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Chatting...

with M. H. B.

● "WE WERE THE BEST PAID, best fed men in the country. And in addition to that we had the biggest experience of our lives" . . . was the way Norman Quibell described his three-month stint as a leader-driver on the tractor trains carrying equipment to the Distant Early Warning radar line being built on our Arctic tundra . . .

Mr. Quibell went up to Moosonee in January, and has just recently returned to his home in Limehouse. Needless to say his wife and two sons, Garry 5, and Kim 2, have been learning a great deal about our frozen northland since his return.

● THESE TRACTOR TRAINS are the most unique method of transporting goods on a large scale, that I have ever heard about. They combine the modern methods with the most ancient. The tractors themselves are diesel powered D7 crawler tractors. Each tractor pulls 10 or 12 sleighs behind it, containing about 100 tons of supplies . . . everything from machinery to sunglasses . . .

There are four tractors to a group which is called a "swing". Each swing had two cabooses, one for sleeping and one for cooking. They were big box-like affairs built on sleighs. In the cooking cabooses

a French chef and his assistant reigned supreme, producing the most delicious of meals all of which were cooked on propane stoves . . .

● THE SWINGS travelled twenty-four hours a day, working shifts of six hours on, and six off. When they took off from their base at Moosonee they had several days' supply of food. After the first few days, food was supplied by helicopter. In all there were about 40 tractors employed in the whole operation. However, each swing travelled separately, and the men took pride in the time they made. The idea of course, was to move as fast as possible . . .

"As fast as possible" was subject to great variations, as you can imagine. Some days when they ran into difficulties caused by breakdowns, storms, and bad ice conditions, the most they could cover would be five miles a day, but on other days when everything ran smoothly, they could make a maximum of 30 miles in a day. One of their biggest hazards was the crossing of large rivers, such as the Albany. The ice was tested as thoroughly as possible, and then they took their chance. Incidentally, the swings were supplied with a two-way radio . . .

● EACH SWING was manned by 7 drivers and a leading foreman who was also a driver . . . this was the position held by Mr. Quibell. There were also 8 helpers, and the two cooks, to complete each unit. The men worked out in the open all the time in weather that can be

pretty rugged, with the temperature dropping down to as low as 60 below. However, they were dressed for the weather in specially designed Arctic suits which had thermo-packing and insulation, so never actually suffered any hardship from it . . .

The men staffing the swings were very hardy, rugged types, many of them former lumberjacks from Northern Ontario and Quebec. And they looked the part, too, with many of them sporting big beards. While there wasn't actually too much physical labour involved in the work, the crew had to be prepared for all emergencies, and if a sleigh or tractor broke down, it had to be repaired immediately. The tundra, while frozen is safe enough, but once it starts to thaw, it becomes a vast swamp of moss and muskeg. If a sleigh were left, it would simply disappear into the depths of the swamp. That is the big reason for trying to make as good time as possible on the trips. The supplies must be brought in while the frost holds the tundra firm.

● AS I MENTIONED before, the salaries paid these men are excellent. Mr. Quibell tells me that the helpers receive \$450 per month, the drivers \$625, and leaders \$675. In addition to this all clothing and transportation from the point where the man was hired is supplied. . . . When the men are hired, they are sworn to secrecy in many respects, but the work the DEW Line is expected to do, and its exact location have been published in the

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newspapers, so you probably have a fairly good idea of what it is all about. The name of the company for which Mr. Quibell worked is the Hudson Bay Freight Forwarding Ltd. It is under the supervision of Alex and Bob Hennessy. Alex Hennessy is the highest authority on tractor-type transportation, having spent most of his life in the northland where he pioneered in mining. He is a very colourful character, dressing in sealskin beaded jacket, fur cap, etc. He plotted out the courses to be taken by the tractors, and kept constantly in touch with the swings by his private plane and snowmobile . . .

● THE ARCTIC TUNDRA itself is extremely flat and barren, with only the odd scrub evergreen to relieve the monotony. There is very little bird life, except for the huge flocks of Ptarmigan, which are an Arctic-type partridge. They are pure white. Quite tame, they toddle along in front of the tractors for hours. Perhaps too many hours for their own good, for the men found they were excellent for eating. The only other bird existing up there is the raven. They too followed the tractors, attracted by the scraps of food the men sometimes threw out.

● THERE ISN'T MUCH animal life either on the frozen tundra. There are lots of wolves, but they weren't bothersome. Often they would get in the light of the tractor, and stand there sort of transfixed. Foxes of all types were numerous also—the Arctic, blue, silver and red. There are polar bears on the tundra but they are very hard to locate. They leave the ice in winter and go into the muskeg to have their young. They are considered dangerous. The men on Mr. Quibell's swing bagged a small one, however . . .

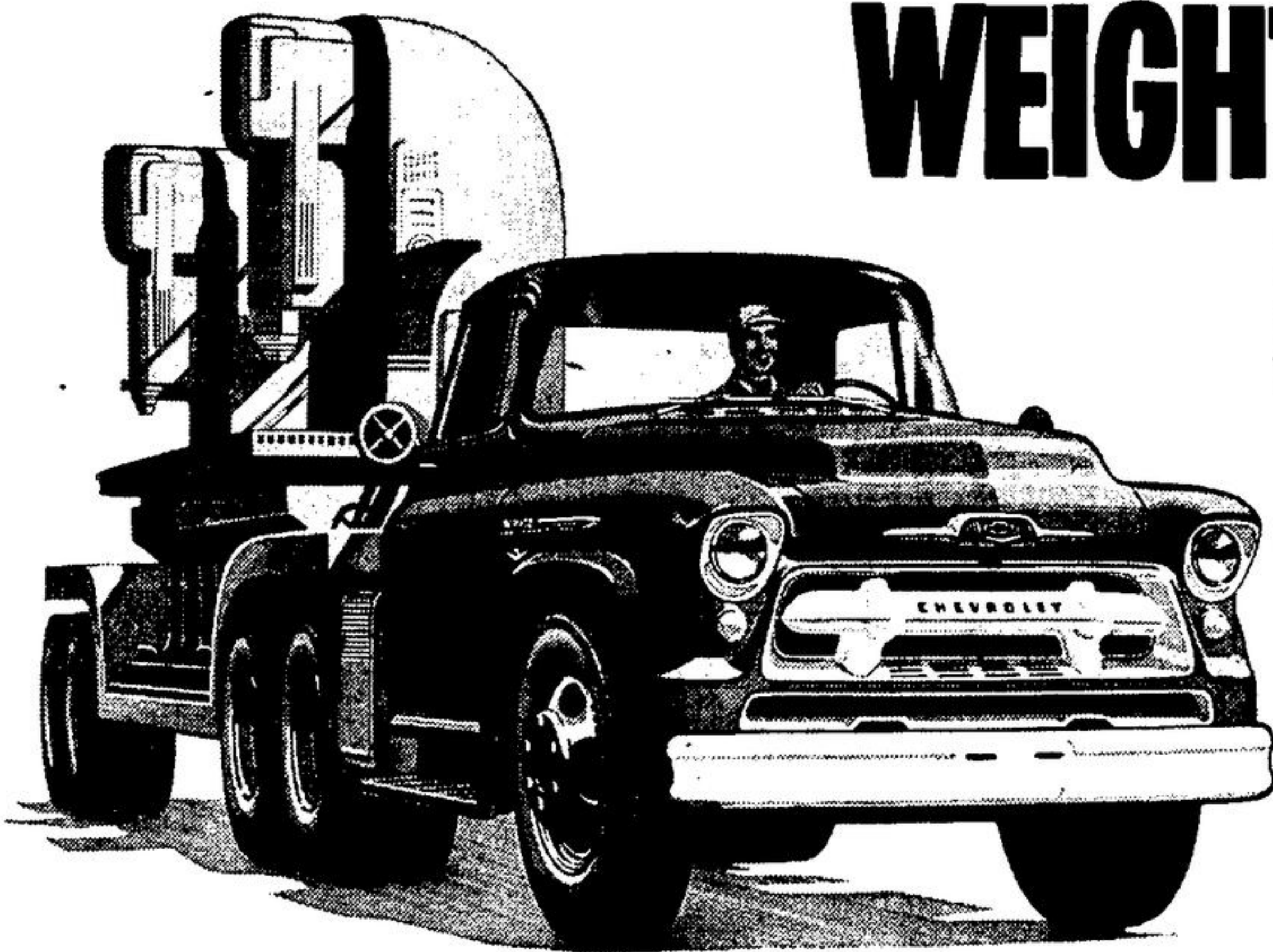
On their route, his swing passed thru the Hudson's Bay Trading Post. It looks just as it was pictured many years ago, and fur dealing is still its main industry. While at the Post, Mr. Quibell bought some very beautiful Indian bead work, and fur trimmed articles to bring home to his wife and boys as souvenirs.

● THERE IS VERY LITTLE human habitation on the tundra. The Indians cluster together in villages of several hundred or so, but these villages are often over 200 miles apart.

● AS I MENTIONED before, Mr. Quibell was sworn to secrecy as far as the technical side of the establishment of the radar line is concerned. But he was safe in saying that the very latest and the very best equipment to be obtained anywhere is being used. The building of the line will take years to complete, and altho Mr. Quibell is resting up from the rigours of the northland for a few weeks at his home, he found the experience so wonderful that sometime he intends to go back for another season.

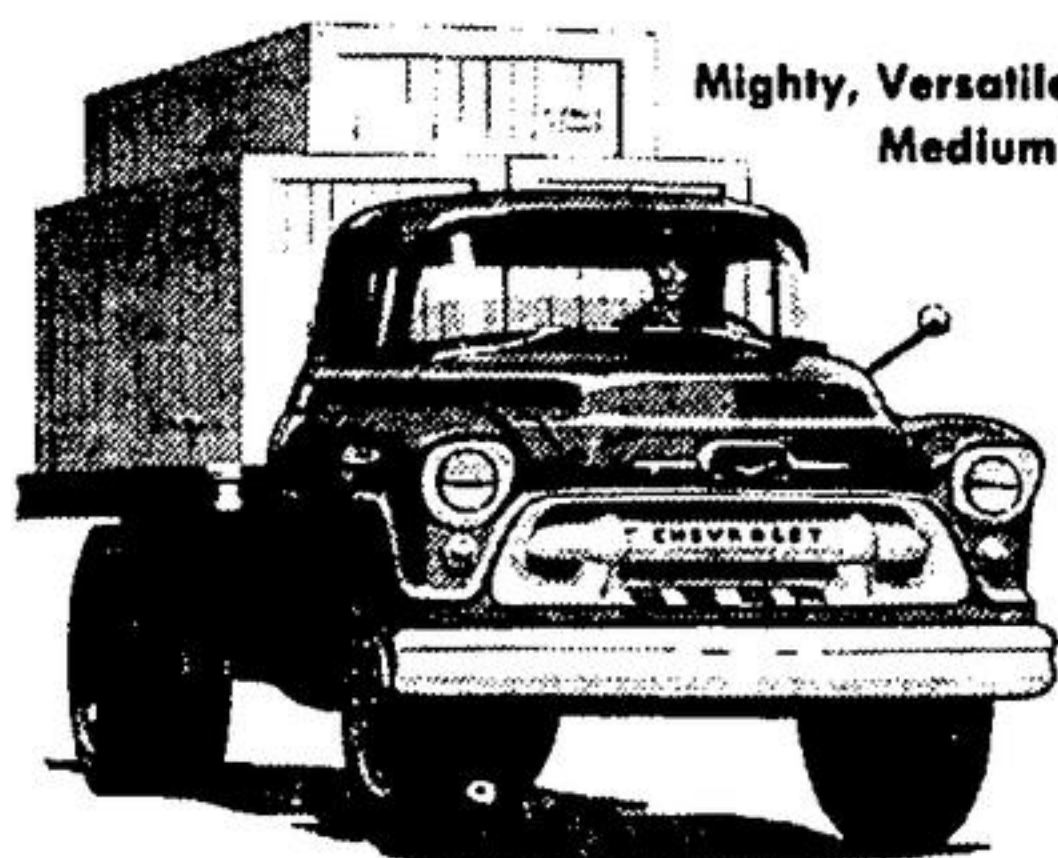
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Ligny Singers Lead In Township Festival

Pupils from Ligny school took the largest share of honours at Esqueusing music festival last Tuesday, when it was held in Esqueusing Community Hall, Stewartstown. Ligny students placed first or second in five of the 13 classes, when winners were chosen to compete in the county rural finals which were held in Munn's School on Friday.

Ashgrove choir were judged best in the class for smaller country schools, and Dublin took honours among larger schools. The Ligny double trio was best in its class.

S. Buchanan, music supervisor for Burlington schools was adjudicator. Mrs. Clifford Hunter, who represents Esqueusing on the county music festival board was chairman in the morning and Mrs. Ernie Curry took over this duty for the afternoon.

Mrs. Roy Coulter, association president and secretary, school inspector L. L. Skuce and district inspector R. H. Bornholt spoke briefly. Mr. Skuce pointing out that 1956 marks the 25th anniversary of the festival.

Members of Esqueusing W.I. served lunch at noon.

Boys and girls chosen to compete at Munn's School were:

Class 4, solo, girls 7 and under, Patricia Blackett, Pinegrove; Janice Leyland, Dublin.

Class 5, solo, boys 7 and under, Johnny McGee, Pinegrove; Andy Spiece, Blue Mountain.

Class 2, choir, enrolment 29 and under, Ashgrove.

Class 6, solo, girls 9 and under, Betty Ann Brown, Limehouse; Donna Rennick, Dufferin.

Class 7, solo, boys 9 and under, Paul Kidney, Stone School; Hugh Graham, Ashgrove.

Class 12, solo, boys changed voices, Albert Ouwendyk, Quatre Bras; David Howden, Ligny.

Class 9, solo, boys 11 and under, Keith Ella, Hornby; David Kidney, Stone School.

Class 3, choir, enrolment 30 and over, Dublin.

Class 8, solo, girls 11 and under, Joyce Rennick, Dufferin; Audrey Brown, Ligny.

Class 13, duet, Marilyn Wilson and Catherine Hunter, Ashgrove; Audrey Brown and Peter Peddie, Ligny.

Class 10, solo, girls 12 and over, Lillian Phillips, Bannockburn; Alleen Harrop, Pinegrove.

Class 11, solo, boys 12 and over, Peter Peddie, Ligny; Sidney Fletcher, Stone School.

Class 14, double trio, Ligny.