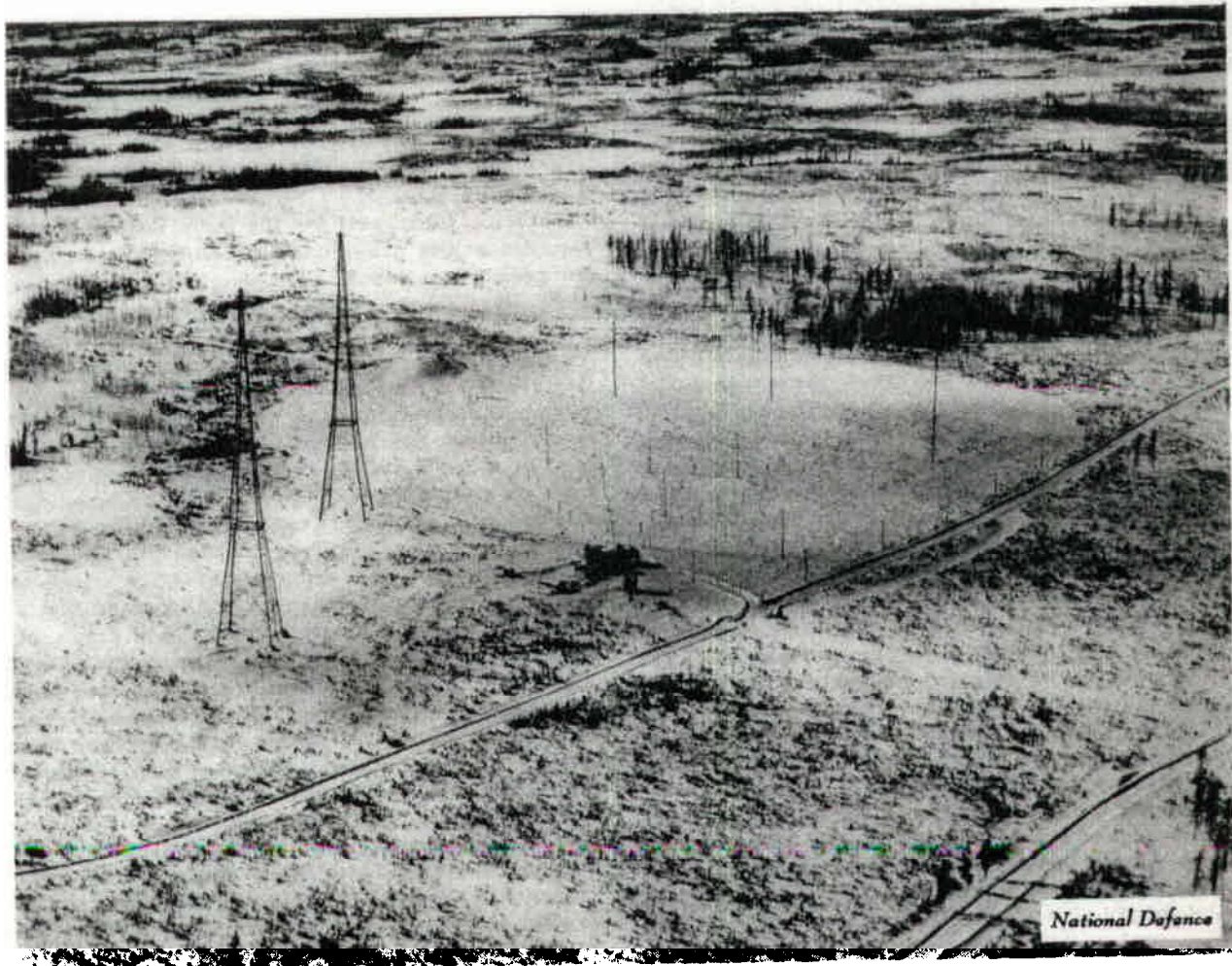


River traffic is portaged from Fort Fitzgerald (above) to Fort Smith, a distance of some fifteen miles.

War, feel a sense of pride when given the opportunity to carry on and see the results of the work of the originals.

The present crew is seeing further growth of the settlement of Fort Smith and is keeping pace with it in constant improvement of the present sites. The present group of four buildings on

The present transmitter site, four miles from town, is regarded as one of the best in the system.





The present modern station (centre, above) is up-to-date in every respect, as are the married quarters (lower left) and single men's quarters (lower right)

lot 49, on either side of the main road, including the Receiving Station, the Garage, the Single Men's Quarters, and the main Married Quarters are completely modern even to automatic oil furnaces and running water. In addition, there is a very large and comfortable married quarter at the old site, and the previously mentioned transmitter and engine site four miles south of town. The Receiving Station comprises the main operating room, the traffic office, the WO's office, the telephone room and one spare office, all spacious and well-lighted.

The operating room was remodelled a few years ago to make better use of the up-to-date remote control equipment for the M17 and other transmitters, and six RCA AR88LF receivers, besides the Bendix receiver and the FM Radio-telephone which is used exclusively for weather traffic.

The one-floor Single Men's Quarters contain

four single and two double rooms, a very large living room, a comfortable dining room, modern kitchen and bathroom all on the main floor, and a commodious ration storage room in the basement.

The community's pride in the importance of its radio station was confirmed in November, 1946, when a replacement vehicle for delivery of traffic was flown in by a RCAF transport plane. The five hundred local residents rightly considered this unprecedented occurrence a far cry from the early days on the Ryan Road when all freight was hauled from Fitzgerald by horses and one Winton Six touring car. The importance of their station is further stressed when a scrutiny of the directory is made. Traffic is originated by and delivered to the largest RCMP Detachment in the NWT; the Indian Affairs Branch and divers other Government Departments under Mr. A. H. Gibson; and the phenomenally growing

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Lands and Forests office, under Mr. E. G. Oldham. It is interesting to note that Mr. Gibson, as Stipendiary Magistrate for the Northwest Territories, holds all the powers of a Supreme Court Judge. He has seen, as has his predecessor, Dr. J. A. Urquhart, much progress on the

NWT & Y Radio System.

These and many other important names make up the delivery roster of the Fort Smith radio station, which is proud to be taking an important part in the development of the Northwest Territories.

Achievements of the U.S. Signal Corps In the Korean Campaign

Before the outbreak of hostilities in Korea, the high frequency radio line-of-sight transmission which had been introduced in the Second World War had been developed under the direction of the new Chief Signal Officer of the US Army, Maj-Gen. G. I. Back, to a high degree by the Signal Corps troops in Japan. One of the longest radio relay systems in the world was constructed there, comprising 22 relay points, and the system carried both voice and telegraphic record communications. This alone proved that the Signal Corps had been far from idle during the occupation.

When the UN forces went into Korea, immediate steps were taken by Gen. Back to extend this system, providing terminals and relays across the channel of the Sea of Japan to Pusan, the principal UN Forces' port, and extending up to Taejon, the provisional South Korean Republic capital. This was followed by complete co-ordination of all available communication facilities of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Voice, radio, teleprinter and CW circuit facilities were networked between Army elements in Japan and in the field, Navy forces afloat and Air Force installations and bases both in Japan and in Korea.

Within a few weeks after the outbreak of the Korean war, the Signal Corps had established approximately 40 landline, voice and teleprinter circuits, 28 radiotelephone, RTT and CW circuits. This was vital to the high command of the American and UN forces fighting the hordes of the North Koreans and Chinese Communists as the real "nerve centre" of battle direction. This achievement alone received high tribute, although unpublicized, for Gen. Back and his staff. Actually it has been necessary to increase these original facilities only slightly since the beginning of hostilities, since they were found adequate for the operations required.

LIGHT FIELD WIRE IN ACTUAL BATTLE

One of the developments of the Signal Corps which underwent full testing in actual field use in the Korean fighting zones in large quantities is the new field wire, WD-1, which is much lighter than old types of cable, has a better talking range but has about the same tensile strength as that previously used. Huge amounts of this field cable have been utilized in Korea and it can be laid by soldiers on foot and even at a run because of the light weight of the pay-out dispensers, while enlarged containers have been used in aircraft to lay out the cable at a speed of 120 miles per hour.

The training of Signal Corps troops and of regimental signals personnel was an objective emphasized by Gen. Back during the days of occupation of Japan prior to the North Korean attack.

MAINTENANCE FROM JAPANESE SOURCES

Another remarkable achievement, brought about by the planning and instruction of Signal Corps technicians in the Japanese occupation period has been the highly successful maintenance of communication systems in Korea during the activities of communist guerillas, and this has been an extremely difficult task for the Signal units in that fighting front.

The new Chief Signal Officer, while CSO of the Far East Command, was instrumental in developing sources of supply of communication equipment and component parts in Japan. These sources of supply have relieved the lengthy time of shipping critical items from the United States to the Korean battlefield. The establishment of maintenance and repair facilities in Japan, in addition, speeded up the return of damaged equipment, especially radio stations and telephone switchboards, to the Korean front and command posts.