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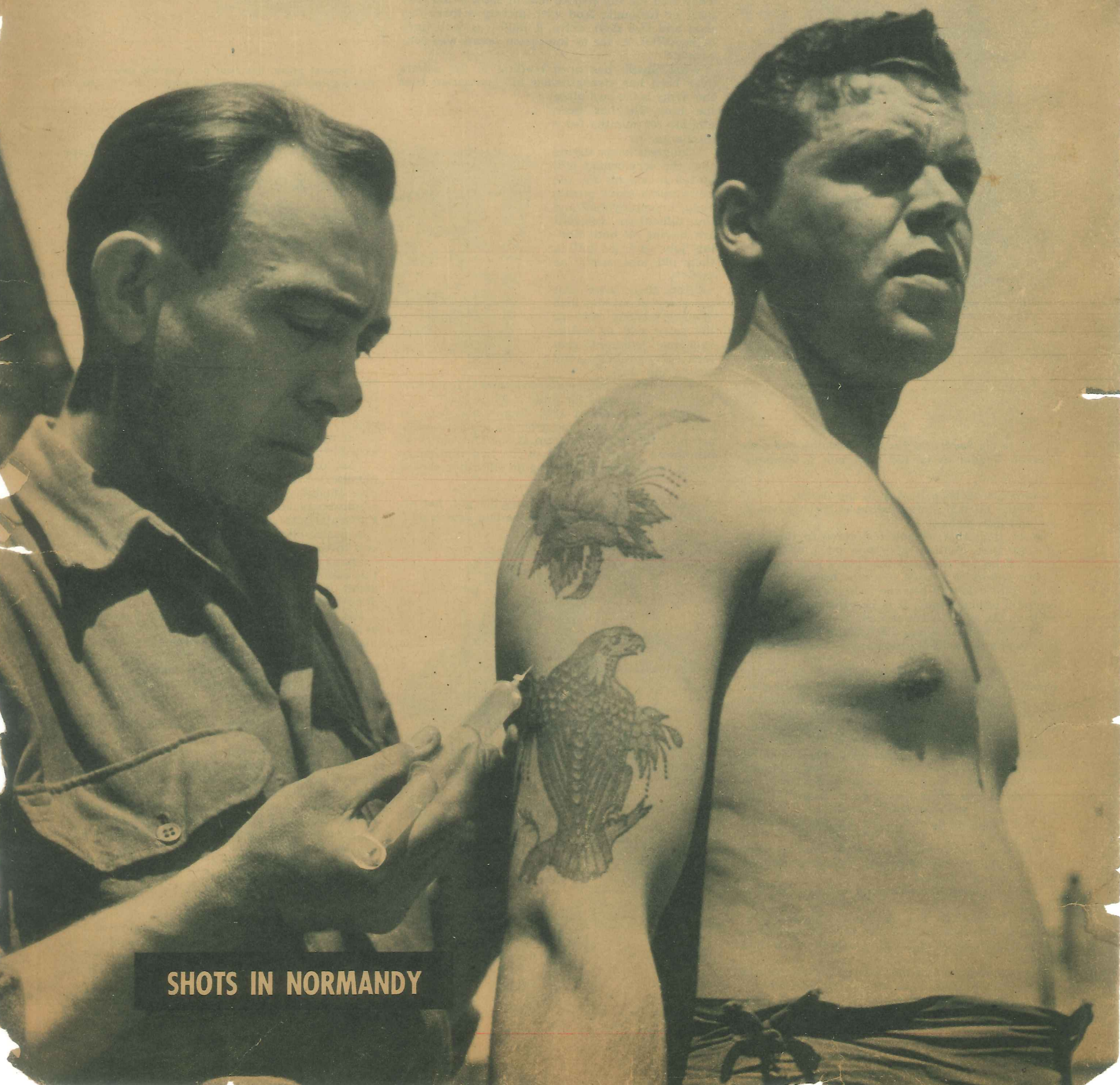
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SHOTS IN NORMANDY

By Sgt. TOM SHEHAN
YANK Staff Correspondent

YELLOWKNIFE, NORTHWEST TERRITORY, CANADA—Now that the war is over this mushrooming boom town on the north shore of the Great Slave Lake expects a gold rush next spring that will make the ones in Alaska and the Yukon that Robert Service and Jack London wrote about seem insignificant by comparison. What's more, Yellowknife expects its gold rush to attract almost as many servicemen, Canadian and Yanks, as sourdoughs.

"Although this field was opened in 1937 and has been prejudiced by wartime restrictions," said Leonard E. Drummond, secretary-manager of the Alberta and Northwest Chamber of Mines, "it had produced \$13,210,563 in gold by the end of 1943. Considering the difficulties encountered by the mining companies in a new and remote field, this represents the most spectacular development which has occurred in Canada. Since the original discovery, which was made along the eastern shore line of Yellowknife Bay, many new companies have entered the field, and the Geological Survey has extended investigations proving a much larger field than was at first anticipated."

Like most Canadian mining developments, Yellowknife has been hampered somewhat by the shortage of geologists and engineers. Geologists and mining engineers are of extreme importance to the industry now, but it appears that the geologist is destined to become of even greater importance in the future than he has been in the past.

While the pay is good in all jobs in the Yellowknife area, living costs are high, with meals averaging \$1 each and rooms renting from \$3 per day. Transportation to Yellowknife from Edmonton, Alberta, is also expensive, but it is usually advanced by the company and deducted

from the employee's pay check. After the employee has been on the job for a stipulated time it is refunded. And if a man stays on the job for a year the company will usually pay his fare out if he wants to quit at the end of that time.

Most of the Yellowknife companies are discouraging married men from bringing their wives with them, because of the housing shortage. After they have located a home however, the men can send for them, but finding living quarters is so difficult that many people live in tents.

Although a new \$140,000 hotel, equipped with 47 rooms, a beauty parlor and cocktail lounge, is under construction, Del Curry, manager of the Yellowknife Hotel, the only real hostelry the town now boasts, is often confronted with the problem of how to put up 75 to 100 men in fourteen rooms. When that happens he usually opens the beer hall and sets up 25 cots. The men have the pleasure of going to sleep in a beer hall with no danger of being thrown out.

As many as four and five men frequently share one room. On one occasion two rival business-house representatives, in town to see the same customer, had to bunk together. On another a sheriff searching for a man found him among the group with whom he was sharing a room.

WITH such a large transient population one of the most profitable local professions of a non-mining nature is waiting on table. "A good waitress gets from \$75 to \$100 a month and her room and board," Jim McDonald, owner of the Yellowknife Coffee Shop, said. "If she is reasonably attractive, has a good personality, knows how to kid and at the same time do her work, she has no trouble at all in picking up from \$5 to \$15 a day in tips. Before these girls even put on an apron they represent an investment of \$200 for us. We have to send them their railroad and plane fare, find them a place to live and give

them some money to live on while they're waiting for their first pay day.

"The big problem is how to keep them in line. They know they have you over a barrel and that you can't fire them until they've earned the money you've advanced.

"Down in the States the wolves might be still using that old one in trying to promote a girl—I'll put you in pictures—but up here just about every prospector on the make for a girl tells her that he'll set her up in business. They get so much attention that it takes a level-headed girl to retain her sense of values."

SOME servicemen have already found a spot for themselves in Yellowknife—Fred Fraser, for instance. Until a couple of months ago Fraser was a squadron leader in the Royal Canadian Air Force. Now, because of the many official jobs he holds in the town, he is called the unofficial mayor of Yellowknife. By appointment from the territorial government he is a stipendiary magistrate with the full powers of a supreme court judge (he can hang you, if you need hanging), mining recorder, agent for Dominion lands, marriage commissioner, crown timber agent, registrar of titles under the Navigable Waters Protection Act and chairman of the local Board of Trustees.

Like most boom towns Yellowknife has its problems. "Real estate is our biggest headache," said Fraser in discussing them. "The lumber and building-materials shortage is second. Then comes the shortage of experienced help.

"Nobody can own land in Yellowknife. Lots are leased for five-year periods for both residential and business purposes. There are renewal clauses in the leases.

"In order to give everybody a fair chance, island properties rent for \$12 a year, mainland lots for \$25 a year and business lots for \$100 a year. There is no more land left on the old town site. All newcomers must take lots on the new town site a mile south of the town on the road to the unfinished airport.

"Quite a few have been making good money by selling their leases for \$800 to \$1,000. We have a rule to prevent accumulation—one lot to a person. In all, more than 20,000 claims have been staked out in this area. From the number of claims filed with me I'd estimate that the popu-

Yellowknife Gold

There's a gold rush in the making up near Great Slave Lake, and ex-GIs are turning sourdoughs.



One of Yellowknife's main streets along the lake front. In center is a bush plane hauled up for repairs.



Donald Guise, local CIO organizer for the Yellowknife District Miners Union.



A bunch of sourdoughs take it easy, looking out across the Yellowknife lake front.

lation of Yellowknife is approximately 3,100."

The selection of the new town site split the citizenry of Yellowknife right down the middle. The original settlers maintained that the old town site, which is built right on Yellowknife Bay handy to the docks, was good enough, but the progressive element won the fight by pointing out that since the town was built on rock it would be impossible to install an all-year-round water and sewerage system because of the prohibitive cost of drilling the rock. However, it is probable that both sites, because they're not too far apart, will expand toward each other.

"Our biggest local problems now are handling the garbage and water delivery," says Fraser. "The Dominion is sending two trucks to Yellowknife, one to haul the garbage and the other to haul water in winter when our exposed water system has to be turned off because of the cold."

According to Fraser, production costs at Yellowknife are higher than in any other part of the Dominion. "We've got to lower production costs if the area is to expand. For instance, the cost of heating is tremendous. For a private family it comes to \$600 a year.

"And that condition is getting worse because, although there is plenty of timber around, it cannot be cut since there is a law that prohibits the cutting of timber on mining lands. And most of the land here is staked out. Fuel wood costs \$21 a cord because of the timber law. I've suggested that oil might be imported from the Abasand area at Fort McMurray. It would solve our fuel problem in production.

"The cost of aerial transportation is higher to Yellowknife than to any other part of the Dominion. It's 16 cents a mile as compared to 10 cents a mile to the Yukon and 8 cents a mile elsewhere in Canada. But it is safe to say that the present Yellowknife development wouldn't even be in existence if it hadn't been for the bush pilots of the Canadian Pacific Airlines and the other companies that fly in and out of here. They've done a great job, but their cost of operation is too high."

The bush pilots who fly the mining people in and out of Yellowknife to Edmonton and to their claims out in the bush are a courageous lot. With no fancy landing strips or radio-control towers they fly "by the seat of their pants," putting their planes down on ice and snow on skis in the winter, and on the surface of lakes and rivers with pontoons during the open season. Invariably, each new trip offers a new problem of transporting equipment for them to solve, and it is not unusual to see a canoe or a rowboat suspended outside the fuselage.

STRICTLY speaking, Yellowknife is not a new gold field. The first discovery of gold in that area was reported in 1899 when E. A. Blakeney of Ottawa reported an assay of ore taken from a point 10 miles from the Yellowknife River as yielding 2.58 ounces of gold in the ton.

But it wasn't until Major G. Burwash, an old northern man, found gold on the east side of Great Slave Lake in 1934, followed by discoveries by Dr. A. W. Joliffe in 1935, that it attracted enough attention to warrant investment by companies such as Consolidated, Negus, etc. While the \$13,210,563 in gold that had been produced

here as of the end of 1943 is regarded as small for a gold field as large as Yellowknife, it is quite promising for its future because of the wartime restrictions the field was operated under.

For instance, ore has been assayed there that has been tested up to 65 percent to the ton, according to Leo Alexander, an employee at Leo Evans' Yellowknife Assaying Office. This establishment handles 60 samples a day and would be receiving more if it could handle them. This is a remarkable figure, according to Alexander, when it is realized that samples which show one percent to the ton are regarded as being from high-grade ore and that gold is worth \$35 an ounce.

Other minerals found in this area include beryl, tantalum, silver, uranium, radium, columbium, tungsten, molybdenum and gas and crude oil. Of course, the commercial possibilities of all these various ore deposits, as well as the gas and oil, haven't been investigated to the extent that the gold deposits have, but the finding of beryl in however small quantities was particularly important because it is the sole commercial source of beryllium, an important alloy for military purposes.

While most of the prospectors working in the Yellowknife area work for themselves, they prefer to let one of the larger companies develop their claims for them. They usually work their claims enough to prove their value and then sell them. Tom Payne, a veteran prospector, is reputed to have obtained the highest price for a claim in the Yellowknife area when he sold the Consolidated his claim for \$500,000, but that was probably paid to him partially in cash and partially in percentages on the claim's earnings.

It costs the average prospector \$2,500 for grub, a camp outfit, a canoe and at least one trip by air, to start out each season. Once he locates the kind of claim he is looking for he will work it eight out of the 12 months in the year. About four months each year is spent in idleness during the spring thaw or in the fall, waiting for the freeze. It used to be that the old sourdoughs had to sit out in the bush during these periods, but now with air transportation most of them spend this time at settlements like Yellowknife.

Prospectors working for somebody else usually receive \$200 a month and a percentage of the claim earnings if pay dirt is reached. Miners working for the big companies receive comparable wages, depending upon their job.

Donald Guise of Trail, B.C., an organizer for the Yellowknife District Miners Union, an affiliate of the CIO International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers, has been on the scene several months. "I would estimate that about 50 percent of the workers belong to the union," he said when he was asked how his campaign to unionize the town was going. "That's a conservative figure, but I prefer to underestimate our strength rather than overestimate it."

Asked if he anticipated any trouble from the big companies, Guise replied, "No. I've talked to an official of only one company, but his attitude was very friendly. I haven't contacted the Consolidated people as yet, but they have signed contracts with my organization at other mines and we don't anticipate any trouble in getting together with them when it is time."

Of course, not all the business ventures in Yellowknife have to do with mining. The McGuinness Fishing Company, for instance, has built a refrigeration plant on the bay and plans to fly fish daily back to Chicago to sell on the market at premium prices. It is estimated that when the plant is ready to operate it will turn out 4,500 pounds of fish a day.

THEN there is Eddie Arsenault, who has been roaming the north country since the early '30s, when he gave up a steady job in an Edmonton jewelry store to sell wrist watches to the Eskimos in the Yukon. Eddie, who converted an old caboose abandoned by the Yellowknife Transportation Company into a shop, sells, repairs and trades watches and makes rings from the nuggets and semiprecious stones that the sourdoughs bring to him. When we visited him he showed us a tray of garnet, sapphire, iolite, tourmaline and ruby rings from stones found in this area.

Eddie's prices are necessarily higher than a Stateside jeweler's because of the high cost of living. Although his shop was only an abandoned caboose he estimated that it had cost him \$2,400 to move here from Dawson in the Yukon and set up business.

"That includes only one trip by air out of Edmonton to replenish my stock," he said. "But I not only had to rent this lot, but also had to rent one on the new town site. I had to have a good spot in the business section and consequently I had to pay a good price for it. The high cost of living keeps me from getting rich, but I like the life better than being cooped up in a job in a city."

Despite the fact that it has been the goal of every adventurous character in the northwest since word got around about the gold strike, Yellowknife is virtually without crime, according to Cpl. Bing Rivett, CO of the three detachments of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who patrol the town.

"Occasionally we have a little petty larceny," he said, "and once a girl came up here and tried to operate, but we ran her out of town. Most men here are law-abiding citizens. The worst they do is get drunk, but one of our men is at the beer hall every night and sends the noisy ones home before trouble develops."

While the territorial liquor laws allow each person 26 ounces of hard liquor and 24 pints of beer a month, whisky is so scarce that it will bring \$30 a quart in Yellowknife. There was a time when the beer hall opened one night a week, Saturday night, and stayed open all night, but the Mounties changed that.

The big social event of the week is an all-night dance, also held on Saturday night, and between the two the Mounties had more than they cared to handle in one night. Now the beer hall is open three hours a night, 7 to 10, and there is some fancy beer drinking done as the boys try to knock themselves out in the allotted time.

Two years ago there was about one woman to every 15 men. In those days the Yellowknife women took quite a beating at the Saturday-night dance, sometimes falling to the floor exhausted before the night was over, but now the ratio of women to men is much more equitable and the representatives of the weaker sex are holding their own.