

greatest of care, the scientific equipment. There were stacks of heavy steel containers full of helium; piles of building material — from nails and screws to heavy scantling and wood siding; cases and cases of fresh fruit; awkward motor-driven stoves to warm aircraft engines and huge tractors broken down into unwieldy parts for transportation by air. But above all there was the mail — three or four white canvas bags with the address "Mould Bay Post Office". These were placed with special care on top of all the other equipment — the lumber, the food, the machines, the gas-drums — on the long sleighs ready to be driven off by tractor.

Airlift Routine

This was the pattern of the airlift for the next three weeks. First the staff and visitors came in. There was a pause of a few days until supplies accumulated at Resolute from planes coming in from Churchill and Montreal. Then the freight shuttle-service to the satellite weather stations began in earnest. The runs went in each day or oftener with determined monotony, each plane filled to capacity with the materials required to sustain life and comfort and provide the elements needed to increase our knowledge of the Arctic. Life and work for an entire year depended on the airlifts in April and in September. While the RCAF was supplying Resolute, Mould Bay and Isachsen, the USAF was making preparations for its contribution to the spring airlift by taking men and materials to Alert and Eureka. For two or three weeks, depending on the weather, this feverish activity would continue, then life at the Arctic outposts would return to its state of normal abnormality.

Between the arrival of the first plane and the beginning of the airlift in earnest, there was a period of waiting when life drifted into a monotonous routine. The permanent staff of the RCAF and the weather stations carried out their normal duties. The visitors who were awaiting passage to their future posts or who were on hand to handle freight kept the air filled with the dreary sounds of phonograph records or the steady clink of billiard balls. The worn pocket-book thrillers in the mess were thumbed through by a new audience. Listless forms lay about the chesterfields and chairs in soporific warmth. There was a soft whine of wind catching at some man-made obstacle outside, the muffled drone of the oil heaters, the vague rattle of dishes and cutlery somewhere in the kitchen. These and the other sounds of Arctic life were interrupted periodically by the clanking of the heavy door swinging wide to let in a member of the staff with a blast of Arctic cold.

The arrival of another aircraft emptied the living quarters and mess. For a few hours hooded figures worked quickly in the middle of the airstrip to load, sort and store the freight. There was maintenance to be done and sometimes extensive repairs. One aircraft landed about midnight. Dinner was ready for the crew. Afterwards, when most of them had climbed wearily into bed after a long and exhausting day, the flight engineer returned to the middle of the wind-swept strip and started a repair job which was to keep him working seven hours through the cold darkness of thirty below zero. An hour later, its engines already warm, the aircraft was once more preparing to take off on its programme for the day. Sometimes new visitors came in making the newcomers of a few days before feel like veterans. One of these visitors set the whole RCAF station into fits of uncontrollable laughter by enquiring innocently: "Now, where are the married quarters?"

During one of these quiet periods we set forth on a hike from Resolute to Allen Bay. This required some preparation and a few elementary precautions. Reasonable clothing included heavy underwear, flannel shirt, flannels, heavy over-trousers, turtle-neck sweater, one pair of heavy socks with slippers and fleece-lined flight boots, heavy jacket and parka, woollen mitts covered by leather mitts. For a longer journey farther from camp, especially in very severe weather, we would have worn on top of all this a pair of coveralls made of nylon pile — light and extremely warm.