

Memoirs of Sgt. John Arthur Trace - Retired



“In Days Gone By”

This is a true tale of the life and times of John Arthur Trace. I was born on 8 August 1933 in Barrie, Ontario. This is mostly about some of my tasks with the R.C.M.P. and the travelling, as well as some exciting happenings that came about along the way. I started school the same month that World War II began, September of 1939, and Camp Borden was located about 15 miles from our home. I could see the soldiers and airmen as they travelled by, and when their planes flew overhead, which made for some interesting times as a boy. I walked to school for the first eight years, then rode the school bus from Allenwood to Elmvale from grade nine on.

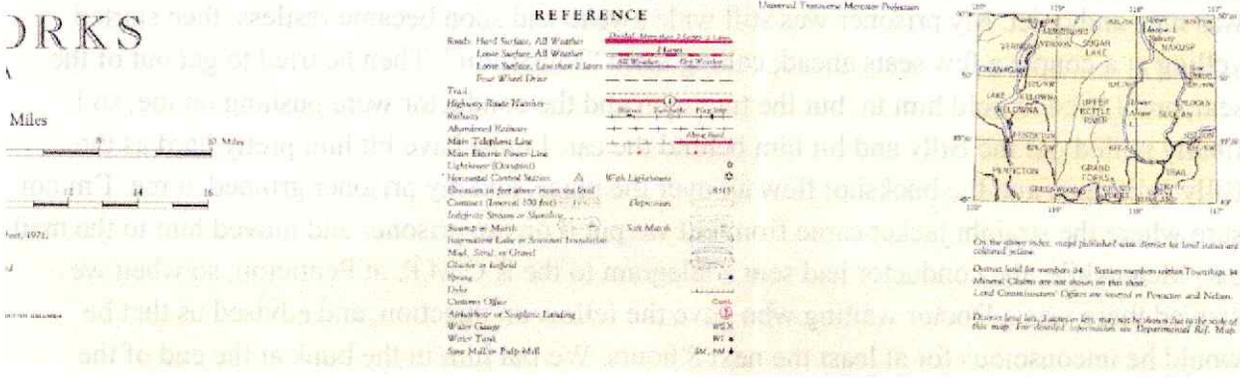
My first job was working for Charlie Ansley as an “Ice Man” at an ice business on Wasaga Beach. Morley Knuff and I stayed in a little cabin nearby and ate our meals with Charlie and Eunice. It was hard, hot work! We started our day at 7AM pulling out the 240 pound blocks of sawdust covered ice, before heading in for a hearty breakfast. Then we had to wash the sawdust off and cut them into 50 and 25 pound blocks before loading them on to 3 trucks. I drove the 1940 International pick up, and we each had our own route. Our customers had an “Ice Card” that would be placed in the window if they needed ice, and the going price was 25 cents for the 25 pound block or 40 cents for the larger size. It was a 7 day work week, and the hotter the day, the more ice was needed, as there were very few fridges and everyone had an icebox. Some of

them were none too clean! Our only equipment was a pair of ice tongs and a pick, and our season went from the end of June to the first week in September. This took up my summers of 1950 and 1951, and in the winter of 1951, I helped to haul the huge blocks of ice off Marl Lake and store them in the ice house for next summer.

In September I went to Witkow, Saskatchewan by train to work on a threshing crew. Our journey took 3 days and our train was pulled by a steam driven locomotive carrying a load of Farm Laborers, and 1950 was the last year that the "Harvest Excursion" operated. It was hard work, and the pay was only \$5 per day plus room and board. It took 6 teams of horses pulling wagons to keep up with the threshing machine, and at one farm we worked from 6AM to 6PM every day for 2 weeks straight.

"Joining The Force - 1952"

I applied by letter to join the R.C.M.P. on my 18th birthday in 1951, and was sworn in on 19 May 1952 in Toronto, and given Regimental # 17748. It was to be a 5 year contract and I was sent to Rockcliffe for basic training, where there were 30 in a squad, and mine was the 94th. The training was tough but it sure put us in peak physical condition, and when we completed the first part we were sent to Regina for the second half. We were renamed the "Q Squad" and had a pleasant trip, as we were allocated to our own railway car. Our training was completed in the first week of January 1953, and I was sent to Alberta's "K" Division. My first assignment was to the Edmonton Highway Patrol, and after only 4 or 5 shifts I was reassigned to Nelson, BC, for what was supposed to be about 2 weeks. I and 8 other members were to assist in the quelling of an uprising with the "Sons of Freedom" Doukhobor sect. We left on a Sunday by train, wearing our red coats, but it was about -40C so the brakes on the train froze up. We arrived in Nelson the following day and 3 of us were sent on to Grand Forks. I'd taken along a Gladstone bag with a few clothes, and that was about all except for my uniform. Well, the 2 weeks lasted over a year, and I had many events happen during this time! There are many books written about the "Sons of Freedom" so I will not go into their history. I found them to be super-nice and I still have friends in the Kootenais.



“My First Arrest”

In training we were taught that when you arrest someone you are taking away his freedom which is his most important right, so you never know how he is going to react. It was on a Saturday night in the Spring of 1953 when a call came into the office advising us of a disturbance at the local café. I was alone except for the night guard who was looking after a couple of prisoners. The café was only 2 blocks away, and was owned by a Japanese lady who employed a Chinese cook named “Chin”. When I walked into the café, which was full of people at the time, the cook was standing in front of the kitchen door. He had a very large butcher knife in his hand, and about 6 feet in front of him was a Doukhobor fellow named Billy Wishloff who appeared to be drunk. Wishloff worked in the logging industry as a “Choker” which is the fellow who puts the cable around the logs when they are being pulled out of the bush, before they are loaded onto the trucks. He wasn’t big but he was very well built, and he stuttered when he spoke. Everybody in the place was watching me, and Wishloff had a bottle in his hand. What to do? I looked at Wishloff and said “I want to see you outside” and turned and walked to the door. He followed right behind, and into the waiting Police car, then spent the night in the R.C.M.P. cells. I have made many arrests over the years, but the first one is the one I remember most! I have seen men go berserk when they were locked up, and also become very hard to handle, so I have to agree that being arrested can be a traumatic event.

“Escorting Prisoners”

My first Prisoner Escort was a mentally challenged man who had been taken off the bus in Grand Forks. He was an ex-German S.S. Officer who was big and strong. The local Doctor examined him and determined that he should be returned to the Essondale Mental Hospital (now known as Riverview) about 400 miles away in Coquitlam, near Vancouver. I was required to wear my uniform but no side arms, and our train departed Grand Forks at midnight. During the time this escaped patient was in our cells he behaved completely normal, and one of our members Ernie Boechler who spoke German felt that he would be no trouble. Fortunately, before we left one of our members gave me his leather spring-loaded “Billy” to carry just in case there were any problems. Our train left on time, and I was really looking forward to this “adventure”. We were put in the main coach that was quite full of passengers, and for the first hour or two it was nice and quiet. My prisoner was still wide awake and soon became restless, then started yelling at a couple a few seats ahead, calling them “Mussolini”. Then he tried to get out of the seat, and I tried to hold him in, but the trainman and the conductor were pushing on me, so I finally pulled out the Billy and hit him behind the ear. I must have hit him pretty hard as the Billy split open and the buckshot flew all over the place, and my prisoner grinned at me. I’m not sure where the straight jacket came from but we put it on the prisoner and moved him to the mail car. Meanwhile, the conductor had sent a telegram to the R.C.M.P. at Penticton, so when we arrived there was a Doctor waiting who gave the fellow an injection, and advised us that he would be unconscious for at least the next 8 hours. We put him in the bunk at the end of the railway car and I sat down exhausted, and tried to relax a bit as it had been a long day.

The railway car had a big sliding door on both sides near the middle, and I looked up to see my prisoner standing by the open door in his straight jacket, and fortunately I was able to grab him before he jumped. I’m sure the “needle” that the Doctor gave him only lasted about 15 minutes. Luckily for me, there was an off duty C.P.R. Policeman on the train that volunteered to join me in the mail car and guarded the prisoner while I rested for an hour or so. Then of course, there was a washout on the track ahead, so our train had to be diverted to another line that put us into the Essondale stop a few hours late. I was expecting to be met by the local R.C.M.P. when we got off the train, but I was wrong, and had to find a phone booth to call for a ride to the mental hospital. While I was on the phone my prisoner bolted, heading down the station platform, and there were dozens of people standing around but nobody tried to stop him. I finally caught up with him and made a flying tackle to bring him down, and when the R.C.M.P. finally arrived I deposited my prisoner and got a receipt for him. That however, is not the end of the story! I was expected to stay at the R.C.M.P. barracks at Fairmont, so I had to take a bus there from the hospital. I was so tired I fell asleep and when the driver woke me we were at the end of the line, so I had to take a taxi back to the barracks. It had been just over 24 hours since I’d left Grand Forks, and I can’t remember much about the train ride back. I heard later that the prisoner/patient had committed suicide.

“Escorting a Female Mentally Challenged Prisoner”

This mentally challenged prisoner was an elderly Japanese lady who lived by herself in a small upstairs apartment in downtown Grand Forks, BC. Sgt. Steele and I took an interpreter along to check on her following a complaint. The one thing I remember about her place was the urn on top of the sideboard that contained the ashes of her dead husband. She was wearing a loose fitting old sweater and had her hands up the opposite sleeves, and it was obvious to Sgt. Steele that she did not want to leave her home. After much effort to talk her into coming to the hospital the Sergeant reached out to take a hold of her arm, but she pulled out a hand which held a sharp paring knife and cut his hand quite badly. She then went for the door and got passed me as he yelled out “get her”, and I made a flying tackle knocking her to the floor. She was also committed to the Essondale Mental Hospital, and I was selected to do the escorting, which included having a Matron to accompany us. At the time I was living in the local hotel and the owner’s wife Mrs. Olenik agreed to act as the Matron. We took the train from Grand Forks and arrived at the hospital in about 8 hours, and the patient never ate, drank or went to the bathroom during the whole trip. When we got off the train at the Essondale station there was the Matron’s husband along with my friend Joe Talerico standing there to meet us. Our prisoner/patient was booked into the hospital and Joe and I checked into a hotel, as I agreed to go back in the Olenik’s car the next morning. There was a little concern when I wasn’t on the train that I was supposed to be on, but the Sergeant said I would not be reported as A.W.O.L. until the following day, and I got back just in time. There were many more prisoner escorts over the years by train, bus, airplane and cars, but the first two by train are the ones I remember best!

“Grand Forks, BC in March of 1953”



“Doukhor Patrol”

There are many books written about the Doukhor sect, and in particular the “Sons of Freedom” who were the main reason I ended up stationed in Grand Forks for over a year. The “Doukhor Patrol” as it was called, consisted of a lot of night patrols checking on the guards we had who worked on the C.P.R. Railway, and we covered all three bridges between Cascade and Grand Forks. We also had a guard on the school in Grand Forks, as there was always the chance that they might blow it up or set it on fire. There were usually two of us patrolling in a Police car, and when there was no one in the office the only way we could be contacted was by phone via the Operator, who would switch on a red light located on top of a power pole in the centre of town. We then called the Operator from the nearest phone booth, and were given the message.

The passenger trains east and west arrived about midnight every day, and these were escorted into town by a “speeder” with an C.P.R Policeman riding on it, just a few minutes ahead of the train to patrol the tracks. Because Grand Forks is located down in a valley, there was usually an additional steam engine hooked on in front to help to pull it up the mountain. I had the opportunity to ride in the lead engine and sit in the “Fireman’s” seat, while the train trudged up the steep grade to a siding called Eholt about 12 miles west of town. What a thrill and exciting experience it was to do that at night!

“Close Calls”

One of our members built a small aluminum boat, and put a small outboard motor on it. It wasn’t much of a boat, and was operated by centrally located levers on each side, but he wanted to try it out in Christina Lake, so I went along for the ride. This was March so we had all our clothes, jacket and boots on, and away we went keeping about 100 yards from the shore. We hadn’t been out long when Courtney tried to steer toward the shore. The motor turned sideways, and the boat spun about and sank, so we were both lucky to make it to the shore. Fortunately, there was a cabin not far from where we landed, owned by an old bachelor who gave us a hot drink of water and whiskey which tasted awful. When our clothes were sort of dry he drove us back to Grand Forks in his Model “A” Ford. There have been many times I have reflected on just how lucky we really were on that misadventure!

A few weeks after arriving in Grand Forks I was on duty one night checking for a stolen car, and sure enough, the very first vehicle that came along was the one we were looking for. I was standing at the front of the police car which had its lights on. As the car approached and got to within 50 feet from me, the driver geared down to 2nd and swerved toward me, just missing because I jumped out of the way. My partner Val Alcock fired 3 shots into the trunk as they sped away, but with the help of the police dog we soon arrested these two car thieves. It was here that I realized that the most dangerous place in the world is a “public highway”.

“Queen’s Coronation Parade Motorcycle Patrol”

1 July 1953 was the day of the Queen’s Coronation so a big parade was planned, and I was one of the 5 members who rode horses. I also owned a nice red Harley Davidson motorcycle that my partner Val Alcock led the parade on. My horse got overly excited and I remember being quite nervous. One of the horses reared right up and came over pinning Ron Elson to the ground. There was a brand new ambulance in the parade, so Ron was taken to the hospital as the first patient but he was not seriously hurt. It was a very hot day, and the motorcycle engine seized up, and had to be replaced with one ordered from Vancouver.

I learned a lot about Police work while stationed in Grand Forks, and I worked on some very interesting cases. To mention a few, I was out on patrol between Christina Lake and Grand Forks and for some reason (call it policeman’s intuition) I swung off into a side road. There I saw an old truck with 2 or 3 men who ran off into the bush when they saw the Police car. A check of their vehicle showed a lot of new clothes, etc, so we got a search warrant and checked out their old farm buildings a few miles away. We recovered about 3 truckloads of property that had been stolen from motor vehicles and stores as far away as the Okanagan.

Another case involved 5 guys who had shot a couple of deer at night with lights (called Jack Lighting). I was alone on patrol and a railway guard had told me about seeing the light and hearing the shots, so I picked up a local photographer to come along. It ended up with court cases against the 5 men plus the seizures of their weapons and the carcasses, but I was transferred to Invermere before it went to court.

“Getting Arrested by the U.S. Customs Officers”

We received information that some dynamite that was found, had come from an abandoned mine located just across the U.S. border near Cascade, so 4 of us were driven across the border to count how many cases of dynamite were still being stored there. The mine site was up a steep mountain, and we had to walk up as we were dropped off in a Police car, and had to wait for it to return to go back home. Since we had our revolvers we did a little target practice, and to make a long story short, we got arrested by the U.S. Immigration, and were held for a couple of hours until Sgt. Steele contacted the F.B.I.

During the time I was stationed in Grand Forks Sgt. Fred Steele was in charge of the R.C.M.P. unit, and had also been the “Chief of Police” in Trail, BC for many years. His father George Wellington Steele was also a North-West Mounted Policeman, whose Regimental number was 1310, and he did the “Death Watch” on Louis Riel in 1885. Fred Steele rejoined the R.C.M.P. when the BC Provincial Police were incorporated in 1950. I recall him as a real Gentleman and good to work for.

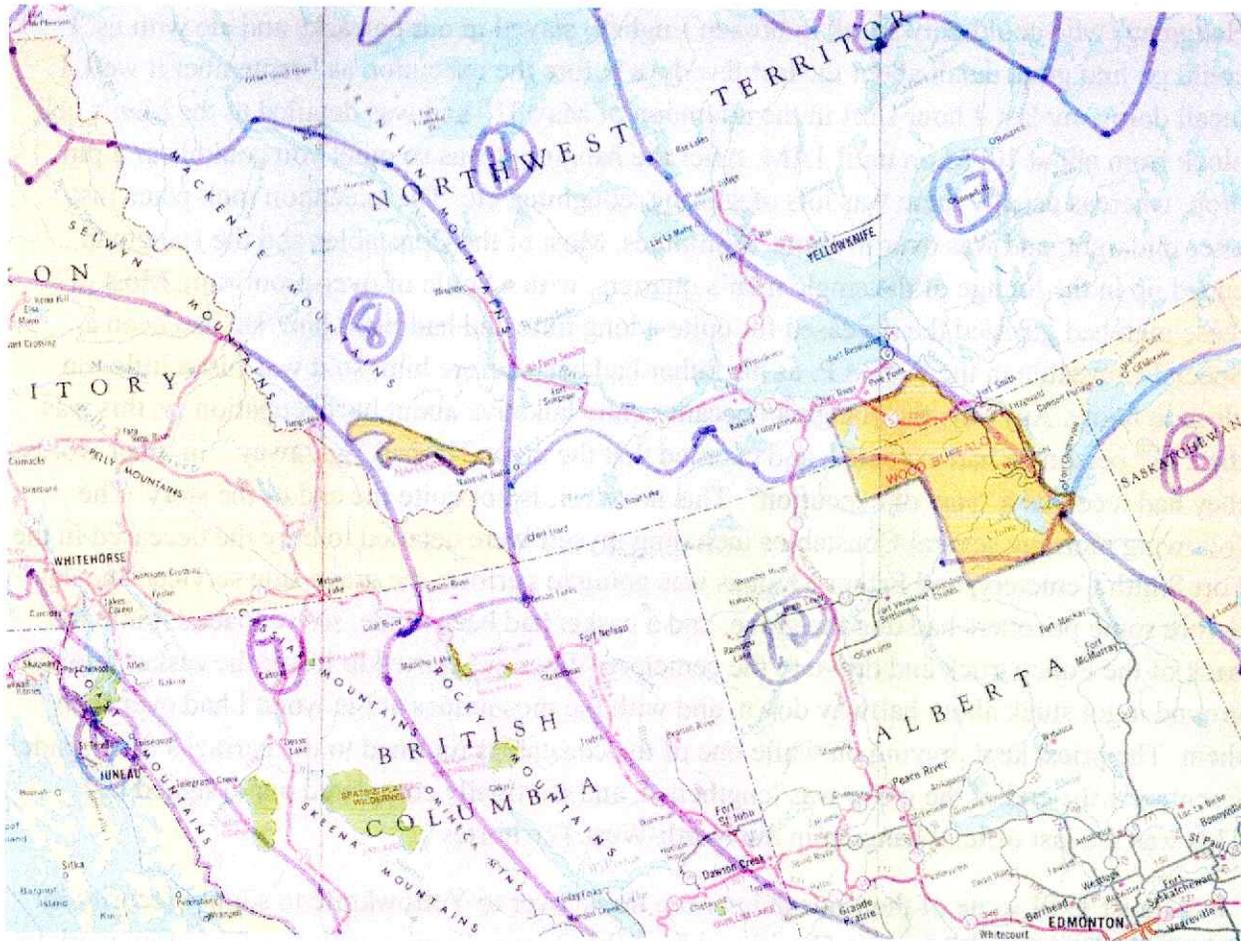
“The Invermere Detachment - 1954”

After a year in Grand Forks I was transferred to Invermere, BC, to a 2 man Detachment where the Corporal in charge was named Jackson Rowe Payne or just “Jack”. A more senior Constable, Wilf Emde, was transferred from Invermere to Grand Forks to set up a Highway Patrol. About a year later he was killed in an Air Canada plane crash on a flight from Vancouver to Regina, Saskatchewan. I boarded with a very nice lady named Ms. Jones in the same place that Wilf had boarded. I really liked living and working in Invermere, as it's located in a beautiful valley between the Rockies and the Selkirk mountain ranges, and our area ran from Canal Flats in the South about 100 miles to Spallumcheen in the North. Radium Hot Springs is located just 10 miles north, and was open every day and provided free to the R.C.M.P. so I made good use of it.

Our Police car had no radio, nor did our Office so it was rather isolated. Cpl. Jack Payne was a pretty serious person, who did not smoke or drink and had a very short temper. Since I was still under 21, I was not supposed to drive the R.C.M.P. car, even though I had been driving them in Grand Forks for a year. Most of the Police work was fairly routine – motor vehicle accidents, and impaired drivers, as well as intoxicated Natives and other such disturbances.

One night Jack got out of the Police car behind the Windermere Hotel, and told me to pick him up in half an hour, as he wanted to see what was going on. When I returned he was laughing quite hard, as apparently he was crouched down behind some bushes when a Native woman came out of the bar. She came over in his direction and started peeing, then looked over and saw Jack in his full uniform, and her only comment was “Hello Jack”. This was one of the few times I had ever seen him laugh.

In April of 1954 a message came through that I was transferred to “G” Division and to take any owed vacation time before proceeding to Edmonton, Alberta. There I was to take further training before heading north, and was reminded to “make out my will”. I took 3 weeks holiday and flew from Calgary to Toronto and spent a couple of weeks at home. I then picked up a new 1954 Oldsmobile for the Magistrate at Invermere, and rode back with a short stop over at Grand Forks to sell my Harley Davidson motorcycle. Jack drove me to Golden, BC in the Police car, where I caught the C.P.R. passenger train to Edmonton. I had to travel in “Red Serge” and met Constable Jim Locker who was also heading north. We've remained good friends and kept in touch for many years. There were about 12 more members going north, so we all took some training at the Charles Camsell Hospital on how to give injections and pull teeth, as well as child birthing and many other medical situations, which I found all to be quite interesting. I flew into Fort Smith on 24 May 1954 on the R.C.M.P. plane C.F.M.P.1 that was flown by R.C.M.P. pilot Ben Ruhl, and for the next 3 years I had a great time living the life of northern man.



“Fort Smith - 1954”

Fort Smith is located just north of the Alberta/North West Territories border on the west side of the Slave River. There are about 15 miles of rapids before it reaches Fort Smith that are too rough to navigate, resulting in a portage trail from Fitzgerald to Bell Rock located a few miles downriver from the Fort, and this was the main route to the north for many years. Fort Smith was the R.C.M.P. Subdivision Headquarters, as well as the jail for prisoners serving up to 1 year. There was one building which housed the jail, and Detachment Office and Subdivision Office, as well as the mess hall. The kitchen prepared all the meals for the prisoners and single Constables (about 10 of us) who had rooms in the upstairs of the building which included a recreation room with a pretty good library. There were usually 10-15 prisoners, (mostly Natives) staying in the cells at any given time, and 1 cell for females, which was occupied by a person who was scheduled to be hanged on 1 June 1954. Once a person has been sentenced to death there is a rule that the prisoner must be guarded 24 hours a day. I was detailed to guard duty for a few shifts that were for 4 hours at a time. The prisoner was a good cribbage player, and we played quite a few games, but he beat me every time. During his last week the Hangman arrived from Montreal to supervise the building of the scaffold which took place about 100 feet from the cell window. A hanging had taken place there a few years before this one, so the trap door was still there, and the

Hangman (who could only speak in broken English) stayed in our barracks and ate with us. I could go into great detail about the last few days before the execution as I remember it well. I recall doing my last 4 hour shift in the afternoon of May 31st and was detailed to the Men's cell block from about 10PM on until 1AM. After the hanging it was so quiet you could hear a pin drop, whereas usually there was lots of snoring, coughing, etc. The execution took place just after midnight, and was over in about 15 minutes. Most of the Constables and the Hangman ended up in the lounge of the single men's quarters, with a bottle of over-proof rum. Most of these men had guarded the deceased for quite a long time and had liked him. He had been a Special Constable in the R.C.M.P. as his father had been before him, so it was just a little too close to home. Anyway, the Hangman became quite talkative about his occupation, as this was the 213th person he had executed, and claimed that the other 215 had "got away", in other words they had received a "stay of execution". This however, is not quite the end of the story! The following morning several Constables including myself were detailed to bury the deceased in the Fort Smith Cemetery, and Father Moquas was going to perform the grave side service. The day before some prisoners had dug the grave, and a casket had been made, so we loaded it into the back of the Police truck and drove to the cemetery. When we started to lower the casket into the ground it got stuck about halfway down, and with the mosquitoes at the worst I had ever seen them. The priest kept praying on while one of the constables returned to the barracks for a spade! Eventually the end of the grave was lengthened, and we finally completed our assigned task. This was the last official hanging in the North-West Territories.

In August 1954 some of the Constables were flown over to Yellowknife to supply security for Prince Phillip, who was touring Canada without the Queen. There wasn't much security work to do, so it was a great time to confer with the Constables from other parts of the N.W.T. I had my 21st birthday in Yellowknife during his visit, and as I recall suffered a bit of a hangover. It took some getting used to the all night daylight of early summer, as well as the very short days of winter. One had to adapt to the semi-isolation of living in the north, as there were no phones except the one that was maintained by the Army Signal Corps. Our mail came in 5 days a week by a scheduled Canadian Pacific Airlines flight, (weather permitting of course), but there was no television, or fresh milk, and very poor radio reception. Our cook Harry Sykes was a 70 year old WWI vet, so we ate very well with meat and potatoes twice a day, and most of us put on weight that winter.

Life was quite pleasant in Fort Smith as far as work goes, as there were a lot of different jobs to do, like inoculating the sleigh dogs for Rabies, supervising the prisoners, and patrolling the town in the old Police car, and of course sounding the curfew at 9PM. The curfew siren was mounted in the centre of town, and every night after it was sounded about 1500 sleigh dogs would all howl a long mournful reply. In the summer there were 2 float planes in Fort Smith, and in the winter they took off the pontoons and mounted the skis. One was the Police "Norseman" flown by Sgt. Harry Heacock, and the other was a "Beaver" flown by a bush pilot named Pat Cary, and during my time there I had the experience of flying with both these great pilots.

A few weeks after arriving at Fort Smith, Pat Cary took 5 of us out for a fishing trip, the local Doctor and the School Superintendent, along with 3 R.C.M.P. members. We left about 8 or 9PM and headed northeast to a lake about an hour and a half hour away, and since it was light out we fished most of the night catching about a 100 pounds of fish, and started back early in the morning. We were taking off with full power on when the motor quit. We were only about 100 feet in the air, so Pat put the plane in a dive and we hit the water with quite a splash. One of the gas tanks was empty, so Pat switched to the other tank and said "I guess we will try again". I think this was my first ride on floats, but I could tell by the scared look on the faces of Dr. McRay and Gordon Devit that this could have been a whole lot worse. I went out on another trip with Pat out over the Wood Buffalo Park, and spotted a flock of whooping cranes. They were just about extinct at this time, as there were fewer than two dozen left in the world, and fortunately since then the population has increased a lot.

With about 10 single members living in barracks there was always enough around to have a game of 25 cent limit poker and a few drinks, even though both were not allowed on the premises. We also enjoyed a Regimental Dinner where the O.C. served the Junior Constable. We had a big turkey all cooked up, and Harry Sykes, our cook started to carve it, when his razor sharp carving knife slipped and cut his hand quite badly. The blood covered a fair bit of the turkey, but he just wiped it off with his apron and the dinner continued.

"The Fort Smith Dog Team Patrol - 1955"

Toward the spring of 1955 I was told that I could go on the dog team patrol with Lawrence Yanike, a game warden from Fort Fitzgerald, Alberta. I had not met him before but really liked him, as he was a very experienced trapper. Our trip was scheduled for a week and was mainly in Alberta toward Fort Chipewyan. The main purpose of this patrol was to check the Native trap lines to see if there were as many beaver lodges as they listed when they got their trapping licenses. We drove to the Wood Buffalo National Park Headquarters loaded with our toboggans and camping gear, and the food for the dogs which consisted of the frozen stomachs of the buffalo that had been slaughtered a few months earlier. Lawrence had a new younger team of 7 dogs, and I had his older team of 7 dogs, and we travelled along the Slave River for a few miles, then went east through the bush. It was quite hard going but I managed to keep fairly close behind. We visited a few Native cabins, where I took pictures, and stayed one night in a trappers' cabin along the Slave River, and another night in our tent at the junction where the Peace River flows into the Slave River. After a long day behind the dogs I would be totally exhausted and very hungry. On our last day we stopped at the Wood Buffalo Park Headquarters to visit with the couple who lived there, then headed on toward Fort Fitzgerald. The weather had been quite mild and then sunny during the whole trip, so travelling along the Slave River was fairly easy going. The team that Lawrence ran was a bit faster than mine, but he assured me that I should have no trouble following him. It was starting to get dark and I was riding on the back runners of the toboggan when I heard a cracking noise from the ice. The dogs stopped, and I broke through! I

started trying to crawl up on the toboggan which kept sinking as the ice kept breaking. I kept crawling up and finally rolled out onto the ice when only two dogs were still on top, so I pulled the other 5 dogs out of the water and the toboggan, and immediately started toward Lawrence who must have been a quarter mile ahead by then. He finally stopped and waited for me, but when he saw my predicament he got a fire going with some drift wood and loaned me some dry clothes from his toboggan. I quickly changed into them and we headed on to a camping spot, set up the tent, fed the dogs and went to bed exhausted! We got back to Fort Fitzgerald the next day and I was picked up by some members from Fort Smith, and so ended my first dog team patrol, which was just about my last. As far as I know, Lawrence never took a young Constable for his "first" patrol again, and all the pictures I took were ruined when someone exposed the film when removing the roll from the camera.

During the early spring of 1955 Henry Larson, the Officer commanding "G" Division arrived. He was on his way to the Arctic coast in a Police plane, and I was detailed to drive him to the airport about 3 miles away. When I went to get the Police car it was all covered in ice, so I got a taxi from Oly Peterson's instead. I was really concerned about using the taxi rather than the Police car, but Henry Larson thought it was quite funny.

The most important event that occurred while I was at Fort Smith was meeting Mary Roherty, a school teacher from Belledune River, New Brunswick. She came to Fort Smith to open the first school to teach the Inuit and Native children who were confined to the hospital with tuberculosis (TB). The first time we went out together was to the Halloween Dance, where I was dressed as Superman. I was transferred to Fort Simpson in June of 1955, and Mary was sent there that summer to open a school in the Fort Simpson Hospital, and again had her own house supplied.

"Fort Simpson - 1955"

Fort Simpson is a very pretty spot located where the Mackenzie and Liard rivers meet. When the Liard River is running high Fort Simpson becomes an island. The relatively new 2 story high R.C.M.P. building was located close to the river bank, with the single men's barracks above the Office and the Corporal's quarters on the other side of the duplex. There was also a full basement, where a whole years' worth of rations were stored. I arrived on a Sunday having left Fort Smith that morning in the R.C.M.P. "Beaver", but on route we went into Yellowknife for some reason then flew over Fort Rae and Fort Providence before landing in Fort Simpson. Harry Hodgson and his wife Fran were going to Fort Liard to take charge while I was taking his place at Fort Simpson, and they left as soon as I had my stuff unloaded off the plane. I spent the next year with Stan and Jean Byer and their son Douglas, and it was a truly great experience working with Stan. Douglas wrote a book called "Northern Service" about his father that is well worth reading. We had a 2 cylinder lighting plant that supplied electricity for the R.C.M.P. building, the Doctors house and Office, and the 2 teacherages, as well as the Game Wardens house. This required checking and adding fuel every day. There was also a back-up air cooled power plant in case the big one stopped. These power plants were located in our garage along with a 1942 U.S.

Army jeep which served as our "Police car". We also had a 32 foot homemade scow which was powered by a 25 H.P. and 10 H.P. Johnson outboard motors for travelling in the rivers, as well as a 20 foot canoe which was coated in fiberglass.

My first experience travelling on the Mackenzie River was in August of 1955. A Native man named Antoine had drowned on the east side of the river opposite Fort Simpson, and I was detailed to go down river to search for his body, and took 3 Native men with me to help in the search. I was to provide the food supplies and gasoline for the backup motors for their canoe as well as my own, and both were pretty full when we left. I had Charlie Cholo for my guide and the other canoe had 2 Natives from Fort Wrigley, that was located about 150 miles north, which was the northern boundary of the Fort Simpson Detachment area. Our trip went smoother after we shifted the weight to the front, and after a few hours we met up together and set up the tent. During the night it got very windy and blew hard for 3 days straight. We sure went through a lot of food, and when we got back all that was left was some hard tack biscuits and tea. We did not find any trace of the missing man, however, 5 weeks later when I was returning from a patrol with an old Native guide we spotted his body in an eddy of the Mackenzie River about 2 miles from where the drowning had occurred. The local Doctor was also the Coroner, and we helped him with the autopsy, and were able to determine that Antoine had indeed drowned. At the time we found his body in the river I pulled it up on the shore and went on to Fort Simpson, returning with the Doctor and the Corporal, and an old rubber bathtub to transport the body in. Here I would like to mention the "Moccasin Telegraph" for a minute, as when we were coming into Fort Simpson every one of the Natives was standing along the riverbank, and when we got to the top of the bank with the body there was not a Native in sight.

"Fort Liard - 1956"

I spent the summer of 1956 at Fort Liard by myself and was kept quite busy. Willie McLeod was the areas "Special Constable" who had lived there most of his life. He looked after about 30 R.C.M.P. sleigh dogs, acted as an interpreter, kept the dock set up so that we could tie up our boats and planes, kept ice in the water barrel and looked after the yard. He also traveled with me on our boat patrols to Nahanni to do the Census of 1956, and to inoculate all the sleigh dogs for Rabies. Nahanni was about 80 miles downriver and we went there twice, once in our R.C.M.P. steel hulled boat, and once in the Hudson Bay homemade scow, which was much faster even though it only had a 10 H.P. outboard motor. That trip we were looking for a missing prospector, and hoping we would not have to camp overnight. Willie was in the front of the scow and I was in the rear, and we were on the north side of the Liard River near a 3 mile stretch of rapids. Willie had signaled to go to the south side of the river as he thought we would be well past the rapids, but we hit a rock and knocked off the Shear-Pin so we had to shut the motor off. Willie was bailing as the water came in, and I had moved up to the nose of the scow with a 10-12 foot pole try to keep it from tipping over in the rapids. We traveled that way for about 3 miles until we could get over to the south side, but by then Willie was crying as he baled. We were both

exhausted when we landed, but managed to put up the tent and went to sleep. We replaced the Shear-Pin in the morning, and headed back to Liard, and realized that we did not even have our life jackets with us. Years later while I was visiting Willie in the Camsell Hospital in Edmonton we talked about that trip. We both remembered the rapids which Willie insisted was 4 miles long not 3. I remember that it was dark by the time we got to the end of the rapids which made it easier to see the water and to steer through it.

I enjoyed the 2 months I spent in Fort Liard, as it was peaceful and quiet, with no roads or an airfield, and I acted as the Indian Agent, Game Warden and Nurse. One day 3 Natives came running into my yard saying that 3 moose were swimming across the river toward the settlement, so I gave them a box of 30-30 shells and went out to watch. The moose were shot as they came out of the water, and were skinned within a few minutes, and the meat was cut up and distributed among the people. The women did most of the work, including tanning the hides which were usually used for moccasins. I was given a big moose steak that I fried up for supper, and bought the finished hides for the R.C.M.P. for \$10 each. During the time I served in Fort Liard I met some very interesting men. One was the Captain of the "Hudson Bay" the boat that delivered the years' supply of rations to the R.C.M.P. Detachments along the river. His name was Walter Johnson, and he had been on the river since 1906, so Walter and I sat in the kitchen while Willie supervised the unloading of the supplies. He had many stories to tell, but the one he did not tell me was the one when he made a wooden propeller for an airplane that had crashed at Fort Simpson. It was made from oak boards that he had taken from an old toboggan which were glued together with some homemade glue made from moose hooves. It worked perfectly and was on display for many years at the Ottawa Airport. This had been the 50th year that Walter had worked on the Mackenzie and Liard Rivers.

One afternoon a Ward Air "Beaver" aircraft landed and tied up at the R.C.M.P. dock, and there were 3 or 4 passengers who were Federal Government Employees who stayed at the school, while the pilot stayed with me. What an interesting man! He was from New Zealand, and had joined the R.A.F. in 1938, and flown Spitfires all through the war. After it ended he became a "Test Pilot" and got the chance to fly a plane to Canada, and then a Dehavelyn "Otter" to Yellowknife for Max Ward of Ward Air. He called me "Police Constable Trace", and he had many stories to tell after we'd had a few drinks. We kept in touch for a few months, but he did not like the cold so moved to New Guinea, which was when I lost touch with him.

Dr. Nyhus was a Medical Doctor at Fort Simpson, and Fort Liard was part of his territory. He had a plane with pontoons and flew in one day with his wife and son and they stayed overnight. The next day I flew with them to Fort Nelson, BC, and later that afternoon we started back to Fort Liard, but the weather clouded over and he had to land the plane on a small lake. It snowed during the night and we had no food or camping gear, so we sat in the plane all night. In the morning we repaired a hole in one of the front pontoons, and tried to take off, but the water was too rough, so we didn't get back to Fort Liard until 24 hours later.

“Edmonton Detachment - 1957 to 1959”

I arrived in Edmonton after a 24 hour bus ride from Hay River, and had to wait there a few days to get my 9 weeks holiday approved. I then went home to Ontario to visit with my family, and returned to Edmonton where I got married on 15 July 1957. During the next 3 years I was kept very busy. This involved spending one week each month “on call” which required me to sleep in the barracks and attend to any emergencies. During this time I worked on the Robert Raymond Cooks murder case, when he escaped from the Ponoka Hospital. He was found guilty and was hanged on 15 November 1960, for which I had to be a “Witness”.

I was also involved in a serious car accident, which resulted in 2 cars being demolished. I was a passenger in the front seat when my Police car was hit from behind by a vehicle traveling at 70 miles per hour. As a result, an artery was severed and I nearly bled to death. At that point Management decided that I needed a break from front line duty so I was transferred to the “K” Division in the Criminal Investigation Readers section at Edmonton. My main duties were to check all the reports that were submitted by the Detachment on all criminal matters. I remained a Reader until January of 1964. Then I was transferred to be in charge of the Spirit River Detachment in the Peace River Subdivision. This was a very busy Detachment. There were 3,000 miles of Government Roads, 29 Dance Halls, and 5 hotels over an area of 100 miles from East to West. I got promoted to Corporal in the Spring of 1964, and our Detachment was made into 5 members. In 1969 I was transferred to Beaver Lodge, Alberta, where I stayed for 2 years. My next position was with the Immigration and Passport Division for the Province of Alberta. This required a move for me and my family back to Edmonton. I spent nearly 2 years doing that work, -looking for illegal immigrants. In May of 1973, I was transferred to St. Albert, and promoted to Sergeant. After 2 years I was transferred to Sherwood Park. In 1976 I was transferred to “K” Division and helped to set up the “Audit Team”. Assistant Commissioner Peter Wright gave instructions of what he wanted done.



Receiving Sergeants Stripes and the “20 Year Good Conduct” Medal

I was offered a position of “Safety Supervisor” for R. Angus as soon as I had completed my 25 years of service. In 1983 my position was done away with, and I was offered a job as a “Safety Supervisor” for North Western Utilities. Finally, in 1992 I retired after 40 years in the work force.



July 2020

I would like to dedicate this story to my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, and to all the friends I have met along the way.

John Arthur Trace