

The end of the world in 2012?

Countless articles have been written about the end of the world happening late in the year of 2012. Time will tell. The world has never come as close as it did to nuclear war than during The Cold War on a historic day in 1962.

The Fort Frances area has a footnote in the pages of that War.

It stands at the Sorting Gap Marina in Fort Frances, Ont., waiting for tourists and residences to climb its newly painted stairs and sporting a great facelift. Commonly known as the Fort Frances Lookout Tower, it has a history almost as long as the Cold War itself.

The tower was constructed at Pal Lake, near Atikokan, Ont., and made to serve as an early radar detection system of defense during the War.

According to an article dated 1949 entitled Radar Defense Bill approved by Senators, it stated that the U.S. Air Force spent a total \$161 million in co-operation with Canada in erecting a network of radar stations around the North American continent.

Canadian and American governments were a target for foreign invaders in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A series of towers at The Pine Tree Line would help detect these invaders. In the early 1950s a Continental Early Warning System were agreed upon by both governments.

There were three different lines of air defense constructed in Canada during the Cold War. It is the Tree Line (Lat 50 N) that is known to our region. The Line was the first to become operational, during the 1952 to 1953 years and it was centered on the 50th parallel with a section covering southern Ontario, and another extension covering the Labrador coast going as far north as Frobisher Bay.

The Line was composed of 44 long-range radar stations, and six United States Air Force manned Gap Filler radar stations. Some of these locations had a very short operational life while others remained operational for more than 35 years.

Following a 1952 study that showed the vulnerability of the US and Canada to air attack, it was determined that the existing Line could not provide the six hour warning needed to launch air defensive forces. Recommendation was to develop the DEW Line to supple-

ment the existing Line, and the planned Mid-Canada Line.

The Basic Pine Tree System was comprised of 33 prime radars and six gap-filler radars. It stretched from Newfoundland to Vancouver Island in three main sub-divisions: Newfoundland and Labrador (64th Air Division, Newfoundland) Eastern Canada (extending west to Beausejour, Man.), and Western Canada (extending from western Alberta to the Pacific Coast). In the region Priority #3 sites were established at Armstrong and Sioux Lookout.

The Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) gap-filler program was initiated in 1959 to provide coverage of areas not scanned by long-range Line radar sites. These unmanned sites were to consist of two buildings and a single radar tower, often no more than 70 feet in height. Detail which has been obtained to date indicates that the RCAF gap-filler sites were to have made use of the FPS-18 radar equipment.

The RCAF gap-filler program was deferred for a year in August 1962 and the entire program was eventually cancelled in January 1964 when the Canadian government cut the budget for the RCAF. It is assumed that all of the gap-filler sites, both those completed and those that were still under construction, were eventually dismantled.

The RCAF gap-filler program was initiated in October 1959 and cancelled in January 1964. Although construction

was 95 per cent complete, the project was cancelled before any of the filler sites became operational. In 1964 the Tower at Atikokan was sold to Province of Ontario, care of the District Forester, Dept. of Lands & Forests, Fort Frances, Ont. The Tower may have experienced a short life as a fire lookout tower.

The Tower also served a role with the Ministry of Transportation, providing non directional beacons for aviation for commercial and military purposes. The Northern Electric Company was contracted to install and maintain radio equipment but with a nearby tower at the Caland Ore site- the Pal Lake Tower was decommissioned.

In 1972, the Tower was relocated to Fort Frances by the industrial commissioner at that time- J.W. Towse who paid a \$1 moose hide cheque for the tourist attraction. Until 2002, the site was open in the vicinity of Pither's Point Park at the foot of the Ranier Rapids where the Rainy Lake empties into the Rainy River.

In 2009, the Tower was relocated to the site at the Sorting Gap Marina on the Rainy River as part of the Fort Frances Heritage Tourism project.

The Fort Frances Lookout Tower may not have aided in catching foreign invaders but it does have a lot of historic value and a place in Canadian history.

by Ron Wolf,
Free Lance Writer



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