

# Working Papers on Arctic Security No. 4

## When the Skies Rained Boxes: The Air Force and the Qikiqtani Inuit, 1941-64

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The Emerging Arctic  
Security Environment

**WHEN THE SKIES RAINED BOXES: THE AIR  
FORCE AND THE QIKIQTANI INUIT, 1941-64**

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## ***Working Papers on Arctic Security***

This series seeks to stimulate deeper academic dialogue on Arctic security issues in Canada. Papers fall into three categories. The first includes theoretically—and empirically—driven academic papers on subjects related to Arctic security broadly conceptualized. The second focuses on the impacts of defence and security practices on Arctic peoples, with a particular emphasis on the Canadian North during and after the Cold War. The third category of papers summarizes key Canadian and international policy documents related to Arctic security and sovereignty issues.

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# *When the Skies Rained Boxes: The Air Force and the Qikiqtani Inuit, 1941-64<sup>1</sup>*

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*P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Ph.D.  
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Historians chronically speak of the military opening up the Arctic, as if it had been a kind of locked and mysterious room before some clever army engineers happened by with the keys. Really, the military swept over the Arctic – first during World War II and more so during the Cold War – like an iron cloud, carpet bombing the place with boxes. Their job was the assertion of sovereignty. Every place a box landed became a beach-head for industrialized society. The boxes soon became the foundation for the Canadian government, which the military had given cause to worry about its sovereignty. Boxes were added, and more of our society – with its various virtues and vices, machines and organizations, ideals, morals, values and goals – were shipped north. What adult Inuit recall when they look back, not always in anger, is decade after decade when the skies rained boxes. The skies rain boxes still.

Kevin McMahon, *Arctic Twilight* (1987)

The unfurling of polar projection maps at the end of the Second World War, when the wartime alliance between the Soviet and Western worlds began to unravel, focused unprecedented strategic attention on Canada's Arctic. Geographical isolation no longer afforded Canada the luxury of apathy when it came to its northland. The US clamored for access to bolster continental defences and Canadian decision-makers, cognizant of the need to work with their southern superpower neighbour or risk the prospect of the US acting on its own, proved accommodating allies.<sup>2</sup> Yet "neither the United States nor Canada looked on the North as a *place* to be protected because of some intrinsic value," strategist Kenneth Eyre astutely observed. "It was seen as a *direction*, an exposed flank."<sup>3</sup> Despite framing the Arctic as a vast, empty strategic space, decision-makers still had to acknowledge that an indigenous population called the region home.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the conference "De-Icing Retired! The Historical Dimension of the Canadian Air Force's Experience in the Arctic," at Sainte-Anne-de-Bellevue, Quebec, 2 June 2010. Thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, St. Jerome's University, and ArcticNet for funding support that facilitated research for parts of this study. Ryan Shackleton, who worked as a historian with The Qikiqtani Truth Commission (QTC) was granted access to the QTC research material for the earlier research paper. The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and in no way reflect the opinions or work of the Qikiqtani Truth Commission. For more information on the important work of the QTC please see the website [www.qtcommission.com](http://www.qtcommission.com).

<sup>2</sup> See Shelagh Grant, *Sovereignty or Security? Government Policy in the Canadian North, 1936-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1988); David Bercuson, "Continental Defence and Arctic Sovereignty, 1945-1950: Solving the Canadian Dilemma," in *The Cold War and Defence*, eds. Keith Neilson and Ronald Haycock (New York: Praeger Press, 1990), 153-70; Peter Kikkert, "The Polaris Incident: 'Going to the Mat' with the Americans," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* vol.11, no.3 (2009), 1-29; Gordon W. Smith, "Weather Stations in the Canadian North and Sovereignty," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, vol.11, no.3 (2009), 1-63.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth C. Eyre, "Forty Years of Military Activity in the Canadian North, 1947-87," *Arctic*, vol.40, no.4 (1987), 294.

In 1946, geographer Trevor Lloyd recommended that Canadians should “see that none of the contemporary military activity in the Arctic is allowed to touch the lives of the Eskimos.”<sup>4</sup> In practice, this wishful thinking proved impossible. The influence of military modernization<sup>5</sup> on Canadian northern peoples has often been noted but seldom explored in detail. Anthropologist John Hughes, in his sweeping 1965 article on cultural change amongst the Eskimo, observed that military construction was the key impetus for “the seemingly inexorable gathering of the Eskimo population into more permanent villages and the attrition of outlying settlements.” Over the course of a single generation, these “settlement Eskimos” had become “oriented to a fundamentally different way of life.”<sup>6</sup>

In their important studies on relocations and game management in the Arctic, Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski see the state as a totalizing force, its mission underpinned by an ideology of progress. “Totalization of the state involved, for the state, the transmutation of the need away from relations to animals and toward what so-called progress had to offer: wage employment, permanent housing, settlement living, and all that they entail,” they argue. “Undermining the hunting regime, as a way of meeting culturally constructed needs, was crucial to attempts to absorb Inuit by the Canadian state into dominant social forms.”<sup>7</sup> During the Cold War era, northern military projects were, as documentary filmmaker Kevin McMahon described, beachheads of modernism: sites of wage employment, new housing and Western technologies, and sources of disruption to northern ecosystems and traditional patterns of life. Although not primarily designed to bring Aboriginal Peoples under state control, defence initiatives – conceived from afar and implemented locally – had far reaching impacts. Accordingly, scholars like Frances Abele have argued that “sovereignty and security policy decisions, in their immediate impact, have been and continue to be disproportionately costly to northern indigenous peoples.” Inuit spokesperson Mary Simon concurred that “too often, military projects are centralized undertakings that are unilaterally imposed on indigenous peoples and their territories. Such actions are inconsistent with the basic principles of aboriginal self-government.”<sup>8</sup> Militarization appears to fit within the framework of a coercive, totalizing, high modernist<sup>9</sup> state interested in re-engineering Inuit life to conform with modern priorities.

The federal government’s approach to Arctic defence was paradoxical. Although the military in general, and the air force in particular, was not at the forefront of intentional social engineering nor did its practices represent a well-orchestrated scheme to “civilize” Inuit, its activities created or exacerbated dependencies on wage employment and

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<sup>4</sup> Trevor Lloyd, “Frontier of Destiny – The Canadian Arctic,” *Behind the Headlines*, vol.6, no.7 (1946), 8.

<sup>5</sup> “A state (or states) working to make a landscape *legible* so as to enroll it more effectively into governmental responsibilities ... through projects backed by the authority of reason and the latest technologies, designed at a distance and implemented without sufficient attention to local nuance.” See Matthew Farish and Whitney Lackenbauer, “Modular Modernization: The D.E.W. Line and the Construction of the Cold War Arctic,” paper presented to the Canadian Association of Geographers annual meeting, Saskatoon, 31 May 2007.

<sup>6</sup> John Hughes, “Under Four Flags: Recent Culture Change Among the Eskimos,” *Current Anthropology*, vol.6, no.1 (Feb. 1965), 14-15.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Kulchyski and Frank James Tester, *Kiumajut (Talking Back): Game Management and Inuit Rights, 1900-70* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Frances Abele, “Confronting ‘harsh and inescapable facts,’” in Edgar Dosman, ed., *Sovereignty and Security in the Arctic* (London: Routledge, 1989), 189; Mary Simon, “Militarization and the Aboriginal Peoples,” in Franklyn Griffiths, ed., *Arctic Alternatives: Civility or Militarism in the Circumpolar North* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens, 1992), 60.

<sup>9</sup> High modernism, to borrow James C. Scott’s framework, sought “a sweeping, rational engineering of all aspects of social life in order to improve the human condition.” *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: 1988), 88. See also Matthew Farish and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “High modernism in the Arctic: Planning Frobisher Bay and Inuvik,” *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol.35, no.3 (July 2009), 517-544.

Western goods, encouraged the sedentarization of Inuit, and set up unsustainable expectations given the “boom and bust” cycles associated with defence work. The presence of military installations did circumscribe certain Inuit behaviours, but the coercion implied in recent literature on state-Inuit relations during the Cold War seems strangely absent.<sup>10</sup>

This study examines how the establishment of air force installations affected Inuit in the Qikiqtani region during the first two decades of the Cold War. “The outlook of the Eskimos ... has been changing since the construction of the northern airfields, the weather and radar stations, and the D.E.W. [Distant Early Warning] Line, opened their eyes to the advantages of wage-employment,” anthropologist Diamond Jenness observed in *Eskimo Administration* (1964).<sup>11</sup> At Frobisher Bay, the military hub of the eastern Arctic, the presence of an airfield, weather station, radar station, and construction activities related to the DEW Line drew Inuit people into the web of modern urban life. Reports from government officials and oral histories reveal how the expansion of the military’s footprint in the 1940s and 50s reshaped boundaries, expectations and tastes of Frobisher’s inhabitants. It also changed the socio-economic and cultural geographies of southern Baffin Island more generally. In the High Arctic, the government-sponsored relocation of Inuit to Resolute aimed to support traditional harvesting practices. The establishment of the Inuit community immediately adjacent to an RCAF base, however, had unexpected consequences. There, Inuit found a comfortable mixture of both tradition and modernity and quickly incorporated the wage economy into their daily lives. In some ways, Resolute served as a model for the transitioning Inuit society. These stories are a poignant reminder that air force projects, conceived for Arctic security reasons, can have dramatic impacts on indigenous populations living in remote communities.

### *Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit)*

The Second World War had a transformative impact on Canada and on Aboriginal Peoples in particular, (re)shaping social discourses and the physical and cultural geographies of interaction.<sup>12</sup> This was particularly evident in the Canadian Northwest, where military development projects brought a flood of outsiders (predominantly Americans) into the region. This incited a sovereignty panic in Ottawa, prompting Vincent Massey’s famous claim that a U.S. “army of occupation” had “apparently walked in and taken possession [of the North], in many cases as if Canada were unclaimed territory by a docile race of aborigines.”<sup>13</sup> Massey’s colourful commentary on the broad Canadian-American relationship also played upon a stereotypical image of Native peoples. In reality, Aboriginal groups were marginalized, their land rights ignored, and a distant federal government both regulated and protected them from outside threats.

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<sup>10</sup> In this sense, our findings support those of David Damas in *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers: The Transformation of Inuit Settlement in the Central Arctic* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Diamond Jenness, *Eskimo Administration : II. Canada* (Montreal: Arctic Institute of North America, 1964), 97.

<sup>12</sup> R.S. Sheffield, *Red Man’s on the Warpath* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 204); Ken Coates and William R. Morrison, *The Alaska Highway in WWII: The U.S. Army of Occupation in Canada’s Northwest* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992); Coates and Morrison, *Working the North: Labor and the Northwest Defense Projects 1942-1946* (Anchorage: University of Alaska Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Vincent Massey, *What’s Past Is Prologue* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1963), 371.

In other areas, the effects of the war were less acute but initiated a process of military modernization that culminated during the 1950s.<sup>14</sup> Frobisher Bay (Iqaluit) was a temporary fishing spot for Inuit of southern Baffin Island, but had never hosted a year round settlement. Its first permanent incarnation was Crystal Two, an airbase and weather station at the head of the bay, and a stop on the Crimson Staging Route, the series of bases and depots that the US established (with Canadian approval) to facilitate the transfer of planes and other material from North America to Europe during the Second World War. By the time the Crystal Two station became operational in 1943, the installation was “virtually obsolete” for wartime purposes.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Crimson Route airfields were heralded as modern miracles. In the words of Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner to Canada, the Americans “treated...with indifference the obstacles which Nature – whose sovereignty in the Arctic is even more supreme than that of the Canadian Government – put in their way.”<sup>16</sup>

The imprint of the Western military was particularly obvious to Inuit drawn to the new settlement. Tomassie Naglingniq encountered the Americans in 1941, when they first arrived in Frobisher Bay to find a location to build houses and an airfield. “The *qallunaat* [non-Inuit] started giving us biscuits, sugar, tea, chocolate and Coca-Cola. They started opening pop and handing them to us,” he remembered. “I took a sip when [one man with a long beard] told me to, and my tongue felt like it burned, but it was just Coca-Cola. When my tongue burned, I threw the pop inside our tent and it exploded. The next day the Americans gave out so many things, including cigarettes, to my family and everyone else.” Inuit were also exposed to Western popular culture:

On a Saturday or a Sunday, when the Americans were not working, they took us to the ship and we watched a movie. We had never seen anything like that. Neither my grandparents nor my mother had ever seen anything like that before.... Once inside the theatre on the ship we saw a big white screen. It was really big. Niaquq, the man that spoke Inuktitut, told us to look at the screen... because we were going to watch a war movie. My mother and her family and a lot of other Inuit were watching. When the movie started, everybody started yelling ‘*ajait ajait*’ [meaning I’m scared] because we never saw anything like that before. It was like the people in the movie were coming and shooting at us, and we were crying, us children anyway. We were even scared to look at the screen. My mother and my grandparents were yelling *ajait* when the people in the movies were shooting. The sound of the shooting sounded like ‘tuk tuk tuk tuk tuk’. The Inuit were ducking and taking cover, because they thought they were being shot at.<sup>17</sup>

The arrival of the Americans marked a turning point in the history of the region. Food, cigarettes, and movies (usually Westerns) are common elements in Inuit narratives of their encounters with armed service personnel. Before the war, the only Qallunaat that Naglingniq’s family had seen were the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) employees at the local trading posts. They had never seen mechanized vehicles like bulldozers. “When they started unloading the ship, their vehicles just started moving on the ground even though they were made of metal,” Naglingniq recounted. “Looking back, we must have thought they were from the moon.”<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> On this theme, see Farish and Lackenbauer, “High modernism in the Arctic.”

<sup>15</sup> See Robert V. Eno, “Crystal Two: The Origin of Iqaluit,” *Arctic* 56.1 (2003), 72.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Grant, *Sovereignty or Security?*, 275.

<sup>17</sup> Melanie Gagnon and Iqaluit Elders, *Inuit Recollections on the Military Presence in Iqaluit* (Iqaluit: Nunavut Arctic College, 2002), 37, 39.

<sup>18</sup> Gagnon et al, *Inuit Recollections*, 39. See also Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), James Iglooliorte interview of Joe Tikivik, Iqaluit, 17 May 2008 (used with permission of the QIA).

Historian Mélanie Gagnon's collection of Iqaluit elders' memories provides poignant insight into how the military presence at Frobisher Bay transformed the lives of Baffin Island Inuit. Elijah Pudlu was about nine years old when he arrived in Frobisher Bay to find "lots of houses by the airport hangar where the Americans were." Inuit he encountered living at the site seemed "very wealthy" compared to those living in outpost camps:

They had all kinds of things such as candies. The Americans were here then. All the people that lived here were helped by the Americans very much. The Americans used to give us fuel for free. We used to get 45 gallons of fuel. Those fuel tanks weren't there when we came here. All the fuel tanks were by the church. There were a lot of barrels. They were refilled from a ship. Inuit didn't use fuel in their stoves back then. There were lots of American ships coming here. Whenever they arrived during the summer, they used to bring lots of supplies. It was like the ship was making babies. We used to watch them when the barges landed. It was like on a movie when they had their combat vehicles. There were a lot of ships that would arrive at once. They were all American. Whenever the combat vehicles were on the land, it used to be very noisy. They were the kind that could drive onto the land. Some of them were small. I heard that there was a war when the Americans were here. They even had a cannon on top of the hill because they were keeping watch. Also over by the airport where there was a military base for the Americans, I heard that they had a big cannon.... They were protecting the Inuit. This town probably wouldn't exist if the Americans hadn't come here to protect us.<sup>19</sup>

The comparison to a "movie" is telling, given the language of protection and how surreal the re-supply operations must have appeared to Inuit living in a comparatively depauperate environment. This was not an invasion force. Indeed, elders recall disappointment when U.S. Army Air Force personnel were replaced by a token Canadian staff sent to man the base in 1944. More Inuit worked, but while the Americans tended to give out things like food for free, the Canadians insisted that Inuit pay. The jump in the price of a carton of cigarettes from \$1 to \$5 was a source of particularly unhappiness.<sup>20</sup>

As relations cooled between the West and the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War, the threat of a transpolar attack on North America became more real. The bilateral military bond between Canada and its southern neighbour tightened, and basic agreements for shared continental defence took shape. In 1947, American authorities returned in strength (400 personnel) to refurbish runway no. 1 at Frobisher Bay.<sup>21</sup> This drew in more Inuit from the dispersed camps throughout the Qikiqtani region, but no one was coerced to move to Frobisher Bay to help with military construction.

Simonie Michael lived at Ukiallivialuk, an outpost camp 50 miles from Iqaluit, before moving to Frobisher Bay to work. When news arrived that about 200 *Puatiki* (African Americans) would arrive,<sup>22</sup> the local Inuit were moved to a

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<sup>19</sup> Gagnon et al, *Inuit Recollections*, 87.

<sup>20</sup> Iqaluk Ipeelie and Simonie Michael in Gagnon et al, *Inuit Recollections*, 97, 99; Igloliorte interview of Shaigiaturuk, 17 June 2008.

<sup>21</sup> Sheila MacBain Meldrum, *Frobisher Bay: An Area Economic Survey, 1966-1969* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1975), 34.

<sup>22</sup> On the Canadian state's response to African American personnel and Aboriginal people, see Lackenbauer, "Politics of Race, Gender and Sex," in *Aboriginal Connections to Race, Environment and Traditions* ed. Jill Oakes and Rick Riewe (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Issues Press/University of Manitoba Press, 2006), 3-16.



nearby island called Ukalirtulik. “We were forewarned about the Black people arriving, telling us that they were going to mingle with our women,” Michael explained:

That is what the Police Officer told us, because they would interfere with our women, he told us to move to the Island. We had to discuss better options, before Apex, we didn’t even have any mode of transportation to move, we had absolutely nothing to move ourselves with! So our men formed their own group and my wife’s father, Itorcheak, became the community leader. The Americans were located up there and Inuit would be located down there, I mean we were not that far away from each other. Perhaps a good walking distance to the end of the point of Iqaluit and that’s how we got there, by walking. The white men were living up there and we lived down here, we didn’t amalgamate in one place.

There was a sign; the RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] officer made a sign stating “Do Not Enter Inuit Land” by anyone and when you go up a distance at the edge of Iqaluit area, there was another sign saying the same thing, that there were to be no entrance to Inuit land. If you entered Apex through Apex Hill or from the south side, it said the same thing, “Do Not Enter Inuit Land” all the way up to Iqaluit, even before we settled in Apex. When they put up those signs, we wanted to make Apex our settlement. Even when we advised them about wanting to move, we were stuck for quite a long time because we didn’t have the means to move, to get off the Island. We didn’t have the material to build our own house, qarmaq, I mean there was totally nothing! Those were the major problems for us!<sup>23</sup>

They found Ukalirtulik “impossible to live in,” with no water, harbour, or easy access to work on the mainland. They gathered scrap packing material and boxes to make houses, which were not insulated and only warmed by makeshift heaters furnished out of powdered milk tins. “Since we were told to work a regular job,” Michael explained, most Inuit “couldn’t constantly provide food for their dogs anymore, so most men couldn’t afford to take care of their dog-teams.”<sup>24</sup>

Andrew Thomson, controller of the meteorological division at the Department of Transport, visited Frobisher Bay in early April 1948. “The Eskimos run tractors and trucks, pump out oil daily from drums and distribute it to station personnel by truck,” he reported to External Affairs. “The local laundry is operated by 3 Eskimos; one runs the dry cleaning section and the other two the washing and ironing section.” The American officer in charge at Frobisher Bay said that without Inuit help it would be “a real problem” distributing the 15,000 barrels of oil taken ashore annually.<sup>25</sup>

About 185 Inuit lived in a village about half a mile from the weather station, an area that was strictly off-limits to military personnel – except “between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon for taking pictures.” Tourists who expected a romantic image of Inuit life were disappointed. Thomson found the living conditions deplorable, which he

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<sup>23</sup> QIA, Mathew Akavak & Mary Akpalialuk interview of Simonie Michael, Iqaluit, 26 January 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. Inuit began to gather around the Frobisher air base by the end of 1951. David Damas has identified three “modes of residence” that developed: a small minority of the families of permanently employed men; a larger group comprising families who lived around Frobisher through the summer months but returned to outside winter camps; and “those who prefer to follow the native mode the whole year.” Damas, *Arctic Migrants/Arctic Villagers*, 59-60. Eventually Simonie Michael and his family moved to Apex Hill, the new Inuit townsite initiated in 1955 about three miles from the air base.

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Thomson to Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, “Notes Taken On Visit to the Arctic – April 5-15, 1948,” 13 May 1948, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 25, vol. 6298, file 9061-A-40, pt.3 FP.

documented to convey “the extremely difficult problem that is created by bringing in Eskimos to work at a weather station.” Inuit inhabited extremely dirty small frame huts, much less satisfactory than their snow igloos. “The Eskimo natives employed attempt to follow the white man’s customs,” he noted. They had replaced their traditional clothing with “woolen underwear and a fur parka; the woolen underwear is left on until, the RCMP told me, it fairly rots off. Normally, in the native state, the Eskimo would take off the clothing and hang it up outside in the cold and sleep in a sleeping bag; in the morning the Eskimo would beat out their fur clothing and get rid of the dirt.” Fortunately, in Thomson’s view, better access to medical care at Frobisher helped Inuit to overcome “the health problems created by the change from their native habits and customs.”<sup>26</sup>

Although the US military continued to operate the Frobisher airbase in the late 1940s, the RCAF had need for labour at its northern stations and contemplated employing Inuit for the first time. It was difficult to get Qallunaat men to serve for long lengths of time, after all, and differential pay rates compounded the high costs of transporting them in and out. Accordingly, commanding officers at various RCAF units in the far north requested authority to hire Inuit as local labours and interpreters. The RCAF looked to be selective, identifying “only Eskimos of the non-nomadic tribes” who had received mission educations, and sought permission from its government counterparts to hire three Eskimos per Arctic unit.<sup>27</sup>

Hugh Keenleyside, the deputy minister at the Department of Mines and Resources (responsible for Eskimo Affairs at the time) explained to the air force that Inuit relied on hunting and trapping for subsistence. He worried that they would lose their hunting and trapping skills if they were withdrawn from the native way of life, even for a couple of years. This also affected childrearing for a traditional lifestyle. Accordingly, the NWT administration had tried to limit the amount of time that an Eskimo could be employed on “White men’s work” and thus sought to avoid difficulties associated with casual employment. At Frobisher Bay, for example, the US army employed about 25 Eskimos who lived with their families at the air base. “Their employment is rotated with other Eskimos in the region so that no native with a family can remain longer than one year at the air base,” Keenleyside explained. “This seems to be the only possible arrangement in cases where there is no guarantee of long-term continuity of employment.” This rotation would make sense for casual or temporary work, as long as men were not drawn away from gathering food for the winter – “otherwise they might face a winter of living on relief at the nearest post.” If young men with “special ability” had the option of permanent work, however, with the same old age security as other RCAF members, then they could be trained accordingly:

The Eskimos are an ingenious race and many have marked inherent mechanical ability as evidenced in their care and operation of boat engines. It is our belief that, if continuity of employment could be assured, many of them could learn to handle maintenance work at air establishments, meteorological and radio stations, etc. In fact, in time, with education, there seems no reason why they might not be able to fill more technical jobs. If opportunity for permanent employment for Eskimos should present itself at any of your establishments in the north, we can see no objection to allowing young Eskimo men of proven ability to occupy such positions. This would be of advantage to the Eskimos by providing careers for them, and to their employer in not having to bring men out on furlough.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Thomson to Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, ‘Notes Taken On Visit to the Arctic.’

<sup>27</sup> A/V/M K.M. Guthrie to Chief of the Air Staff, 1 December 1947, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

<sup>28</sup> H. Keenleyside to W. Gordon Mills, 31 January 1948, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

The RCAF was cautious about any permanent arrangement, however, until it had more experience employing Inuit as casual labourers.

In the meantime, the Department of Mines and Resources (DMR) agreed to actually employ the men and attach them to the units, with the RCAF covering wages and expenses. So long as the RCAF work did not disrupt regular hunting and trapping, rates of pay fit with the department's norms, pay was credit with the local trader (preferably the HBC, "who are definitely interested in keeping the natives fit for trapping"), and the local RCMP were consulted, DMR supported it.<sup>29</sup> RCAF officers also had unique responsibilities to oversee the Inuit transition to modern "civilized" society, Keenleyside emphasized in early 1950:

As you know, the Eskimos are a nomadic, comparatively primitive people and conditions of settled living and employment are a drastic change for them. They need encouragement, leadership, instruction and supervision in the big task of learning to live satisfactorily under settled conditions. For example, they need to learn the habits of cleanliness and sanitation, which are not necessary or at least, not practised, in their normal nomadic existence. There may be a tendency on the part of the Commanding Officers at bases where Eskimos are employed to look at the matter from the standpoint of securing labour without taking into account the fact that a profound change in the life of the native takes place when he accepts employment, and interest and help are required if he is to adjust to this change. The Commanding Officers where natives are employed can be of very great assistance in seeing that the native employees learn the proper techniques and discipline required in civilized living, techniques and disciplines which we take for granted. In particular, it may be pointed out that since the RCAF, as the employing organization, assists in providing living quarters for their Eskimo employees, we should be quite happy to see your officers insist upon the maintenance of adequate standards of cleanliness and sanitation amongst the Eskimo employees and their families. This matter would also have a bearing upon the general health and welfare of the whole establishment at the air bases concerned.

Keenleyside expected that Inuit would be drawn into the wage economy even more over time, and hoped that RCAF cooperation would help them "to make the transition successfully."<sup>30</sup>

When the RCAF took over the unit formerly operated by the US Air Force (USAF) at Frobisher Bay effective 1 August 1950, it proposed to employ five Eskimos on a continuing basis: three tractor operators, one as a labourer assisting the driver of fuel tender and on sewage disposal, and another to operate a small laundry. Furthermore, up to forty men might be hired as labourers to help unload boats during the open water season (July to October). All of these men would be drawn from the native village a few miles from Frobisher Bay:

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<sup>29</sup> D.J. McCormick to Assistant Deputy Minister, 27 April 1948, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1. Pay was comparable to what Inuit reindeer herders received in the Western Arctic, and took the form of HBC credits because government officials did not believe that the Inuit could "be trusted to spend their money wisely, and for actual needs." Housing was another concern. "Particular care must be taken when moving this class of people into houses to see that the quarters are properly cleaned and heated to suit them, as they develop chest infections when so housed, which in some cases had lead [sic] to considerable tuberculosis," D.J. McCormick, the assistant director of civilian personnel for the RCAF, noted. The central housing systems used in RCAF stations would be too hot, and special quarters might be needed in cases of Eskimo employment. D.J. McCormick to Assistant Deputy Minister, 4 March 1948, LAC, RG 24, acc. 1983-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

<sup>30</sup> H.L. Keenleyside to C.M. Drury, 27 February 1950, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

The Officer Commanding the unit concerned will be instructed to work in conjunction with the RCMP constable in the district in obtaining the proper natives and will also be advised to ensure that natives employed by the RCAF have proper living accommodation and that such accommodation is kept in good condition. This will also be done in conjunction with the RCMP constable. It is not intended, however, that special accommodation be provided by the RCAF.

These conditions were the same as those applied to the RCAF hiring natives in the Western Arctic and at Fort Chimo, Quebec – with the added perk that Frobisher Bay Inuit receive a small cash salary so that they could buy cigarettes and tobacco from the RCAF canteen.<sup>31</sup> The deputy minister at Mines and Resources was pleased.<sup>32</sup>

Burgeoning federal plans for Frobisher Bay in the early 1950s prompted the RCAF to articulate its own views on military modernization and government policy towards Inuit. Given the large air force presence in the community, the RCAF and the Defence Research Board participated in preliminary planning for a new Inuit townsite. The main requisites included a site that would not interfere with base operations but would be relatively accessible to it for employment reasons. Group Captain F.W. Ball, the Commanding Officer of the RCAF station Goose Bay (of which Frobisher Bay was a satellite), doubted that Frobisher Bay was the best place for an Inuit settlement, given that “the surrounding countryside can support only a few hunters” and already many of the local Inuit had become “charity residents.” He noted a “conflict in thinking” about the future of Inuit. On the one hand, policy favoured keeping an Inuk “as close as possible to his original state so that he can hunt and adding only minor modern improvements to his way of life.” On the other hand:

the second policy seems to favor giving the Eskimo the full benefit of modern civilization and educating him to make take his place beside any other Canadian. This second policy appears to have the brighter future and for this reason a move of such a centre further to the south is recommended. However before any scheme of education or rehabilitation is undertaken it is felt the long term objective of the government must be made clear. It is believed there is no happy medium, either the Eskimo must be left in their natural environment or if they are to be given modern benefits a full and rigorous program must be instituted.<sup>33</sup>

Group Captain Z.L. Leigh completely agreed with this report and passed on the message that “the Frobisher Bay area is a totally unrealistic selection if it is the intention that the Eskimos remain as hunters.” Only by moving Inuit southward, closer “to areas where employment, medical coverage, etc., is reasonably close at hand,” could Canada achieve the “eventual rehabilitation of the Eskimos.”<sup>34</sup>

The federal government did not follow this line of advice (indeed, it relocated some southern Inuit to the Far North as we describe later), and growing American interest in Frobisher Bay (driven by changing geostrategic assessments arising from the Soviet detonation of an atomic device and the outbreak of the Korean War beginning in late 1950)

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<sup>31</sup> C.M. Drury to H.L. Keenleyside, 10 June 1950, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

<sup>32</sup> C.W. Jackson to C.M. Drury, 20 June 1950, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

<sup>33</sup> G/C F.W. Ball to AOC, ATC HQ, 3 October 1953, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1. On the tension between these policy aspirations (framed in the theoretical construct of ‘totalization’), see also Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit (Mistakes)* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994), 6-7. For more on the ACND study of the Inuit in Frobisher, see ACND Document ND-64, “Eskimo Settlement at Frobisher Bay,” 13 October 1953, LAC, RG2, vol. 6181.

<sup>34</sup> G/C Z.L. Leigh to CAS, 19 October 1953, LAC, RG 24, acc. 83-84/049, box 595, file 443-5 pt.1.

prompted resurgent military activity. Command of the base returned to the USAF Northeast Air Command, the base served as a transshipment point during the construction of the massive American airbase at Thule, Greenland, and a radar station (the terminus of the Pinetree Line which spanned southern Canada and ran up the Newfoundland-Labrador coast) was built near the Frobisher Bay airfield.<sup>35</sup> In 1953, the American 926th Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron arrived to maintain the radar site. With the arrival of more armed forces personnel came more restrictions on local mobility. Tomassie Naglingniq recalled walking too close to the “Upper Base” as a teenager hunting with some friends:

It was scary when the Americans came with their guns. We were not supposed to be in that area with guns. We had caught a lot of ptarmigans. They took the ptarmigans from us. I guess they called the RCMP officer because he came. He was the only policeman at that time. When he took us, we thought we had been arrested, but he just took us home. The next day they did not return the ptarmigans, but they gave us pop and chocolate in return. That was a scary experience. We were scared. The next day they just told us not to go up there again.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, Akisu Joamie recalled that the “Inuit were not allowed to go beyond where the breakwater is today.” At that location, Inuit would hand over to the RCMP officer goods and carvings they were trying to sell. The police would act as a liaison and offer them to the Qallunaat working at the base. Although Inuit-Qallunaat interaction was prohibited, this did not mean that service personnel were disinterested in the plight of their neighbours. Joamie and others remembered how service personnel “would pile up food, such as a hundred pounds of flour, or a hundred pounds of sugar,” where they knew Inuit visited.<sup>37</sup>

For their part, Ottawa officials lamented the growing dependency of Inuit on the military and concomitant loss of traditional land skills. Although defence projects attracted indigenous people from the surrounding areas, it would be erroneous to presuppose that government planners sought Inuit sedentarization. Geoffrey Bruce, a member of the Defence Liaison Division at External Affairs, visited Frobisher in 1953. At that point, the site consisted of an Inuit settlement, RCAF and USAF buildings, a radio and meteorological building belonging to the Department of Transport, and a radar station. “The Eskimo community is a pitiful, pathetic site and one of the most perplexing and infectious problems facing the Northern Administration of the Department of Resources and Development,” Bruce reported. “I understand that these Eskimos are almost completely dependent on the white settlement.” Many of the local inhabitants had worked at the station since 1942, and consequently had forgotten much of their old ways of life: hunting, fishing and trapping. Living in permanent, ramshackle houses made out of old scraps of material, they no longer migrated seasonally “but continue to live in increasing filth.” Wage employment was not an equalizer. “Although a couple of Eskimos drove trucks, the great majority worked in the kitchens and around the buildings,” Bruce observed. “It was pitiful and tragic in that the Eskimos have given up their own culture and have accepted, or are accepting, many of the material advantages but few of the non-material benefits of the ‘Western World.’”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Eno, “Crystal Two,” 73; Meldrum, *Frobisher Bay: Area Economic Survey*, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Gagnon et al, *Inuit Recollections*, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Gagnon et al, *Inuit Recollections*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> “Arctic Province,” circa August/September 1953, LAC, RG 25, vol. 3842, file 9061-J-1-40, pt.1.



In Bruce's eyes, the convergence of militarism and modernism had created an unavoidable storm. "Since it is quite clear that now it is too late to turn back, Canada has inherited an obligation to provide these people with something more than Family Allowances, a shovel, cigarettes, Coca-Cola, clothing, fuel and a healthy credit account at the Hudson Bay Company," he insisted. The military had surpassed the whalers and fur traders as "the greatest employers" of Inuit, and their clustering around defence installations had fundamentally disrupted their traditional patterns. "Before this development, there was probably some chance that these people could continue living their own life; now this is impossible," Bruce asserted. "Perhaps because there are only several thousand Eskimos in the entire Canadian Arctic the transition will be easy and painless. Possibly, it may be tragic."<sup>39</sup> This language of inevitable demise, which was inextricably linked to a sense of modern progress, was commonplace in the 1950s.

The apogee of military modernization came with the DEW Line, a string of radar stations along the Arctic coast built by the Americans from 1955-57 to provide advance warning of a Soviet bomber attack on the North American heartland. During the early Canada-US negotiations that led to the construction of the system, Canadian officials expressed concerns about the effects that the military mega-project would have on Inuit. At the request of the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR), the conditions for the building of the radar system included provisions to protect Inuit from the fundamental disruption to their way of life and health.<sup>40</sup> Commentators took note. The government "insisted that no activity in any form should interfere with the Eskimos' normal way of life, or of making a living," Richard Morenus wrote in his epic 1957 book on the DEW Line. "Eskimos could be used as guides or as workers in certain types of jobs, but only after the Department agents had given their okay." He painted a positive portrait of "very intelligent" government support:

These people, they explained firmly, were Canadian Eskimos, and Canada planned to have them stay that way. Eskimos, living as Eskimos have always lived, will remain a proud and valiant race with intelligent co-operative help. Canada will never allow her natives to become serfs or charges through assimilation if she can possibly prevent it.... They are not menials or servants. They are a proud people in their own land. The result is a splendid sense of equality among all the men working on the Line. There is no segregation, favoritism, or sense of superiority in one human over another. Up there in the Arctic there is a common bond in one world.<sup>41</sup>

Morenus suggested that the Canadian government was succeeding in insulating its Inuit from changes to traditional life, and that Inuit were flourishing in a broader world.

Others were less certain that fundamental transformation of Inuit life could be avoided. "The question whether the DEW Line will serve any useful military purpose has still to be answered, but there is no doubt that it will have a profound and lasting effect on the Arctic," C.J. Marshall, the director of the Northern Research Co-ordination Centre of the DNANR,<sup>42</sup> anticipated the same year. "Inevitably, the lives of most of the Eskimos in the region will be

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Annex to Exchange of Notes (May 5, 1955) between Canada and the United States of America Governing the Establishment of a Distant Early Warning System in Canadian Territory, Canada, Treaty Series 1955, No. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Morenus, *The D.E.W. Line: Distant Early Warning, The Miracle of America's First Line of Defense* (New York: Rand McNally, 1957), 82.

<sup>42</sup> The NCRC was created in 1954 to report through the Secretary of the Advisory Committee on Northern Development. Its functions included collecting and disseminating scientific and technical data, as well as coordinating, sponsoring and conducting scientific research. John Nicholas

drastically altered.” Material prosperity brought benefits and temptations that would usher in a “new pattern of life” for Inuit, but Marshall ended with optimism: “The adjustment will not be easy but with reasonable controls and guidance there is no reason why the D.E.W. Line should not be a boon to the Arctic even if it does not prove to be a shield for the rest of North America.”<sup>43</sup>

In terms of an increased tempo of military activity, the DEW Line was “a boon” to Frobisher Bay which became the communication and construction hub for the eastern section of the system. In April 1955, Pierre Berton found the Frobisher Bay base to be “a confused mosaic of men and machinery.” He described huge planes on the runways, a great host of noisy vehicles and machines, and a list of southern food: “Coca-Cola, T-bone steaks, Irish stew, dumplings, grapefruit, pickles, ham and eggs, apple pie, and ketchup, ketchup, ketchup.”<sup>44</sup> Alooook Ipellie recalled, as a child, going to the base “to wait outside their kitchen in hopes of being offered something to eat. We often succeeded and the smell of their food was like nothing that we had ever smelled before.” Eventually, the tastes of Western society infiltrated Inuit dreams. “There came a time when at least once a day I would start to dream of having tons and tons of Quallunaaq food right in our little hut,” Ipellie remembered. “Even if all of the food could not go in, I would think of becoming a genius at storing food and somehow get it all in there.”<sup>45</sup>

The scale of DEW Line activities transformed Frobisher Bay, with profound implications for Inuit of the region. In April 1956, *Edmonton Journal* reporter Douglas Leiterman predicted in a major article that “DEW Line Means End of Old Way of Life for 10,000 Eskimo’s in Canadian Northland.” His story focused on the story of “Charlie” Sageeaktuk, for whom the DEW Line “came in a roar of engines from the south, and it brought with it for Charlie a white kitchen range, an outboard motor, and more wages in a day than his father had seen in a lifetime.” It also foretold the end of his people’s way of life. Sageeaktuk earned the reputation as “the best cat-skiner [bulldozer operator] in the eastern Arctic,” but he was one of the first “victims” of the “\$450,000,000 string of radar stations that guard the bombing route from Russia.” He was also a happy victim. The Inuk was eager to trade “the harpoon for the west mop or the monkey-wrench and \$1.67 an hour,” but the Northern Service Officers (NSOs) and RCMP, “who have watched history harpoon the Eskimos,” were less convinced. Holding Sageeaktuk up as an example of what was transpiring more broadly, “civilized Charlie” was “much less of a man than his father before him. At the half-way mark between seal-meat and sausages, he is chained to a way of life for which he is ill-prepared. He is ravaged by whiteman diseases. He lives a life of squalor and filth, a pitiful camp-follower, a mere blip on the radars built by the white man’s fear.” His “packingboard shack surrounded by garbage and offal” could not be abandoned and rebuilt as easily as an “ancestral igloo.” Sageeaktuk owned “a shiny white range,” but he had to “scrounge” for wood to fuel it. “His children wear mail-order shirt-tails under their sealskin parkas,” the reporter noted, “but will grow up in a world in which they must always be outcasts.” Echoing previous government and military commentators, he emphasized that the DEW Line set in motion an inevitable process of socio-economic and cultural change:

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Harris, “National Defence and Northern Development: The Establishment of the DEWline in the Canadian North” (unpublished M.A. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1980), 195.

<sup>43</sup> C.J. Marshall, “North America’s Distant Early Warning Line,” *The Geographical Magazine* 29/12 (April 1957), 616-28.

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Berton, *The Mysterious North* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 235-36.

<sup>45</sup> Alooook Ipellie, “Frobisher Bay Childhood,” *The Beaver* (spring 1980), 4-8.

Sociologists warn that changes as fundamental as these must be spread over decades for good results. “But how can we go slow,” asks a northern service officers, “when the D.E.W. line is going ahead like an express train, and the Eskimo must change if he is to survive?”

The change will be slow at first, and like the going of the sea-ice, it will be accompanied by much creaking and groaning. Nothing can stop it. The D.E.W. has cracked the face of the Arctic in 50 places, and the cracks will spread until the old life is swallowed up and the Eskimo becomes a first-class citizen.<sup>46</sup>

There is no simple answer whether the DEW Line was a net benefit or liability for Inuit. Its transformative effects, however, were unmistakable. One RCMP officer noted:

The fact that Eskimos at these points have been introduced to employment is not a matter subject to change. The policy to encourage Eskimos to take up employment as a means of livelihood is a part of that policy which acknowledges that employment and hunting and trapping can be the only sound economy for the Eskimos in the north. This of course is not to discourage the hunter from pursuing his skills in taking animals from the sea and caribou from the land, but it is designed to provide him with some of the more substantial things which all Canadian citizens are entitled to enjoy – plenty of good food, security, a good home, medical treatment, and in some instances schools. Thus far all reports have tended to discredit the things which the DEW line construction has brought to the Eskimos. These can be weighed only in the light of good that the same circumstances have brought.<sup>47</sup>

Inuit were making between \$350.00 and \$650.00 a month working at the DEW Line. They received Sundays off and were generally permitted to take a few days off at a time to go hunting. Earned wages permitted Inuit to buy new tents, rifles, boats, gasoline and other goods. In addition, the DEW Line provided Inuit with training, and including some opportunities for industrial trades courses at places like Leduc, Alberta. Northern Service Officer R.D. Van Norman noted “All of these things are a far cry from just three years ago.” Inuit had “a substantial means of livelihood, security and the opportunity to compete for equality in all matters.”<sup>48</sup> How they spent this money, and whether employment would continue in perpetuity, was another matter.<sup>49</sup>

Although DEW Line stations provided limited employment for Inuit at other stations in the Qikiqtani region, the Qikiqtani Truth Commission concluded that the project as a whole had the greatest economic impact “in stimulating Iqaluit’s growth as an administrative centre and forwarding point, and in the development of its airport.”<sup>50</sup> The growth of the town was explosive in the late 1950s. Anthropologist Toshio Yatsushiro counted 258 Inuit in 1956, and

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<sup>46</sup> Douglas Leiterman, “DEW Line Means End of Old Way of Life for 10,000 Eskimos in Canadian Northland,” *Edmonton Journal*, 10 April 1956.

<sup>47</sup> Economic Conditions of Eskimos Living at or near D.E.W. line sites, 10 June 1957, LAC, RG 18, Acc. 1985-86/048, vol. 57, file TA 500-20-10-7.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jenkins, for example, commented on the situation and the maladaptation of the Inuit to the wage economy. “It has been noticed on various sites of the DEW Line that the Eskimo people in general tend to spend their money carelessly by purchasing confectionary goods and other luxuries which of little value to them,” he reported. “Possibly this situation will correct itself in the near future, when the Eskimos learn that candy, chewing gum, hair tonic, etc, is not of as much value to them as a good home, good education, and medical services.” Conditions Amongst the Eskimos – Frobisher Bay, R.D. Van Norman to O.C., 24 September 1956, LAC, RG 18, 1985-86/048, vol. 57, file TA 500-20-10-7. On the difficulties of spending cash earnings in remote Baffin communities see, for example, Conditions Amongst the Eskimos – Frobisher Bay, Eskimo Conditions at Site 38 – DEW Radar Line, 26 February 1958 and 15 July 1957, LAC, RG 18, acc.1985-86/048, vol. 57, file TA 500-20-10-7.

<sup>50</sup> QTC, “Government and Development in the Baffin Region, 1950 to 1975,” <http://www.qtccommission.com/actions/GetPage.php?pageId=37> (last accessed 28 May 2010).

624 in 1958. By that point, 59% of the Inuit residents lived in tents in summer and “wooden huts” in winter – mostly “shacks” or “hovels” of the worst imaginable type, with poor insulation and overcrowding.<sup>51</sup> By January 1957, only nineteen families lived in camps away from the main settlement, while forty-two resided at the air base and seventeen at the new government townsite.<sup>52</sup> Inuit were not the main priority for boosters who trumpeted Frobisher Bay’s potential as the Alexandria of the North, located at a new “crossroad of the world”, and hatched ambitious plans for the settlement.<sup>53</sup> The US Strategic Air Command (SAC), which operated the long-range strategic bombers protecting North America and sought to improve its in-flight refuelling capabilities in the northeast by stationing a squadron of KC-97 tanker aircraft at Frobisher Bay, began constructing a base in 1958. Cabinet approved a new townsite adjacent to the airfield that June, and the RCAF (which had transferred the airfield to the Department of Transport in late 1947) played an increasingly minor role in this bold planning.<sup>54</sup>

Grand visions built around the projected expansion of the airfield and an anticipated community of 5000 people “proved ambitious, misguided, and ultimately false,” historian Jeff Noakes tidily summarized.<sup>55</sup> The signs were already clear by the end of 1958. After serving in Lake Harbour (Kimmirut) from February 1957 to September 1958, RCMP constable Terry Jenkin returned to find Frobisher a very different place than that which he had left:

It was my request to go back to Iqaluit to get into real police work. I was shocked; it was very busy in a different sense. The D.E.W. Line and aircraft traffic had decreased. The non-Inuit population had decreased. The Inuit had also increased. In fact, I met a family that I had visited in Lake Harbour. I was shocked to see them there. There were other families that came from Lake Harbour. I guess there was accommodation on Apex.... I think the US had left and there was a small number of Canadian Air force. The US still maintained the PINE Station. There was a larger government in the Apex hill area. I think a lot of the functions we [the RCMP] had as registrars was taken over by local government institutions.<sup>56</sup>

Frobisher became an administrative centre, but its role as an essential refuelling base for transpolar air force and commercial traffic proved fleeting. By late 1960, long-range jet airliners, capable of flying to Europe directly, obviated the need for commercial airlines to use Frobisher as a “regular stop.”<sup>57</sup> The government continued with a reduced urban development program, but when the Americans unexpectedly decided to withdraw from their SAC base in 1963, about half of Frobisher Bay’s non-Native population – American and Canadian servicemen and their families – departed. “Sunk without a trace,” historian Morris Zaslow noted, “were the grandiose futuristic plans for the experimental Polar City made proof against the Arctic weather.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Toshio Yatsushiro, *Frobisher Bay 1958* (Ottawa: Northern Coordination and Research Centre, 1963), 1-2. See also “The Changing Eskimo: A Study of Wage Employment and its Consequences Among the Eskimos of Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island,” *The Beaver*, vol. 42, no. 1, outfit 293 (1962), 19-26.

<sup>52</sup> Damas, *Arctic Migrants*, 59-60.

<sup>53</sup> On this theme, see Farish and Lackenbauer, “High Modernism.”

<sup>54</sup> Meldrum, *Frobisher Bay: Area Economic Survey*, 34-35; Eno, “Crystal Two,” 73; Jeffrey Noakes, “Under the Radar: Defence Construction (1951) Limited and the Military Infrastructure in Canada, 1950-1965.” Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, 2005, 429-38.

<sup>55</sup> Noakes, “Under the Radar,” 436.

<sup>56</sup> QTC, Jim Igloliorte interview with Terry Jenkin.

<sup>57</sup> See “Unveil High Arctic Town Plans,” *Globe and Mail* 26 July 1961, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Morris Zaslow, *The Northward Expansion of Canada, 1914-1967* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988), 343, 355. For a contemporary view, see Walter Gray, “Frobisher Bay Boom Ordered Suspended,” *Globe and Mail*, 13 June 1963.

The military had proven to be yet another transient resident of the Arctic, but the experience at Frobisher also revealed how defence installations served as catalysts for cultural change.<sup>59</sup> The American and Canadian air forces had played the formative role in transforming Frobisher Bay from a fishing spot to the largest community in the eastern Arctic. By May 1960, the non-Inuit population of Frobisher was 590 and the Inuit population 800, nearly all of whom lived in the settlement.<sup>60</sup> Despite earlier RCAF admonitions that the local area was not suitable for subsistence hunting, and that the Inuit transition to modernization would only occur if they were relocated south, Frobisher Bay had changed from an air force facility born in the Second World War to a permanent administrative centre governing Inuit of the Eastern Arctic. Ironically, relocations of Inuit from the South to the far northern settlements of the Qikiqtani – particularly Resolute – represented a very different experience.

## Resolute

In 1947, the Canada-US Joint Arctic Weather Station (JAWS) programme established its hub at Resolute. Two years later, the RCAF established a base there. Built at a cost of approximately \$1.5 million, the base became the jumping off point for researchers, explorers, and government agents travelling in the High Arctic. In many ways, the establishment of the RCAF base at Resolute was an important step towards opening the High Arctic to human habitation and development.<sup>61</sup> By 1952, Resolute had a population of approximately 200, making it the second largest settlement in the Qikiqtani region. There were, however, no Inuit living in the immediate area.

The Canadian government was awakening from its long period of “absent mindedness” about its North in the early 1950s, partly as a result of development interests and partly out of a responsibility towards its Inuit citizens. Reports of starvation and third world conditions in the eastern Arctic were carried back by American military personnel after the Second World War and popularized in southern newspapers, magazines and books. Reading between the lines of sensationalism the message was clear: Inuit life was changing. The introduction of family allowances, the increasing reliance on imported technologies, and the crash of the fox fur market brought Inuit into a more dependent relationship with the state. The government, aware of the changing nature of the north, scrambled to address the problems of insufficient game resources, a health crisis that saw a large portion of the Inuit population in southern sanatoria, and a failing traditional economy.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, John J. Honigmann, “Transforming the Arena of Action: Two Paths to Cultural Modernization Compared,” *Dalhousie Review*, vol.47, no.3 (1967), 388. After the military departed, the growth rate in Frobisher continued through the 1960s, propelled by even more migration from neighbouring communities. Quinn Duffy noted that “by 1969 only 5 percent of the area’s population was entirely dependent on the traditional way of life based on the fur trade.” R. Quinn Duffy, *The Road to Nunavut: The Progress of the Eastern Arctic Inuit since the Second World War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1988), 163.

<sup>60</sup> Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*, 59-60.

<sup>61</sup> Peter Kikkert and Whitney Lackenbauer, “Setting an Arctic Course: Task Force 80 and Canadian Control in the Arctic, 1948,” *The Northern Mariner*, vol.21, no.4 (2011), 327-58. One Arctic historian claimed that Resolute was the most important of all the northern weather stations and DEW Line airfields. Bruce McAllister, *Wings Above the Arctic: A Photographic History of Arctic Aviation* (Boulder, CO: Roundup Press, 2002), 86.

<sup>62</sup> On the early 1950s, see for example Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*; Duffy, *Road to Nunavut*; Damas, *Arctic Migrants / Arctic Villagers*; Jenness, *Eskimo Administration: II*; Richard J. Diubaldo, *A Historical Overview of Government-Inuit Relations, 1900-1980s* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1992); R. Gordon Robertson, *Memoirs of a Very Civil Servant: Mackenzie King to Pierre Trudeau* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); and Mark O. Dickerson, *Whose North? Political Change, Political Development, and Self-Government in the Northwest Territories* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992).



One government solution to the “Eskimo Problem” was to relocate Inuit from places where the game was dwindling to more abundant hunting grounds. The most infamous of these government-directed moves were the High Arctic relocations. The Canadian government organized to send seven families (32 people) from Inukjuak in northern Quebec to Craig Harbour and Resolute.<sup>63</sup> Aware the conditions in the High Arctic were different than in northern Quebec, planners recruited three Inuit families from Pond Inlet, a more northerly settlement, to help the Inukjuammiut adjust to life in the High Arctic. The government’s intent for the relocations was to relieve the pressures on the northern Quebec game, and provide Inuit with a means to continue their hunting and trapping lifestyle. The plan was also, in part, “an experiment to determine how well Eskimos from southern areas could adapt themselves to conditions in the High Arctic.”<sup>64</sup> By all accounts, the first years were difficult for the relocatees. The stories of plenty that convinced them to relocate were not easily reconciled with the poor variety of game and other foods in the High Arctic, where Inuit faced extreme environmental conditions, colder temperatures, lack of wood, and (most significantly) three months of complete darkness.

Both the Resolute and Craig Harbour groups were accompanied by an RCMP constable, who was responsible to supervise the group’s welfare and to report back to Ottawa on progress, challenges, and general developments. The groups were designed to be entirely self-sufficient. Inuit were sent north with supplies, and the RCMP established and ran trading stores. Nevertheless, the RCAF worried that Inuit relocated to Resolute would become dependent on the base.<sup>65</sup> Whereas Inuit at Craig Harbour were moved 50 kilometres away from the RCMP post to discourage any tendencies to loiter and look for handouts, the Resolute Inuit settled just five kilometres away from the RCAF facility. Despite this close proximity, Inuit and Qallunaat were kept apart intentionally. Interaction between base personnel and Inuit was limited whenever possible for various reasons, with officials worrying that contact could lead to disease, social dislocations, and moral corruption. An RCAF Station Standing Order placed the Inuit village out of bounds “to all personnel except on business.”<sup>66</sup>

The historical record of the relationship immediately after the relocation is confusing. On a tour of the Arctic Islands, just a week after Inuit arrived at Resolute, G.W. Stead of the Department of Transport commented:

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<sup>63</sup> The Craig Harbour Relocatees would eventually form the community of Grise Fiord. The High Arctic relocations have been well documented in previous studies, most of which were written to encourage the federal government to apologize to and compensate the relocated Inuit. See, for example, Zebedee Nungak, “Exiles in the High Arctic,” *Arctic Circle* (September/October 1990): 36-43; Alan R. Marcus, “Out in the cold: Canada’s experimental Inuit relocation to Grise Fiord and Resolute Bay,” *Polar Record*, vol.27, no.163 (1991): 285-96; “‘Their Garden of Eden’: Sovereignty and Suffering in Canada’s High Arctic,” issue of *Northern Perspectives* (Canadian Arctic Resources Committee), vol.19, no.1 (Spring 1991); Alan R. Marcus, *Out in the cold: The legacy of Canada’s Inuit relocation experiment in the High Arctic* (Copenhagen: International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs, 1992); Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*; René Dussault and George Erasmus, *The High Arctic Relocation: A Report on the 1953-55 Relocation* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1994); Alan R. Marcus, *Relocating Eden: The image and politics of Inuit exile in the Canadian Arctic* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1995); and Melanie McGrath, *The long exile: A true story of deception and survival amongst the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic* (London: Fourth Estate, 2006). For critical responses, see F. Ross Gibson, “No reason to apologize to the natives,” *Arctic Circle* (September/October 1991), 8; Doug Wilkinson, “The paradox of the Inuit relocates,” *Arctic Circle* (Summer 1993): 32-3; Magnus Gunther, “The 1953 Relocations of the Inukjuak Inuit to the High Arctic: A Documentary Analysis and Evaluation” (report for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1993); and Gerard Kenney, *Arctic Smoke & Mirrors* (Prescott, ON: Voyageur Publishing, 1994). To avoid obvious political bias, we have returned to the original documents to assess RCAF-Inuit relations in Resolute.

<sup>64</sup> R.G. Robertson to C.M. Drury, Deputy Minister of National Defence, re: relocation of Inuit families at Resolute Bay, LAC, RG 22, A-1-a, vol. 298, file 40-8-1, pt. 4.

<sup>65</sup> C.M. Bolger, “Relocation of Eskimo Groups in the High Arctic,” circa 1960, NWT Archives, 263, N-1992-023, Box 24, file 10, Relocations – Movement of Inuit 1953-1968. Date taken from location in file.

<sup>66</sup> Conditions Amongst Eskimos – Resolute Bay, 5 January 1961, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

As soon as the Eskimo family arrived problems of their relationship to the military encampment began to appear. Where Military camps and Eskimo villages are adjacent, the Eskimos tend to be turned into "camp followers." The different moral bases of the two societies tend to exercise a harmful influence on both: junior members of the Armed forces attempt to get a corner on the output of handicrafts and so forth.<sup>67</sup>

The RCAF also commented about Inuit dependency on the base. Deputy Minister of Defence C.M. Drury reported several months after the relocation that Inuit had indeed become "more or less" wards of the RCAF detachment.<sup>68</sup> These reports, however, contrast those from the RCMP who monitored and reported on the day to day activities of Inuit. Ross Gibson, the RCMP officer relocated with the Inukjuammiut from Port Harrison, explained to RCAF representatives and DNANR administrators that Inuit had been able to obtain sufficient food through hunting, and that income from trapping provided Inuit with enough money to purchase goods. The relocated Inuit "had been living their native way of life, had little or no contact with the base, and were so happy in their new surroundings that they were already talking of having some of the relatives from Port Harrison" join them.<sup>69</sup> By March 1954, more than six months after the group had disembarked at Resolute, the women and children had not yet left the camp. Inuit men, however had been exposed to the Qallunaat presence on occasional hunting trips, organized and chaperoned by the RCMP.<sup>70</sup>

The archival record fails to provide us with any answers to why these accounts differ. Perhaps reports from the base about the initial assistance provided in setting up the Inuit camp were exaggerated. Possibly the RCMP was hesitant to report any assistance received for a fear that relocations would be considered a failure. What we do know, however, was that the RCMP did supervise any contact that they did have.

The most significant point of contact came through employment. The DNANR was interested in Inuit taking advantage of wage employment opportunities. Deputy minister Gordon Robertson explained to C.M. Drury, the deputy minister of National Defence, that despite the self-sufficiency of Inuit and the experiment's emphasis on hunting and trapping lifestyle, the department "had not overlooked the possibility of some of the Eskimo at least finding employment." Casual employment, would "not interfere greatly with the natives present way of life and will enable them to add to their income during seasons when they have little else to do."<sup>71</sup> Ben Sivertz, a director with Northern Affairs, suggested that "in view of the rapidly changing conditions at Resolute Bay, and throughout the Arctic, it may be necessary to modify our thinking with respect to such groups and perhaps to encourage, rather than discourage, them in taking up employment at such places."<sup>72</sup> The department felt that it was reasonable to allow Inuit to "engage in whatever casual employment that might be available at the base, or any related establishments, from time to time." Accordingly, DNANR turned to the RCAF for support in fostering the Inuit economy. In January

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<sup>67</sup> "Confidential Report on Tour of the Arctic Islands, 8-12 September 1953, LAC, RG 22, vol. 176, file 40-20-20, pt. 3; G.W. Stead," 29 September 1953, quoted in Tester and Kulchinsky, *Tammarniit*, 154-153.

<sup>68</sup> C.M. Drury, Deputy Minister to R. Gordon Robertson, Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources, 2 February 1954, LAC, RG 22, A-1-a, vol. 298, file 40-8-1, pt. 4.

<sup>69</sup> R.G. Robertson to C.M. Drury, 18 February 1954, LAC, RG 22, A-1-a, vol. 298, file 40-8-1, pt. 4.

<sup>70</sup> Conditions Amongst Eskimos – Resolute Bay, 26 March 1954. LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

<sup>71</sup> Robertson to Drury, 18 February 1954

<sup>72</sup> B.G. Sivertz, "Conditions Amongst Eskimos – Resolute Bay, re: RCAF Christmas Airlift," 28 December 1954, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA500-8-1-14.

1955, deputy minister Robertson wrote Drury asking that Inuit of Resolute be given instruction and practice with the machines at Resolute so that they could play a more useful role in unloading supplies during the annual sealift.<sup>73</sup>

Despite this emphasis on employment, the government was hesitant to unnecessarily interfere with Inuit hunting. Officials recognized that if the need for Inuit employment ever dried up, Inuit would have to rely on hunting once again. The most viable option for wage employment was to have Inuit work as stevedores during resupply shipments. By allowing seasonal workers part of the year to hunt, and full time workers “sufficient time off for hunting throughout the year,” the government could help ensure Inuit would “retain certain ethnic skills and be more content in their work.”<sup>74</sup> The combination of a small amount of income earned through casual work and the harvest from hunting and trapping combined to make the economic life of Inuit in Resolute quite stable, and allowed Inuit of Resolute to escape a cycle of dependency.

As was the case in Inukjuak, Inuit could not afford modern hunting equipment without employment or good trapping grounds. Without this equipment, it was difficult to secure sufficient game for both food and trade. The RCAF base at Resolute provided Inuit with the opportunity to earn the necessary income needed to participate in the modern hunt. Constable Gibson recounted the progress that one Inuk, Sudlavenick, had made since he came to Resolute. In Inukjuak, he had poor equipment, only three scrawny dogs, and lived entirely on family allowance and relief. After coming to Resolute he had obtained a winter home, several dozen traps, a shotgun, a rifle, ten strong dogs, and a large sled. So much had his lot improved that Gibson suggested that he be returned to Inukjuak so that another less fortunate Inuk could take his place in Resolute.<sup>75</sup>

The Eskimo Affairs Committee recognized the success of the flourishing mixed economy at Resolute and planned to send a “few more families from Port Harrison to Resolute Bay to meet a developing demand for casual labour.”<sup>76</sup> Accordingly, the second phase of the High Arctic relocations sent another 34 people to Resolute in 1955,<sup>77</sup> and Inuit employment at the base became an increasingly important component of Resolute’s mixed economy. When the RCAF employed outside Qallunaat help rather than Inuit in 1959, deputy minister Robertson wrote his counterpart at Defence telling him that if Inuit had not been hired because they were insufficiently trained to work at the base, DNANR was prepared to provide education and training to bring Inuit up to an employable standard.<sup>78</sup> The following year the RCAF once again employed Inuit during the annual sealift. Robertson’s involvement in procuring several stevedore positions not only demonstrate the department’s determination to ensure the Resolute would be successful, but also its realization that a mixed economy was integral to that success.

By 1960, both the RCAF and DNANR agreed that Inuit contact with the base was beneficial not only for Inuit but for the base as well. The RCAF recognized that the pool could be tapped deeper if more Inuit received “on the job” or

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<sup>73</sup> R.G. Robertson to C.M. Drury, re: transport of families to Resolute, 18 January 1955, LAC, RG 22, A-1-a, vol. 298, file 40-8-1, pt. 5.

<sup>74</sup> Bolger, “Relocation of Eskimo Groups.”

<sup>75</sup> Conditions Amongst Eskimos Resolute Bay. 14 November 1956, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

<sup>76</sup> Report re: Economic Development and Actions taken in 1953 and proposed for 1954, no date, LAC, RG 22, A-1-a, vol. 298, file 40-8-1, pt. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Only one family of six people were sent to Grise Fiord, perhaps indicating the government’s evolving preference for Resolute because of its mixed economy.

<sup>78</sup> R.G. Robertson to F.R. Miller re: Eskimo Employment at Resolute Bay, LAC, RG 22, vol. 895, file 250-45-1, pt.1.

specialized training outside the community.<sup>79</sup> The younger Inuit men received vocational training so that they could work in more technical positions at the weather stations, military installations, and with the growing oil industry. By May 1962, three men were receiving training from the base, one as a mechanic and two as mobile equipment drivers.<sup>80</sup> In addition to the ongoing employment of Inuit during shipping season, RCAF also employed several Inuit to help with the northern survival school that had been transferred to Resolute from Cambridge Bay in 1958. Inuit instructors taught RCAF and Northern Affairs personnel survival techniques in case they were forced to make an emergency landing in the Arctic environment.<sup>81</sup>

Beyond the economic sphere, Inuit derived other benefits from their close proximity to the base. The RCAF medical attendant accompanied the RCMP on all medical calls, providing professional treatment. In serious medical cases, Inuit patients were evacuated aboard C-130 Hercules aircraft to Edmonton or Thule, Greenland. In 1963 alone, four Inuit were evacuated by this method. As a result, in many cases, professional medical services for the severely ill were available within a matter of hours. This stood in stark contrast to the other remote communities where it could take days, if not weeks, before outside assistance arrived. The base was also a focal point of entertainment. The RCAF provided weekly movie showings and hosted the social gathering of the year: the annual Christmas party. Base personnel also organized the first Boy Scout Troop in Resolute. Known as the First Polar Troop, the eleven members attended weekly meetings at the base on Saturday afternoons. The governing committee of the troop was formed by four members of the RCAF, an Inuk, and the RCMP constable.<sup>82</sup>

For better or worse, the airbase at Resolute provided a closer link to the outside world. The regular flights to and from Resolute ensured efficient mail service. As a result, Inuit were “able to order a wide variety of clothing from stores such as Eaton’s and Simpson-Sears at very low cost,” RCMP officer R.R. Gordon commented. “The Resolute Bay Eskimo is well clothed as a result of a higher standard of living than most other Arctic towns.”<sup>83</sup> By comparison, Grise Fiord Inuit, who were for several years unable to kill enough caribou to supply them with the necessary hides for winter clothing, had to rely on imported sheep skins purchased from the post store.<sup>84</sup>

As in many other Arctic communities with military installations, the base dump also influenced Inuit lives. Unlike other settlement dumps, however, the RCMP closely monitored the Resolute garbage pile. Inuit were welcome to set traps for fox that fed of the food wastage, but Inuit were strictly forbidden from taking clothing or food from the dump. They were permitted to collect scrap wood and other building materials for use in the construction of their homes, which often featured discarded RCAF furniture and even linoleum flooring.<sup>85</sup> At times the base personnel

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<sup>79</sup> Bolger, “Relocation of Eskimo Groups.”

<sup>80</sup> R.R. Gordon to O.C., re: Conditions Amongst the Eskimos, 12 January 1962, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

<sup>81</sup> Don Bissett, *Resolute: An Area Economic Survey* (Ottawa: Industrial Division, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1968), 89.

<sup>82</sup> “Conditions Amongst the Eskimos – Resolute Bay for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1962,” 14 January 1963, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

<sup>83</sup> Gordon to O.C., 12 January 1962.

<sup>84</sup> R.J. Baccus to OC Eastern Arctic re: Conditions Amongst Eskimos Generally, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-5.

<sup>85</sup> T.C. Jenkins to O.C., re Conditions Amongst Eskimos, 4 January 1960, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-9-1-14. All the houses had free electricity supplied by the Department of Transport.

chipped in and helped with the construction or improvements to Inuit houses.<sup>86</sup> As a result, Inuit houses at Resolute were considered “well beyond the usual type of Eskimo dwelling constructed from scrap.”<sup>87</sup>

Many aspects of contact with the base had fewer positive outcomes. Inuit who worked there (either permanently or temporarily) were entitled to base privileges, including access to the canteen and alcohol. Soon after Inuit found steady employment at the facility, the police reported “a few drunken disturbances in the Eskimo village.”<sup>88</sup> The base commander addressed this problem in 1961 when he disallowed Inuit from buying liquor at the base. “It has been found that this has helped the people, although some will disagree, in their homelife [sic] and work,” the RCMP commented. “The women are pretty well all agreed that the move was a good one and are quite happy to see it remain that way. Most state that the home and village, life has been much better since the move was made.”<sup>89</sup>

The development of Resolute as a mixed economy was not a result of the coercive acculturation of Inuit into Western life; the government recognized that many Inuit wanted to maintain traditional lifestyles. Indeed, civil servants saw Resolute as a model for Inuit relocation programs. By contrast, the Administrator of the Arctic, C.M. Bolger, recommended that the Craig Harbour experiment should not be replicated.<sup>90</sup> The director of DNANR noted in 1960:

While Grise Fiord [Craig Harbour] should be continued for sovereignty purposes, it should not be duplicated at other isolated locations. He considers, rather, that any new colonies to be established should be in the vicinity of established weather stations.... He also thinks that a logical development would be to start these colonies as satellites of the Resolute Bay community.<sup>91</sup>

These colonies were not created when the federal government officially ended relocations early that decade, recognizing that scarce game resources would not sustain a larger population. Nonetheless, Resolute grew modestly. Housing, education, and social services brought a closer integration into Western society, and a local RCMP officer boasted that progress had revealed to Inuit “the benefits and security which employment provided compared to the hardships encountered in their old way of life.”<sup>92</sup> Such optimism was offset by problems of settlement living – including alcoholism, social deviancy, and externally-imposed governance – which challenged the developing community.

By the time the Air Force left Resolute on 1 April 1964, transferring the operation of its base to the Air Services, Civil Aviation Branch of the Department of Transport, the local balance between a hunting and wage economy was giving

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<sup>86</sup> “Conditions Amongst the Eskimos – Resolute Bay for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1962.”

<sup>87</sup> Jenkins to O.C., 4 January 1960.

<sup>88</sup> Gordon to O.C., re: Conditions Amongst the Eskimos, 5 January 1961, LAC, RG 18, vol. 55, file TA 500-8-1-14.

<sup>89</sup> “Conditions Amongst the Eskimos – Resolute Bay for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1962.” After the initial problems with alcohol, the community experienced continual problems with alcohol. At time it was imported from outside while at other times Inuit in the community made it through home-brewing.

<sup>90</sup> Bolger, “Relocation of Eskimo Groups.”

<sup>91</sup> C.M. Bolger to Mr. Stevenson, re: Relocation of Eskimo Groups in the High Arctic, 4 October 1960, NWT Archives, 263, N-1992-023, box 24, file 10, Relocations – Movement of Inuit 1953-1968.

<sup>92</sup> Lee Weissling, “Inuit Redistribution and Development: Processes of Change in the Eastern Canadian Arctic, 1922-1968” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Alberta, 1991), 206. On the government’s decision not to establish communities near the weather stations, see also Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 324.



way to the dominance of cash work. The following year 12 Inuit were permanently employed at the base complex, and by 1966 the community had only one full-time hunter. Part-time subsistence harvesting for food continued (and was facilitated by the introduction of motorized snow vehicles), with supplements from carving and trapping remaining important. Officials saw the community as economically viable and even prosperous by Inuit standards. "Compared with other settlements in the Arctic, the Resolute Eskimo is fairly well off and continues to possess articles that are not owned by a good many other Eskimos," one RCMP officer observed. "There are washing machines, tape recorders, record players, irons, sewing machines, transistor radios and 35mm cameras." Less favourable was the lack of government support for the Port Harrison people (Inukjuammiut) who wanted to visit or move back to their original home.<sup>93</sup> The federal government's recent apology for the High Arctic relocations and unfulfilled promises associated therewith,<sup>94</sup> however, should not be misapplied to the generally positive relationship between the air force and Inuit in Resolute.

In evaluating the impact of the RCAF station on Inuit, we must consider not only the original intent of the relocation but also the evolution of government policy. The High Arctic relocations were an admitted experiment, but upon closer analysis we see that there were really two experiments going on. One placed Inuit in a traditional economy (Craig Harbour) and the other evolved into an experiment in a mixed economy (Resolute). Frank Tester and Peter Kulchyski have argued that "in effect, a policy of using the air force base as a vehicle for establishing systematic integration of Inuit workers would have implied failure of the relocation project because the project was developed on the assumption that Inuit would be more able to be self-sufficient in this 'virgin' territory."<sup>95</sup> The archival record is clear, however, that casual employment of Inuit was always a possibility in the minds of planners. "Systematic integration" was not. Instead, the government attempted to provide Inuit who had become dependent on relief and other social transfers the opportunity to maintain as much of their traditional lifestyle as possible. Officials appreciated the importance of hunting in Inuit culture, not just as a means to procure food, but also in myriad social functions: defining relationships, transferring knowledge, and maintaining cultural linkages. With the growing dependency on technological advances needed for hunting and larger populations requiring access to a wider hunting range, wage employment was a key element in the new Inuit hunting economy. The best answer was to supplement the income obtained through traditional hunting and trapping with part-time employment. Many Inuit found in Resolute a balance between wage employment and traditional hunting practices.

A measure of Resolute's success is found in the government's analysis of the economic potential of the community in the second half of the 1960s. During this era, DNANR conducted area economic surveys across the Arctic, identifying potential revenue sources and resources. The survey for Resolute concluded:

Resolute offers an example of a successful experiment in settlement of Eskimos in the Queen Elizabeth Islands.... The relative success of varied age groups of Eskimos in wage employment as exemplified in

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<sup>93</sup> Damas, *Arctic Migrants*, 134-36. See also QTC, Resolute Bay Community History, [www.qtccommission.com](http://www.qtccommission.com).

<sup>94</sup> See, for example, Bruce Campion-Smith, "Ottawa apologizes to Inuit for using them as 'human flagpoles,'" *Toronto Star*, 18 August 2010; Deborah Tobin, "Harper brings apology to relocated Inuit," *Halifax Chronicle-Herald*, 18 August 2010; Bill Curry, "An apology for the Inuit five decades in the making," *Globe and Mail*, 18 August 2010; Jane George, "Canada says sorry to High Arctic exiles," *Nunatsiaq News*, 18 August 2010; and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, "Government of Canada Apologizes for Relocation of Inuit Families to the High Arctic," News Release 2-3389, 18 August 2010.

<sup>95</sup> Tester and Kulchyski, *Tammarniit*, 55.

Resolute and on the DEW Line suggest that relocation programs of moving Eskimos to areas of greater economic activity be stressed by the Department. Continued immigration of Eskimos should be predicated on the availability of wage employment rather than on the resource base.<sup>96</sup>

The RCAF base at Resolute provided an ideal opportunity for the government to experiment with this new economy. Military infrastructure alleviated much of the potential for disaster. Unlike Craig Harbour, where contact with the outside world was limited to the annual sealift, Inuit at Resolute had access to medical services, electricity, construction materials and assistance, and modern communications. In many ways, government officials saw how establishing an Inuit community near a military installation offered a model for achieving a mixed economy and allowing Inuit to succeed in the modern North.

## Conclusions

By the 1960s, the military had largely withdrawn from the Arctic. Kenneth Eyre observed that military interest in the Canadian North peaked in the late 1950s but declined with the arrival of the “missile era” following the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1958. The military’s footprint in the region, which had expanded since the Second World War, began to retract:

The Navy gradually stopped its northern summer cruises. Army exercises ceased. The radio system and the Alaska Highway were turned over to civil departments of government. The Canadian Rangers were left to wither on the vine. Aerial surveillance flights were curtailed. In the later part of the Diefenbaker years, Canadian defence policy was dominated by the three Ns of NORAD, NATO and nuclear weapons. Lester Pearson’s Liberal administration during the following five years completed the process of withdrawal. By 1965, only the DEW Line stations remained.<sup>97</sup>

Technological advances expanded the distances that jets could fly without refuelling and shifted the continental defence emphasis from static radar lines to satellites and ballistic missile submarines. This allowed Canada to reduce its military presence in the region without concern that this would undermine its *de facto* control over its Arctic lands. As military personnel withdrew, civil servants arrived to administer the northward extension of the state to oversee Inuit housing, education and healthcare. Despite high hopes for improved Inuit standards of living through wage labour (including work at defence installations), a transition from self-sufficiency to the welfare economy and dependency was a stark reality for many Inuit drawn into settlement life.

The case studies of Frobisher Bay and Resolute yield several lessons of policy and historiographical relevance. Air force development projects, as part of the larger military thrust into the Arctic during and after the Second World War, directly influenced northern life in various ways. Direct impacts included transportation and communication infrastructure, as well as access to new supplies of food, clothing, and housing. Wage employment, even if only part-time, offered income which supplemented traditional economic pursuits such as hunting and trapping. Although the military tried to minimize the impact of defence projects on Inuit in the Qikiqtani region, the construction and

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<sup>96</sup> Bissett, *Resolute*, 160.

<sup>97</sup> Eyre, “Forty Years of Military Activity,” 296.

operation of air force installations had lasting effects. These included changes to the tastes and preferences of Inuit who congregated near military installations to seek employment, material goods, and medical services. These benign inducements led to the creation of sedentary communities which persisted long after the defence projects ceased to offer significant local employment opportunities. The culmination of the Inuit transition to settlement life occurred in the late 1960s, but military projects played a pivotal role in “modernizing” Arctic life in the preceding decades.

Perhaps the most basic message is the importance of considering impacts on local populations when conceiving military projects designed, from afar, for national security and sovereignty reasons. In response to the Conservative government’s assertion that Canada faces a “use it or lose it” proposition in the Arctic requiring a bolder military presence, aboriginal spokespersons have complained that this pithy phrase ignores their presence in the region – the “bedrock” of Canadian sovereignty<sup>98</sup> – and marginalizes their contributions domestically and internationally. Paul Kaludjak, the former president of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., argued that investments in northern defence infrastructure “should be a component of a sovereignty strategy that engages northerners, not the strategy itself.” Rather than a “use or lose it” approach that treats the Arctic as an empty frontier, he reminded Ottawa that “Inuit are here – use us or lose our support.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed, a logical lesson learned from past military development in the North is the need to anticipate what projects and activities will mean for Aboriginal Peoples. Military projects have tended to fit Mary Simon’s characterization of “centralized undertakings that are unilaterally imposed on indigenous peoples and their territories,” and northerners have been disproportionately affected by “sovereignty and security policy decisions” in the past. Although the impacts have not been uniformly destructive, the Canadian Forces should ponder previous relationships – both positive and negative – as they re-establish their presence in the region. Constructive engagement must be a key priority not just for the politicians but for defence planners and service personnel who must implement the government’s strategy in the Arctic in a manner that balances the needs and desires of the military and of Inuit.

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<sup>98</sup> Mary Simon, “Inuit: The Bedrock of Arctic Sovereignty,” *Globe and Mail*, 26 July 2007.

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