



## Forest Fires—Whitehorse, Y.T.

By CPL. H. E. D. GUTTMAN

**N**or since the cremation of Sam McGee "On the marge of Lake Le Barge" has a fire stirred so much public interest as the one which started on June 19 near the city of Whitehorse. And rightly so—seldom before has such a large area of forest been reduced from a technicolor wonderland to a monochrome in tones of grey. Even the blue sky was gone and in its stead, a white mushrooming cloud similar to an atomic explosion blotted out the sun.

To battle the ever widening circle of flames men and equipment worked relentlessly to conquer the growing giant. To assist local fire fighting efforts, the Commissioner, F. H. Collins, called in advisers from outside; Park Wardens were dispatched from Banff, Jasper and Yoho National Parks to lend their knowledge and experience in battling the flames.

On patrolling the highway it was observed that man's attempt to halt the fire's progress had been futile. Fire break after fire break had been breached by the flames which had been strengthened by winds up to 20 miles per hour. With the assistance of 100 men from the Army and Air Force, and a drop in winds, the immediate threat abated and the fighting force was cut to 27. Good fortune however, was not to be the fire fighters lot. As of July 17, 750 square miles of forest had been burned, 14 fires were being

fought and seven more were burning in remote areas where no fire fighting was possible.

The threat that had been conquered, in part at least, was now a more formidable hazard. Smoke which had covered the city previously had been brought a great distance by wind but now the fire was racing to catch up to those clouds of smoke and ash. To indicate that the people of Whitehorse were worried might be considered an exaggeration, but to say that those with fire insurance were happy to have it would sum up their feelings as discreetly as possible.

The number of men to fight the fire was again near 100 (Army and Air Force) with additional civilian volunteers and employed fire fighters. Men and machines were again working feverishly cutting fire breaks and pumping water to hold the advancing flames. Homes in the RCAF and Army areas were considered in immediate danger as was the city of Whitehorse, and local churches held special services to pray for help.

On Thursday, July 17, the fire was showing no sign of abatement and indeed was still advancing on the city. The Mayor of Whitehorse called an emergency meeting of the City Council to discuss the serious situation. Next day a larger meeting was called, including