

# Nineteen Months in Retrospect

By Martin Allinson, 2003.

Forty years on, I still remember the DEWLine with great affection.

Considering that it was located in a barren, inhospitable region, and that it was an all-male environment, that opening sentence may sound surprising.

But I have always considered that the Line gave me back every bit as much as it took.

In fact, all it really took was 19 months of my youth. I had just turned 24 when, in April 1959, I reported to the Columbia Hotel in Streator, Illinois; and I was still only 25 when I departed Cape Dyer for postgraduate studies in the teaching of electronic engineering.

And in the meantime, there had been a lot of fun, and the acquisition of a wealth of experience and a hefty bank balance.

**CAVEATS** I am writing this article (in 2003) for Larry Wilson because my memory has been stimulated by my coming across all the slide photos that I took on the Line. But memory is notoriously fickle, partial, and unreliable. So, I will have to end the article, as Victorian invoices did, with the initials E.&O.E.

Those initials stand for **ERRORS AND OMISSIONS EXCEPTED.**

Sometimes I will have to guess at the spelling of names, and maybe I will have misremembered some of the names. Sometimes I will have a clear (but possibly wrong) memory of an event but get it in the wrong location---and vice versa! I apologise for all the unwitting errors that there may be in what follows, and to anyone who feels traduced by what I remember of him. As you read, please remember that the words come from the mere fragments of an old man's memory. The only hard facts are that there was a DEWLine and that, during my time on it, these photos were taken!

**GETTING THE CONTRACT.** Attending for interview at an office near Edmonton Airport, the Federal Electric Corporation representative gave me an electronics test paper to answer. No problem with that---I had just spent a year teaching the stuff at the Institute of Technology in Calgary. After he had graded it, he started to tell me about the Line. And I got a distinct impression that he wanted my application to succeed. Maybe he was below his recruitment target, who knows.

Anyway, he didn't make me do the Personality Assessment questionnaire in a race against the clock, as he was supposed to. He said I could take the questionnaire with me, answer it at leisure, and mail it back to him (being very careful and wary, as the graders compared the answers of some of the questions with the answers given to other questions to catch out pretenders). Maybe he was being helpful, or maybe he just wanted to get away early to his golf, who knows.

I spent the whole afternoon and most of the evening on that questionnaire, answering each question only after checking back on the previous ones and forward on the later ones. I came to the conclusion that, whilst I might not really be a normal and well-balanced young male, I could certainly make a good pretence of being one. Years later, it dawned on me that that was all that was required in order to be socially acceptable on the Line.

**STREATOR.** The 14 weeks at Streator were hard going. Unlike the group that Charles Flynn writes about in "Green Grass Fever", we were not knowledgeable, experienced technicians.

So they worked us hard and each Saturday morning there was a stiff "do or die" test---score less than 70% twice and you were out.

We lost one of our group after two weeks: 68% on the Weather Reporting course, and 68% on the Electronics Theory Revision course. There was a strong whiff of suspicion that the Streator Management had wanted one failure "pour encourager les autres". And some of us felt quite outraged as the man who was sacked, Doug Helm, would have made a very dependable Radician, especially for an I-site. Doug was about 35 and quite a bit older than the rest of us. His only problem was that he was not so used to studying in Streator Success Mode (i.e. "pack-it-into-short-term-memory-and-forget-it-next-week").

The result was that a core of angry young men resolved that management wasn't going to get anybody else, and each Saturday morning the seating was carefully planned so that each of the weakest was between two of the strongest and allowed to see their answers to the multiple-choice questions. Where the two strongest were giving the same answer the weak one put in that answer, too; but when the answers of the strong differed the weak one had to guess which of his stronger to follow. Sometimes the weak one got a slightly higher score than both of the stronger ones!

We even got my roommate through. And Don really was a struggler. His only electronics studies had been at a night class to prepare for the test for a Ham's licence and he had nil electronics experience apart from a bit of domestic radio and tv repair knowledge that he had picked up whilst doing spare-time work. Sure, he had six years with British Columbia Electric to his credit--but, if the truth had ever come out, he had been working with them as a bus driver! After the first day of the week on Electronics Theory Revision he confessed to me that, for him, it was a bit of Revision and a lot of First Time. He had got through the test at the interview because someone in Vancouver had managed to get hold of a copy of the test paper and it was circulating amongst the Hams. I wonder how that had come about---maybe someone else was below his recruitment target, who knows.

I was glad to help Don in repayment for him introducing me to private flying. He was a private pilot and had taken me up from Streator's little aerodrome on our first weekend. And a few weeks later I managed to get their little Taylorcraft back on the grass after my first solo flight.

We finished at Streator at noon on the Friday during Calgary Stampede Week and I was determined to get home for its final Saturday. Don was in a hurry to get home, too. So, we chartered a Cessna from Streator to Chicago. It scared us witless to go into Midway amongst all

the big stuff. I hopped westward through the night on three red-eye flights and got to Edmonton at dawn to find that there was no flight to Calgary because it was a Saturday. In those days, it was nearly all business executives who flew between Edmonton and Calgary, and they didn't work on Saturdays. And there was neither a train nor a Greyhound bus till evening. So, the journey that started with my only-ever air-taxi charter ended with 200 miles of hitch-hiking. But I got to the Stampede---and could hardly keep my eyes open, even during the chuckwagon races.

**CAPE DYER.** If any landing that you walk away from is a good one, then we nearly had a bad one on my first arrival at DYE Lower Camp. It was a Wheeler Airlines DC 4, and a bloke called Miller landed it (first time) just slightly short of the threshold.

Unfortunately, the ground level had been slightly sloping and the gravel for the runway had had to be built up quite thick there. This had resulted in a slope with a gradient of about 5 degrees in front of the threshold

. So, as the saying went, it was a down that was no touch. About 30 tons of DC 4 travelling at about 120 knots hit the slope with an almighty bang, bounced up (to 100 feet, the onlookers said) and then dropped down again with an even bigger bang. I thought that second landing would bring the oleos right up through the wings but, miraculously, there wasn't even a burst tyre.

However, bad things had been done to the structural integrity of the wings (including three fractures of the main spar, it was rumoured). So, both the DC 4 and Captain Miller ceased to serve with Wheeler Airlines. Permanently for Miller, but only temporarily for the DC 4. After some repairs, a special approval for one flight with no load was obtained and a volunteer Wheeler Airlines crew came up to fly the plane gently back. By then I was on shift at DYE, and I happened to be the console operator when it left. The Captain gave me the longest, most detailed flight plan that I ever had to copy. No mere "Great Circle Route, Cape Dyer to Montreal" for him. He was going to fly exact airways, point-to-point, and was making sure that Search and Rescue knew exactly where to look for him if a wing started to droop and he had to do a wheels-up on the muskeg. And his track south from DYE was quite a zigzag as he eased the delicate patient around and avoided any cloud that might be turbulent. Next day, I enquired at the Comm. Centre and learnt that they had made it to Dorval.

**DYE MAIN** Those first few weeks at DYE MAIN went well (though there was better to come). The work was varied and enjoyable and the summer weather was mostly good; so days off could be spent getting in some walking along the cliffs and to the snow and ice caves. Soon the Sealift could be seen on the surveillance radar, advancing through the ice clutter. Days off were subsequently spent at the beach taking photographs and giving a hand by driving a 4X4 or a 6X6 from time to time.

**TOWARDS THE I SITES** Quite soon after arriving at DYE, I had indicated to the Sector Chief, Communications and Electronics that I was interested in the position of Sector Radician (I Sites) when it came available in about four months time. I had figured out that the Sector Rads got to travel about a bit, rather than being continuously on one site, and that only the I Site position was within my youthful, limited experience and competence.

Also I was attracted to the I Sites as they seemed less formal than Main or Aux Sites. Their basic, year-round staffing was just four men: Station Chief, one Radician, one Mechanic and a Cook. And the basic buildings were just a short train of modules and a garage. But in summer there were supplementary staff, such as storekeepers, drivers and labourers to help with the arrival of the Sealift, and maintenance workers such as painters. For summer, Jamesway huts were opened up for accommodation and dining.

My interest in serving at I Sites was received favourably, and in September 1959 I was sent to FOX D as an I Site Radician for three months prior to becoming a Sector Radician

**FLYING TO FOX D** The flight to FOX D was my first in a DC 3. It seemed perfectly routine, until suddenly we were flying in a fiord and doing a descending turn between a little island and a great big cliff. But that was the only way to get into a position to do a safe landing at FOX D.

The terrain at FOX D was so undulating that the only possible airstrip that could be built had to start on the edge of the sea, slope upwards, and end a very short distance inland. Landings had to be uphill and takeoffs downhill. So both arriving and departing had to happen always at the beach end of the strip, and so both involved a U-turn in the fiord. And the fiord had an island in the middle, so the U-turn had to be done just before landing and just after takeoff. Not a place for the faint-hearted, and only permitted with a small load.

Frank Tilzey, the Station Chief, Frank Tilzey, and the other half dozen personnel on site made me welcome and I soon settled in to being Radician, weather reporter, ground-to-air operator, medicine man, and general helping hand.

It is the medical side that remains most prominent in my memory. Because no site would ever be without at least one Radician, and because all Radicians went to Streator, it had been decided that Radicians should look after first-aid etc. unless there was someone better qualified available. To prepare Radicians for this, they were given a short course (two Saturday mornings!) at Streator and ceremoniously presented with an American Red Cross First-Aid Certificate. Nobody seemed to be concerned that this only helped us to deal with the first few minutes of a situation, and that we might have to cope for days and even weeks before "Second-Aid" could be available.

**MEDICINE MAN** A diabolical outbreak of influenza in Kivitoo, the Eskimo village at the old whaling station near the airstrip, was my first test. When the head man, Nauyopee sent a messenger to ask for help, Frank took me down there in the snowmobile and we went into the first toopik--- a one-room hut made from scrap wood and tarpaulins. Every one of its five occupants was clearly very ill, and all I had to offer was bedside manner and aspirin. Once again, the liar in me came to the fore, and I cheerfully assured them, whilst taking their temperatures and feeling their pulses, that "you are sick, you will be sick tomorrow, sick next day, then ok". Goodness knows why, but that seemed to brighten them up a bit. I put their clock right by the time on my watch, made sure the clock was fully wound up, gave each one an aspirin, and drew little pictures of the position of the clock hands at the times when they were to take their aspirins. They seemed very reassured by this clear evidence of profound medical knowledge, training, and experience. And their temperatures were all down by a full degree. Praise the Lord for his creation of the Placebo Effect.

But then I noticed that I was alone with my patients. Frank Tilzey had succumbed to the stench of old seal meat in the toopik and was throwing up his dinner by the snowmobile---though he assured everyone that it was my complete and utter bullshit to the Eskimos that had turned his stomach!

We went on to the other toopiks and ended up with about twenty patients. Over the next few days we continued putting on this same air of confidence (or pulling the same confidence trick) and gradually they all recovered.

**CONSULTANT OBSTETRICIAN** Then came the day when I was just starting back in the snowmobile after taking a weather observation at the airstrip and Frank called me say that a messenger had come to ask for help for the Kivitoo grandmother who acted as midwife. She was struggling with a difficult delivery. My heart dropped. What help could I be to a woman who had delivered dozens, when I hadn't even seen a childbirth, never mind being involved in a difficult one? My mother had been a midwife before her marriage, but she was 5000 miles away, and all I could remember was that she had once said that "midwifery is just a matter of helping Nature to do what it is trying to do anyway".

But I was kept from brooding by ever-helpful colleagues. On the I Sites our only communication link with the outside world was to our neighbouring Aux Sites via the same uhf voice channel that was used for the vehicles. So the Comm Centre operators at FOX 4 and FOX 5 heard that I was getting my baptism of fire. At least their gleeful mock advice kept me fully diverted from thinking about what was to come when I got to Kivitoo.

Praise be, when I got to Kivitoo, the midwife had got the foetus to turn and present itself properly and I only had to be an approving, apparently- experienced spectator.

**WHAT A BIG BOIL** My next case was easy: a young Eskimo man with a boil that was four inches in diameter on his left buttock. The Doctor who was attached to FOX and DYE Sectors happened to be at FOX 5, so I could talk with him on the uhf. He thought that something that size must be a carbuncle. I wasn't disposed to argue with a professional whom I had never even met. Anyway, the treatment was the same either way---Epsom Salt poultice of magnificent size, and evacuation to DYE Lower for lancing by the doctor when he got there. There was only one problem. The patient couldn't sit down in the DC 3. We finally strapped him face down to a stretcher and tied the stretcher to the floor of the plane. And made sure that one of the other passengers had a sharp knife to cut the patient free if the plane had to be evacuated in a hurry. Later that Doctor was to agree that it truly was a boil---and a potential entrant for the Guinness Book of Records.

But then we got a tough case. It happened in mid-December, when my relief had arrived and been phased in, and I was on the manifest for the next plane to DYE Lower.

**NURSING, NURSING AND STILL HAVING TO NURSE** Tommy Kimmisantee, our Alaskan Eskimo bulldozer driver, started on the vomiting and belly pains which are the classic symptoms of appendicitis. The weather was WOXO, so there was no chance of evacuation in the two hours of daylight that we would get that day. Obviously, Tommy couldn't stay out in his

Jamesway hut, so Frank moved into the dormitory, and we put Tommy in the Station Chief's bed in the Station Office/ Dining Room on the other side of the dining table from the Radician's bed.

The weather stayed WOXO day after day and all we could do was basic nursing and have anxious radio consultations via relay with Doctor Roche, who was also WOXOed over in FOX Sector. Seen from today, it was all so pathetically inadequate--- no drips, or pain killers (except morphine injections as a desperate last resort, and then only if immediate evacuation was assured) and only very weak, broad-spectrum, antibiotics. To see your patient tiring with the pain, and gradually dehydrating, is a galling experience.

Finally, after ten days, the weather lifted a little---still stormy, but with enough breaks in the cloud cover for a Dutch bush pilot to say that he would have a go at reaching FOX D. And Doctor Roche was inbound to FOX MAIN, whence a DC 4 would bring him to DYE Lower.

That was an anxious day. I drove the five miles to the strip with Tommy on his stretcher in the snowmobile, so slowly and gently that Frank, whose family were undertakers in Manchester, said he would recommend me to his father as a 'black car' driver. To our horror, more cloud came over and the patches of fog in the fiord were visibly thickening. We heard the DC 3 overhead twice, but never saw it. In the semi-darkness, and with only goose-necked oil lamps on the runway edges and one snowmobile's headlamps and rooftop spotlight on the apron, we couldn't believe that the plane's crew could find us. And we were scared stiff that Tommy couldn't stand much more being moved around.

Suddenly someone shouted, "There it is", and CF-HTH came roaring out of the fog to a perfect touchdown just inside the threshold. Magnificent flying.

The door was opened by a young co-pilot who was white as a sheet. When I commented on his Captain's superb landing he just nodded dumbly.

Whilst we were loading up, we got the news that the DC 4 bringing Doc Roche had landed at DYE Lower.

With Tommy's stretcher tied down beside two passenger seats, and his body packed round with sleeping bags held in place by a cargo net, we bucketed off towards DYE Lower.

Later, I heard that DYE MAIN console had passed on a report from DYE Lower of a gust of 54 knots just as we commenced the landing circuit. No weather to be trying to land a twenty-year-old DC 3. I can still see the white knuckles of a French Canadian painter who was in the passenger seat ahead of me, as he clutched the seat frame and prayed and cursed. Was I ever glad to be on the ground and handing Tommy over to Doc Roche.

After putting Tommy on a drip and confirming that the problem really was an inflamed appendix, Doc Roche decided to take him to Frobisher and operate there, with the help of the hospital nursing staff. The DC 4 that had come from FOX MAIN was waiting to leave for Montreal and could land at Frobisher enroute. It had to wait a couple of hours for the gusting wind to drop sufficiently for it to go off, and by then Tommy was doing so well on his drip and

sedatives that Doc Roche decided that it was best to overfly Frobisher and get him to Dorval and have Montreal General do the operation. All that went well, and Tommy was back at FOX D in a month.

Old CF-HTH was known as "Heaven to Hell". But that afternoon she was hell to heaven for Tommy---and me.

**MEDICAL RESEARCH** A few days later I met Doc Roche again and we had time for a chat. That was the start of a great friendship and many, many more chats (especially after he discovered 5 gallons of Ethyl Alcohol in the DYE medical stores---we used to add it to orange juice for the purpose of serious medical investigation into the rate of absorption of alcohol by our livers).

**CHRISTMAS AT CAPE DYER** Now that I was a Sector Radician, I was really just a spare bod. We only had two I Sites and both had competent Radicians who looked set for months, so there wasn't even a training requirement. But being a spare bod landed me with one sombre job.

About nine o'clock on Christmas morning, a hut which was the accommodation for one of the Eskimo workers was seen to be on fire. Several of us went out into the morning darkness, but there was nothing we could do. The fire couldn't possibly be extinguished and when the roof fell in, we could see the young man's charred corpse on the bed. The Sector Office staff took over and contacted the RCMP, who said that they would send an Officer up on the plane that was to fly from Frobisher to DYE Lower that evening. The Sector Superintendent wanted to be able to give an assurance that nothing had been disturbed at the scene, so a watchman had to stand by the remains. Being spare, I was put on the job from 6 p.m. until about 10 p.m., when the Sector Office people arrived from DYE Lower with the RCMP Officer.

Fortunately, it had been a fine night, though cold. And I had seen the most amazing display of Northern Lights. I had seen some aurora borealis at FOX D, and was to see more at other times, but nothing to approach the brilliance, variety, and sheer continuity of the display during those hours whilst I sat by that young worker's body in his burnt-out hut.

**RE NOAH ESTATE** There was a sequel to that sombre job. Forty-two years later, I had finally got around to becoming acquainted with this Internet thing and had become hooked on Googling. One evening I put in "Cape Dyer" and, amongst the 1,110 results, I spotted a reference to a page entitled "RE Noah Estate.". With a shock, I remembered that Noah had been the name of the young Eskimo worker who had suffocated in his sleep as his hut filled with smoke.

The case report made fascinating reading. Noah had been one of the first Eskimos to go south for training and take up industrial work and die and leave a considerable monetary estate. He had left over \$26,000 (equivalent to about \$1,000,000 today). It included \$25,000 that presumably came from Death Insurance. The Department of Northern Affairs needed a legal Judgment to tell them whether Ottawa law or Eskimo custom and practice should apply, and whether Noah's wife could inherit when her marriage hadn't been (but couldn't have been) solemnized by a minister of religion. These were delicate and important issues, upon which the Judge took evidence at Broughton Island (near FOX 5) and considered long and deeply.

The Judge said: "The matter of Eskimo intestate succession does require further study, and much study, and immediate study... the Eskimos and Eskimo rights and customs should not be further ignored". And, later, "The Eskimos have no treaty!! They have no Eskimo Act!" (In contrast to Canada's other indigenous people, the Indians). "This court must guard their rights, when it can, and sometimes must write upon a clean slate."

The money was to be shared equally between Noah's widow and their baby daughter. And the case became a starting point in one section of Canadian law.

**QUICKLY OFF TO FOX E** My time back at DYE MAIN came to an early, unexpected end. After a few days of bad weather around New Year the helicopter that served FOX E flew there with the mail, and came back with a hand-written note from George Coffey, the Station Chief at FOX E, to the Superintendent of DYE Sector and the Sector Chief for Communications and Electronics. It expressed a wish for a change of Radician at FOX E, as the man there had taken to eating nothing but a dozen eggs a day, and to spending long periods outside the Modules, practicing his imitation of a wolf howling! George had sent the note because he didn't feel that it was a matter to be reported by the uhf radio; all sorts of people, in vehicles and in Comm. Centres, at FOX E, FOX 5, and DYE MAIN could hear what was said on the uhf. Fortunately, the man concerned had previously had a lot of experience at Main and Aux Sites, so it was decided that I should go to FOX E as soon as the weather permitted and take over as Radician. Then the man there would transfer to DYE MAIN "in view of the impending shortage of Radicians who were experienced in Main Site operations". That was to be the story, and the four of us who were "in the know" would stick to it. So, I got my first chopper flight earlier than expected.

**BY CHOPPER TO FOX E** The helicopter was an Okanaghan Helicopters Sikorsky S 55 that had been fitted with big balloon floats (photo below). In summer the pilot would fly to FOX E through the mountains, but in winter he always took the "sea route". The object was always to have the best chance of surviving a forced landing, and of being rescued. In winter the idea was that the chopper could settle on the sea ice and rescue could come by dog sled, or even a small bulldozer. However, in summer one wouldn't want to try settling down amongst ice floes, and/or into stormy water, in an autogyro landing after an engine failure; so it was the "mountain route" that was used in summer.

The sea route gave great views of the cliffs on the west coast of Baffin Island. And, after an hour's flight, there was FOX E looking "out of this world" on top of the cliffs of Durban Island. **FIRST TIME AT FOX E** I soon appreciated how much hidden concern the Radician who I was relieving was giving. But the chopper was back in a couple of days and off he went. Then began a very pleasant couple of months even though we got our share of arctic winter weather.



# Nineteen Months in Retrospect PART 2

By Martin Allinson

**THE MODULES AT AN I-SITE** Through the winter we lived entirely in the Modules. If necessary, we could manage for several days without anybody going outside at all. And sometimes the weather was so bad that the Station Chief would decree that we were all staying in that day. But if it was vital to go outside, say to the Garage to the Standby Generator or to the Store Building for a spare part, it could be done as we had a lifeline rigged from the Modules to the Garage, and one thence to the Store Building. With a length of rope tied round your waist, and a loop from that round the lifeline, it was impossible to get lost (although it could be quite scary, if you were caught by a whiteout).

Each module was about 16 feet by 28 feet and the five of them, joined side by side, made a building about 80 feet by 28 feet that was raised on stilts about 4 feet high.

Looking at the photograph, from left to right, there is the Generator Room (with an emergency-exit door facing the camera), then the Radar Room (with two windows), then the Station Office/ Dining Area/ Kitchen module (with two windows). To the right of the ladder is the Dormitory (with one window) and the main entrance door, and finally the Storeroom (also with one window).

The ladder was provided so that the Radician could get up on the roof to climb the low mast and knock the snow and ice off the propeller and moving vane which fed his wind speed and direction meters in the corner of the Radar Room that was his "Air Traffic Control" position.

**INTERIOR ARRANGEMENTS** Entering by going up the steps to the fourth module, there was a small corridor, about 12 foot long, at right angles to the main passageway that ran through the centre of each module for the whole length of the building.

The fifth module (to the right as one entered) was devoted to storage: racks of shelves for food, spare clothing, and bedding etc. etc., and a big water tank. My only interest in the fifth module was the low frequency (LF) beacon transmitter that lived on the shelves there. It simply transmitted a carrier wave that carried a tone that was interrupted so as to form the two letters in morse that identified the beacon. The interrupter was simple in the extreme--- a slowly rotating disc with a circle of holes into which were fitted brass pegs (long ones for dashes and short ones for dots). When a brass peg was passing the pickup brush, the tone was transmitted. Simple but effective; and I don't remember having any trouble from those l.f. beacon transmitters, other than the occasional demise of a vacuum tube. (But the beacon antennas were a pain. As the photos show, their main element was a horizontal wire that needed frequent de-icing and sometimes one night of blowing snow would bring it down).

Turning to the left into the main passageway, one had a cage containing the 60Hz motor-400Hz generator sets and a big tank on the right and the dormitory door on the left. The big tank held the sewage, until it was time to empty it (from outside!) into the Honey Wagon. That was a transit tank on a sled, which was taken to the edge of a cliff, where the contents were disgorged

through a wide hose pipe. The photo below shows the brown streaks down the cliff at FOX E (in line with the tower. After use, the Honey Wagon was parked well away, and downwind!

The dormitory contained three sets of double bunks and was the sleeping accommodation for the Mechanic and the Cook and any winter visitors (such as the Sector Radician, and Riggers).

Through a fire door, one then entered the "living module". On the right, up a few steps, was the shower room, which also contained the lavatory. The shower room took up about a quarter of the module. The other quarter on the right was the kitchen area with water heater, stove, sink, clothes washing machine, and the Cook's table.

On the left was an area of about 16 feet by 12 feet that contained the Station Chief's bed, his desk, the dining table, and the Radician's bed (with the radar equipment alarm buzzer by his pillow).

In the next module, the Radar Room, one had the Radician's workbench, storage shelves and desk/comm. centre on the right and the radar transmitters in cabinets on the left.

And the end module was the Generator Room, with two 10KW generators driven by diesel engines. During summer 1960, these were changed to 20 KW units. Fortunately, the sound insulation was good, and the noise of the diesels was quite acceptable, even in the Radar Room.

**WINTER ON AN I SITE** This was the really testing time. The four of us lived cooped up in the Modules, with no contact with one's "nearest and dearest" except letters that arrived fitfully. Our main entertainment was endless games of pool on the miniature table that, with a cover on, was also the dining table. And, on average once a week, we would be sent a movie which we projected on a small foldaway screen. No television, no radio, and any newspapers would be at least two weeks old on arrival. This was before the days of cassettes of recorded music, but we did have a record player and a few records that we played over and over. As the Radician, I was lucky in that I had the desk in the Radar Room as a place to write letters or read a book. And I was fortunate that, before my winter at FOX E, I had been at FOX D through the Autumn, and at DYE for Christmas----the others had already been at FOX E for months.

**STATION CHIEFS** I developed, and retain, a great respect and admiration for the four I Site Station Chiefs that I worked with. I have a photograph of Frank Tilzey that was taken at Christmas 1958, when Frank was a Mechanic at DYE Lower. The only photograph of George Coffey that I can find was taken as I was leaving FOX E after my first spell there. George is on the left of the snowmobile. Later I knew Wally Paterson at FOX E and Earl Roberts at FOX D. The photograph of Wally Paterson shows him with sled dogs. Wally and animals had an instinctive affinity for each other; and Wally was saving so that he could own his own farm in Ontario.

And here (below) is Earl Roberts, waiting to unload an incoming flight at FOX D strip. It also shows the Station (above Earl's head, at the highest point on the skyline).

The Station Chiefs carried all the responsibility for the operation of the Station, and the well-being of its personnel, as well as doing a full day's work as a Mechanic. (Nowadays I meet these modern managers with their BA's and MBA's and think "Very impressive----but you wouldn't have lasted a fortnight as an I Site Station Chief" !). To be a manager but never able to have a private word with your boss; and to have no room to yourself but live the whole 24 hours in a room that was Station Office, and dining room, and social room, and a shared bedroom, was asking a lot. The photo above shows how close everything was. And yet all the four I-Site Station Chiefs that I knew ran thoroughly harmonious Stations. Great men.

I only knew of one of them losing his temper ; and then only the once. It was at FOX D. We had had a good blizzard during the night before and the result is shown in the above photograph. The Generator Room emergency-exit door had blown open and most of the room was swimming in water and half-melted snow. The "inside" Mechanic was a young Dutchman, known as Boeey. (I never did know his proper name). He always did his work, but he was well known for making it as easy as possible. On this day he simply cut a hole in the Generator Room floor and read a magazine whilst the water drained away. Frank went ballistic. Boeey got a new one, but whether it was punched, bored, or drilled and reamed, he wasn't sure! However, it was soon all over and we knew that was the end of the matter. Frank wasn't one for keeping bad memories alive. But that Mechanic was, for ever after, known as Short-Cut Boeey.

**GOOD TIMES** After I had been at FOX E for a couple of months, a new Radician was sent from DYE to be trained up to take over from me. I found this made a great improvement to life. With two Radicians on site each could have some whole days off, which was never possible when one was the sole Radician. In fact, a sole Radician could never be far from the Modules. And, if out, he always had to be using a vehicle so that he could be summoned back by the vehicular uhf radio, if there was an alarm from the Radar Room. But with two on site, one could happily go off in one of the bulldozers and push snow for an hour or two. Or get an Eskimo to teach him how to build an igloo (See photo below). Also, it eased another of the sole Radician's frustrations: chopper arrival.

**CHOPPER ARRIVAL** Because of the expense, the chopper only flew when there was a load that couldn't wait. And sometimes not even then, if the weather was bad. It wasn't unusual to go ten days without getting mail and movies. So when the chopper did come it added a bit of excitement to the day. Everybody but the Radician would be down at the pad for a meet and greet. Our "baggage handlers" were equipped differently to their counterparts down South. The photo below shows our Eskimo garage-worker, Silucee, driving the small caterpillar tractor, and Camille Roy (Mechanic) riding on the sled whilst taking the outgoing load to the chopper. But the Radician had to stay in the Radar Room to do his 'air traffic control', so he didn't normally get to see even the one fresh face. But when there were two of us we could take it in turns to get a share of this welcome break in the monotony.

**MANNING THE "I" SITES** Filling the I Site Radician positions gave the SCCE (Sector Chief Communications and Radar) a lot of headaches. I think there were 32 Radician and Comm Centre Operator positions to keep filled at FOX 4, FOX 5, DYE MAIN, and RES X1, but the SCCE reckoned that finding just the two for the I Sites gave him as much trouble as finding the other 32.

Obviously they had to be volunteers. To have someone on an I Site who didn't want to be there would make for great problems. And only a small minority of personalities would countenance the cramped conditions and the isolation entailed in I Site service.

But also men who were keen on electronics, and wanted to feel they were advancing their knowledge and experience, scorned the I Sites because there was so little technical content in the work there. When once I had to strip an hv power supply in order to replace a defective transformer at the back, it was such a rare occasion that I had a photograph taken (above) to show that I Site Radicians did do a bit more than just take their daily meter readings! And there was no job satisfaction to come from feeling that one was doing a vital job. After a few spells on a console, we all knew that the Aircraft Alarm System (for which the I Sites provided the beam) was of zero importance. In the SCCE's delicate phraseology, "The AA is as unnecessary, and useless, as the tits on a bull". (When the Line was being planned, in 1953, it had made sense to let it be known that it would be effective against low-level, as well as high-level, penetration. But the AA had been overtaken by events. Aerospace technology had developed in the direction of high-level bombers. There had been no development of low-level penetrators that could possibly carry enough fuel to bring them from Russia to populated Canada, never mind get them home again. Also, the DEWLine surveillance radar was proving both effective and reliable. Any Russian submarine sitting in the Davis Strait that recorded the ground to air traffic from the consoles to our lateral DC3's, would have proved to Moscow that low level penetrators wouldn't get past without being detected. So, by 1959, it was clear that the AA System was redundant; and, in fact, it was soon to be decommissioned. "Tits on a bull" was a harsh comment, but a perfectly accurate analogy.)

The SCCE (whose surname was Cook (or Cooke), I think) had decided that the best tactic was to look at all new arrivals from Streator and, if they had the right personality, to encourage them to volunteer to try an I Site. So, my volunteering to be I Site Sector Radician had been music to his ears---but he hadn't let on. To encourage potential volunteers, he would promise real support. And we discussed ways of living up to that promise. For instance, there was good Ham equipment available for any Hams to take with them, and we thought we could even wangle Heathkits for those who wanted to do some constructing. I put into the Suggestion Scheme a request for the issue of a really good manual on nursing matters (the US Navy Manual for their medical corpsmen). We got the support of the Sector Super on that--- though I was prevailed upon to delete my remark that Streator only trained us to be corpse men!

And, above all, we would invent excuses for the Sector Radician to have to pop in for a couple of days (and then hang around for a week waiting for a flight out) so as to give the Radician some days off. The SCCE's colleague in charge of the Mechanics, who was, I think, entitled SCOP (Sector Chief Outside Plant) was keen on this, too. He had asked me to give Frank Tilzey a hand with the station paperwork (which wasn't Frank's forte) and this had worked well; so the SCOP saw that having the extra Radician coming in for part of the time also had benefits for his people. I was to feed the SCCE photographs of the good side of I Site life, such as fishing for arctic char. But the SCCE didn't want to know, officially, about all that happened on days off---such as expeditions to Padloping, or accompanying walrus hunters (photos below)!

**NOMAD** So it came about that the later half of my contract was spent nomadically. My main activity was to go to and fro between FOX D and FOX E (via DYE Lower and a brief look-in at DYE MAIN each time). The only exceptions were when I was "lent" to RES X1 once, and to DYE MAIN twice, to cover short vacancies caused by one of their Radicians going out on R&R. Having been a young mountaineer, I was used to packing up and moving on; so it was just a matter of taking things as they came.

**HURRIED DEPARTURE** One morning I had just woken up in a room at DYE MAIN and was thinking about dressing, washing, having some breakfast, and then wandering over to see if there was anything to do in the Sector Electronics Workshop, when somebody came to tell me that the SCCE was sending me over to FOX E (I can't remember why). I said I'd get over to the SCCE's office, catching a bit of breakfast on the way; only to be told "You've no time for that. The chopper is picking you up here. It's on its way up from Lower Camp now". So all that I had unpacked in that room (fortunately not much) had to be hastily thrown into a couple of holdalls--just spare clothes and my emergency-survival sleeping bag wrapped round an emergency-survival bottle of medicinal ethyl alcohol. And that is how I once came to arrive at FOX E looking like death warmed up: unshaven, with sleep still in my eyes, my belly rumbling emptily, and dressed in quilted trousers and a parka that hid my pyjamas.

**THE DAVIS STRAIT TRADER** The Hudson Bay Company didn't have any presence at Cape Dyer, Durban Island/Padloping, or Kivitoo. But, in the interests of supporting the lads and the Eskimo-worker families at the I Sites, I did my best to make up for the absence of HBC. The FEC Eskimo workers would do carvings and we would buy sealskins, fox skins, and even the occasional polar bear skin from Eskimo hunters who came to us from Padloping or Kivitoo. I was the middleman who passed these on to people at Cape Dyer who wanted to take a souvenir home at their End Of Contract.

That way, FOX D and FOX E would acquire extra creature comforts. A typical trade would be a quite-ordinary seal skin for ten back-numbers of Playboy.

But for a really nice sealskin I would get the acquirer to leave me a full holdall of work clothes as I knew these were really appreciated by Kivitoo and Padloping residents for wearing under their furs.

And the Eskimo-workers' houses got better and better equipped. I can't claim to have sold a refrigerator to an Eskimo, but I have helped one to choose one from Eaton's Mail-Order Catalogue.

**RETROSPECTIONS** I left the Line after finishing one contract, with just a month's extension. I felt very honoured that the Sector Superintendent, Jesse Covington, wanted me to come back and be Station Chief of FOX E: and I was quite tempted. But my wife pointed out that we had got what we set out to get---enough money to live well whilst I did a year of postgraduate studies, and a bit more besides. She was right. The money from the Line made a big difference to us for the next ten years or so.

There must be hundreds of untold stories of how savings from a period of work on the DEWLine got a young couple off to a good start, or even founded a family business. I know that I wouldn't have got my Lectureship at a good technical college without those postgraduate studies. Nor would we have then been able to buy the houseboat on the Cam, and so live in the centre of Cambridge, without the savings from the Line. And, later, that money allowed us to buy a small hill-farm in the mountains of Wales, when I went there to work at a nuclear power station.

Thank you DEWLine for all the fun, the experience, and the little pot of gold!

With affection, Martin Allinson, August 2003, NE Thailand, (E. & O. E.)