



A NATIONAL FILM BOARD

Release

THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA, MONTREAL

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Prod. No. 56-321-9  
330' fine grain pos.

CABLE CODE: CHRISTMAS  
Cable Address: Newsreels,  
Canadafilm, Montreal.

OPERATION SANTA CLAUS  
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UNIQUE CANADIAN ESKIMO CHRISTMAS  
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CANADA'S MOST COLOURFUL CHRISTMAS PARTY  
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Frobisher Bay, Christmas, 1957.

If the weather was right and if the ground wind didn't rise and block the only road there would be a party -- an Eskimo Christmas party -- at Frobisher in the Canadian Eastern Arctic. For in the Arctic every form of transportation -- which means all forms of human activity -- is subject to the weather. Well, Seelah, all powerful god that controls the forces of nature, looked kindly on the little settlement and the part was on.

At this vital northern station the Canadian Government Department of Northern Affairs, the Royal Air Force, the United States Air Force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Foundation Company of Canada, decided to bring Santa Claus back to the North for Christmas.

Word soon spread to the three hundred and fifty Eskimos living within reach of the Base and the fun was on.

During the day dog teams arrived carrying whole families on their sleds. It was so cold our cameraman could only shoot outside for a few minutes to avoid camera trouble.

The party was held in a combined garage workshop and a huge Christmas tree with decorations gave the hall a real festive air. Under the tree and in a huge Santa Claus bag were hundreds of parcels for our northern citizens donated as a Christmas goodwill gesture by Montreal businesses -- toys, clothing, fishing tackle, flashlights -- enough for every child and adult.

Dressed in white parkas striped with red, blue and yellow braid the people came to enjoy the festivities -- stocky men with the frame of wrestlers, faces seamed but not humbled by many battles with Arctic weather, and their wives in their fishtail parkas, most of them carrying a baby inside their hoods. Children by the dozen hopped with excitement, garbed in pointed hoods and sealskins.

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The giving of gifts took a long time. Eskimo names are long and hard to pronounce. Santa Claus had help from Simonee, one of the few Eskimos who speaks English. An RCMP officer also helped Santa Claus hand out the gifts. The kiddies were delighted and awed. Santa Claus was very new to them and hard to comprehend, but the gifts and candy everyone could understand.

Gift giving over, the happiest people in Canada wanted to dance. No record player was necessary for Noah's wife settled herself with her accordian and broke into a fine rousing tune, part jig, part square dance, part reel. Hundreds of "southern" spectators from the Base watched the merriment. Bedtime for Eskimo children is highly flexible and the young fry enjoyed the party as much as their parents -- Jackapussy, Adamee and Josafee had new toys to play with. The babies in their mothers' parkas slept through the festivities completely undisturbed.

The merriment continued well into the night but all things must end and hooded figures must get home while the weather is still and good and the only road still open.

Seelah held back Anoraktulak, the strong wind, so the road remained clear for their return. Everyone involved was happy about the party, for Frobisher and her citizens are very important to Canada.