

Like many Inuit, he knew little about the superpowers' Arctic strategies, but he was clear on their relative geography. "If nuclear rockets start flying over our heads, then for sure each one of them will try to shoot down the others' rockets . . . and our region will be all contaminated."

"We don't have any enemies that we hate so much that we want to kill them," he said, adding, as northerners often do: "we don't want any part of a war because they are not our enemies."

Yet the Inuit are part of the war and eagerly so – largely out of necessity. As their traditional economy has collapsed, they have become almost wholly dependent on government handouts. Most families still hunt for food but need cash for the basic amenities of an increasingly southern lifestyle. With jobs few and far between, military developments mean economic promise to most natives. Ironically, the military is providing a solution to a problem it did much to create, albeit unintentionally.

DURING AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER the Second World War, when most Inuit still lived in hunting camps and there were only a handful of whites in the region, the American military "opened up" the Arctic with a string of huge projects. In rapid succession, it built the Alaska Highway, Canol pipeline, a chain of American air force bases and, finally, the DEW Line. Each attracted Inuit to work, earning what they considered easy money. Fearing for Canadian sovereignty, the federal government countered the US presence with schools and nursing stations. In a few cases, it also physically relocated Inuit hundreds of miles, plopping them down beside American installations to serve as Canadian flag poles. Throughout the Arctic, the changes meant Inuit were soon living year-round in large communities for the first time in their history. They were also developing the immense social problems and sense of cultural loss they now struggle with, problems which have much to do with feelings of poverty and worthlessness.

Thus when government officials toured the Arctic in 1986 for com-

munity meetings on the North Warning System, which will replace the DEW Line, they repeatedly heard two concerns. One was that site fences be designed so that caribou could not be trapped by them and the other was that Inuit be given work on the line. Currently about seventeen of the more than six hundred workers on the line are Inuit. All have menial jobs but are nonetheless the economic elite of their communities. A large part of each bid for the recently-awarded \$150 million North Warning System operational contract was a promise to hire more Inuit and the NWT government is planning to train natives for its high-paying electronics jobs. One of the four bids actually came from an Inuit-owned company, in partnership with the ITT subsidiary now running the DEW Line. Meanwhile, the Canadian Rangers programme, touted as the Armed Forces' "eyes and ears" in the north, is popular with natives mainly because the rifle and ammunition it provides amount to an income subsidy. The Rangers' prime duty is to attend an annual "training" excursion from which they return with \$400 and, usually, a caribou. Inuit involvement with the military is also made easier by the cynicism they feel about control over Armed Forces activity in the north. An Inuk TV producer, who opposed Arctic militarization, nevertheless felt that "it's going to come up here anyways, so why shouldn't Inuit benefit?"

AT THE SAME TIME, THE INUIT HAVE a good deal of respect and goodwill for the military people who have worked in the Arctic. For example, the people of Resolute Bay, who were moved there to establish a sovereignty beachhead, are bitter about Ottawa but nostalgic about American airmen. The flyers made friends by allowing the Inuit to pick through their garbage for building materials after the government brought them north from Quebec and left them to fend for themselves. Elsewhere, the favours have been more direct. In Hall Beach the DEW Line provides the community water supply. When the local pastor recently requested help getting a part for his church, the DEW Line manager had it

flown up from Winnipeg the next day. "Some of the nicest, most generous people we have ever known," says John Amagoalik, "were American military personnel."

And while the Inuit see themselves as having no enemies, they know that southerners are not so lucky. Simon Keanik, who is roughly eighty, said he had always been told that the Russians "want to go to war . . . the reason is because they want to take over our country after they kill off all the white people." After years of such tales, says Amagoalik, many Inuit have developed an emotional distrust of Russians and many still maintain one for the Japanese and Germans. Grateful for the benefits southerners have brought them, the Inuit are amongst the most patriotic of Canadians and so feel a duty to help protect their apparently embattled countrymen. During the Second World War, young Inuks with experience of white culture volunteered for battle. "[I] was told what was going on," said one, "and I knew they were not going to have war in the north . . . but [I] was prepared to protect Canada." Many still feel that consenting to the military use of their territory is something "we can do for Canada."

Ultimately most Inuit consent to that use because they don't really know what it means. They see bits and pieces of an extraordinarily powerful and complex system run by men who appear to know exactly what they are doing. Their lives are deeply rooted in isolated communities where the prime source of "outside" information is the constant and peculiar flicker of TV images beaming in from (of all places) Detroit accompanied by an English commentary that only the children really understand. Ironically, the Inuit were first given an image of war with the introduction of television in the mid-1970s. But, being what it is, TV has done little to explain that image since. The majority of Inuit have no real notion of the extent of the jousting that takes place daily above and beneath the ice as American and Soviet nuclear submarines, bombers and fighters rehearse their moves. Nor, in any real way,

are they aware of the technological developments, the strategies or, most importantly, the stakes of the game.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE INUIT ARE typical Canadians. Their ambivalence is striking because of the huge cultural gulf between them and the nuclear systems sprouting up in their area. But their acceptance of a relentless nuclear arms competition is really just a mirror image of our own with a bit of fur trim. Where they buy in to gain a temporary job on a radar site, we do so to keep the people of Rexdale gainfully employed at Litton; where they get the spinoff benefit of a new airstrip built for fighter jets, we get cheap computer technology and lasers for eye surgery. For us, as for them, acceptance is made easier by a belief in authority and in technology, by feelings of duty and of fear, by the daily demands of the immediate and by a sort of willful ignorance fed by the soft blue light that helps us forget what we feel we cannot change.

And for both, too, there is a certain fatalism in which to take final comfort. In the South it is called Armageddon theology or Eighties nihilism, depending on who describes it. In the north, especially amongst elders, it is the Word: "He heard it first from the shamans and also from the religious groups," said a translator who was relating something I often heard when I asked the old Inuks about militarization. "The Bible says the world's gonna end. It's just going to turn into a big ball of fire. And nobody can go against the Bible." □

#### Further Reading

*Arctic*, Vol. 40, No. 4, December 1987: Frances Abele. "Canadian Contradictions: Forty Years of Northern Political Development," N. D. Banks. "Forty Years of Canadian Sovereignty Assertion in the Arctic," Kenneth C. Eyre. "Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North."

Hugh Brody. *Living Arctic: Hunters of the Canadian North*, Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987.

Kelly Curwin. "An Interview with ICC President Mary Simon," *Inuit Circumpolar Conference*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1987.

John Honderich. *Arctic Imperative: Is Canada Losing the North?*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987.