

ARCTIC SUPPLY - 1959

From Hudson Bay's wind-swept southern shores to Alert, Canada's northernmost weather outpost, the Department of Transport was busy throughout the summer with the biggest Arctic supply task in history.

During the few short weeks of Arctic summer, the Department's convoys delivered more than 100,000 tons of supplies to 40-odd weather stations, defence outposts, Eskimo villages and other ports of call. Taking part were 17 departmental icebreakers and special Arctic supply vessels, more than 125 landing craft and 26 chartered commercial tankers and freighters. In addition to the ship's crews, more than 1,100 men were taken north by ship and plane to help get ashore the vast quantities of supplies and the shiploads of oil and gasoline.

The Department's operations this year included deliveries to the Mid-Canada Line stations in Hudson Bay, the joint Canadian-U.S. weather stations as far north as Alert, 550 miles from the North Pole, the DEW Line installations in Foxe Basin, points on the Labrador coast and, for the first time, the mid-Baffin Island DEW Line bases. In addition, there was a major supply undertaking at Frobisher Bay, Canada's new "Hub of the Arctic" and now an important refuelling base for trans-Polar international aviation. At this one port, 17,000 tons of dry cargo and vast quantities of oil and gasoline were delivered.

In the Western Arctic, the Department was responsible for getting some 5,000 tons of goods to various defence, radio and weather outposts. While the Eastern Arctic operation was mainly by sea from Quebec, Montreal and Maritime ports, the Western Arctic delivery was in the main by way of the MacKenzie River system, thence by ship along the Arctic coast-line.

Most northerly port of call for the Department's shipping was Eureka, on the northwest coast of Ellesmere Island and 750 miles from the North Pole. Cargo was delivered there by the Department's icebreaker, C.G.S. "d'Iberville", which in Norwegian Bay broke through an ice-field 70 miles wide in the course of her journey. Supplies for Alert, farthest north of the stations, were taken to Thule, Greenland, and forwarded by air. The Department is hopeful that this supply job, in future years, will be undertaken by its recently-launched triple-screw icebreaker "John A. Macdonald", which will be in service next year.

At most ports of call the ships had to have with them their own landing equipment such as fork-lifts, barges, tractors and trucks, for,

with the exception of Churchill and Frobisher Bay, the ports are without loading or dock facilities of any kind. This year's undertaking was also hampered by heavy ice that lingered later than in most years and, moving with wind and tide, sometimes held up ship-to-shore operations for days at a time. In some cases, such as at Resolute Bay on Cornwallis Island, ice floes up to eight and ten feet thick, weighing hundreds of tons, were jammed tight in the harbours until a change of wind eased the blockade. At all ports, however, cargoes were finally landed and residents of all the High Arctic communities were provided with another year's supplies.

Department of Transport vessels taking part in this year's northern operations included the northern supply vessel, C.G.S. "C.D. Howe", the icebreakers "d'Iberville", "N.B. McLean", "Montcalm", "Sir William Alexander", "Labrador", "Sir Humphrey Gilbert", "Saurel", "Ernest Lapointe" and the lighthouse supply and buoy ship "Edward Cornwallis". Also participating were seven sea-going powered barges, used particularly where shallow draft vessels were needed. C.G.S. "C.D. Howe" visited more than 30 Eastern Arctic ports, serving as a base for the Government's Eastern Arctic patrol which supervises the interests of health, welfare, law and order in the northern settlements. More than 2,000 Eskimos were brought aboard the ship for medical examination and their villages were visited by staffs from the Departments of National Health and Welfare and Northern Affairs, who travelled on the ship.

PASSENGER SERVICE

Transport Department vessels carried more than 450 passengers to and from the Arctic and between northern ports of call. They included departmental staff going to and from assigned posts in the Far North, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, missionaries, trading company staff and many Eskimos.

The year's operations began in late June and continued until the fall freeze-up in October. Icebreakers remained in the north until all commercial shipping was safely out of Arctic waters.

An important factor in the season's operations was the Department of Transport aerial ice patrol, which continually carried out flights over the northern sea-lanes and kept all shipping advised as to the location and movement of ice. With the advent of winter, the patrol moved its operations to eastern waters and the Gulf of St. Lawrence, where it will continue to serve shipping during the winter.