

The important men of the Arctic are the meteorologists and their associates who man the outposts within a few hundred miles of the Pole. Almost all other activities in this part of the world are designed to support the meteorological programme or are dependent upon the weather men. The RCAF brings in the men, their food, their equipment, even their houses and working buildings. Radio operators are on duty to transmit their information south, where it is used to predict the weather in every part of North America, and, indeed, in Europe and the Eastern Hemisphere. Scientists who go to the Arctic to learn about Arctic life, the characteristics of frozen ground, the shape of the earth or the nature of the aurora borealis are all dependent on the weather stations for their operations.

Six years ago, there was little activity of any kind in the Canadian Archipelago north of Lancaster Sound. The weather-stations did not exist. The area was inadequately mapped. Little was known about life in the Canadian Arctic, and even less about those scientific problems to which the Arctic yields so many answers. Then in 1947, Canada and the United States worked out a joint programme of Arctic weather-stations. It was a five-year programme in the course of which five stations were established through the joint efforts, and for the joint use, of both countries. The U.S. Weather Bureau was as anxious as the Department of Transport's Meteorological Division to establish reporting stations in the Arctic, since weather from the Pole does not stop at the Forty-Ninth Parallel. The United States Navy provided ships on which Canadian and United States officials penetrated as far as navigation would allow in search of sites for the tiny but important new scientific communities. The United States Air Force bore the responsibility for "airlifting" the men and supplies to places which ships could not reach. The plans so carefully made on paper on the basis of the available information had to be changed in the face of Arctic realities. The main station had to be placed some hundreds of miles east of the intended location and was eventually put at Resolute on Cornwallis Island. That was on August 31, 1947. Winter was fast approaching, and the men and ships worked round the clock for days to put ashore the supplies and shelters to sustain life for the long months until ships and aircraft could reach the spot the next year. Two years later, the RCAF took over an airstrip near the station, and now Resolute is the focal point for all activities in the Canadian Arctic.

Starting the Chain

It was on Easter Sunday of 1947 that the first landing was made at Eureka on Ellesmere Island. Supplies were moved in by air from Thule in Greenland in temperatures from 30° to 50° below zero. Heavy aircraft, landing on the thick ice, were able to discharge their cargo so efficiently that two trips a day were made until the station was established, with sufficient supplies to last 400 days. All this unloading and the construction of temporary buildings were completed by five men who managed, at the same time, to start their weather observation programme.

In April 1948, Isachsen was established by air on Ellef Rignes Island from an ice strip at Resolute. In the first ten days from the beginning of the operation, 84 tons of supplies, which had been flown in, were stored by the nine men who were originally on the staff of the station. Such is the sense of urgency in the Arctic.

Mould Bay was established about the same time on Prince Patrick Island, 500 miles west of Resolute. In a single day during that initial operation six airlifts of supplies were flown in — everything from tinned vegetables to a tractor for the eventual construction of an airstrip.

The station at Alert, the northernmost post office in the world, was established in 1950. The beginnings of this station provide a fascinating story of human courage and endurance. Two years before, a tractor, with fuel and other supplies, was cached