



STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

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"ARMED FORCES IN CHURCHILL"

An address by Hon. Brooke Claxton,
Minister of National Defence, to
Ottawa Rotary Club, June 14, 1948.

There has been so much speculation, a good deal of it quite irresponsible and exaggerated, about our defence activities in the far north that I thought I might take this opportunity of telling you what we are doing there. Pictures have been painted of vast encampments of troops ready to launch a devastating attack at a moment's notice, all equipped with push-buttons.

If this excited view is taken in North America, you can imagine what the Russian writers make of it. In an article "Polar Fever in America", by V. Golant in ZEVEZDA for November 1947, it was said ".... Uncle Sam's flyers practice bombing walruses and polar bears . . . enormous military enterprises . . . No small parts of these funds (\$12,000,000,000) will be spent for military construction in the Arctic and adjacent regions . . . From 1943-45 huge winter manoeuvres took place in the Arctic regions of Canada in which representatives of the Canadian, English and American armies, navies and air forces took part . . .", and so on.

Of course, there is nothing whatever like this; however, I do think that some of the things we are quietly learning about conditions in the Arctic and how to live there are of importance and usefulness to all Canadians. As I recently visited Churchill, and as it is the most interesting of our northern establishments, I thought I would speak to you about it first and then say something of our general programme for all of the north.

While Churchill is properly thought of as an outpost, or frontier settlement, it has a history which dates back much further than many of the more civilized parts of the continent. The harbour was originally explored in 1619. In 1689 it was named after John Churchill (later the Duke of Marlborough), who was at that time Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company. Settlement was undertaken in the same year but its buildings burned to the ground a few months later. In 1718 Fort Churchill was built and in 1731 reinforced by Fort Prince of Wales, the ruins of which still exist. It was destroyed again in 1782 by a French naval detachment. In 1783 the Hudson's Bay Company re-opened the Fort and it has carried on ever since.

As you know, during the late '20's the federal government began the development of Churchill as a commercial port, and in 1929 the railway was brought in from The Pas.