

What Good Is 'Exercise Musk Ox' Likely to Accomplish?

WHEN "Exercise Musk Ox" heads north next Thursday from Fort Churchill, Manitoba, on the edge of Hudson's Bay, it will be the first, large-scale operation of its kind in the history of North America.

Using 4½-ton armored snow-mobles similar to those designed for the invasion of Norway, the expedition's about 100 officers and men, plus observers from six nations including the United States and Soviet Russia, will begin an 81-day stride across 3,100 miles of frozen North country—for what?

One Canadian Cabinet minister is quoted as saying: "We all know that an invasion of North America, when and if it will come from the North, not from the South. We have to be ready. We have to be able to live, travel and fight in the cold."

The National Defense Department of Canada has announced that Musk Ox is designed to simulate "winter operations generally in the Arctic weather zone" and to "test the mobility of over-snow vehicles." In addition, "certain technical research projects in Arctic air and ground warfare will be studied. The expedition is expected to obtain information of immense value."

Reids to Observe

There is no communique form, in part of the answer to Exercise Musk Ox Canada would like to find out what its own Arctic track yard is like. The boys across the alley should start a war. Both the U. S. and Soviet Russia are interested observers.

Before sending its observers, the U. S. assured the Canadian Government of full co-operation in developing and carrying out the expedition.

Thus it can be assumed that, as a joint Army and U. S. A. P. enterprise, Musk Ox will test problems of supplying an Arctic expedition by air, air-to-ground communication, rations, clothing, fuel and lubricants, weapons, tents and sleeping bags, heaters—all the gear needed to fight wind, wild terrain and man. The men are now taking detailed mental and physical tests, which will be repeated after the exercise ends next May.

Snowmobles Churn

Only a few years ago, Fort Churchill was enjoying its most tremendous boom, when American soldiers were building an air-strip and hangars as well as a gigantic staging route across Canada for planes to England. Although the route was little-used, it included fields at Churchill, Southampton Island and Greenland. Today, "Marger" posters and the old A.P.O. numbers still remain an evidence of the American occupation.

During the last few weeks, newly designed snowmobles have been churning up Fort Churchill's icy streets. Correspondents in long parkas and felt-lined mukluks have written humorous stories about their lessons in snow-house building. The 40-below winds off Hudson's Bay have made life tough for everybody.

Test expeditions into the barren, treeless country around Fort Churchill have shown already the wisdom of using sledges behind the caravan of 12 snowmobles, instead of tracked trailers as originally planned. All sorts of makeshift repairs to machines and equipment will have to be made en route.

Canada will study the chances of blunting a Northern attack as Americans and Reds observe

By GRADY CLAY, JR., Courier-Journal Staff Writer Recently in Alaska

out through country opened up in 1971 by Samuel Hearne, who led the first land expedition from Fort Churchill to reach Arctic seawater.

Assuming that all information collected by the Canadians will be shared with the U. S., what good will it do? Do we really need more information about the Arctic? You can take the word of one old-timer in the North country that we do. He is Lt. Col. Marvin M. Marston, former commander of the Alaska Territorial Guard, the guerrilla "hundred army" of 10,000 natives which he organized when a Jap invasion was expected in 1942.

Information, Please

"We've got to learn to use the Arctic for military operations," Marston once vigorously told the writer. "We didn't know how to use the Arctic when the war started. As a result, soldiers were issued 100-pound parkas before they came to Alaska—and let them never use them after they got here. The Army tried to get native women to make mukluks for soldiers' feet— but there weren't enough native women, nor enough time to equip even a regiment."

Such new machines as the Canadian snowmobles are only a partial solution to the development of the Arctic, commercially and militarily, Marston believes. "You still have to fall back on dog team and sleds to cover huge sections of the North," he believes. However, he thinks it possible to drive a jeep over the shore ice all the way along the Alaska coast from Nome to Point Barrow, and possibly over into Canada, in midwinter—with the proper machines.

What's needed, says Marston, is a bulldozer-type machine with horizontal saws for cutting through the jagged piles of pressure ice piled along the shores of the Bering Sea and Arctic Ocean.

Says Russia Ahead

Aside from the military importance of Arctic research, Marston thinks it important commercially. "You can't develop Alaska and the Arctic's natural resources with the same methods you use in the States. You've got to adopt your machine to a new type of existence. The Russians have done it, and are far in front of us."

For example, the Russians use ice-breaking tugs to clear the way for great convoys into the East Siberian Sea in summer, Marston points out. These convoys have stimulated trade in much of Northern Siberia.

One of Marston's projects, in conjunction with a New York artist-author, Henry Varum Poor, is the development of a leak-proof tundra-block house. Made from square blocks of matted tundra or muskox hides are firm in winter, but thaw and melt in summer. "We've got to study the Arctic and learn all it's got to offer," Marston believes. Possibly the closest counterpart to Exercise Musk Ox yet carried out by the American Army was a 48-day combination test and rescue expedition into the 12,000-foot peaks near Mt. McKinley, Alaska, by Army Air Forces personnel in 1941.

Louisillian Helped

Included in the party as a "guinea pig" was Robert Bruce Bass, of Mocking Bird Terrace, Louisville, then a major and veteran of 22 months in a bomber outfit in England. Bass had been recalled from the E.T.O. to Wright

Field and volunteered for the Alaska mission to test personal equipment of Arctic rescue parties.

Operating in temperatures down to minus 43 degrees, Bass' four-man party followed a 40-mile rescue expedition sent to investigate a C-47's crash into a mountain peak.

During the tests, Bass lost 20 pounds. Besides walking 5 to 20 miles over snow and ice daily, the group tested Arctic rations, radios, just about every test procedure by the Air Force and Quartermaster Corps, and other gear.

There's no end to what you can learn from an expedition of that sort," said Bass. Some of the results were the following developments:

A new four-man tent for rescue parties; a small, inexpensive parachute for air delivery of cargo in 100-pound lots or less; a new field radio; an Arctic rescue litter; Yukon-type stove for emergency use; an improved four-man cockpit, and a large

General H. H. Arnold already has decided some of the North Pole area will be the strategic center of that country capable of supporting 100,000 men, and close to Chungking, Houston, and New Orleans.

In addition to being a shorter and more direct route, it is over wild, virtually uninhabited country, and the weather is generally better over the North Pole than over the Atlantic or Pacific," he said.

Why Islands Valuable

In this connection, General Arnold is one of many public figures who have called attention to the importance of Greenland and Iceland to U. S. security. Possession of Iceland, he said, would "put us that much nearer to the economic centers of other countries."

It appears that the North American Arctic is a natural site for antrocket or anti-aircraft defenses. In the event of another war, it is livable by white men using the latest techniques and equipment. It abounds in minerals, furs, fish, lumber. Even agriculture pays off in some areas. Both Canada and Alaska remain in some of the world's "last frontiers," says this nation's "last frontier."

At least on the Alaska side, that frontier is being allowed to rot, to wither on the vine, says Alaska's delegate to Congress, Robert Bartlett.

Bartlett recently said that the Army and Navy have reverted to their prewar neglect of de-

ment and testing lab of American Air Filter Company, Louisville. Like thousands of other places of interest in the Arctic has been sharpened by 22 years, he said.

The writer saw this disintegration beginning as early as February, 1945, as various Alaskan and mainland bases were cut down to "caretaker" status. In December, 1945, the North Pacific Combat School at Adak, in the Aleutians, was closed. Only in minor ways is there real evidence that the U. S. is aware of the importance of the Arctic.

'Old' Route Used

In 1937, a record transpolar flight was accomplished by Soviet fliers who flew 4,302 miles from Moscow over the top of the world to San Jacinto, Cal. Although, four B-29's have flown nonstop from Japan to Washington, D. C., using the Great Circle Route over Alaska and Canada.

According to General Carl A. Spaatz, "A range of only 6,500 miles is sufficient for an aircraft to take off from a base below the Arctic Circle, fly across the polar region on a one-way trip, and reach every great industrial-political-military center on the other side of the world."

Although Musk Ox is purely a Canadian show, the eyes of the world are on it. It is foolish to say, as did one correspondent recently, that "considerations of strategy are secondary." They may seem secondary to a snowmobile driver with a broken track sprocket, but they are certainly not secondary to men in the War Department who must be prepared—mentally if in no other way—for any kind of war, anywhere.



American soldiers test a "snow jeep" in Alaska. It is a forerunner of the 12 snowmobles in "Musk Ox."

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