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TORONTO, ONTARIO
MSR 1P8

Nov 15/77

Dear Thomas Raddall:

Your 1976 Memoir In My Time got me looking up my letters from Jim Hood. Enclosed are copies from two of them, the second one written since I last wrote you. Hood died a few years ago, leaving a son in California, and probably other relatives. You, who never met him, would know more about him and would appreciate his letters even more than I. Somewhere in your writings is a description of the men attracted to and developed by the on-the-spot responsibilities of those isolated wireless posts. To me, your description seemed to be of Hood himself.

Hood's letters bring back much of him, especially his intimacy with machinery, as was Kilmer's tree intimate with rain.

And Sable Island, under the conditions we knew, must have been intimate with mutinies. Hood mentions another, and there were at least two while I was there.

That cold winter of 1919-20 mentioned on p 79 of your Memoir, is mentioned by Hood as part of his new problems with the new VCT station.

For the summer of 1920, till September 15th, I was back in Nova Scotia on VDT, i.e. C.G.S. Acadia of the Canadian Hydrographic Survey, whose coastal area that summer was mainly eastward from Isaac's Harbour. One day I heard Jim Hood, probably using VCT's plain-aerial set, asking CQ for news of vacant berths, as he was leaving the Marconi Company. I chipped in to say that VDT might be vacant from September 16th. Hood's acknowledgement ended with W0.

This was an emergency: for me it was too soon after our last unhappy months. Instantly there leapt to mind, and I dash-dotted, the name of our 1917-18 Men's House cook, a pleasant chap whose ambition had been to go ashore and learn W/T, which ambition, Hood had predicted, would fail. I'd like to think that Billy-Alf made it.

At Marina in The Nymph and the Lamp there is mentioned a note of lurking mischief, the need for something to do. In particular I'd found at such places a hunger for hilarity, for something to laugh at. Harry Lauder reached us only through a few gramophone records. As yet there was no radio with Eddie Cantor or Jack Benny.

Someone would tell, say, the story of the French-Canadian operator, startled at finding, still wriggling, the "dead" mouse he'd been holding by the tail. "Me feex!", he cried, rushing to lower its head into the spark gap of the emergency coil -- himself thus in line for some of its hundred thousand volts.

Or the story of Captain Farquhar, himself born on Sable Island and his ship called the Sable I., returning late in 1914 from months of seal hunting. Forgetting any wartime instructions that might have reached him, he didn't wait till dawn but entered Halifax Harbour by calm moonlight. Suddenly, at George's Island there loomed an anti-submarine net. Too late for anything else, the Sable I., with its icebreaker sloping bow, slid gently over, and dropped anchor further on, near Niobe. In the morning came a signal from N.I.D.: "When did you come in?" "Last night"
"Did you break the gate?" "What gate?"

One day at VCT it seemed "a good idea at the time" while there was some of last week's bread, to hide my new batch of loaves. So it seemed a good idea to the others to ransack the station, overlooking, however, the sudden abundance of cotton waste in the engine room bin. I mightn't have been so successful, though, if Hood had been among the searchers. He, by the way, was extra tall. Anything hidden by him was apt to be somewhere near the rafters.

As such interests ran out there'd be, say, criticism of The Powers That Be. Mr. Stupid, in Toronto, for sending us the wrong weather. Mr. Harvey, in Dartmouth, for purposely delaying our mail. The new-west-light contractor who, for concrete footings, sent out bags and bags of cement and bags and bags of sand. To consider such people's point of view would have been kinder but less hilarious. To credit the contractor for preferring sharp sand to Sable Island's rounded granules -- had we realized the difference -- would have made more sense but less fun.

It is one thing to be ridiculing someone a hundred miles away, but something else when the search for fun finds a victim right on the island -- already on the island and not in need of further isolation. To newcomers, this could be a situation never before encountered; its implications not immediately perceived, nor when perceived readily counteracted.

The conspiracies of April fool's day normally await April, and then end quickly, that same day. But not with us. Ideally they end with the victim being dubbed a good sport and the perpetrators forgiven. Ours, when eventually they were stopped, ended in bitterness. Lasting bitterness.

Though I enjoyed Sable Island, it was this that marred my last days there. Many of us were from sheltered homes and some of us with still much to learn. To others this could have been amusing, but to Hood perhaps at times insufferable. While the youngest of us were still in kindergarten he'd have left school early to go jiggling for cod in the cold and fog of Newfoundland. Lacking our opportunities, he had made it anyway.

And for Hood, that winter of 1917-18 would have been especially hard, without his wife (in or out of hospital ashore) and without her cooking.

Hood was always resourceful. Normally he was stimulating company. And in emergencies he was magnificent. We hoisted him up the mast one day -- he insisted on going up himself, first giving us, the ground crew, clear and specific instructions. Correctly he'd predicted that we'd be able to hear him better than he us. (Or the opposite, I forget which). On reaching the ground again he calmly described the condition of the shackle from which the hoisting pulley, some 160 feet aloft, was slung. He'd found it almost parted, but somehow had managed to secure things some other way.

At almost every outpost there would be an autoharp, bought from Eaton's catalogue for \$5 or less. Hood introduced me to the autoharp, which I've since developed to play many chords, even the french sixth in Shenandoah. I've not yet found the opening of a tune whose second half he knew:

CHORDS C7 F (D-7) G E7 C

I think I'll remember Jim Hood best by that.

Your 1976 Memoir, page 67, line 6. Our VCT Fairbanks-Morse engine had one vertical cylinder, I think with make-and-break ignition. The piston was driven down by the explosion. Its up-stroke exhausted the gases. The down-stroke drew in a fresh charge. The up-stroke compressed this, for the next explosion. The direct-current dynamo was used only for charging the emergency-set (plain aerial) batteries. For engine transmission there was an alternator plus the smaller exciter. One hand placed at the cylinder-top valve prevented compression and made it easy to get the fly-wheels spinning. Then that hand was shifted briefly to a nearby pipe, to obstruct its intake of air, thus enriching the charge. (Briefly; in case of backfire). Very easy, and with Hood's maintenance very reliable.

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Also re page 67. The VCT OIC is aptly described as a veteran. Yet he was only 32 years of age! His August '19 staff wouldn't have been there earlier than the December '18 boat unless as Navy personnel.

Underneath our VCT station was a cistern for rainwater. We seemed to thrive on it. Such cisterns must have been the only water supply for many bleak capes and islands. At Jeddore Rock lighthouse, 22 miles east of Halifax, there were moveable fins, to divert the first flow of rainfall until the salt had been washed off the roof. I don't know whether our VCT cistern was accessible for cleanout. I wonder which supply was worse -- ours which could have contained drowned rats, or yours seepage.

If Rockhead is a shoal near Camperdown(p115) then it must have been Letitia's SOS I heard and relayed at VCT, having no idea that Letitia would be blasting into Camperdown's headphones. What I heard and relayed was ROCKHCAA: (a hurried scrawl from the bridge?)

At Sable Island I had heard about depth charges, and on one of our patrol boats saw a sort of garbage can slung over the stern. "Yes", they said, "It's a depth charge. No, we don't practice with it. That depth charge is designed for a forty-knot destroyer. Our top speed is eleven knots. We only drop that once".

And on the Acadia I was told of the passenger ship, leaving St. John's as normally by evening, and running southerly so-many propellor revolutions before rounding Cape Race for Halifax. But in port this time the propellor-pitch had been changed. Cape Race had not been rounded. It was said there were no survivors that dark night. The word echo was not in the vocabulary of the French-Canadian Mate who told me this. The coast there, he intimated, has cliffs. You should blow the whistle and the whistle come back to you. If the whistle come back too soon you veer off quick.

At North Sydney (p76) you learned of an operators' union. At about that time I attended at Toronto something that was probably an organization meeting. The talk was entirely of forcing the Marconio Company to ... etc. Any suggestion that the Company might be having its own difficulties would have been howled down. I didn't like it.

Page 263. To me, Nero, My Dog, Has Fleas suffers chiefly from its Lowell Mason tune, especially as there is already repetition in the text. In 1912, more people would have known something of the success story to which it alludes. But the Titanic's bandmaster would hardly be hesitating. Nero likely was the handiest score or the most recently rehearsed. ... Nearby, in some hymnals, is a very different, Irish, tune to Be Thou My Vision.

Page 332, middle paragraph. If God Be With You has become an Anglican hymn it would be through rescue from its earlier tune.

Your Canadian editions seem to be distinctive, as in the spelling of Harbour. Yet, in Chapter 30 of The Nymph and the Lamp, there is repeatedly a Reverend Palliser. I'm sure there was a time, at least in Ontario, when this form was not Canadian. And I'm told that the invasion has not yet reached the guidebook in use by Canadian Press.

It was Rushbrook, once your instructor, who installed the small set at Jeddore Rock, using as ground a second aerial: a network of wires spread over the rocks. All my attempts to extend this by wires tied to rocks flung into the ocean were flung out again, minus the rocks, by the next surf. His ability was outstanding, but you were more fortunate than I in enjoying him.

On the other hand, some of my Toronto friends enjoyed their visits from Charles G. D. Roberts: With them he was modest and his conduct exemplary. In the second-hand shops I've been finding more of his descriptions of the New Brunswick woods. One gets the impression that he knew them. You may know whether he really divined, before it was confirmed, the winter habitat of the Restigouche salmon: Greenland.

Page 357. I bless Vincent Massey and his wife and forbears every time I take a tray in that high-vaulted dining hall at Hart House. He must have put much of himself into Hart House as into other things.

Page 306. I'm pretty sure that at some time in my youth I was introduced to Miss Marshall Saunders, who was visiting someone and had brought her parrot with her.

For me it is a novel experience to be aware of writing something that could by mischance reach a set of archives. Thus in places I've been silent and have attempted in others to be circumspect. Perhaps it's just as well.

Generally, throughout your Memoir, I find many places to be gone back to, where much has been said and in just the right few words.

I marvel at the attributes of a writer. In the old days a writer would learn more about Sable Island during the few hours of boat day than I learned there in eleven months. But you were the one who managed to capture the very different feeling of life there during the long waits between boats. Your descendants will be fortunate in having what you have written. And in describing Sable Island you have done it for my descendants too.

With thanks and all good wishes. Sid White tells me that you've been held up with cataract operations. I hope you are soon writing again if that is what you want to do. Matthew Carney's creator should not be having even temporary eye trouble.

R O Allen

T.H.R.

Afterthoughts. Of the early coast stations, few were actually manned by the navy in 1914-18. VCH VCO VCT VCS and VCU are all that I remember. The others remained Marconi-manned, and for naval purposes had special call signs -- available for our patrol boats. At VCH (Pointe Riche, Nfld.) our letters on that circuit were, I think, LCS, but for most naval purposes NV. As NV we relayed our messages to NR (North Sydney). Only as NV did we use naval procedure. Perhaps some ships knew us only as VCH or LCS.

At Rointe Riche I doubt if there was as much as a two-inch depth of soil anywhere within a quarter-mile of the station. The mast halliards were cleated to a large gravel-filled wooden box. You can imagine our feelings when in 1918 we got orders to bury all our code books outside, especially at night. The best hidy-hole I could think of was to put a false bottom in that weather-beaten box.

By the time I went back there in 1918 I'd had about eighteen months of Hood's good training. I wonder what went wrong with him in 1919. Since typing the earlier pages I've learned that none of his August/19 staff would have reached VCT before the 1918 armistice. Perhaps his marriage was already falling apart. As things turned out it seems that the Marconi Company got a lot of work out of him after the fire. Possibly they then lacked someone to replace him, and bided their time.

Hood at his worst was a corrosive influence such as I've never encountered before or since. Lurking mischief? You said it! Yes, it was Hood who caught that bucket of water. (I wonder if Jack Gregoire was still at East Light in 1922).

The earlier pages begin with a compromise: after rejecting Dear Mr., then Dear Dr.

R.P.R.

15 Nov 77

Have had a very stormy and miserable winter so far will be glad when it's about over. hope to be up around your country when the sun starts shine again. Do take it easy and you will live longer Eh?
Shall ring off for now

Jim

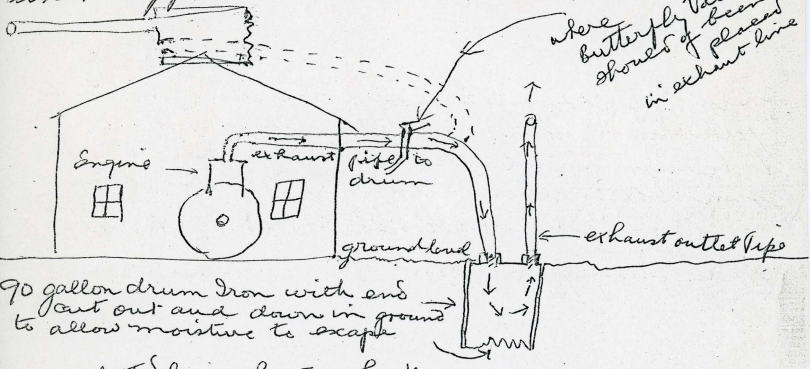
EXCERPT BELGINS HERE: FROM JIM HOOD'S CHICAGO LETTER TO ROA OF JAN 11/52

together with history because that pile of sand contain numerous ^{stories} of sea and ships. Raddall's remarks about the pump, i.e. bi pump etc. on log. well to begin with I had to install all the plumbing and fixtures and finish hundreds of unfinished jobs including painting outside & inside staining & varnishing carpenter work of all kinds. and finally I had to get water for the stations use the main water got useless. now the reason for the station to be left in this unfinished condition was the fact that the construction crew came during the winter months to build the stn. and we had a very severe winter thus the crew ran out of food etc. before the stn was finished. and refused to work and they all jumped the first boat that came and left ~~the~~ the 3 operators & myself to finish the job. So the water was the most important. I drove a two inch Sandpoint down

until it went below the sea level and attached
 the two way suction pump gush & pull action to
 the sand point and up came nice cool clear
 water "fresh". The salt water filtering thru
 the sand becomes fresh. and there was
 always plenty. The pump forced the water
 up into the five hundred gallon tank in
 the attic and the overflow came down
 into the engine cooling tank. that's when
 the operator knew the attic tank was full
 when the overflow ~~came~~ would start to
 empty into the cooling tank. when I
 installed the pump it took about ten minutes
 twice a day to furnish plenty of water. I was
 going to attach the pump to the engine with
 a cutting in & out arrangement. But when
 I decided to leave VCT I didn't bother. &
 the pump ^{went} ~~was~~ on the bum after I left
 and ^{was out} ~~was out~~ cooled or would fix it so that's why
 it took so long to pump sufficient water.

Well I know Dick you must be getting tired
 reading this epistle. But I must tell you
 "this" one The new str building was
 twice as large as the old one. and all the
 bed rooms were on the same side of the
 building that the engine room was. And
 the engine came out without any muffler
 and during the summer when all the
 bed room windows were open it was
 almost impossible to sleep owing to the

4
 noise from the engine's exhaust pipe. The muffling job I was perfect not at sound but I forgot to make it fool proof and having one sleepy goofy operator here's what happened



----- dotted line shows what happened when opr kept on and on turning engine over without stopping to examine. or to carry out instruction when starting engine. - REASON FOR WRECK - everytime the engine turn over without firing it just pumped in and compressed a complete mixture of gas & air after a dozen or so revolutions without firing. Why the Engine just pumped the exhaust pipe & drum full of the undischarged rich mixtures and the operator keeps turning the engine over she finally does catch and with one explosion it ignites the whole mixture in exhaust pipes and drum and away sails the muffler and all on top of the str roof. about 3 A.M. The operator named [redacted] half asleep in the early morning forgot to remember. But nevertheless I should of made it more fool proof. by putting a butterfly valve in the exhaust pipe between drum & building operated by the gasoline starting and running valve on engine. Read you remember the button like valve about this size

Controls for butterfly valve could of been attached on this gasoline valve

nos - 1. for running, no [] for starting

over) [unclear]

JAN

Chicago - 11 - 52 -

Hello Dick:-

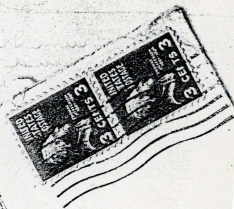
Received your CBStims and many thanks for same. I don't just remember when I wrote you last. I am certain tho it was early last year because my wife & I just about finished our ~~plans~~ plans for a two or three months trip which included East & West Canada and around USA. I have relatives in British Columbia and my wife in western parts of US. And it was just about a week before we had decided to leave when "bang" my wife was taken very ill. had to be rushed to hospital and remained there for eight weeks. Suffering from high blood pressure late change of life and very ^{bad} case of nervousness. & thus the results leaving her both physically & mentally not to good. This happened in June and she is still under the Dr's care. But I am almost sure she is going to come out of it very good. and I trust we shall be able to make our trip this coming season. Some sponsor put the nymph and the Lamp on Television here few weeks ago it was very good I have often wished that I had ~~not~~ contacted Raddell before he wrote the book I could of told him some very interesting facts about VET and

And myself. because I have heard from several of the old masoni operators and they are of the same opinion as myself that Raddall wrote the story around Evelyn and myself. He twisted it up so much that certain parts of the book is not very interesting to the average folk not familiar with life on Sable Island how it is and how it ought to be. It could of made a dam good story if he had obtained more facts and together with history because that pile of sand contain numerous ^{stories} of sea and ships. Raddall's remarks about the pump. i.e. bi pump etc. on log. well to begin with I had to install all the plumbing and fixtures and finish hundreds of unfinished jobs including painting outside & inside staining & varnishing Carpenter work of all kinds. and finally I had to get water for the stations use the rain water got useless. now the reason for the station to be left in this unfinished condition was the fact that the construction crew. came during the winter months to build the Stn. and we had a very severe winter thus the crew ran out of food etc. before the Stn was finished. and refused to work and they all jumped the first boat that came and left ~~the~~ the 3 operators & myself to finish the job. So the water was the most important. I drove a two inch Sandpoint down

Wk 3, 4 interview (you) already have these

Had a very stormy and miserable winter so
will be glad when it's about over - hope
to be up around your country when the
starts shine again. So take it easy
and you will live longer etc?
Shall ring off for now

Jim



CHICAGO
JAN 12
7:18 PM
1952
ILL.

AFTER FIVE DAYS RETURN TO

James A. Hood
3253 W. Palmer St
Chicago - 47 Ill

Mr R. O. Allen
221 Davisville Avenue
Toronto - 12 - Ontario
Canada -

= *dm*

221 Davisville Avenue,
Toronto 12, Ontario,
January 21, 1951.

Dear Mr. Raddall,

There must be many, like myself, who are grateful to you for bringing back so vividly, in your recent novel, memories of their own experiences while stationed on Sable Island.

Your wireless station there, differently laid out, seems to have been built on the foundations of ours. A southern extension was added to ours while I was there; probably it was all burned down. The sandpoint, or well, came just after I left; our supply was the cistern, supplemented in winter from a pond that formed nearby to the south, and conserved in summer drought by washing our clothing at left-hand pond (to the east).

Nor would we have been allowed to leave the phones long enough for pumping, although we did take time off to copy the Arlington or Cape Cod "press" - which the superintendent, next day, would broadcast by phone to all stations on the island, afterwards sending the copy to be read at the Men's House.

Our spark was, I think, in the office ... We did have linoleum, which the highest winds would lift right up off the floor; perhaps your station was better built.... We cooked with smoky bunker coal, which didn't seem to bother your heroine... None of your characters, I noticed, seemed ever to run out of cigarettes.. For days at a time, I remember, a ring of fog would cut off all view and would mildew our sunday clothes.

To me, the pond region to the east was even more of a paradise than you made of it - particularly the swimming there, the berry-picking, and the easterly view from that high hill where the road again joins the lake beach on its way to Number Three.

The only Number Two Station I remember was about four miles east of the wireless station. It had been abandoned not many years before. A longer-abandoned building, I think further east, we knew as the schoolhouse.

On the north beach, I think opposite Number Two, was the (1903) wreck of the Skidby - most of her side plates had been stripped for salvage.

The north beach, when I arrived, was strewn with barrels, from which some of my predecessors had constructed a barrel-boat. Later came slabs of paraffin which we cut into bits to kindle the stove..... The winter I was there there was lots of skating on the lake and on a northerly pond towards main station...Our pony-riding was mostly got in fetching the main station cows. The return trip to East Light was considered too far for a pony in one day, but we walked it more than once, although I never got beyond East Light to see the Refuge Hut... Very curious about us were the seals which, swimming perhaps fifty yards out from the beach, would follow us for miles along the beach....Walking, through the sand, was a technique that had to be learned - and unlearned on again returning to city pavements.

At Main Station I also remember an autoharp, and the ox team, but no skull collection. A new West Light was built the winter I was there (May, 1917, to April, 1918).

I have kept pretty well in touch with the family of Captain Blakeney who was Superintendent there. Dead, I hear are the cook Billy-Alf Gill, Will Cleary and old Johnny Booth. I still have photos of the families of East Lightkeeper Jack Gregoire, Jim Ritcey (#4), and Walter Blank (#3). I wonder what happened to them.

In charge of the Wireless Station was Jim Hood. Also with us was Frank Penney, afterwards of Louisburg, who died recently in Montreal. The rest of us left the wireless service after the war.

Lieut. R. V. Ridges, Halifax Fleet Wireless Officer during my service, though probably English, wore no monocle and was a prince of a fellow, universally popular... Rather unpopular was our supply-ship captain, and yet much like the character you made so likeable... Striking, too, was your mention of activities whose only justification was that they were "something to do". →

Horseplay, among many Sable Islanders, seemed to be a necessary resource. Leaving the Men's house one day, I remember being quietly warned to precede another member of our party and not to linger outside the door - so that he might get the full benefit of the bucket of water they had ready to throw at him as he departed.

Especially in August and September I loved Sable Island, and hope later on to find some way of seeing it again.

Yours sincerely,

R. O. Allen

Yes, I have many recollections of Jim Hood, whom I first met at VCH (Point Riche, Nfld) in 1916 just after his marriage to Evelyn Blakeney. They returned to Sable Island that winter, taking with them a motor boat (which proved a disappointment on the lagoon) and a collie pup appropriately named Robin. Hood - a born mechanic who always kept the engine eating out of your hand - got the sandpoint idea from the 1917 construction gang who successfully used it at West Light. If he had had to do the pumping himself he soon would have had the engine hitched up to do it for him. = colm

Hood was very tall, and he had an active mind. Keen of hearing, he could copy almost any signals on the air. On one occasion, though, he was less successful technically. Dismantling the transmitting condensers one day, to strain the dead flies etc, out of the oil, we failed to replace the plates exactly as they had been - because, unfortunately for us, their arrangement had not been strictly alternate. Thereafter VCT's power set sounded as loud to us but not to the boss at CAMPERDOWN.

From Chicago, Hood, now 64, writes that in 1920, unable to get a U.S. ~~license~~ operator's licence without American citizenship, he got into monotype printing where he soon became foreman but had to quit through occupational lead poisoning. Taking up electrical and maintenance work he remarried in 1930. They are now owners of an apartment building which is their comfortable home and livelihood.

Hood lost all his Sable Island photos in the fire; I'll see if I can get him duplicates of some of mine. ... Figuring that the mainland would be too much of a change for his tan-and-white collie, Robin, he left him on the island. Possibly Robin was there in your time.

I have many recollections, too, of Superintendent Blakeney, whose most memorable seafaring days had been as Captain of a ship which sailed to the far north to meet a returning Peary expedition. He and his family were most hospitable. In my time, as probably in yours too, one of the Superintendent's many duties was to record the weather observations and send them in code twice daily to R.F.S., Toronto (R.F.S. standing for weather bureau chief R. F. (afterwards Sir Frederick) Stupart). With part of his mind Blakeney thought that a remote landlubber like "Mr. Stupid" had no business telling seasoned on-the-spot observers like himself what their weather was going to be.

Faced, that winter, with a strike of his main station hands who had run out of tobacco and were smoking up the tea, Blakeney had the readings taken by a substitute who recorded them well enough but, as events turned out, coded them wrong. After some days of this you can imagine his feelings when "R.F.S., Toronto" wired him: "Your barometer readings have been wrong for several days past."

Blakeney died only about four years ago at the age of 87. A daughter, Mrs. Peter Stewart, here, tells me that before taking the Sable Island post Blakeney had consulted the well known Captain Farquhar (himself born on Sable Island) whose response was to this effect: "Joe, she's the best ship on the Atlantic. You take her".

At VCT one beautiful December morning while I was wearing the phones, Hood came into the office from outside, having heard a strange rumbling sound. The ether was exceptionally clear. By telephone we learned that the construction crew at West Light had heard it too. Not for several hours did we learn of the Halifax explosion.

That night, through very bad static, I copied, - in sections and after many repetitions - a ^{code} coded message from North Sydney and relayed it with greater difficulty - not to VCS whose landlines were down - but direct to the *Niobe*.

By the time all this commotion was over and the engine shut off, VCT's entire staff, long accustomed to wartime's watchful silence, was thoroughly aroused and eager to decode the message - which turned out to be the King's condolences to the people of Halifax. ... Emerson who copied it on the Niobe (although his aerial was half down) told me later that at that time he didn't yet know what had happened to his family uptown.

That night was the very bad storm in which C.G.S. Simcoe, sailing somewhere east of P.E.I., was never again heard from. Weeks later a lifebuoy of hers was washed up on the north beach, possibly all of her that was ever found.

Yes, I well recall the vivacious chirp of VCE, not, somehow, while at VCT but as first I heard it in 1916, breaking clear across Newfoundland to cheer the lonely night watches at VCH. In 1916 there were still plenty of neutrals, including U.S. ships, to keep VCE busy. Later, at VGT, there was the mysterious, foreboding quaver of British Admiralty BZR, Bermuda, echoed by the fainter BZQ, Jamaica, urgently addressing all British Merchant Vessels: "ABMY ABMY Government War Warning begins no warning issued ends AR".

Your VCT lore includes perhaps a 1932 Canadian Geographic article by my schoolmate, Dave Rosebrough (VCT 1916-17, VCU, D.F.Stations). Dave, in his spare time, is now a highly honored member of the American Association of Variable Star Observers.

I know one should not look for "photography" in works of art, but the scene of one of your short stories (in which the wife sets fire to the station) sounds like Belle Isle, despite the difference in the island's size. If so, you'd be interested to know that having been at VCH again the summer and fall of 1918, I well remember the slaphappy sending of at least one VCH operator whose code messages were almost impossible to copy although he sounded like an old hand. He, we decided, must have been there "too long".

For me, you see, you have brought back many acquaintances, and stirred up many recollections which this letter has given me a welcome incentive to jot down. You, by now, are probably delving instead into the perhaps very different background of your next book. With best wishes for you and it,

Sincerely yours,

R O Allen

1-30-51

Chicago Ill.

Well. Hello Dick

Was somewhat surprized on receiving your letter. very often when I get reminising through my Seven years at Adale Island I have wondered where and how all you fellows are. How did you ever get my address? Evelyn has a sister Ivy. who was married to a wireless op. named Stewart. stationed at Sarnia. but they seperated and she went to Toronto and I am almost sure she is still there. Evelyn + Coan is in Michigan Grand Rapids. After the war I went back with the Marconi Wireless Co & after little more then a year they wanted to transfer me to Cape Ray Nfld. so I decided I had enough of their isolation place & resigned. Went up to Boston Mass to get a American certificate & found out that I had to be an

2

American Citizen b4 I could obtain
a Certificate. So I took up a branch
of the printing business, namely the
Mono-type. Very much like a
line-type machine, only much more
complicated. and I did remarkable
well. within two years I became a
foreman. but the metal being
lead antimony & tin. 90. percent
lead I developed lead poison.
the mono-type machine being so slow &
me so tall I therefore inhaled too much
of the fumes. So I did electric wiring for
several years and maintenance.
then in 1930 I got married again
to a charming & intelligent woman
with good business ability and
together we accumulated enough
to purchase a apartment building
which we are ^{now} living quite comfortable
on its returns.

Say what's that fellow's name besides
Steve & you. he was the son of some
Professor. also who was that Bully
at St. Riche - besides Wood + Campbell &

Yes I will remember that old lady
Cook we had she existed on 3 or 4
Cup of tea a day. and I haven't
read that book about the Island
the nymph & the hawk. hope I can get it.
Here I believe the Govt erected
some Radar or Directional finding
station on the Island during the last
war. because I read were a plane
collided with one of the towers or
masts & caused a big smosh up.

Yes I still play the harp but
I cannot keep it tuned or tune it.
glad hear you got married & ~~got~~^{have}
such a nice family. remember
the Collie dog Robin well I left him
on the Island. thought the mainland
would be too much of a change for
him. Both Enylrs father & mother
are dead. ~~the~~ two of the boys
are in California & Muriel & Clyde
are in B.C.

I got quite a crack up about month
ago. while getting out of the
bath tub I fell back in

and across breaking two ribs
 & getting somewhat dried up.
 I am ^{now} over 64. Time as surely
 gone by. Eh. Say what do you
 think about this damn mess
 we are in now? Guess we would
 of been much better off if let
 Hitler take Moscow. I don't
 think he would of ever bothered
 us, because we were too strong
 then. Say Dick does this book
 about VET have any photos?
 lost all of mine in the fire if you
 have any to spare please send
 me some.

Well guess I shall sign off
 for now, remember me to any
 of the boys you may contact
 I am still wondering how
 you got my call letters here.!

So hit us
 Sincerely yrs
 Jim

November 23, 1977

Mr. R.O. Allen,
68 Belmont Street,
Toronto, Ontario.

Dear Mr. Allen:

Thank you for another interesting letter, for the Xerox copies of our 1951 correspondence, and of Hood's letters.

You are right in your belief that I modeled "Matt Carney" on Jim Hood. As I pointed out in my memoir without naming him, I subtracted from and added to the actual man in order to shape him for my tale. So it was with the real people whom I called "Isabel" and "Skane", who in actual life never met each other and never set foot on Sable Island. The accidental shooting of a chief operator's wife, and the problems of keeping her alive and then getting her away to a ship, occurred on a Labrador station after I left the service. I learned about it from an operator who was present at the time, and when I wrote *The Nymph* and *The Lamp* the incident fell into place on "Marina Island".

When I was at VCT I heard one of the lifeboatmen yarning about the burning of the wireless station in 1919. According to him, someone at Main Station noticed the glare and all hands grabbed buckets and hurried to the scene. They found the wireless shack well alight, and the operators drawing gasoline from a drum on the nearby dune and running down and hurling it on what remained of the station. Excepting Hood, who stood grim and aloof. The others were drunk and jubilant. This yarn may have been a snide invention (there was no love between the operators and most of the Main Station gang in my time) but I do know that some small drums or tins of alcohol, salvaged from the *Plataea* earlier that year, had been stashed away for local consumption by all hands on the island. They used it to fortify their home-brewed beer. The result must have been liquid dynamite.

Hood was well regarded by Arcon, and so they kept him on the payroll when they let the others go; but as he said to you in one of his letters, he soon quitted the Marconi service himself and went away to the States. From your letter to me I can see that you had mixed feelings about Hood (you mention "lasting bitterness") but that you found his virtues greater than his faults.

Jack Gre^og^oire was still in charge of East Light when I was there in 1921-22. Jim Horne kept West Light. Walter Blank had the patrol post at the east end of the salt lake or lagoon, and Reuben Naugle had the post between Blank's and East Light.

About Charles G.D. Roberts. There is plenty of testimony about his Jekyll-and-Hyde personality where attractive women were concerned. Some people saw only the poet, some the satyr, but many were able to see both. The strange thing is that until the age of 35 or so he seems to have been content with the simple life of a comfortably married professor in the rustic surroundings of Windsor, N.S. It was there that he wrote his best verse and established the reputation that made him the vates sacer of Canadian literature in his time. Then, suddenly, he flitted away to New York, and soon after that to Europe, where for thirty years he revelled in la vie Boheme.

Andrew and Tully Merkel, with whom he stayed nearly a whole winter after the prodigal's return to Canada, both described him as "utterly charming". Yet Tully confessed that she never dared to leave Roberts alone in the house with her maid. She took the maid with her. And Merkel himself observed that Roberts wrote best about animals and scenery because his view of humans was so shallow. The president of King's College in the 1920's used to refer to Roberts as "C.G.I.T. Roberts" -- an allusion to the teenage groups in church societies known officially as the Canadian Girls In Training.

In her (1943) biography Elsie Pomeroy saw only the poet, and her book was adulatory from start to finish. A very plain spinster, she not exposed to Charles's other side. His brother Theodore, who knew all about it, once went through Merkel's copy of the Pomeroy book, pencilling gleeful comments in the margins and adding episodes that Elsie missed. Merkel showed it to me afterwards in the house at 50 South Park Street. I wonder what became of it after Merkel's death. It would be priceless nowadays.

All that Roberts wrote after his sudden metamorphosis at 35 was a farrago of prose and verse, mostly rubbish except his nature tales. As a youth and in his twenties he had roamed the woods and streams of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and he was a good observer. Even so, I seem to recall a story of his about Grizzly bears in the Rockies, written at a time when he had never been west of Ontario, and had seen grizzlies nowhere but in the London Zoo.

Well, enough of that. I'm glad you have enjoyed my reminiscences. I've had several letters from old-time brasspounders in the Canadian sea and land service, and I had a phone call from Mike Walsh, whom I saw last on the beach at Sable Island in 1922. He is now retired at North Sydney.

Best wishes,

Sincerely,

R. O. ALLEN
68 BELMONT STREET,
TORONTO, ONTARIO
MSR 1P8

Dec 4/77

Dear Thomas Raddall:

It was a pleasure to get your reply and to speak with you by phone that evening. My friends especially will be interested about Charles G. D. It was astonishing to learn that your Matt Carney was based, of all people, on Jim Hood. This feat leaves me almost speechless and with material for reflection for the rest of my days.

Almost. Jim Hood a hero? There seems nothing heroic in persistently maligning someone on your staff. (Anyone would do, as long as the others were credulous). Or in no spirit of camaraderie hiding the cog-wheel of the ice-cream freezer. Or never letting on when the hens started laying again. Or the scrounging To all of us that winter Jim Hood was no hero. He was the villain. We consoled ourselves with parodies such as: James Allen Hood is a prize, and he can tell-so-many lies on us poor innocent guys -- I never could. If he would but name a day and jus' go trip-trip away on the S S Lady Laurier ~~would~~ sing hip-hip-hurray for Mr. Hood.

If only your subtracting could have been done then! Lasting bitterness? It lasted the rest of that winter, and two years later ~~was~~ still not ready to be identified when trying to help Hood find another berth. You found it a struggle to get acquainted with your characters. We were only too well acquainted, we thought, with Hood.

Yet, many a portrait is best "seen" from further back, Already you had the remoteness of never being stationed with Hood. To that distance you add some thirty years before starting to write about him. Some such span, I think, preceded the recognition of Dr. Robert Bethune. It seems to take some three hundred years to perceive a saint, which is done without consulting the people who had to put up with him.

As Hood was your model you should have (herewith) the commencement of his second letter -- in which you'll find no gratitude. It was not Hood's habit to lavish praise. On the contrary. Also, despite Hood's imaginative powers with machinery, he lacked, I should think, artistic sense. E.g. the question in his first letter about pictures (i.e.photos) in The Nymph & The Lamp.

But you are right. You can't spend sixteen months even with a villain without in time getting mixed feelings about him. Gradually the horns soften and disappear, leaving space for the halo.

And now will the real Jim Hood please stand up?

Page 364 of your Memoir indicates that what was printed is a condensation. Perhaps that is why pp 68-9 give the impression that you had supposed VCT's entire staff, OIC and all, to have departed in 1919. It was this that caused me laboriously to marshal items to the contrary, point by point, on the first page of my letter.

By the way, Orme, my middle name, commences with three dashes.

This letter is short, but yet again you have given me much to think about.

Regards
Dick Allen

You don't calculate these things. It's how you feel. And Hood was also an importunist: that, too, is a matter of inclination -- how much you want to get involved.

THR

So Tambour is Belle Isle! Again I recall the slappyhappy sending that came from there (VCM) in the summer or fall of 1918. Not inexperience but the hand of someone with perhaps too much experience, or isolation, or illness, or booze. VCM was one of the many coast stations that remained Marconi-manned during 1914-18. Except for VCE, those that I remember were still using the old fixed gap - which would arc when overheated and perhaps did not take kindly to overstressed dashes. The kind for which, Hood said, the correct spacing was the thickness of a fifty-cent piece, whereas for the ten-inch coil it was one inch. Letitia, I think, had a fixed gap.

Except, of course, for Nymph,

A Your wireless stories haven't yet shown up in the series The New Canadian Library. Recently Old Favorites Book Shop found me copies of A Muster and of Tambour. The latter \$7.50. Dora Hood's price was \$15.

R O R.

Dec 4/77

416 920 9744

R. O. ALLEN
68 BELMONT STREET
TORONTO ONT M5R 1P8

Dear Thomas Raddall:

On May 16th I'm taking a trip to California and the next day expect to see Evelyn, who as Mrs James Hood I last saw in April 1918 at Dable Island. I was leaving on the boat that brought her from a long winter on the mainland.

Evelyn was pleasant, warm-hearted, and with a good sense of fun. It shouldn't be hard to get her chatting. If you think of anything to ask her about do let me know.

Hope your vision/problems are clearing up and that life still looks good.

Regards

R O Allen

May 2/79

May 6, 1979

Dear Dick Allen:

How strange that you should be seeing Evelyn (nee Blakeney) in California around May 17, when about that time I shall be flying out to Sable Island for a look-see, 57 years after I left it, thus fulfilling the doggerel I wrote on my last graveyard watch there!

The Provincial Department of Mines has a small fixed-wing plane that flies out to VCT periodically for a check on the ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxx~~ sealed oil drill-holes made several years ago, and I have been invited to go along.

At my age, and with my arthritic hips, I won't be able to scramble over the dunes as I did when I was eighteen, but I hope to get a good look. The photo in my book, showing me with the other operators, also shows the butt of the mast, the only thing left after the fire in Hood's time, except the store shed. It had begun to rot deeply at the sand level, and the Marconi office in Halifax sent down some bags of cement and told us to dig out the rotten wood and then make a concrete form and build a cement block about six feet square around the mast butt. This we did. To make aggregate we broke up several pieces of the old machinery left by the fire, and mixed that in. When the cement was still wet, I took a stick and inscribed our names and the date.

I'm told the old station, abandoned long ago, is now buried to the eaves in sand. Somewhere under the sand is that cement block, probably too deep to uncover.

I heard much about the Blakeney's at VCT, and they were well liked and remembered. You ask for questions that Evelyn might answer. Well, I've always wondered:-

- (a) Has she any detail of the mutiny and the fire in 1919?
- (b) What caused the rift between her and Hood?(I realize that he was a difficult man to get along with.)
- (c) Where did the rift occur? ~~It~~presumably in the States after ~~xxxxxx~~ they left the island.)
- (d) When did she marry again, and where?

If she has a spare snapshot or snapshots of herself with Hood at VCT I'd depply appreciate one or more.

Ever since publication of The Nymph and The Lamp various Hollywood people have been taking options on the film rights. None of them were able to swing the financing. At the present time my lawyers are dealing with a film group who propose to do the outdoor shots on Sable Island. That's one reason why I want to have another look at the place myself.