



Photo: Jenafor Ollander

THE CANADIAN RANG TRUE NORTH

REDPOINT
MEDIA GROUP INC.



by JUDY WAYTIUK

JEFFREY QAUNAQ JOINED UP AT 18, AS SOON AS HE WAS OLD ENOUGH, BECAUSE "I'M A CANADIAN. I WANT TO PROTECT MY COUNTRY."

Now 29, Qaunaq is one of 1,500 Canadian Rangers, all military reservists, in the 58 patrols that make up the First Canadian Ranger Patrol Group (1CRPG). He's based 1,100 kilometers above the Arctic Circle in the hamlet of Grise Fiord, at the southern tip of Ellesmere Island. Grise Fiord, Canada's most northern community, is called *Aujuittuq*, "the place that never thaws," in Inuit.

The 1CRPG volunteers patrol the Northwest Territory, Yukon Territory, and Nunavut, 40% of Canada's land mass.

1CRPG is one of five Ranger Patrol Groups, 4,500 members in all, that have protected outlying regions of Newfoundland and Labrador, northern Ontario, Québec, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and the remote west coast regions of British Columbia, for more than sixty years. The Maritimes don't have Rangers, probably because they don't have the kind of isolated communities that need them.

Few Canadians outside the remote regions they serve even know the Rangers exist. Here at West, we stumbled across them while researching the annual Hudson Bay Quest dogsled race a few issues back. The Rangers, we discovered, help the race to run safely every year, staking out the trail and watching for mushers in trouble.

The Rangers' training equips them to help regular troops and to conduct reconnaissance. They're also available to pitch in whenever their communities need them. They even give northern winter survival training to southern Canadian Forces.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE NORTH

"The guys down south have to learn to cope with the cold, because it's not the same there. If you light a stove in the south, you do it in a certain way. Up north ... you have to pour naphtha on it to warm it up, or it just won't work," says 1CRPG Commanding Officer Christian Bergeron who is based in Yellowknife.

There are women Rangers and there's no upper age limit; Bergeron has an 84-year-old in his command and says older Rangers offer invaluable experience. "They've got so much knowledge about the North," he marvels, "ice conditions, navigation — it's one thing to read a GPS, but how can you read the ice to tell what is safe and what is not?"

Arctic-based Rangers carry out more than 110 exercises and operations a year to ensure Canada's sovereignty over the wild, windswept, achingly-empty Arctic terrain. "This year from March 19th to April 14th, we launched three patrols on Ellesmere Island, on the northwest, central and eastern sides," says CO Bergeron.

And, every year or so, Qaunaq and a small band of Ranger companions travel west from Grise Fiord by air to Resolute, Canada's second most-northerly community, aka *Qausuittuq* — where the sun never sets — on Cornwallis Island. They make the 450 km. return trip by snowmobile. The journey can take up to three weeks, depending on the weather and how often the snowmobiles break down. Really harsh weather can drive the patrol group into their tents to hunker

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