

## THE JOINT ARCTIC WEATHER STATIONS: SCIENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY IN THE HIGH ARCTIC, 1946-1972

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## Getting Along at the Top of the World

When a man cracks up in the Far North, he follows a pretty fixed pattern. First he argues constantly with his mates, then he avoids them, and finally he sits by himself just staring into space. The eventual outcome of this progression can be suicide. The outposts have had only one such case so far, mainly because the men have become trained to spot psychological weaknesses and if any symptoms show up in a new man, he is whisked out again before the last plane leaves in September.

Bill Davidson (1952)<sup>1</sup>

Despite postwar technological advancements in transportation, communications, resupply, and logistics, the Joint Arctic Weather Stations remained remote places. Storms prevented aircraft from evacuating sick or injured comrades. Communications and fresh foods were limited. Station crews had to cope with local wildlife and interpersonal tensions with little hope of external supports. All of these challenges intensified during the winter months. Reflecting on this isolation, Monte Poindexter recalled watching the final fall airlift flight depart and noted: “once the aircraft is gone, you realize that you’re there, and that you’re not going anywhere. You sort of get used to it.”<sup>2</sup>

Getting “used to it” was often challenging. Coupled with the somatic practices of scientific data collection and the environmentally-imposed rhythms of the seasonal cycle, quotidian life at the stations produced a

particular kind of “domus” on Canada’s Arctic Archipelago. Coping with prolonged isolation and confinement within or near their station, JAWS personnel experienced many of the same stresses and symptoms as their counterparts at stations near the South Pole. During the long, dark winter, individuals who grew tired of seeing the same faces every day had few or no opportunities to meet new people. As co-habitants of small, self-contained stations, they had to find ways to co-exist. They also had to navigate the intricacies of a binational command structure that exemplified the “jointness” of the JAWS program, but also created a hierarchy that could foment divisions or even contests of authority between Canadian and American personnel.

Almost everyone at the stations — even those who were well suited to isolated life, and those who served multiple tours — struggled at times to cope with the demanding conditions and expectations. Winter was the most difficult period for JAWS personnel, bringing common “over-wintering” symptoms familiar to polar researchers: fatigue, weight gain, gastrointestinal complaints, rheumatic aches and pains, headaches, sleeping difficulties, reduced cognitive abilities, depression, anger, irritability, anxiety, and interpersonal conflict.<sup>3</sup> Most people found ways to prevent these symptoms from impairing station operations<sup>4</sup> and, on the rare occasions when individual coping strategies proved inadequate, the interventions of station leaders provide insights into how personnel managed to work and live together in a challenging and isolated environment.

## Keeping Busy

Maintaining morale began with a long work week: everyone worked twelve-hour shifts. Eight personnel (and more as the stations grew in size and complexity) afforded sufficient capacity to make the station run without risking redundancy. JAWS veterans recalled that there was never a shortage of work. “You could stay busy 24 hours a day if you wanted to,” Howard Wessbecher explained.<sup>5</sup> Met techs, for example, were not only responsible for the daily upper air observations, but also attended to their laundry, KP (kitchen), cleaning, and fire watch duties, maintained the camp, and processed new supplies.<sup>6</sup> OICs and ExOs encouraged their men to undertake heavy schedules. The best way to “keep people safe and happy,” OIC Monte Poindexter summarized, “was to keep people busy.”<sup>7</sup>

The importance of staying busy blurred the line between work and play. The extensive “remodelling” of Eureka during the winters of the early and mid-1950s reflected the desire of JAWS personnel to keep busy during a period when outdoor activities were not possible, even when many of these interior jobs were optional. Station personnel had considerable flex-time, and this “freedom of the job, with no ‘pushing’ from their superiors” to do particular tasks at particular times, fostered an amicable work environment.<sup>8</sup> When he was at Isachsen from 1953–54, Bill Nemeth recalled the cooperative attitude that was common to many stations:

We built new wash facilities inside the Operations Building. I remember everybody pitching in. If you could wield a hammer and saw and paintbrush, or whatever it was, you know. It just happened and I don’t think it was through any major organization that had to take place; we just agreed that if we’re going to be reasonably successful, and accomplish what we were sent there to do, we had to work together.<sup>9</sup>

Personnel regularly undertook this sort of work, even when it was ineligible for overtime pay.<sup>10</sup>

## Breaking Up the Monotony

Busy work schedules were not enough to keep eight people fully occupied for up to a year at a time. The daily and weekly rhythms of scientific observations at the stations produced predictable, even monotonous, schedules that threatened to gnaw at station morale. Thus, JAWS personnel recognized that leisure time was “very necessary.”<sup>11</sup> Every station had a billiard and ping-pong table, skis, and a toboggan. Some men enrolled in correspondence courses, while others built models.<sup>12</sup> Poindexter recalled how one individual at Alert “spent time building various model ships, loading them with dynamite, and floating them in the bay to use them for target practice.”<sup>13</sup> Mould Bay even briefly sported a “band” with station personnel playing the harmonica, jaw harp, and wooden sticks.<sup>14</sup> Another station developed what *Collier’s* magazine’s Bill Davidson described as “a novel twist to the recreation problem. Among the observers was a judo expert, and night after night the men gathered in a gymnasium built in a tool shed

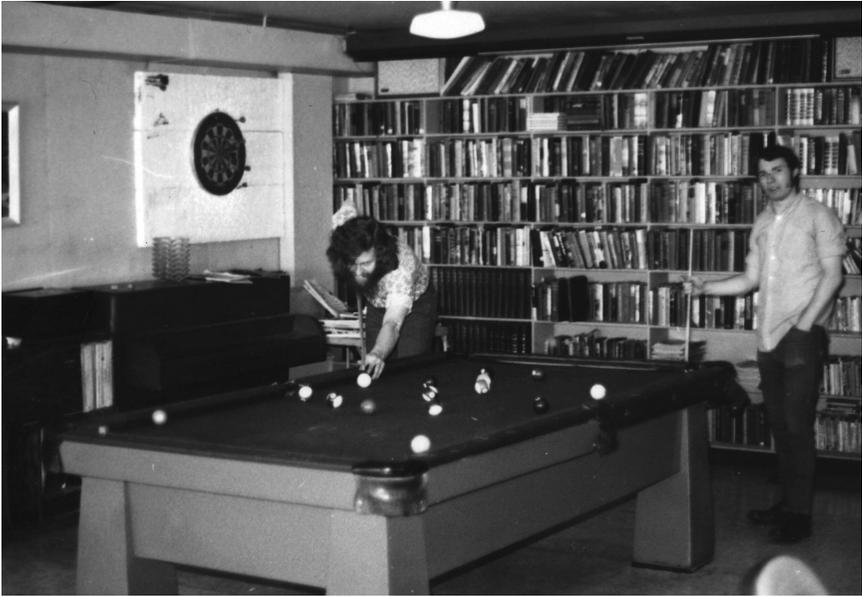


FIGURE 8-1. Personnel playing pool at Eureka, LAC Winnipeg, RG 93, Acc 2004-01213-7, Box 2, File Eureka, n.d.

to see who could toss each other highest in the air.”<sup>15</sup> Cards, especially cribbage, were popular. Poker was also popular when the airlifts brought fresh players and money to the stations, but declined when “the rich got so much richer that the poor had not the means to continue playing.”<sup>16</sup> J. Glenn Dyer and C.G. Goodbrand eventually banned all gambling in December 1963 because it led “to deterioration of personnel relations, and is often accompanied by substantial financial losses by those who can ill afford it.”<sup>17</sup>

Each station also had a library and, like people at other isolated posts around the world, the men took refuge in these volumes. “If you don’t lose yourself in reading up here,” Alert OIC John Lewis quipped to Davidson, “it’s easy to go off your rocker.”<sup>18</sup> In the early years, most of the books were detective novels of the “who done it’ variety” and Isachsen OIC Verne Marsh complained that these became “very tiresome after the first dozen or so.”<sup>19</sup> Margaret Oldenburg, a Minnesota philanthropist with a strong interest in the Arctic, eventually donated a larger diversity of books to



FIGURE 8-2. JAWS personnel reading at Isachsen during the winter of 1963–64. Jim Jung Collection.

each station library.<sup>20</sup> Magazines, on the other hand, only arrived a few times a year and were “looked through until their contents are practically memorized.”<sup>21</sup> All of this reading led to vigorous debates among the men confined to the station. Writing for posterity, the compiler of a Mould Bay photo album recorded how “intense and varied discussions are always a favourite pastime with the station personnel. Topics range from the early boyhood of Genghis Khan to the collective theories of the late Dr. Albert Einstein. No country may claim immunity, and no political leader is safe from the intense verbal investigations and dissections of the gathered intelligencia [*sic*].”<sup>22</sup> Radio operator Jim Varabioff told a journalist that “we’ve done so much reading we qualify as junior experts on everything. We discover atom bombs, nuclear fission, politics, and pin-up girls.” In the end, the men at the stations settled “everything but the pin-ups.”<sup>23</sup>

Movies were scarce and treasured resources. At Eureka in 1952, for example, they were only available because Dyer brought them during his inspection station tour (and they followed him to the next station when

he departed). By the mid-1960s, Resolute received films every two weeks on its regular resupply flight. Even this steady stream did not satiate local cinematic appetites, and station personnel found novel ways to enjoy the films that were available. When men tired of a Marilyn Monroe film, for example, they played it backwards to amuse themselves.<sup>24</sup> The satellite stations had to make do with an even more limited selection of films delivered by the fall clean-up flight, and the overwintering crews did their best to maximize enjoyment from these precious reels during the dark period when there were fewer recreational alternatives. Personnel at Isachsen, for example, enjoyed their own version of “Saturday Night at the Movies” during the 1960s. “It is definitely money well spent by the administrative offices,” Isachsen ExO John Llewellyn noted in his October 1965 monthly report.

Most of the movies are very good selections and even the ones considered second rate, we get a big kick out of sitting back and hissing and booing etc. Movie nights at Isachsen are just like “down south.” At intermission there is a big mad rush to the tank room to stock up (not tank up) on candies from the large selection we received on airlift.<sup>25</sup>

By the following March, the station had watched twenty-one of the twenty-three movies that they had received, and their ExO speculated that JAWS personnel “will not feel as great a need for the movies” with the return of daylight.<sup>26</sup> While there was likely some truth in this view, men serving at the satellite stations still considered movies to be a “luxury item” at the end of the 1960s.<sup>27</sup>

Communications with distant loved ones are always critical to maintaining morale at isolated stations. Because aircraft only landed to retrieve mail from the satellite stations a few times each year during the 1950s, most personnel relied on amateur radio. Journalist Ritchie Calder observed during his visit to the stations that:

The other great diversion of the Arctic men is the “ham” radio. They have hundreds of friends, thousands of miles away in all parts of the world with whom they are on gossiping terms and

through whom they keep in touch with their own folks calling them up occasionally on the phone. The local “ham” picks up the signal and phones the relative or friend and switches them through. The walls of the weather stations are covered with call-signs of “ham” radios.<sup>28</sup>

Southern operators such as Charlie Harris, Bret Fader, and Fred Bisset connected the remote stations with the wider world. The connection could either take the form of textual radiograms or phone patches (where southern operators coupled their receivers into phone lines to facilitate voice communication). “It would be impossible to do justice to the dozens of Amateurs who gave so much of their time to traffic handling and phone patches,” radio operator John Gilbert explains. “For many years they provided the only private link with the ‘outside’ world and virtually every human drama, from romance to bereavement, was acted out over these vital communications links. In a very real way they were the mail service, the telephone service and the news service.”<sup>29</sup>

The most notable of these radio operators was J.S. (Stan) Surber of Peru, Indiana, who first contacted Alert in 1950. During their conversation, JAWS personnel asked him “if he would write down a couple of messages from men there and mail them to their families in the United States.” Surber agreed, and soon became known as “Stan the Man” for his willingness to send and receive messages from all the JAWS stations over W9NZZ. His job as a night train dispatcher allowed him to conduct five or six “gab sessions” with the stations each day between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m.<sup>30</sup> An early recipient of the insulin treatments developed by Sir Frederick Banting and Charles Best, Surber believed in giving back to society, insisted that the families only pay the postage fees for his services, and often hooked his radio to his phone line so that he could phone patch JAWS personnel through to their loved ones.<sup>31</sup> The frequency of phone patch use varied from person to person. Floyd Wilson, for example, used Surber to schedule a weekly phone patch with his wife and to send her a radiogram at least once a week.<sup>32</sup> Other individuals were more private and only made a handful of calls during the course of their postings, or avoided them after finding that southern contact rattled their emotions.<sup>33</sup> Although Surber often talked with station personnel and serviced phone



FIGURE 8-3. J.S. Surber at his living room amateur rig in May 1958. John Gilbert Collection.

patches, he relayed all textual messages by Morse code. The workload was often intense. In 1953, for example, he handled 12,000 radiograms: an average of thirty-three per day from JAWS and other northern stations.<sup>34</sup> Despite this load, Surber remained committed to the work for over a decade. Even when he contracted tuberculosis in 1959, he continued a more limited schedule “from his bedside.”<sup>35</sup> For this dedication, Surber received a USWB citation and the 1953 Edison Radio Amateur Award from the General Electric Company. The same ceremony also saw Surber’s wife presented with a special citation and wristwatch for being “the most understanding wife of the year.”<sup>36</sup>

Radio communications between stations also helped to reduce the sense of isolation. Although some individuals had few family members to contact or were content to enjoy their surroundings and let the days pass without interruption, most eagerly sought information about life down south.<sup>37</sup> Resolute served as a hub for this small but emerging Arctic community. Throughout the 1950s, most Sundays included a weekly “round table” discussion via amateur radio between all of the stations, with

subjects ranging from station difficulties to the latest gossip about airlift dates or replacement personnel.<sup>38</sup> This amateur radio community sometimes extended beyond the JAWS network. On Christmas Day 1953, the weekly roundtable included men serving at far-flung posts in Arctic Bay, Britannia Lake (Dronning Louise Land, Greenland), and Fletcher's Ice Island (the T-3 ice station).<sup>39</sup> The practice sputtered in the mid-1960s<sup>40</sup> and the term "roundup" fell out of use, but Resolute OIC Norman McFarlane still emphasized the need for his station to hold weekly discussions with Isachsen to alleviate morale problems in 1965. In that case, "amateur radio was the only way to clear up misunderstandings which were held there concerning transport of mail and supplies."<sup>41</sup>

Communications could also bring bad news. During the dark period in 1952, one of Eureka's personnel received a letter from his wife stating that she was leaving him. The station member was understandably upset, and life at the station became "a living hell for him." His bad news also affected other personnel at the station. Floyd Wilson, Eureka's cook, wrote to his wife about the event at some length, suggesting that the woman in question "should be forced to live under these conditions for a year, then she would realize the sacrifice he was making for her." Wilson claimed that news from down south did not normally upset him, "but here we have to live with each other and his attitude is of course reflected on everyone."<sup>42</sup>

Practical joking livened station verve and broke up routines. In 1953, Isachsen OIC Bill Nemeth and several friends pranked the station cook, Eugene Cerullo, who had only recently arrived and was still learning about the Arctic. Nemeth arranged for a southern "news" message to arrive at the radio room, which he then relayed to Cerullo via walkie-talkie:

Canadian officials have disclosed the greatest mass wildlife migration in Canadian history. The yearly migration consisting mainly of polar bear, Muskoxen and wolves has begun two weeks earlier than expected and hundreds of miles east of their usual migration path. Ptarmigan fliers report vast herds of Muskoxen[,] wolfpacks [*sic*] and numerous polar bears in the eastern arctic archipelago extended from Prince Patrick Island with the outer fringes of the migration overlapping Elefringness [*sic*] Island. Officials at the following weather

stations are being alerted to the imminent dangers involved in this unusual phenomenon. Mould Bay, Resolute Bay, Eureka Sound and Isachsen.

We will now have a personal interview with a polar bear captured at Mould Bay during the spring of 1951, and who has since been domesticated.<sup>43</sup>

No one was safe from such pranks. Even the OICs were fair game. After returning to Eureka as OIC in 1963–64, Don Shanks recalled being targeted:

The crew were a bunch of pranksters and it seemed great fun for one of them to come into my room and swap out the regular light bulb in my floor lamp and replace it with a large photographic flash bulb having the same size screw base. I would groan and utter some epithet and hear the unrestrained laughter from several rooms down the hall. Then they would come howling to my open door — but I could not see them as I was still recovering from the flash in my face!<sup>44</sup>

Occasionally such efforts at amusement shifted to the bizarre. In 1951, several of the personnel at Isachsen began obsessing about their thinning hair. In September, they used some fat from a recently killed polar bear as “hair restorer.” One of the personnel suffered burns to several fingers preparing the concoction and his peers had to relieve him of some of his duties “until his wounds heal[ed].”<sup>45</sup> By November, they adopted a new approach. According to the station’s diarist:

Perhaps to relieve monotony or possibly for the expressed reason of stimulating languid hair roots four of the personnel [at Isachsen] had their heads shorn of all thatching this evening, risking frost-bitten scalps and the jeering amusement of their fellows. Steve, as benefits his position in the camp hierarchy, began the trend a week ago, and a barbering session this evening brought the total polished polls up to five. The general opinion is that the contrast with the beards of varying vintages is unusual.<sup>46</sup>



FIGURE 8-4. Isachsen's John Lessard and Jim Perry get a trimming from Steve Kalin and Bill Thrasher in the station's washroom, November 1951. LAC, RG 93, Acc 81-82-084, Box 18, File 6754-1291 Pt 9.

JAWS personnel also used celebrations to break up the monotony of station life. Scientist and historian Jack Stuster observes that it is important to mark the passage of time at isolated posts to emphasize hope and eventual departure.<sup>47</sup> The stations celebrated both the Canadian and American Thanksgivings with decadent meals that included turkey with “all trimmings and ... an after dinner drink or two.”<sup>48</sup> Christmas celebrations, discussed in chapter 7, were also a crucial part of the dark period. New Year's Eve parties, sunrise celebrations in February, and birthday parties throughout the year also broke up the drudgery and allowed personnel to mark the passage of time. So too did interactions with the non-human inhabitants of the stations.

## Animals

In addition to working and living alongside their comrades, JAWS personnel interacted with nearby wildlife. Animals were sources of amusement, stress, and potential danger. Huskies, for example, were an integral part of JAWS life. Originally, planners in Washington and Ottawa had assumed that dogs would be unnecessary in the age of mechanization. The early polar bear mauling at Resolute served as a poignant reminder of why Inuit and early explorers relied on dogs as a form of “early warning” and protection against these marauding predators.<sup>49</sup> An original batch of twenty-five huskies from the Canadian War Assets Corporation were despatched to the stations to warn personnel of approaching wolves or polar bears and to provide companionship.<sup>50</sup> For most personnel, the dogs were welcome playmates and key distractions during the dark period,<sup>51</sup> and a few individuals trained station dogs to pull sledges.<sup>52</sup> During the Christmas airdrop, the dogs (raised above the treeline) also amused station crews by becoming “mighty interested” in the evergreen trees, “having never seen one before.”<sup>53</sup> Newborn puppies were an especially “great morale lifter for the gang.”<sup>54</sup>

With no check other than disease to control their numbers, the dog population at each station grew rapidly, and it only took a few years for the dog populations to strain station food supplies. In 1952, the Canadian Department of Resources and Development instructed Resolute to destroy all but five of its dogs, and for the satellite stations to reduce their populations to two animals. Resolute’s crew appears to have followed the instruction, and Mould Bay’s personnel shot their oldest dog but refused to cull its remaining four animals. Meanwhile, Isachsen ExO George Toney planned to take one of the five dogs home, but his crew and that at Eureka refused to reduce their remaining populations, which stood at four and six respectively. Rae, recognizing the crews’ fondness for their dogs, recommended that no further instructions be issued “unless a law is passed limiting the dogs at each station to a specific number, and the RCMP is authorized to enforce the law.”<sup>55</sup>

Instead, the dog population continued to expand. In 1953, Mould Bay housed five full-grown huskies and a litter of seven pups. NWT Commissioner H.A. Young consequently encouraged DoT’s Controller of

Meteorological Services, Andrew Thomson, to again instruct the OICs to keep in check their stations' dog populations after speculating that the animals might harm nearby ptarmigan nests or caribou herds, and expressing concern about a report of the dogs harassing muskox herds and killing a calf.<sup>56</sup> These concerns about wildlife, in addition to the problem of feeding so many animals, led the Canadian Department of Resources and Development to instruct each satellite station to destroy all but two male dogs in late December 1953. The following March, men at Eureka sent a telegram "request[ing] permission to keep dog population at a permanent level of three males and one female in interests of morale and safety of personnel. Guarantee that this level will be kept at station by personnel without any assistance from outside executioner.... Kindly confirm by this message that this arrangement will be satisfactory."<sup>57</sup> Thomson took the newly-created Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources (DNANR) to task for going over his head in issuing the edict. He admitted that the dogs had molested wildlife in the past, but doubted that they posed a future threat if station personnel controlled their numbers and kept the remainder well fed. Other incidents had recently left two of the stations with only two dogs each, and Thomson asserted that this was too low. Enforcing a two-dog, male-only policy would force the program to replace huskies by expensive airlifts, and since the dogs provided "the necessary companionship and protection" when station personnel carried out regular scientific observations half or three-quarters of a mile from the stations, he believed that a higher threshold of male and female animals was critical to station safety and morale. Thomson concluded his letter by insisting that DNANR could rely on the "integrity" of JAWS OICs and other personnel to enforce a higher and more reasonable population level.<sup>58</sup>

DNANR accepted a compromise. The satellite stations each limited themselves to a maximum of three male dogs and received new dogs from the three male and one or two female dogs at Resolute. To ensure that these orders were carried out, Director F.G.J. Cunningham ordered the RCMP officer at Resolute to cooperate with the OIC to "dispose" of any "surplus dogs" at any of the Joint Arctic Weather Stations.<sup>59</sup> Thereafter, each installation kept two to three dogs. The ratio between male and female dogs was not strictly controlled, and litters sometimes resulted, but

disease and transfers of surplus animals to other stations maintained a stable population.

In addition to imported huskies, JAWS personnel interacted with wildlife near their stations. These encounters created spontaneous and, with rare exceptions, welcome distractions from the monotony of station life. John Trinko described his delight at seeing “Harvey Rabbits” (Arctic hares) hopping on their hind legs across the tundra.<sup>60</sup> The rare birds that overflowed or landed near the stations also fascinated personnel. Lowell Demond noted snowy owls, ducks, and geese, and was especially excited when he spotted a Greenland gyrfalcon that he knew from Shakespeare’s plays. Bruce Weaver had been an avid bird watcher and photographer prior to arriving at Mould Bay in 1965, and he continued these hobbies with gusto in the High Arctic. In fact, a PCSP team copied many of his bird photographs to compare with another wildlife survey from the mid-1940s.<sup>61</sup>

The Arctic fox garnered the most attention from station staff. “The fox,” Eureka OIC Frederick G. Ayling wrote for the *Christian Science Monitor*, “is a cute little animal the size of a large house cat, its bushy tail comprising half of its bulk. Were it not for the station dogs, it would soon become a real pet, for it is unusually inquisitive.”<sup>62</sup> Personnel at Isachsen actually tamed a few foxes in 1951. Station diarist George Toney enjoyed working with strip mechanic Jim S. French to domesticate the animal and recorded their progress in detail. On September 4, he noted that:

the fox accepted food, nipping an occasional finger in his eagerness and anxiety. The larger morsels he took off up or down the bay shore, seemingly to bury. When the slices of meat were broken up, he ate them on the spot. All the while he was eating he kept watch on the hill where Pudge [a station dog] was sitting surveying the scene. The fox, although easily tempted, is shyer when two are present than with one person around, according to Frenchy. Even so, “Poochy” came directly up to the men when called and chirped at and remained sniffing the air and looking appealing even after the food ran out.<sup>63</sup>



FIGURE 8-5. OIC Steve Kalin feeding an Arctic fox at Isachsen in 1951. LAC, RG 93, Acc 81-82 / 084, Box 18, File 6754-1291 Pt 9.

A few days later, “Frenchy” met the fox outside “and had the animal climbing all over him as he sat on the ground.”<sup>64</sup> A few months after that, station personnel delighted when a fox ventured into their kitchen several times for food.<sup>65</sup> At Alert during the early 1950s, men worked even harder to domesticate these wild animals. They allowed a skulk of Arctic foxes to build a den under one of the station’s quonset buildings. According to journalist Bill Davidson, “one of the foxes, named Igor, is so tame that he sits up and eats out of [OIC John] Lewis’s hand, like a dog.”<sup>66</sup>

JAWS personnel extended most wildlife this sort of care. At Alert, for example, protecting the Arctic foxes from wolves became “a diversion ... co-equal with card playing, reading and radio listening.”<sup>67</sup> Hunting was strictly forbidden at the stations: only Inuit were allowed to kill seals or walrus while other animals, such as muskox, were off limits to everyone. Although a few personnel who grew up in rural settings hunted rabbits to satiate their curiosity about their comparative taste, such indiscretions were rare.<sup>68</sup>

Station personnel distinguished between what they deemed to be threatening and non-threatening animals. They feared polar bears most of all. Canadian law strictly forbade hunting them, but men shot the bears when they believed that the creatures posed a direct threat. In the mid-1950s, RCMP Constable Ross Gibson flew to Alert to investigate one such case of ursacide, the killing of a polar bear. “Nanook, the bear, had come into the camp followed by his henchmen, a couple of wolves, the jackals of the Arctic[,] and Frank [Adams], one of the weather station men, had satisfied The Law that it was either his life or the bear’s,” reporter Ritchie Calder recounted. Under Arctic game regulations, however, non-Inuit could only kill a polar bear in self-defence. To acquit himself, Adams recounted how:

The bear ... came around the weather station. We could hear him prowling around our mess-hall and he got among our dogs and scared the wits out of them. He was chasing one of the huskies when one of the pups got loose and he was going to kill it. I had my gun and I was going to scare him and make him drop the pup. I made for the door — the cook was aback of me — and as I opened the door the bear was on a snowbank about thirty feet away. Before I could fire — and scare’m — he dropped the pup and made for us. With one bound he got on top of the bank in front of the mess-hall, with another bound he was off of it and with the third he was coming at me. So I fired — and fired to kill — because I hadn’t much option. I didn’t know a bear could move that fast. It was five feet away when I fired and even if I had tried, I couldn’t have got inside the door and slammed it against his weight. Then we went out and got the wolves.

The law prohibited Adams from keeping “his trophy,” however, and Gibson took the bear back to Resolute where it was given to Inuit to use as dog food.<sup>69</sup>

Many JAWS personnel also considered wolves dangerous to the success of all other life on the islands — including that of humans — well into the 1960s. After all, most scientists still equated these predators with declining caribou populations which, mixed with longstanding stereotypes in the Western imagination, encouraged the killing of wolves as destructive, ruthless animals.<sup>70</sup> Station diarists at Eureka therefore initially described wolf encounters as “attacks” to be “staved off” or “fended off” by shooting the animals.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, a 1959 memorandum from Eureka noted that wolves became “very bold” during the winter months, having killed eight of the station’s dogs in recent years and periodically threatening station personnel. In one instance, two wolves “attacked a station weasel (a vehicle) on the way from the airstrip area to the camp... Had this been a man walking,” the author noted, “he certainly would have had difficulty surviving.” The memorandum went on to request a scope rifle “to provide better marksmanship and protect the station from wolves.”<sup>72</sup> There were more wolves in the vicinity of Eureka than elsewhere, but the other stations adopted similar attitudes. When two wolves approached Isachsen in August 1953, for example, three personnel boarded Isachsen’s motorized weasel and pursued the wolves for over a mile, shooting whenever they came into range.<sup>73</sup> “We killed a number of wolves,” Lowell Demond remembers, “and I look back on it with regret from the point of view that ... we didn’t really understand them... We sort of believed ... that these wolves were more dangerous than they actually are.”<sup>74</sup> Author Farley Mowat, whose 1963 book *Never Cry Wolf* (loosely based upon his experiences in the Keewatin region in the late 1940s) went a long way towards rehabilitating the reputation of the Arctic wolf, would have agreed wholeheartedly with Demond’s sentiments.<sup>75</sup>

By the late 1960s, stories from JAWS personnel reflected changing popular and scientific attitudes towards Arctic wolves.<sup>76</sup> According to Alert’s OIC from 1968–69, Bob Plaseski, the “military wanted to shoot them all because they were ... around all the time,” but “if you waved your arms they generally went away.” As the regional game warden, Plaseski exercised practical jurisdiction in this matter, and only “a couple had to be

shot because they got too aggressive.” Even these confrontations were considered “unusual. Nobody wanted to shoot them but they had to be shot.”<sup>77</sup> David Oldridge also preferred to coexist with the wolves. Having observed these animals during his time at Alert during the mid-1960s, he ventured to Isachsen in 1969 and did not like the attention he received from one of its local predators. Instead of shooting the animal, however,

I took a broom handle, taped a knife to it making a spear; and I took a baseball bat. I took my spear and my baseball bat and went outside and had a confrontation with Mr. Alpha male wolf and once he realized that I wasn't backing down from him everything was fine. We just had to establish the hierarchy. After that he never bothered me, nor did any of his pack.<sup>78</sup>

This gradual shift in perceptions about predatory wildlife around the stations mirrored the “rehabilitation of *canis lupus*” in Canada more generally — although there are no stories of JAWS residents resorting to eating mice, as Mowat allegedly did to prove his hypotheses about wolves’ dietary preferences. Station personnel preferred more conventional diets.

## Food

“It is an axiom of the Arctic that good food is one of the most important factors in maintaining high morale,” J.J. Davis, USWB Chief of Polar Operations Project Personnel Management Division, observed in 1960.<sup>79</sup> Antarctic social scientists confirm this assessment. “The elevated importance of food under long-duration isolation and confinement,” cultural anthropologist Jack Stuster explains,

has several predictable effects, including increased eating by some, increased complaining about the food by others, and increased time spent in conversation during and following meals.... People who might eat only two meals a day each when at home show up for all three meals at a remote-duty station just for the social contact. They might not be hungry but eat to be sociable, or because there is little else to do.<sup>80</sup>

Archie Asbridge identified the cook as “one of the most important persons” at the weather stations, given his role as a “catalyst for creating a harmonious crew in isolated living conditions provided that he presented appetizing meals.” Considering the limited provisions to which a cook had access, this was no easy feat.<sup>81</sup>

Most cooks dedicated themselves to satisfying voracious polar appetites. Despite the limited ingredients available at most of the stations and the lack of fresh meat or vegetables during certain parts of the year, most personnel raved about the meals. Bill Nemeth, the OIC at Isachsen from 1953–54, bragged that his cook “was top notch and ... could womp up anything you wanted.... Even on his days off, he’d come in and say ‘ok, what do you want?’ I called him my ‘magic chef.’ He could brighten your day anytime.”<sup>82</sup> Many cooks enjoyed the challenge of sustaining high morale. Cook Paul Reid relished “the opportunity to innovate,” quickly learning how to bake pastries and experimenting with variations on old recipes. His biggest challenge was the station’s stove, whose uneven heat only offered three temperatures: “warm, hot, and bloody hot.”<sup>83</sup> To further diversify station cuisine, some cooks allowed other personnel to prepare special dishes including cornbread during the 1950s and, by the 1960s, Chinese fried rice, chow mein, Japanese tempura, and Italian pizza.<sup>84</sup> Several stations also produced their own ice cream.<sup>85</sup> As a result of these culinary efforts, many individuals recall gaining ten to twenty pounds during their postings in the High Arctic.<sup>86</sup>

The importance of food afforded cooks “informal” influence at the stations. The OIC “ran the show,” but food could also be a powerful motivator. Paul Reid recalled an encounter with a strip mechanic named Albert from Ottawa, who shaved once a week and left his considerable stubble in the sink. Reid repeatedly asked the strip mechanic to clean it up to no avail. In frustration, the cook set up a “surprise” for his messy comrade:

he had shaved that morning and the sink was as grubby as always.... So I was cooking breakfast for guys and ... Albert was sitting there waiting for his because, of course, he knew that I knew what his regular order would be. Well he was waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and eventually he said “Well come on Paul, what is the problem?” I said “Albert, I am really very



FIGURE 8-6. Dinner at Isachsen, n.d. LAC Winnipeg, Acc 2004-01213-7 AES Photographic Records of Arctic Weather Stations, Box 1 – Eureka.

busy this morning and I am saving a bit of time because I'm going to clean the sink too." He sat there quietly, thinking that he was still going to get breakfast. Well I had no intention of letting it go that easily. So everybody was finished and had headed out for work, and there was Albert still waiting for his breakfast. I finally said, "Hey Albert, I'll make a deal with you. You clean the sink [and] I'll give you a good breakfast. Well off he went very reluctantly.... So that was an example of how the ... cook could leverage certain things in an isolated spot.<sup>87</sup>

Not all cooks enjoyed such eminent stature. Their position was one of the hardest to fill, and the USWB and DoT occasionally had to settle for applicants with minimal qualifications. ExO William Greco reported that



FIGURE 8-7. Lindley L. Bradbury, Resolute's cook, with fresh biscuits in 1952. LAC Winnipeg, Acc 2004-01213-7 AES Photographic Records of Arctic Weather Stations, Box 1 – Eureka.

“there were many doubts” when Charles Neuner — a trained strip mechanic — arrived at Mould Bay to assume the duties of the station's cook. Neuner, however, proved effective, and Greco noted that “a majority of the station personnel” gained weight during his tenure.<sup>88</sup> A few cooks failed to meet the standard. One man who served at Isachsen during the early 1960s had peeled potatoes in France during the Second World War but had no other culinary experience or training. “We learned early on with his stay with us that he could wreck most things ... and he was forbidden to touch any of the fresh produce and meat that we got,” Don Shanks recalled. “He could open cans and do his thing with that, but he couldn't do anything more.” The same individual also baked “bricks” because he forgot to add key ingredients like baking powder and baking soda to his dough. When

this happened, the cook stormed out of the kitchen and threw his “bricks” into a “big steel sled outside, and 25 lbs of his cake reverberated throughout the whole camp.” Accordingly, the Isachsen crew “ate better” during the cook’s day off. In such situations, personnel “learned to love” what the cook prepared, filled the remaining gaps as best they could, and made the best of the difficult situation.<sup>89</sup>

Ideally, all cooks took Sunday as a day of rest from this critical role, but this practice was not always viable. Most crews respected this rule by preparing their own meals during some or all of the day, but many of the men had limited cooking skills and left disarrayed kitchens in their wake. The need for quality meals, combined with the inability or unwillingness of other personnel to take care of the kitchen, drove some cooks to forgo their respite. For John R. Boyle, Isachsen’s cook from 1954–55, the decision to work seven days a week was not easy, as he explained in a letter to his superiors:

This is officially my day off — but of course I never can follow the policy to the letter.... Did you ever try to chew on a pork chop bone while you were the sole object of a beagle [hound’s] supplicant gaze. In short when John eats — everyone eats. If John wants a cup of coffee, be it A.M. or P.M. everyone is in — Knowing the futility of trying to dine in solitude I also prepare dinner and supper. But it isn’t all solicitude for the well being of these brats I have to mother that causes me to work overtime (no extra pay involved). Call it more of a defense measure. When you consider what a shambles these bastards would make of the kitchen, were they to forage for themselves, you can readily understand why I submit to them. A guy has to protect his interests.<sup>90</sup>

All personnel worked long, hard hours, but the importance of good food and the incompetence of others meant that many JAWS cooks spent most of their time, every day of the week, in the kitchen.<sup>91</sup>

## Alcohol and Drugs

At JAWS outposts, alcohol consumption varied from crew to crew. Some personnel believed the stations ran better without excessive drinking, and did not miss the absence of hard alcohol.<sup>92</sup> Most OICs and ExOs, however, found that responsible alcohol consumption generally fostered morale and community.<sup>93</sup> Occasional get-togethers in the Arctic Circle Club or in staff rooms gave personnel a chance to relax. Rigid station work schedules and military policies on the base at Resolute deterred personnel from over-consuming.<sup>94</sup> From time to time, Monte Poindexter recalls, personnel were “grossly inebriated ... but it was only on their own time” and they were always “up for work the next day.”<sup>95</sup> The vast majority of JAWS personnel, moreover, had “other irons in the fire besides getting drunk” — activities that ensured alcohol “was not generally a problem.”<sup>96</sup>

Alcohol was available from various sources. American personnel received a limited amount from the US Highway Patrol, who sent confiscated alcohol to remote American bases in boxes stamped “for medical use only.”<sup>97</sup> Some personnel also purchased their own alcohol before heading north, imported it from Thule, or received bottles from family and friends. The Canadian state also sometimes supplied alcohol. The RCAF, for example, dropped a large ration to redeem itself after sloppy piloting destroyed much of Isachsen’s 1952 Christmas airdrop. “Imagine our faces and exclamations,” the OIC noted in a subsequent report, when the crew opened a box containing eleven forty-ounce bottles of Seagram’s rye and another crate containing O’Keefe’s and Labatt’s beer.<sup>98</sup> At Resolute, beer was available at the Arctic Circle Club run by the RCAF. Furthermore, although few OICs and ExOs condoned the activity, the scent of “home” brewing or distilling was hard to miss at such small stations. When permitted, this practice could bring together USWB and DoT personnel. “Some of those Americans knew how to make good moonshine ... [because] they came from places where it was quite common,” Dave Oldridge reminisced.<sup>99</sup> During his stay at Mould Bay from 1956–57, USWB meteorological technician Monte Poindexter similarly acknowledged that several Canadians made “pretty good beer” using a pickle barrel and parts ordered from the Eaton’s catalogue, though he joked that he “never drank [from] the bottom” of the barrel.<sup>100</sup>

Sometimes personal drinking problems predated service at the stations and occasionally contributed to unruly behaviour. While at Resolute in the early 1960s, radio operator Bill Stadnyk was socializing with a member of the RCAF at the Arctic Circle Club. Suddenly the fellow reached across the table, grabbed Stadnyk's shirt, and the "next thing I knew there was a large fist staring me in the face." Stadnyk managed to talk the man down, but the individual subsequently damaged a metal ski-doo with his fists and answered to his Commanding Officer the following day.<sup>101</sup> So long as apparent alcoholism did not disrupt station operations, however, personnel were allowed to continue consuming.<sup>102</sup> When the addiction inhibited people from performing their duties satisfactorily, however, they were sent out and did not complete their full tour of service.

Illicit drug use was less common. Each station's drug cabinet was padlocked and under strict control, but a few individuals managed to bypass these safeguards. During the late 1950s, one individual had to be sent home after accessing painkillers without permission.<sup>103</sup> On another occasion, Glenn Dyer refused to send additional morphine to Eureka after noting that the station's consumption did not match its reported medical emergencies.<sup>104</sup> For the most part, however, the presence of drugs and alcohol at the stations did not create serious problems or hinder official activities.

## Sexuality

"Darts, reading, chess, skiing, record-playing, table tennis and other diversions" cannot compensate for the lack of female companionship at the stations, *National Geographic's* Andrew Brown insisted in 1955.<sup>105</sup> At Resolute, the neighbouring Inuit village provided occasional glances at the opposite sex but, while limited interaction between JAWS personnel and residents of the nearby community likely occurred, station officials and the RCMP strictly discouraged liaisons. The satellite stations were, with the rare exception of short-term female guests, completely homo-social environments until after the joint program ended in 1972.

Consequently, glimpses of non-Indigenous women were largely constrained to illustrations and dreams. The use of pin-ups and pornography to cope with sexual deprivation at isolated locales is well documented,<sup>106</sup> but the contestation of their use is less appreciated. Pin-ups from *Playboy*



FIGURE 8-8. Radio Operator Jim Jung running amateur radio equipment at Isachsen in August 1958. Note the pin-ups and amateur radio call sign cards on the wall, as well as the Morse code tap. Jim Jung Collection.

and other magazines adorned many personal quarters at the stations and sometimes hung in common rooms. On at least one occasion, Glenn Dyer felt the pin-ups were too prevalent. While he acknowledged that “some discretion may be allowed in placing decorations in private rooms of individuals,” he considered their placement in common spaces and the radio room to be “entirely inappropriate for a public building.” He consequently ordered American personnel to refrain from mounting posters outside of their quarters, but station crews ignored the edict and continued to adorn public spaces with pin-up posters.<sup>107</sup>

Any form of prospective contact with women excited station crews. “Ignore the leers about the women,” journalist Ritchie Calder wrote after visiting the stations:

The nearest white woman was five hundred miles away in Cambridge Bay and the Eskimo women never came near the all-male service base. While I was there a sensational signal came through that a woman Wing-Commander was coming in for a tour of inspection. If a visitant from Mars had been announced it could not have caused more consternation and comment.

One of the Oldest Inhabitants — a young weatherman — said “And as she comes through that door, we will look right at her and say, ‘A woman, if my memory serves me right.’”

She did not come. So the only reminder of womankind which that exile would have for another year was the Hollywood pin-up girl above his typewriter.<sup>108</sup>

Stations along the trans-Atlantic commercial flight route even took advantage of their location to converse with airline stewardesses as they flew overhead. “On one occasion a Stewardess from a Dutch KLM flight came on the frequency with a very pleasant voice,” Bill Stadnyk recalled of his time at Resolute Bay. “So I asked her if she would say hello to the boys down on the base. I then connected the air-ground frequency to the station intercom and she came on and said something like ‘Hello boys, I hope you’re all doing fine down there, wish you were up here with me.’” The station personnel relished such banter, however contrived. “We’d kinda ask her to lay it on pretty thick,” Stadnyk reminisced, “and she would do that.”<sup>109</sup>

Eureka personnel also enjoyed these exchanges with overflying aircraft and even held a Miss Eureka “personality queen” contest. To enter, flight attendants who flew with the British Overseas Airways Corporation sent the station a letter wherein they described their travels to exotic parts of the world, hobbies, age, height, and hair colour. One described going



FIGURE 8-9. “Miss Eureka” Sue Curtis accepting a plaque presented by former Eureka technician Ron Girardin in front of the GPO Tower in London, England, 1969/70. Eureka weather station logs, Eureka.

to a “blue movie,” and another described “lying in the sun all day with nothing much to do [other] than down the occasional gin and tonic,” joking that it was probably best that the contestants were not “parading in swimming costumes or bikinis” for the station crew since it “might prove to be too much for such folk as yourselves who are virtually ‘womanless’ for such a long time!!” Several applicants included a photo of themselves. Ideally, each entrant also spoke with Eureka radio operators while flying overhead. Station personnel replied to several of the letters, and some personnel went even further. In 1969, Sue Curtis of British Airways won the contest, and twenty-five-year-old Ron Girardin made the trip to London, England and met Curtis at the GPO (now BT) Tower for a “blind date” where he presented her with a station plaque.<sup>110</sup>

Aware that radio contact was the closest that most of the men would come to interacting with women during their time at the stations, many JAWS personnel neglected their personal appearance. In a homosocial

environment, personal grooming became less important, bathing less frequent, and profanity more prevalent. On rare occasions when women visited the stations, they cleaned up their appearance. Lloyd Cope, the OIC of the ionospheric station at Resolute from 1949–50, found it:

most interesting to observe that change in men's psyche, when after not seeing, hearing, or looking at a female for a considerable length of time, they do funny things. The whole camp of men, some thirty or more, had learned that the USAF was coming in this particular week and part of their human cargo would be two nurses, enroute to Thule in Greenland. It was the talk of our community for days. Such sprucing up of person you wouldn't believe. Beards came off, hair got cut and the crowning glory was to see two of the men in ties as the plane landed.<sup>111</sup>

A similar metamorphosis ensued when two nurses from Thule hitched a ride on a USAF transport to visit their former patient Lowell Demond who had returned to Eureka in 1957. He recalled that:

when this airplane came in we had advanced notice that there was going to be two women on that airplane, and the guys cleaned ... themselves up, changed their clothes, and there was sort of a pecking order that sort of arose to say hello to these girls and try to be friendly and ... the language habits really changed, I didn't hear anybody say anything off colour while they were here. When they left we reverted back to the way we were; to our primitive methods.<sup>112</sup>

Such "reversions" after the departure of female guests were common, but sometimes the impact from these visits had more longevity. In 1956, a medical flight from Whitehorse brought RCAF nurse Flight Officer M. Edna Poirier of Prince Edward Island to Mould Bay. During her half-hour stay, Poirier attended to her patient, briefly toured the station, consumed a cup of tea, and smoked a cigarette. After her departure, the men stopped one of their own from cleaning up the table. "Don't wash the cup," they



FIGURE 8-10. An RCAF nurse being welcomed to Isachsen by Canadian strip mechanic Harry Sevigny during the summer of 1958. Jim Jung Collection.

agreed. “Let’s save it, with the lipstick on it, and the cigarette.”<sup>113</sup> The crew subsequently displayed these items in the station’s living room in a special display case built of wood, glass, and green velvet with the following inscription:

### Thy Cup

On Sept. 1, 1956, 1700 hours, mountain standard time at Mould Bay, NWT, history was made by this cup which was used by the first woman ever to visit Prince Patrick Island.

Presented to Mould Bay weather station in remembrance of womanhood throughout the entire world by the staff of 1956.<sup>114</sup>

The statement was inaccurate. A few Inuit women had visited the Mould Bay station prior to Poirier. For example, Amagoalik, an Inuk from Resolute who guided a geologist working at Mould Bay, was accompanied by his wife and family during an expedition earlier that decade.<sup>115</sup> Her presence evidently did not stir the same excitement amongst that station's personnel as Poirier's short visit.

At a time when Western Cold War cultural norms were obsessed with heteronormativity, concerns about homosexuality occasionally surfaced at the stations.<sup>116</sup> In November 1952, the cook at Alert claimed to have witnessed one of the station's radio operators "playing with" the OIC's genitalia while the latter cut the radio operator's hair. "Both men were fully dressed at the time" and, while station personnel had suspected that the two men had been romantically involved for some time, none had witnessed additional contact.<sup>117</sup> The station personnel discussed the matter among themselves for three weeks before contacting Toronto on December 9 (as homosexual contact between consenting men was still considered a criminal act). DoT sent two possible replacements for the accused, as well as Resolute's OIC to investigate. Resolute's OIC quickly determined that insufficient evidence existed to lay any charges. "Despite the inconclusive evidence," he reported, "the other six men indicated that they were convinced ... [that the accused] were homosexuals and that they intended to be aboard the departing aircraft if the two were not removed."<sup>118</sup> Consequently, Resolute's OIC sent the two men to complete the remainder of their tour at larger stations further south. According to the report, they were removed from the stations "because of the potentially dangerous personnel problem which would exist if they remained."<sup>119</sup> Since the allegations were never substantiated, the incident was not added to their DoT records. The official explanation for their transfer simply stated "personnel difficulties." Reflecting on the outcome, an official from the USWB commented that:

While guilt was not proven, the fact that the remaining five [*sic*] members of the staff were solidly arrayed against them lent credence to the fact that some grounds for suspicion existed. While I do not concur with the idea that, ordinarily, a person be removed from a position on the grounds of suspicion alone,

I feel that in a remote, isolated spot, such as Alert, where so few men must live and work in close harmony, such a situation might soon result in violence.<sup>120</sup>

Thus, at the isolated Joint Arctic Weather Stations, sexuality was checked from without and within. Homosexuality was not accepted under any circumstances. Even heterosexuality was circumscribed. Personnel openly craved female companionship, but did so within accepted boundaries. Public actions such as piping a female stewardess's voice through the station loudspeakers or posting pin-up posters were commonplace. Even celebrating the transiency of a nurse with a display case was within acceptable mores. So long as station personnel stayed within these boundaries, their activities served as useful coping strategies and contributed to station morale.

## Coping with Isolation

Despite the activities and distractions available to JAWS personnel, many struggled to cope with their isolated and confined conditions. As polar explorers and psychologists have long noted, minor idiosyncrasies or quibbles can become major irritants to personnel stationed at remote outposts.<sup>121</sup> With so few individuals with whom to interact, unable to travel south owing to technological or budgetary limitations, and aware of chronic shortages of fresh recruits, everyone was encouraged to be friendly and to try to defuse altercations. Nevertheless, even the well-adjusted individuals suffered occasionally from confined conditions.

JAWS personnel were generally patient with each other's idiosyncrasies as long as they did not disrupt station life. Bob Plaseski, who served as a met tech at Resolute from 1967–68, and then as Alert's OIC the following year, remembered one mechanic who had no family and rotated between six-month postings at Alert and McMurdo Station in Antarctica. Plaseski praised the individual's ability to "fix almost anything," but admitted that he "found him a little squirrely."<sup>122</sup> "The dark period was a very difficult experience for almost all of us," Lowell Demond recalled. "We found for example that we spent a lot of time sleeping... Some people would get fairly depressed and we sort of cared for each other ... and tried to be supportive whenever we could.... You would always try to be helpful and

always try to be friendly with someone else.”<sup>123</sup> John Gilbert agreed. “If we noticed anyone suffering ... we would let them work it through for a few hours and then jolly them out of it.”<sup>124</sup>

Sometimes station crews found creative ways to correct what was considered to be abnormal behaviour. At Resolute during the late 1950s, for example, two individuals refused to do their laundry or take showers. After a while, Asbridge reminisced, “their presence was noticeable as soon as they entered a room,” so other station personnel took matters into their own hands. At first, the rest of the crew tried to intimate the imperative of cleaning by leaving soap in the offenders’ boots, but the two individuals failed to take the hint. A bolder, second attempt proved more successful. By using teletype paper, Resolute’s personnel produced large banners with six-inch text saying “BATH NIGHT AT RESOLUTE” and “LAUNDRY DAY AT RESOLUTE.” After a few “well-directed verbal quips,” the dirty personnel obliged their peers.<sup>125</sup>

Although the vast majority of personnel selected for the JAWS program coped well with the strain and only exhibited minor stress symptoms, problems ensued when either the USWB or DoT sent ill individuals north. In December 1952, for example, Isachsen’s station cook was chronically oversleeping and failing to prepare meals on time. At first, the station’s ExO “put off saying anything to him in the hopes that he will straighten himself out.” When the situation did not improve by the new year, the OIC asked the ExO to approach the cook about keeping up with his duties. Thereafter, the meals were “more regular” but the quality became “very poor.” When approached again about his failure to empty the kitchen’s heaping garbage can, the cook refused, daring the ExO to “make him.” On February 15, the cook again overslept and refused to get up despite the ExO’s repeated attempts to wake him, so the station’s personnel had to prepare their own dinner. Later that evening, the cook insisted that he was ill with bronchitis. “The general opinion of everybody when this came up was that it was a feigned illness that he was putting on to cover up for his laziness,” the ExO remembered. “The reason we thought this was that he didn’t say anything about it to me when I called him.” The ExO radioed south and received instructions for the treatment of bronchitis, then moved the cook to a bunk in the mess hall so that he would not have to venture outside. In the coming weeks, the cook’s health did not

significantly improve, though he was “up and running in and out of doors watching the sunrise” on February 16. To his horror, the ExO subsequently learned that the cook was receiving a US Army pension for chronic bronchitis contracted while serving in Iceland during the Second World War. The cook claimed he had disclosed his condition to the USWB before coming north, but the ExO complained in his report that it “appears unreasonable that he would take a job in such an unfavorable climate. It also appears unreasonable that the Weather Bureau would send a man to an isolated station who is being pensioned for a chronic illness.” The rest of the station personnel continued to question the severity of the cook’s condition, which led to the latter quitting all kitchen work and spending most of his time in the barracks. This forced the station personnel to assume complete responsibility for meal preparations, and the cook took his meals in the mess hall after everyone else left.<sup>126</sup> The final outcome of these difficulties is not recorded in the archival record, but the example illustrates how prolonged illness strained relations at isolated stations with limited staffing.

Such incidents, while rare, also pointed to weaknesses in the JAWS personnel selection processes. Bruce Weaver remembers a new American met tech who arrived at Mould Bay in September 1965 and learned that he suffered from agoraphobia. The individual had been completely unaware of his condition, but “discovered it in a hurry. He literally could not make it down from the cookhouse to the bunkhouse. So he stayed in the cookhouse for thirty days until the ... October supply flight came in and he left on that.”<sup>127</sup> Due to the short-notice evacuation, Mould Bay had to operate without a fourth met tech that winter.

More heated altercations, though rare, strained camaraderie at the stations. In the mid-1960s, the exterior door to the Mould Bay barracks automatically slammed shut to ensure a tight seal. The rapid closure sent a gust of wind down the corridor causing all of the bedroom doors to jar loudly. Personnel were told to close the door slowly to prevent this disturbance. The seismologist, who slept in the JAWS barracks but kept different hours than the rest of the station, “often complained bitterly about” one individual who consistently woke him by allowing the door to slam. When this occurred one too many times, the otherwise even-tempered seismologist rushed from his room and, brandishing a fire axe, threatened

to attack the noisy offender. According to Weaver, the two yelled at each other for ten to fifteen minutes “and it was over. The two of them kept their distance from each other for the next month or so.”<sup>128</sup> In this case, station personnel resolved the matter without recourse to the OIC or ExO. Such self-regulation was typical and necessary for successful station operations. “The dynamic of the station crews allowed these things to sort of ebb and flow,” Don Shanks explained. “I think if you took a hard stand on this and try to regulate it out of existence I think you’d have failed at it.”<sup>129</sup>

## Leadership

While informal discipline was common, confrontations that required the OIC or ExO to intervene tested the relationships that station leaders cultivated with their subordinates. Personnel continued to rebuff leaders who, like Cleghorn at Resolute in 1947, tried to impose an authoritarian style on station culture. Another OIC, who went on to enjoy a lengthy JAWS career, infringed upon his frustrated ExO’s authority at Isachsen in 1959 and developed a reputation as a “perfectionist” among most of the station’s personnel. One individual even called him “autocratic.” A station inspector noted the OIC’s “meticulous” attention to detail but admitted that “this personality does not mix well with the others on the station” and that he had “completely withdrawn” from the social life of the camp. Upon reflection, even the OIC conceded that he struggled to get most of the station’s personnel to follow his orders.<sup>130</sup>

Instead of establishing a strictly hierarchical command structure, “esteemed” leaders (as polar psychologist Paul Nelson describes them) adopted a “democratic” and personal leadership style that preserved impartiality. Successful leaders differ “most from unpopular leaders by exhibiting greater emotional control and adaptability and maintaining harmony within the group.”<sup>131</sup> The most effective OICs and ExOs also developed a rapport with each individual at their stations and worked, ate, and relaxed with the rest of the personnel. They consulted on-site specialists about technical matters before making decisions, and all personnel expected to give input on general station policies. In short, effective leaders were good team builders. Bill Nemeth used this formula when serving as Isachsen’s OIC from 1953–54:

If there was anything that really needed to be done on a joint basis, we just sat down and hammered it out, and got the guys all together and said “this is what we have to do, what is the best way of doing it, and who is available to help?” And that pretty well handled it. The assignments were made, and no one I can remember ... had cause to say “gee I don’t like that assignment” ... because everyone pitched in.<sup>132</sup>

Team unity and trust between station personnel and leaders also allowed for more authoritarian-style leadership during crises.<sup>133</sup> If leaders failed to intervene in these situations, disruptive behaviour was “often infectious.”<sup>134</sup> Yet, even in these situations, effective OICs and ExOs carefully avoided overstepping their authority by following the “kindness and consideration” examples shown by leaders like Ed Goodale at Thule in 1948.<sup>135</sup> Indeed, most station leaders recognized that they had few alternatives. Every position at the stations was critical to successful operations. Consequently, “if there was a personality problem you had to fix it,” Bob Plaseski explained, “because you knew that by shipping somebody south you wouldn’t probably get a replacement — you’d have to do without.”<sup>136</sup>

A brief private reminder from the OIC or ExO usually resolved minor personality problems. Weaver recalled how his station leaders gently approached personnel to suggest that “it would help if you did your laundry periodically” or “take your turn cleaning.”<sup>137</sup> On other occasions, longer conversations were necessary. At Isachsen in 1953, the cook learned that his father had died during the Christmas season and subsequently showed signs of depression. Sensing his cook’s darkening mood, OIC Bill Nemeth took the time to talk with him one-on-one and helped the cook to put the situation back into perspective. Nemeth later recalled that, once personnel recognized that they could not leave and remembered that their duty was “short-term pain for long-term [financial] gain,” they settled into a routine and kept busy.<sup>138</sup>

Sometimes these discussions could be hair-raising. One night at Eureka during the winter of 1963–64, OIC Don Shanks was in his bed when a Canadian radio operator ran into the barracks yelling “Shanks, Shanks, they’re gonna kill each other.” Rushing to the mess hall, Shanks found his cook and electronics technician eyeing each other in “dead

silence.” The tech was checking the clip on his .45 pistol while the cook was in the kitchen sharpening a butcher knife. Shanks sat down at the head of the kitchen table and asked: “so what’s going on guys?” They both gave him “the eyeball” but said nothing. Shanks told both of them that he knew what was going on and, turning to the electronics technician, said: “‘you’ve got to give me that gun.’ And within about three seconds he slid it across the table to me.” Removing the clip, Shanks turned to the cook and told him “‘you’re going to put the knife back on the chopping block aren’t you.’ And he did it with no words.” In hindsight, Shanks thinks that the electronics tech, who was the oldest man at the station, was relieved to escape a dangerous situation. “It had escalated beyond where he had thought it was going to go,” Shanks observed, “and here I was offering him an out.” The next day, Shanks and his ExO discussed these events and decided to watch the two men closely but not intervene unless there were further confrontations, thus allowing the two men to find their own way to coexist. For the remainder of the tour, the relationship between the two men was “strained,” but they did not exchange further harsh words and simply “kept their distance.”<sup>139</sup> Even in extreme circumstances, JAWS leaders avoided dictating resolutions whenever possible; calmly redirecting frustrated individuals into compliance offered a more attractive remedy that produced long-term peace and stability amongst men confined to an isolated outpost.

Occasionally, mental depression proved more destructive. Alone in his room during the week between Christmas and New Year’s in 1953, a drunken individual at Eureka (who was a known alcoholic) shot a hole in the roof with one of the station’s rifles. The OIC and ExO confiscated the weapon and helped the depressed individual back to a healthier mental state. In the end, Ken Moulton recalled, “he got through it, as we all did.”<sup>140</sup> In rare instances, such assistance was not rendered in time. When coming off duty, Richard Harrison, an American radio officer at Resolute, had a habit of going into the OIC’s bedroom and turning on the lights to wake him up. On 17 February 1952, Harrison entered the room to find a scene of carnage: the OIC had shot himself in the head. “Troubled with melancholy and lack of self-confidence,”<sup>141</sup> the OIC had requested a transfer out but this had been rejected. The traumatized crew had to clean up the mess and prepare the body. When Howard Wessbecher arrived at

the station a few months later, he noted that the staff remained “totally jittery” and nervous as a consequence of the former OIC’s suicide.<sup>142</sup> In a summary of the incident, Resolute’s ExO noted that “this tragedy grimly points out the paramount need of careful screening of personnel.... It also points out the need for a careful watch by responsible personnel for signs of mental breakdown.”<sup>143</sup>

Achieving Goodale’s “kindness and consideration” equilibrium was not easy. Excessive tolerance or nagging by station leaders could harm their authority. In 1953, Isachsen’s ExO, for example, gathered snow for melting when his personnel refused to take their turn at the job. When discussing the issue in his regular reports, the ExO claimed that “more often than not the personnel at fault dislike being reminded” of their duties. He “found it easier to do this myself than [to] have to put up with the constant nagging and arguing which is my lot when the chore is not done. I have tried every means except force to get cooperation on this chore and although personnel say they are willing to do it they either forget when their turn is due or just don’t bother.”<sup>144</sup> Although additional reports confirm that at least two of Isachsen’s personnel that year proved disruptive and poorly suited to station life, the ExO’s example demonstrates how station leaders did not always manage to strike a delicate balance with all personnel under their charge to ensure smooth station operations.<sup>145</sup>

## **Shared Command and Canadian Sovereignty**

On the rare occasions when more decisive action was necessary, OICs and ExOs had to carefully navigate the complicated and overlapping binational command structure of the JAWS program. The OIC commanded the entire station and therefore focused on operations, drafted work schedules, and monitored Canadian personnel. The ExO bore responsibility for all American equipment and supplies at each site, as well as his country’s personnel. DoT’s ongoing struggle to recruit a sufficient number of individuals for its allotment of JAWS personnel forced it to deploy OICs who were often much younger and less experienced than their American counterparts, and this limitation led some prominent Canadian officials to worry that Americans might dominate the stations and compromise Canadian sovereignty in the High Arctic.

JAWS personnel naturally brought their national identities with them to the stations, and cultural differences occasionally created friction. In 1956, for example, Canadian and American personnel debated Britain's controversial involvement in the Suez Crisis. Such divisions were rare between citizens of closely allied countries.<sup>146</sup> Domestic politics created a few additional disagreements, though these were also infrequent. "Civil rights were just becoming understood," Weaver remembered from his time in the JAWS program during the mid-1960s. "We had a number of southerners who were adamant about Blacks," he recalled, "so there were times when that got quite testy."<sup>147</sup> According to a letter from Glenn Dyer to Eureka's ExO, another American at the station "openly voices disdain and antipathy for certain racial groups or individuals." Dyer instructed the station's ExO to maintain the "good will ... built up over the years" with Canada by confronting the individual, reminding him that he worked at an "international cooperative station," and instructing him to "curb his frequent declamations about ethnic groups."<sup>148</sup>

Such tensions never threatened to undermine Canadian sovereignty in any way, and national identities did not factor heavily into everyday life at the isolated posts. Indeed, most JAWS personnel carefully avoided divisive subjects and focused on commonalities. "There are cliques," R.A.J. Phillips acknowledged in a draft article for *Foreign Affairs*, but station groups did not tend to divide between Canadians and Americans. Instead, the occasional cliques that developed typically formed along professional lines like radio operators or met observers.<sup>149</sup> JAWS personnel were ultimately "a bunch of like-minded people, regardless of nationality doing whatever work we were there to do," David Weston recalled.<sup>150</sup> Maintaining this common focus on getting the job done was usually sufficient impetus to move past any awkward moments arising from national differences.<sup>151</sup>

A small handful of JAWS leaders, however, ignored instructions to cooperate. When OICs and ExOs failed to respect their overlapping jurisdictions or misinterpreted their powers, clashes sometimes ensued. ExOs, for example, resented OICs who assumed that their responsibility for the "overall administration of the station" entitled them to oversee an ExO's areas of responsibility.<sup>152</sup> When ExOs ignored their OICs, similar complications arose. R.G. Chapil, Eureka's OIC from 1960–61, had to overcome ageism when some American personnel complained that he "was young



FIGURE 8-11. JAWS personnel posing for a group photo at Eureka in 1959. Department of Transport.

enough to be the executive officers [*sic*] son.” His ExO did “not seem to have much knowledge on the operation” of the JAWS program and stubbornly clung to the idea that he was “in charge of the station.” Chapil responded to this challenge by “dig[ging] through station files time and time again” to document his own areas of jurisdiction. Through these means, the young OIC maintained his authority and asked the USWB to better instruct its personnel and, ideally, assign “younger” ExOs in the future.<sup>153</sup>

Inexperience could nevertheless bring an OIC’s judgment into question. When a new Canadian OIC arrived at Alert late in the fall of 1954, he had not been fully briefed on his duties. After arriving, the ExO’s “strong personality and longer Arctic experience caused [the OIC] to agree too readily with his ExO’s ideas during early in the tour.” Consequently, station personnel gravitated toward the ExO for direction and leadership. “Aware of the situation, Alert’s OIC chose not to make an issue of it to ensure that no incidents would arise,” an official report lauded, “and the year passed smoothly” even though the OIC proved unwilling to counter some of the ExO’s decisions.<sup>154</sup>

In moments of doubt, most American ExOs recognized that they were on foreign soil and remained mindful of Canadian authority. In 1964, for example, Resolute's comparatively new OIC dismissed a popular and talented Canadian met tech from the station for allegedly disrespecting authority figures. ExO Burton Goldenberg had considerably more experience after working at the station for a year and a half in addition to previously serving with the USWB in Antarctica, but he refused to intervene despite his personal doubts about the allegation.<sup>155</sup> In his judgement, the matter was "mostly Canadian. We [the United States] are involved only because we are here." Although station personnel sometimes created "uncomfortable" situations by encouraging Goldenberg to take sides in disputes, he assured concerned USWB officials that "I have always avoided partisanship. I realize the necessity of working with the OIC on a cordial basis[.] I have always done this, and will continue to do so in the future, regardless of my personal feelings."<sup>156</sup>

Serious differences or power struggles between OICs and ExOs remained exceptional, and the joint command structure that underpinned the JAWS program proved overwhelmingly amicable and effective. In 1955, Canadian Deputy Minister of Transport J.R. Baldwin reported to the Department of External Affairs "that any differences experienced with the United States personnel have been of such a minor character that they could be considered as non-existent."<sup>157</sup> This spirit of cooperation persisted through to the end of the program. In monthly and semi-annual reports, OICs, ExOs, and station inspectors typically characterized cooperation between American and Canadian personnel as "excellent."<sup>158</sup> Indeed, an overwhelming preponderance of archival and oral evidence emphasizes "cooperative" or "harmonious" relations between station personnel, demonstrating that high-level concerns about power asymmetries and sovereignty were divorced from friendly and effectual cultures on the ground.<sup>159</sup>

Although the OIC's authority flowed from his status as a Canadian official operating on Canadian soil, sovereignty was not a major component of station culture. Most Americans accepted Canadian sovereignty without question. "I was a pretty green young man at that time about things like that," Ken Moulton explains. "But I don't even recall that they [the USWB] talked to me about that before we went there, but I was certainly

aware that we were on ... Canadian soil, we were their guests really at the station.”<sup>160</sup> Former Canadian JAWS personnel offer similar recollections. When discussing his memories of the stations and Canadian sovereignty, Lowell Demond remembered having “some inkling ... but we were never versed in it.”<sup>161</sup> As an OIC, Don Ware understood the importance of maintaining control, but he acknowledged that the primary purpose of the stations was to collect weather data for global forecasting. “Sovereignty never really came up,” he recalls; “certainly it was nothing we ever talked about.”<sup>162</sup>

Ultimately, the vast majority of OICs and ExOs successfully navigated the intricate and sometimes overlapping command structure by respecting each other’s roles, establishing strong professional relationships, and consulting continuously on all matters of common interest. Bob Pearson, an American who served as a radio operator at nearly all of the stations during the early 1950s, noted that these leadership roles were well understood and well established. “We knew the OIC was in charge of the whole works,” he explained. “The ExO was there to handle any problems we had with the Weather Bureau.” If a more general problem arose, “the OIC would have handled it.”<sup>163</sup> Shanks, as OIC at Eureka from 1963–64, reached a similar understanding with an ExO who was more than twice his age. If American personnel thought something serious was wrong, they were to approach their ExO who “would either stop them or take the case ... to me. But you know,” he emphasized, interactions were “never ever that formal.”<sup>164</sup>

Such close consultation and trust between station leaders remained common throughout the JAWS program. In one case, the cook at Alert struggled to cope with the isolation and became agitated each time someone complained about his cooking. At one point he went on strike and, brandishing a knife, barricaded himself in his room. Because the cook was American, the ExO intervened. Station OIC Bob Plaseski “assisted” his ExO by being present, but emphasized that “it was his staff, not mine.” The intervention helped for a time, but it eventually became clear to both station leaders that the cook was unable to find a better frame of mind. As the OIC, Plaseski decided that it was best to send the cook home and simply make do without those services for an indeterminate period. Throughout

the episode, the OIC and ExO consulted one another constantly, and Plaseski concluded that their division of responsibilities was “textbook.”<sup>165</sup>

In 1958, R.W. (Bill) Rae wrote that:

The trials and hardships which Arctic explorers of old had to endure are almost beyond belief[;] the Arctic exacted a heavy toll on the daring few who ventured to probe its secrets. The operation of modern Arctic weather stations, however, does not resemble the enforced winterings of former Arctic explorers any more than a trans-continental flight resembles a trek across the prairies by ox-cart. Cold front-lined holds of sailing ships have been replaced by prefabricated insulated houses, heated by thermostatically-controlled oil burning furnaces. Flickering oil lamps have given way to diesel-generated electric power. The staples of Arctic diet are no longer tinned beef and lime juice but well balanced diets, including fresh meat and vegetables and, an added safety factor, vitamin pills.<sup>166</sup>

Such descriptions of “effortless modernity,” Stephen Bocking observes, provided southern readers with familiar touchstones, offering reassurance that the physical and institutional infrastructure installed by Canada and the US made the High Arctic safe and liveable for JAWS personnel. Modern transportation systems and robust logistics allegedly overcame the harsh and challenging Arctic conditions endured by previous generations of explorer-scientists, and now afforded scientists the comforts of southern homes.<sup>167</sup>

The men who actually worked at the stations recognized how their lives in the Arctic differed from those of the “heroic era” scientist-explorers who passed through the region, but they did not see their contributions as expressions of “effortless modernity.” By providing historical and empirical depth to our understanding of everyday experiences at these polar sites, this chapter offers further insights into the material and affective dimensions of station life.<sup>168</sup> The High Arctic weather stations, with the exception of *Resolute*, were hundreds of kilometres from other communities. Isolation and confinement created stresses similar to those experienced by personnel at Antarctic stations and encouraged similar coping strategies.

JAWS personnel worked long hours, pursued diverse hobbies to fill their free time, cherished station dogs, and appreciated good cooking. In these exclusively male environments, the crews posted pinups of women and enforced heterosexual norms. Overall, the tenuous aspects of life at the stations are striking because they reveal the limits of modernity's power to create safe and stable places for the collection of reliable data for scientific consumption.<sup>169</sup> Joking and gentle cajoling helped to buoy spirits and avoid depression. Personnel who felt lonely pursued additional connections via an Indiana radio operator and overflying stewardesses. Like their Antarctic counterparts, JAWS leaders adopted the gentle leadership styles that are necessary at isolated places, managing personality clashes and depressed crew as needed. Not all problems had satisfactory solutions, but most did, and stories about life at the stations reaffirm (as scholars Lawrence Palinkas and Peter Suedfeld remind us in general) that personnel working at isolated polar stations "can enjoy and benefit from an experience even though they also show signs of discomfort or psychological symptoms."<sup>170</sup>

The stories also reveal a strong, collective sense of belonging at jointly-run stations cohabited by men from two countries. "In a small unit ... events of national and inter-nation[al] magnitude are reduced to a purely personal basis," American Bruce Aikins, the JAWS Administrative Officer in Resolute, explained in early 1963. "If the men with whom you work form their opinion of the Joint Arctic Weather Stations, the Weather Bureau and even the whole United States, based on their opinion of you, it becomes vital that your actions be considered carefully."<sup>171</sup> In isolated stations operated by an equal complement of Canadians and Americans, the danger of the small teams dividing along national lines posed legitimate concerns. Both the US Weather Bureau and DoT believed that it was "essential that cooperation and [a] cordial relationship exist between staff members of both U.S. and Canada" to sustain good morale at the stations,<sup>172</sup> and had no qualms about recalling personnel when individuals failed to work amicably with their "foreign" counterparts.<sup>173</sup> Such cases were rare, however, and oral histories and the archival record do not support the typical portrait of the Joint Arctic Weather Stations as locations of Canada-US tension and struggle. Historian Shelagh Grant, when framing the program as an example of the US government's duplicitous agenda

to usurp Canadian Arctic sovereignty, alleges that “officially, the ‘officer in charge’ was a Canadian; in practice there was also an American ‘executive officer’ unofficially in charge.”<sup>174</sup> Similarly, historian Stephen Bocking suggests that the JAWS “facilities [were] themselves the site of a contest of authority between Canada and the United States.”<sup>175</sup> Our systematic research reveals little empirical basis for these claims. The vast majority of American ExOs recognized the Canadian OIC’s authority, which reaffirmed the Canadian state’s presence and sovereignty. The successful bilateral relationships forged and sustained on the fringes of the Arctic Archipelago, however, did not stop Canadian journalists, politicians, and bureaucrats from worrying about their country’s Arctic sovereignty or from lobbying for their country to “Canadianize” the program.