

Perhaps somewhat less dramatic but equally important to our defences -- and even more significant, perhaps, to Canada's economic progress as it rolls the map northward -- is the building of the Mid-Canada line. This also we saw at close hand earlier this week as we inspected key sites on the ground and from the air, and saw something of the marshalling of supplies and materials needed for this great enterprise. More than 1,200 men are working on the Mid-Canada line and thousands more are working to supply and equip it.

The building of this line is entirely a Canadian undertaking. The rapid way in which the little known sub-Arctic hinterland of Canada is being opened is evidence of the imaginative and effective way in which the RCAF and federal government departments, the management contractor, the Bell Telephone Company, and the other Canadian contractors are working together on this huge assignment.

As I have just seen it at close hand over one thousand miles of its extent, I should like to tell you something about the Mid-Canada line, the culmination of many new ideas in construction, communications and transportation.

I well recall the first conferences to study the problem of providing this vital element in the continental warning system.

Our experts began, of course, by studying the map of Canada - Northern Canada. And in so doing they were forced to consider the difficulties they would face in building this line across the sub-Arctic. Around Hudson Bay especially, the terrain and climate conspired against any intruder: in winter, forbidding trackless wastes and cold; in summer, impassible bogs and muskeg -- and mosquitoes, large alike in size and in number.

Each area presented special problems. Ungava in the east was slashed across by its innumerable lakes, rocky ridges, scrub forests and bogs. The James Bay area in summer was mired down in muskeg, with many lakes and surprisingly large streams. The coast of Hudson Bay, because of shallow waters, was almost unapproachable. To the west, the muskeg merged again into wooded country, at first hilly, and then, in the far west, vast areas of high, forbidding, almost unexplored mountains.

It was evident, of course, that cold would challenge the builders' ingenuity, but transportation above all was the great and continuing problem. The construction of the Mid-Canada line would clearly involve many of the harrowing problems which in earlier years plagued the pushing of the Hudson Bay Railway to Churchill, the building of the Alaska highway and the opening of the Knob Lake country.