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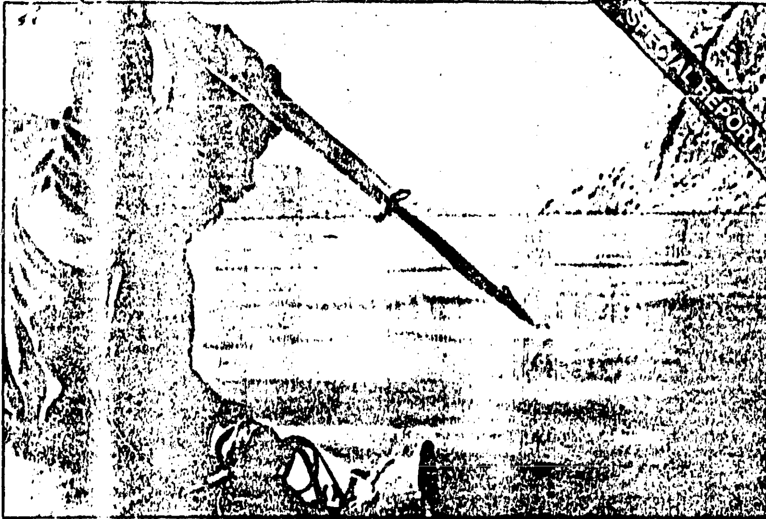
With a 19?0s rifle, he stands on guard for thee



Gazette photos, William Marsden

Larry Audl··k: "I get annoyed when ... Canadians think of this place as a no-man's land."

By WILLIAM MARSDEN
of the Gazette

RESOLUTE BAY, HIGH ARCTIC — On the shores of Resolute Bay, beyond a graveyard of rusting snowmobiles, Sgt. Walter Audla crouches low behind his Honda three-wheeler. His rifle rests against the seat, pointing down a shallow gravel gully toward the figure of a man outlined in black against a white target.

Behind Audla is Barrow Strait, where the U.S. icebreaker Polar Sea passed one month earlier without Canadian consent, sparking renewed political cries to protect Canada's sovereignty. Now, the red and white Canadian icebreaker Sir John A. Macdonald rests at anchor.

Audla, bracing against a sub-zero wind sweeping inland off the Northwest Passage, aims, fires and hits the target figure squarely in the chest. He's getting ready for the enemy.

In his uniform, a scarlet baseball cap and armband, Audla stands on guard for thee. Should the Red Army suddenly dash over the ice packs, he and his men — a military reserve unit of 15 Inuit called the Rangers — would probably fire the first shots in anger, if

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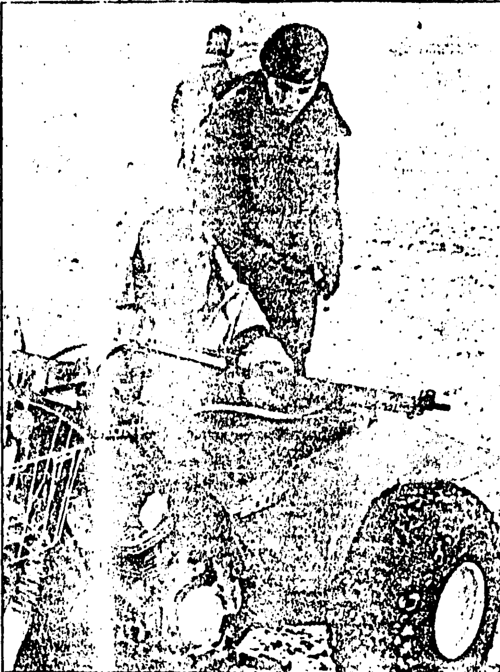

Ranger Solomon Kalluk takes aim. Right, Philipoosi Novalinga was in Nanook of the North.

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NORTH

Inuit have transformed High Arctic from 'frontier into homeland'

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the world wasn't already nuked.

Outfitted with .303 bolt-action Lee-Enfield Second World War rifles and 300 rounds of ammunition a year, they are Canada's only permanent military presence in the High Arctic.

And that presence has recently taken on a new meaning here, where interest in the Rangers seems to rise and fall according to the latest U.S. ship going through the Northwest Passage.

When the oil tanker Manhattan went through the passage in 1969, Ranger patrols were reactivated by the department of national defence.

The Polar Sea has initiated a new flurry of recruiting and training sessions. At Resolute Bay, for instance, four new recruits were enrolled last month.

Casual group

Audla, 47, is sergeant of the Resolute Bay outpost. It's a casual group of Inuit skilled in Arctic survival whose job is to report sightings of submarines and strange aircraft.

The Rangers would act as a modern version of the Indian scout if the regular army ever had to fight an Arctic campaign.

Pockets of regular forces periodically conduct manoeuvres in the Arctic. But Canada's permanent armed force in the vast Arctic archipelago, with its million square kilometres of land and sea, is just two tiny Ranger units of about 15 men each, one in Resolute Bay and the other 383 kilometres northeast in Grise Fiord, the nation's two most northerly communities.

"The intent is to provide a military presence in the Arctic," Brig. Gen. Mark Dodd, commander of the Arctic Rangers, says from his base in Yellowknife.

"We have to do our part," Audla says, very seriously. "But it has its good part and bad part. Inuit don't like killing people."

The Rangers don't actually patrol as a group. They simply go about their normal lives of hunting and fishing and working around the settlement. If they see a submarine, for instance, they are expected to report the sighting to headquarters in Yellowknife, which would then dispatch a reconnaissance aircraft.

Reliable weapon

At a recent session with the Resolute Bay patrol, members were given photocopies of submarines on the surface — just so they would know what they looked like.

Three army regulars (one a British paratrooper) trained them to use radios and maps and how to fire the .303, which Dodd says is a "highly reliable weapon."

Throughout the Northwest Territories and Labrador there are 36 Ranger patrols, with about 700 members. In the past few years, they have reported several aircraft sightings over Labrador. But the aircraft turned out to be West German planes flying out of Goose Bay.

There was one submarine sighting but it was never confirmed, Dodd says.

National Defence is preparing a white paper on defence policy. Dodd says he expects our military presence in the Arctic to expand.

"We will probably be giving (the Rangers) uniforms and build armories for a more permanent presence."

For the people who live in the North, the Polar Sea voyage was less a challenge to sovereignty — a war of words that was played out by the politicians — than another painful reminder of the South's ignorance and carelessness of the Arctic and its people.

"I get very annoyed when I think that Canadians think of this place as a no-man's land," says Larry Audlaluk, deputy fire chief for Grise Fiord, a tiny settlement of 105 people on the southern end of Ellesmere Island — most of which essentially is a no-man's land.

"They took us up here 33 years ago and until this Polar Sea thing happens it's almost as if they forgot they put us up here."

Few Canadians know that until 1953, Canadian Inuit did not live in the High Arctic. The only residents were those stationed at an air force base at Resolute Bay (established in 1947 and since closed) and several RCMP "flag stations" (with special constables hired from Greenland) whose job was to counter the intrusion of Greenland Inuit crossing Smith Sound to hunt on Ellesmere Island.

In 1953, fearful of losing Arctic sovereignty, the federal government asked Inuit families from Port Harrison in northern Quebec to move 1,800 kilometres north to Resolute Bay and Grise Fiord. Six families volunteered to go.

A hospital ship left the families on gravel shores during the summer, with whatever possessions they could carry including caribou tents, some tea, flour and two boxes of ammunition.

More families moved north and today the 200 Inuit in Grise and Resolute are one of our most solid arguments for sovereignty over the High Arctic islands and surrounding waters, said Neil Faulkner, assistant deputy minister of northern affairs.

'Tremendous activity'

The Inuit have transformed the High Arctic from a "frontier into a homeland. There's tremendous activity up there."

In the space of 32 years, their lives have changed dramatically. They live in tidy bungalows with modern fridges, stoves, freezers and the occasional microwave oven. Seal, musk ox, caribou and arctic char are still eaten but the main diet is beef and pork and frozen vegetables.

The Inuit, a sturdy, lean people, have become voracious consumers. The young, modern Inuit hunter pull seal-skin trousers and parkas over designer jeans and T-shirts that read "I wanna rock." He climbs into a large aluminum power boat or Ski-doo and heads out to find whale or seal herds while his Sony Walkman feeds his head with music and at home his Betamax records his favorite television show.

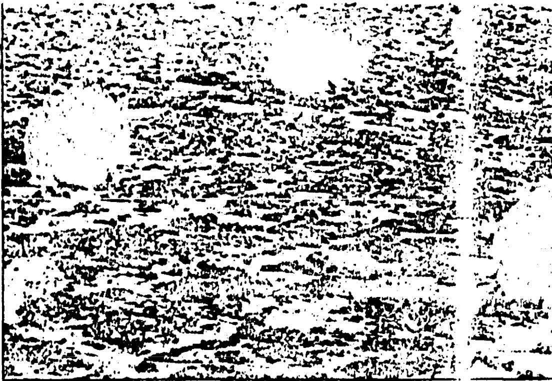
The modernization of the Inuit, however, hides the fact that these are essentially artificial communities kept alive by federal government welfare. Housing is largely subsidized. Heating, utilities, education and health care — including drugs — are free. Whites — too often here to fill their pockets and return south — perform most of the steady labor.

The environmental group Greenpeace successfully destroyed the seal-skin trade and the effect has dragged down the price of other pelts.

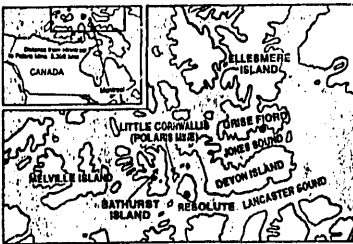
Liquor is destroying the social and family structure. Incidents of wife beating and child molesting are so frequent and harsh that a Northwest Territories task force recently stated their numbers are of "grave proportions."

Population growth is stagnant.

These communities produce almost nothing but a sense of isolation and the satisfaction among southern map readers that we have a presence way up here.



Rabbits nibble food above Cominco's Polaris Mine on Little Cornwallis Island. Mine...



Maps shows the vastness of Canada's North.

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Commercial airlines fly four Boeing 737s into Resolute Bay weekly from Montreal and Edmonton. But bolding together Canada's sovereign Arctic communities are Twin Otters and Second World War Douglas DC 3s that make flying an adventure.

At 4,000 feet, our red-tipped Twin Otter is flying northeast from Resolute toward Grise under a cloudless, deep blue sky. The flat landscape of Devon Island with smooth lakes and thin ravines passes below.

As we reach the mouth of the fiord, a strong north wind catches the Twin Otter. It rocks and sways violently. The pilot veers east of the settlement, banks against the mountain side and drops the plane toward the white landing strip when suddenly a second wind sweeps the plane offline.

A woman screams as the pilot guns his engines and lifts the nose. The mountain lurches toward the plane's front window. The pilot veers out to sea banking close to the mountain side.

He circles back and approaches the strip from the west. He swings the plane down hard on to the snow-covered runway, cuts his engines, taxis to a stop and lets fly a barrage of curses reflecting badly on the religious and sexual habits of the north and west winds.

Boxes unloaded

People in parkas gather around the plane. The passengers — two Inuit women, a white weather technician, a white biologist here to measure whales, three whites who will build a community centre, and a journalist — jump out into the clear, cold (-4 C) morning. Boxes of fresh oranges, tomatoes, frozen foods, spare parts, tools and luggage are unloaded. Two RCMP constables watch who and what comes off and gets on. The school principal-teacher, heading for a convention in Frobisher Bay, climbs on. The plane takes off.

The settlement is about 100 metres downhill from the landing strip. A bulldozer is rebuilding the coastal road apparently washed out a day earlier by a storm.

The first building along the road is a tidy, whitewashed RCMP station. Const. James Herman and his assistant, Special Const. Imooshee Mudaraqjuk, made six arrests (drunk and disorderly) last year. Herman, a tall, smiling, friendly guy with not a lot to do, says the count is low because Grise is dry and doesn't have an alcohol problem.

Against many houses, seal skins for making winter clothing are stretched out to dry on wooden racks. A two-storey hotel — $125 a night including meals — has nine bunkbeds for visitors. For $2,000 tourists can fly from here to the North Pole and back.

$11.89 for coffee

The Grise Inuit co-op store, where a 360-gram tin of coffee sells for $11.89, is managed by Cecil Tucker, a white man from Cape Breton Island. It's a food, clothing, hardware and appliance store rolled into one. It also operates the Grise Fiord Video Club, annual membership $10, film rental $5. The selection is mostly family films.

Philipoosi Novalinga, 79, is Grise's oldest citizen. He came to Grise in 1953 with the original settlers from Port Harrison in northern Quebec.

He's sick. His fingers are stained with nicotine from chain-smoking Player's and he coughs constantly. He's crippled with arthritis and emphysema and has a heart pacer. His face is round and his smile broad.

He sits beside his bed coughing and hacking and smoking and watching the news he can't understand on color television. He speaks through an interpreter:

"If it wasn't for the government, I don't think I would be alive now."

When Philipoosi left Port Harrison, the life expectancy of the Inuit was about 30. Philipoosi is of an era when an Inuit family starved to death if it missed the caribou migration. Disease could easily ravage an Inuit community.

Port Harrison is where explorer and film-maker Robert Flaherty made the famous 1920 silent film *Nanook of the North*. Philipoosi is in that movie. Nanook went hunting one day and never returned. Philipoosi went north to Grise.

"In Port Harrison there were food shortages. One family starved. The government did the right thing in bringing us up here. There's more game."

Younger Inuit do not share his views.

Larry Audlaluk came to Grise with his parents when he was two years old. As a deputy fire chief, he is employed by the government of the Northwest Territories. His basic material needs are all looked after by the government.

Yet, along with many other Inuit of his age, he wants the government to pay the Inuit what they call settlement compensation. Translated, that means he wants money for maintaining Canada's sovereignty in the High Arctic. His English is fluent. So is his political savvy.

"They left us with nothing. They brought us to a place that was just empty. It was like taking you off a ship and leaving you on a deserted shore.

"There wasn't enough snow to build igloos (Grise's annual average snowfall: 15.2 cm, mean high temperature in January -27.2 C). Igloos are very warm. We had to live in tents which is just like living outside."

Settlement compensation is part of the land claims currently being negotiated with federal government by the Inuit political arm, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada.

But Philipoosi opposes settlement compensation:

"The only hardship we suffered was the darkness for four months. They shouldn't talk about that. We're not starving now. We don't need money."

People flow into the High Arctic from all over Canada. Teachers, social workers, scientists, technicians, small businessmen, policemen, nurses, doctors, adventurers, wealthy Americans who pay $20,000 a shot to cruise the Northwest Passage on European luxury ships all come and inevitably leave.

Larry Holt came north last January. He was hired by the territorial government as a social worker for Resolute Bay where about 100 Inuit live but don't seem to like it. ("This isn't land. This is ice," says Sarah Amagoalik, an original Resolute settler. "I hate it. I'm always cold.")

Ugly town

Resolute is an ugly town, a gravel pit with buildings. Its airport is a transit area for people going somewhere else. It doesn't have the mountains of Grise Fiord to give variety and grandeur to the barren landscape. Nor does it have the community spirit of Grise. Lots of isolation.

It's an old bedfellow with a terrible drinking problem.

Last year, one Inuit drove his snowmobile off a cliff. Another shot her brother in self-defence and a third tried to kill herself and her children. Const. Normand Fradet made two arrests for every 6 adults. They were all crazy drunk. That's why Holt was brought here. He's a psychologist from Memorial University in Newfoundland.

"Last Friday half this town was drunk," he said, adding that alcohol abuse is a major problem throughout the Arctic.

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Gazette, William Marsden

rs can bank $45,000 a year.

They bring cases of whisky in from Frobisher and Yellowknife and they sit down and drink it until it's gone. Unfortunately, there are people here ready to pay the Inuit in booze rather than hard cash.

"There is a tremendous amount of alcohol abuse leading to child abuse ... to spousal assault and also sexual assault.

"The amazing thing is the government has spent millions up here studying the ice, the age, the movement of the ice, the marine life, counting birds' eggs and whales, and they don't spend a cent finding out anything about the people. Nobody has ever bothered to study why the Inuit drink the way they do.

"The government just gives everything to them. To heap goods on a people and expect something good to come of it is ridiculous."

Inside Resolute's three-room school house, teacher George Graham watches as an Inuit teacher gives the older children their daily hour of Inuktitut. One child is playing a spelling game with an Apple computer.

"It would be a very small minority of children who are not abused," Graham said.

The school is kindergarten to Grade 8. Children must go 1,500 kilometres southeast to Frobisher Bay to attend high school. Like most children, Inuit do not like to leave home at age 13. They simply complete their education at Grade 8.

"To me, (the Inuit) are Canada's valid claim to this area but they aren't being told that," Graham said. "They are just given things. In comparison, all these weather stations and scientific research don't count for anything."

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One of the first sights you see as you fly into Cominco's Polaris Mine on Little Cornwallis Island is a giant Canadian flag painted on the roof of the mine's lead and zinc storage building.

The flag was the idea of a Hungarian engineer who fled to Canada during the uprising in 1956. He wanted the biggest Canadian flag in the country. He got it.

Workers come to this flat gravel island sitting over 1,500 feet of permafrost for one reason: the mathematics.

A miner works nine months a year, 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, free food, lodgings and travel. Taxes are the second lowest in Canada. He can easily bank $45,000 a year if he's single.

"If you can tell yourself you'll do that for four years, you can come out with a lot," said miner Ted Wesley, who was born in Zambia.

One Inuit miner, Phil Ojiluk, saved enough money to buy a farm in New Brunswick. That's how life is up here. Everything is handed to you. And if you work hard and save enough money, you can get out.

Polaris is the only industry of note in the High Arctic. The ore is estimated to last 20 to 25 years. By about 2010 the world's most northerly mine probably will be closed. And the biggest Canadian flag of all will rest on an empty shell.