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Interim Report:

RCMP Review of Allegations

Concerning Inuit Sled Dogs

Operational Policy Section  
National Contract Policing Branch  
Community, Contract and Aboriginal Policing Services



Royal Canadian Mounted Police  
Gendarmerie royale du Canada

Canada



## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	4
Methods & Procedures .....	6
Extensive Review of RCMP Records .....	6
Extensive Review of External Government Records .....	7
Internet Searches .....	9
Interviews of RCMP Members & Civilians .....	9
Literature Review Focused on the Media .....	10
Results .....	12
General Findings: .....	12
Key Findings: .....	14
Conclusion .....	23



## Executive Summary

The purpose of this interim report is to outline the research that has been conducted thus far concerning allegations that the RCMP is responsible for a mass culling of Inuit sled dogs in Nunavik and Nunavut between 1950 and 1970, which is alleged to have been carried out at the direction of the government, or on the RCMP's own initiative. An RCMP review team, with resources from RCMP National Aboriginal Policing Services and various experts in research methodology at RCMP National Headquarters, has been created to conduct a full and comprehensive review into these serious allegations.

The main goal of the RCMP review team has been to ensure all possible sources of information relevant to this matter are located and reviewed objectively to determine if there is any evidence of an organized and systematic mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic between 1950 and 1970. Other goals are to depict the most accurate chronology of events possible, to ensure that key people from northern communities are located and interviewed, and to consult with other federal departments that were active in the Eastern Arctic during this period. The review team has faced significant challenges in terms of unearthing details from 35 to 50 years ago. Often with the passage of time people's memories are affected and concrete evidence is minimal or no longer exists.

To date, an estimated 20,000 pages of historical documents from the RCMP and other government departments relevant to this matter have been obtained and reviewed by the team. Also, more than 40 persons (RCMP members and civilians who have lived and worked in the Eastern Arctic) have been interviewed and their statements have been documented. It is anticipated that over 200 people will be interviewed during the complete review process. An extensive media review and literature review of academic papers and books on this subject has been conducted as well. Collaboration with the Makivik Corporation and the Qikiqtani Inuit Association will be sought in the near future to review statements and to discuss the specifics of their complaints. The review team will be reaching out to other key federal government agencies and media resources to gain more insight into the Inuit way of life in the Eastern Arctic during the time period in question.

The RCMP review team is continuing its efforts to establish an accurate and complete historical record of this time period in the Eastern Arctic, which will be compiled into a comprehensive final report and will be forthcoming in May of 2006. More full-time resources will be dedicated to the review team to ensure the final report is complete, detailed and timely.

Presently, the review team has found evidence that Inuit sled dogs were destroyed in the past by members of the RCMP. However, the destruction was undertaken for public health and safety reasons because malnourished, disease-ridden dogs posed a threat to residents of the northern communities. The preliminary findings of the review team is that there is no evidence of an organized mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs by RCMP members in Nunavik and Nunavut between 1950 and 1970, which is alleged to have been carried out at the direction of the government, or on the RCMP's own initiative.

## Introduction

An RCMP review team has been created to conduct a comprehensive review of RCMP actions concerning Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic between 1950 and 1970. The team has been dedicated to this review since Spring 2005. This team is made up of resources from the RCMP National Aboriginal Policing Services and various experts in research methodology at RCMP National Headquarters, to ensure adherence to qualitative and quantitative research methodology standards. More research is necessary and is continuing. The review team will have a final report on this matter in May 2006.

RCMP research concerning the context of life for the Inuit and their sled dogs shows that the sled dogs fulfilled a key role in the Eastern Arctic, in terms of transportation, hunting, homing instincts in blizzard conditions, search and rescue, warmth and companionship, and even as a food source, when the harshest conditions prevailed. The health of the Inuit sled dog was often a concern in the Eastern Arctic because when their dogs were afflicted with canine distemper, canine hepatitis, rabies, and famine or, when the dogs were left to scavenge for themselves during the summer months, this had a serious effect on the livelihood of all of the people in the Northern communities. Inuit sled dogs also played a role in the Eastern Arctic which was spiritual in nature. Some Inuit sled dogs were known to have been sacrificed as proxies to ward off illness or approaching death for their human owners. It is clear, from the many documents

that the review team has examined, that the Inuit sled dogs were integral to the Inuit way of life half a century ago.

The geographic and socio-economic issues of Northern Quebec and Baffin Island in the 1950s to 1970s was also researched by the review team. The physical environment was often harsh and unforgiving, and at times presented enormous challenges to those who remained in these isolated regions from one generation to the next. An important consideration discovered by the review team, and one that will be explored in more depth for the final report, is the influence of socio-economic changes during this time period on the Inuit way of life. The Inuit people were facing inevitable socio-economic change resulting from the progress and effects of science and technology, and the increased numbers of non-Inuit influences in the Eastern Arctic. The introduction of the snowmobile, for example, had a considerable impact on the traditional way of life for the Inuit people. Added to these factors were epidemic outbreaks of canine distemper, rabies, hepatitis and widespread starvation of the dogs, as mentioned earlier.

## Methods & Procedures

This review has consisted of many challenging tasks and the review process is continuing. The following activities have taken place:

### Extensive Review of RCMP Records

The team has searched many existing RCMP documents for any material pertaining to the alleged mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic, and to date, there are no RCMP documents that support these serious allegations. The following is a list of RCMP internal records that have been reviewed:

- Conditions Amongst Eskimos — 15 documents with this title covering 15 North West Territories communities;
- Patrol Reports — five documents with this title covering four communities;
- Regulations re: Dogs – sleigh (1969);
- Care and Supervision of Eskimos;
- *Animal Contagious Diseases Act* (1953);
- Confidential Monthly Reports — 16 covering all years from 1950 to 1969 except 1952, 1964, 1966, 1967 as these reports are still being located;
- Internal Investigation — three volumes;
- Grise Fiord - Inuit Allegations — four volumes;

- Inuit Relocation Program - High Arctic Media Request — one volume;
- Human Rights Complaint against the Force re Inuit people — one volume;
- Internal Investigation - Allegations of RCMP Misconduct - Grise Fiord — two volumes.

## Extensive Review of External Government Records

The Government of Canada's legislative records provide an important insight into the framework within which its agencies, such as the RCMP, conducted their activities. The review team covered the following legislation and documents:

- *The RCMP Act* - outlined expectations of members in the performance of their duties.
- *The National Archives of Canada Act* - dictated which RCMP records were to be retained and which were to be destroyed.
- *The Privacy Act* - determined what information could be published concerning any cases of misconduct by RCMP members.
- Statutes, ordinances and by-laws applicable in the region - during the period in question there were ordinances that any dogs roaming free in a community were to be shot.
- *The Inquiry re Administration of Justice in the Hay River Area of the Northwest Territories* - a Royal Commission held in 1968 provided a general insight into the way the RCMP interacted with Aboriginal communities during this time period.
- *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* - 1991-1996, described events regarding the Inuit people, such as the relocation to the high Arctic. Destroying sled dogs was not a strategy used to force relocations of communities. This comprehensive report makes no reference to any deliberate, unwarranted destruction of Inuit sled dogs by the RCMP.



The RCMP has been accused of a cover-up because there are some past records that are no longer available. However, as stated earlier, the *National Archives of Canada Act* governed the disposition of RCMP records. The RCMP was required, in accordance with this Act, to purge certain occurrence files from northern detachments. This would have included dog complaints and specific incidents where dogs were destroyed. This purge of documents was a legislated, standard practice. It is important to note, however, that all policy records have been retained and have been reviewed by the team.

Many federal departments, whose mandates included northern issues, have been and are continuing to be consulted by the review team. They include: Agriculture Canada, Health Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), and what was then known as the Department of the Solicitor General, now Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (PSEPC). Some material has been provided by INAC, as well, and includes:

- recent documentation on the sled dog issue,
- the Makivik Report, e-mails, press clippings, web articles (including interviews with elders), letters, briefing notes, and,
- INAC files held at Library and Archives Canada (12 volumes).

The RCMP sent a request to the Sûreté du Québec for information on this issue pertaining to their jurisdiction during the relevant period. In northern Quebec, the RCMP gradually closed detachments between 1959 and 1961, and the Sûreté du Québec opened offices in Fort Chimo in 1961 and Poste-de-la-Baleine in 1963.

## Internet Searches

Through Internet searches the review team found a number of books, reports and academic papers that focused on the Inuit and their lifestyle, and also on Inuit sled dogs. These include:

- *The Inuit Dog: its Provenance, Environment and History*, Masters Thesis for a Masters in Philosophy in Polar Studies by Ian Kenneth MacRury, University of Cambridge, 1991
- *Tammarniit (Mistakes) Inuit Relocation in the Eastern High Arctic 1939-63*, by Frank James Tester and Peter Kulchyski, Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994

These books, which are external to the RCMP, will be reviewed and other books will be sought to provide an historical and a cultural overview of the Inuit way of life in the Eastern Arctic, and will be used as an RCMP reference tool regarding facts on Inuit sled dogs.

## Interviews of RCMP Members & Civilians

To ensure all details of the alleged events concerning the Inuit sled dogs are captured, the RCMP review team will be requesting copies of statements of Inuit elders. Much of this material rests with the Makivik Corporation, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and Qikiqtani Inuit Association. Researchers have accessed some Inuit statements as depicted in “Echo of the Last Howl”, a 50-minute video by the Makivik Corporation which dramatizes allegations of a mass slaughter with re-enacted scenarios interspersed with segments of recollections by Inuit elders. These were translated from the original Inukitut into English and heard as voice-overs in the video.

RCMP members who are now retired have come forward in heartening numbers to relate their experiences and recollections from their service in Canada’s Eastern Arctic. They do this with

some pride, knowing that the record shows careers dedicated to serving the communities in which they lived in a positive and supportive manner.

The review team, in conjunction with RCMP Northern division members, have identified and interviewed more than 40 retired regular members of various ranks, including several Inuit special constables, who had varying job functions while serving at Eastern Arctic posts in the 1950s to 1970s. Some of these members called or wrote to the review team before the team had a chance to find their contact information. The statements were taken in various manners including documented telephone discussions, audio-taped interviews, and written statements.

Witness statements were reviewed from the Royal Commission documents and no reports were found that referred to the alleged mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs by the RCMP.

## Literature Review Focused on the Media

The news media, especially media located in the Eastern Arctic, have been following the allegations concerning the Inuit sled dogs for several years now. Researchers have retrieved and reviewed articles from the following news sources thus far:

- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation News, Iqaluit
- Nunatsiaq News, Iqaluit
- Northern News Services
- Canadian Press Newswire / Presse Canadienne
- Montreal Gazette
- Ottawa Citizen
- Le Devoir

The review team analyzed more than two dozen media reports and the trends of that coverage clarified the media's approach. Further media reviews will be conducted by the RCMP review team to explore, in more depth, the French news media reports and those of the Inuit communities in the Eastern Arctic.

## Results

### General Findings:

#### **Destruction of Inuit Sled Dogs:**

- The systematic killing of 20,000 sled dogs would have required an equal number of rounds of ammunition. There are no records to account for shipments of RCMP ammunition in the necessary quantities to the Eastern Arctic to support a cull of that magnitude.
- The allegations of 20,000 sled dogs being systematically killed would have meant that an average of two teams of 10 sled dogs would have been destroyed every week for 20 years in a row.

#### **The RCMP and Sled Dogs:**

- RCMP members who worked in the Eastern Arctic, in the time period in question, owned and cared for sled dogs. They also cared for other sled dogs in their communities. More than 50 years have passed without any statements by any of them indicating that an systematic slaughter took place.

### **Inuit Sled Dogs:**

- Inuit sled dogs were not viewed as pets in the Eastern Arctic in the time period in question, they were working dogs. They were a primitive, aggressive animal that could, and did at times, pose a real danger to public safety - particularly when diseased or malnourished<sup>1</sup>. Inuit sled dog populations were very seriously and negatively impacted by disease epidemics.
  
- The strong jaws and teeth of the Canadian Inuit Dog (sled dog) allow for the crushing of bone and the tearing of flesh. They are very muscular and strong dogs. To properly feed a Canadian Inuit Dog requires as much meat and fish as an adult would consume. The dogs are able to go days without food, but when food is available they will gorge themselves, consuming prodigious quantities at record speeds. The Inuit sled dog diet was based on what was killed by the animal's master and consisted primarily of meat, skin, guts and bones. Each Inuit sled dog would have consumed a kilogram or more of meat, fish, blubber, bones, fish, etc., every day. Many Inuit owners fed their dogs every second day. The sled dogs were considered "high maintenance", requiring the owner to hunt constantly to keep the team properly fed. This could explain the Inuit attraction to snowmobiles when they first appeared, and, in some cases, their abandonment of dog teams.

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<sup>1</sup>Information was gathered from the following book: *The Canadian Inuit Dog: Canada's Heritage*. 2002 Second Edition, by Genevieve Montcombroux.



## Key Findings:

### **Inoculations:**

- The RCMP review team has discovered documentation in RCMP internal reports from the Eastern Arctic that the RCMP administered inoculations for sled dogs in the 1950s to 1970s. The canine vaccines that were administered were received from Agriculture Canada. Reports indicate that RCMP members inoculated their own sled dogs and they also inoculated the Inuit sled dogs in an attempt to preserve the dogs from decimation by disease. The review team will liaise with Agriculture Canada on this subject to review any documentation in their records concerning canine inoculations for the Eastern Arctic.

Lew Philip, a retired Inuit RCMP member who worked in Nunavut stated that during the 1950s and 1960s the RCMP flew into communities in the North to inoculate dogs with vaccine against rabies and distemper.

### **Donation of RCMP Sled Dogs to Inuit Families**

- It has been learned by the RCMP review team that in some instances, during the time period in question, the RCMP donated RCMP sled dog puppies to Inuit families whose dogs had been destroyed due to disease so that they could sustain their traditional lifestyle.

Anglican Bishop John Perry, who served in Nunavut from 1974 to 1990, says *“the police were fully members of the community, respected, trusted, and did a tremendous amount for the growth of northern life.... That is an experience that I can speak of from deep*

*conviction....There was a great loss of dogs by distemper in Pangnirtung which was a great tragedy. But I also have information that ...dogs were taken from police teams elsewhere and sent so that [the Inuit] could build up their teams in that particular part.”*

Calvin Alexander is a retired RCMP member who worked at several eastern Arctic postings from 1954 to 1976. When referring to one of the epidemic outbreaks of canine disease where hundreds of Inuit Sled Dogs died near Pangnirtung, Alexander says, “*The RCMP provided the Inuit with eight or ten of their own Siberian Husky puppies that had been reared at one of the two dog breeding stations run by the RCMP at Herschel Island and Fort Norman. In addition, a number of surplus RCMP dogs from Baker Lake and Eskimo Point (Arviat) were donated to the Pangnirtung Inuit.*”

**The Media:**

- Most newspaper articles and media reports are sympathetic to the Inuit concerns regarding the allegations concerning the Inuit sled dogs.



### Statements:

- Retired RCMP members and concerned citizens (nurses, teachers, clergy and Inuit), who lived in the Eastern Arctic in the time period in question, have come forward to provide statements recounting their recollection of events. Many feel the allegations are unfair to the RCMP based on what they recollect and based on what they have heard in media reports.

### Statements of Retired RCMP Members:

- The following two segments of statements, given by retired RCMP members who served in the Eastern Arctic, demonstrate how retired members of the RCMP recall their posts in the Eastern Arctic, specific to the allegations concerning the Inuit sled dog.

Retired Staff Sergeant Glen Warner, who had many postings in the Arctic between 1954 and 1979, speaks passionately about the relationship with the people of the north: *“It wasn’t ‘them’ and ‘us’. We curled together and square danced together and drove dogs together... it was all one community then and the RCMP were a close integral part of it...Whenever I go to back to places I’ve been stationed before...people still hug you and shake your hand and love you; it was that sort of relationship. To think that we murdered their dogs and did anything, anything that would make it tougher for them to live off the land or follow their lifestyle is just totally unrealistic.”*

Retired Superintendent Lauren McKiel, who also had many postings in the Arctic between 1959 and 1986, says *“I have never...in all my northern service...heard of any systematic shootings of sled dogs in any northern community by the police, RCMP or by-law officers...I spent many an hour in camp and in the settlements with the elders, and*

*had there been such an activity they would have been the first ones to discuss the matter.”*

**Civilian Statements:**

- The richness of oral history widely recognized in the Inuit community is also found in non-Inuit people who lived in the Eastern Arctic. The RCMP review team has tapped into this extremely valuable source of information. Much of this information is being recorded for the first time in RCMP history. Not only are retired members of the RCMP willing to share their memories and personal records of life in the Eastern Arctic during the years in question, but others, such as teachers, members of the clergy, Hudson Bay employees, nurses, and social workers have histories and recollections which provide insights from a non-Inuit / non-RCMP perspective. Their recollections are invaluable in establishing a comprehensive, objective picture of events.

As an example, the RCMP review team received an unsolicited letter from Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Ross, who were both nurses in the Ungava Bay area from 1956 to 1964. They had seen television coverage of Inuit people who claimed that the government conspired to force them to live close to settlements by destroying their means of transportation and their livelihoods. *“In the TV program the Eskimos said that they were encouraged to stay at the post, there were a number of reasons why [they] came to live at the post but they were not encouraged by any of the Department officials as the opposite is the truth.”* The nurses go on to describe the fear with which they walked about in their community where half-starved sled dogs threatened, and sometimes succeeded, to attack adults and children without warning. *“I made medical visits with a walking stick club,”* the letter

relates, and *“my wife did not make medical visits to homes without another adult with her on account of the dog situation.”*

Another interview with William Jay Carpenter, a dog care professional, who has lived in the Northwest Territories from 1942 to the present, shows the effect that new technology had on the Inuit way of life. *“...A complete change of lifestyle occurred the moment the Skidoo came in, because people would come in with the dog team and go back out with the Skidoo.... some of the dogs were left for weeks and weeks without anybody properly attending to them... The RCMP ...were perhaps having to make decisions about dogs.”*

#### **Destruction of Inuit Sled Dogs for Public Health and Safety:**

- The researchers found reports that many Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic were destroyed by the RCMP, locally appointed dog catchers, and other community members for public safety purposes because they were disease-ridden or malnourished. Other sled dogs were put down because, left unattended, they had become feral animals which threatened and sometimes injured or killed people in northern communities. Instances were found where Inuit had requested that the RCMP and/or the locally designated dog catcher shoot their dogs for the aforementioned reasons, or in some instances, because they no longer had a use for their dogs due to socio-economic contributing factors. The RCMP historian (now retired), Dr. William Beahen, who has written several books on the organization’s history, has never found any information about a systematic cull of Inuit sled dogs. The review team did not locate any evidence of an organized or legislated mass slaughter of Inuit sled dogs, despite reviewing thousands of pages of documents.

- The RCMP did destroy Inuit sled dogs when the dogs were loose and posed a public health and safety risk to humans. The dogs were dispatched as humanely as possible and pursuant to the provisions of the territorial legislation.

Otto Binder, was a Special Constable who worked for the RCMP from 1955 to 1975 in Aklavik and Inuvik, NWT. During his statement he said that the RCMP did not kill dogs without a reason and the most often reason was because the animal was sick with rabies. He said during his patrols to the communities in the western Arctic, the RCMP would take rabies shots with them and inoculate the sled dogs. He remembers that the RCMP would be asked to shoot old or sick dogs by their owners and that entire dog teams were not shot, except in one instance in a settlement because the team had attacked and killed the owner's wife when she tried to use the dogs. He stated that once the dogs smelled human blood, the normal practice was to kill the team, because the team would kill again. He indicated that he would visit coastal communities in the eastern Arctic to deliver goods by boat and he never heard any complaints about the RCMP putting down dogs there.

Ollie Ittinuar who was an RCMP Special Constable from 1949 to 1957 in Chesterfield Inlet, Nunavut, stated that he was employed by the RCMP and one of his duties was to destroy dogs that were vicious and were roaming around the community. He said that the shooting of loose dogs was rare and that he remembered shooting less than 10 dogs over his eight years of service.


### **Epidemic Outbreaks of Canine Disease:**

- RCMP members did destroy Inuit sled dogs at the request of their Inuit owners to contain disease outbreaks and in some instances when the owner no longer wanted/needed the sled dogs and they were starving.
- The RCMP review team has learned, by reviewing various reports and by interviewing RCMP members who served in the Eastern Arctic, that epidemic outbreaks of rabies and canine distemper occurred between 1950 and 1970. These large outbreaks of canine disease made it necessary for RCMP members to destroy diseased Inuit sled dogs as a way of containing/controlling the epidemic.

As stated by Ian Kenneth MacRury<sup>2</sup>, “A serious outbreak of what is believed to have been distemper and infectious canine hepatitis in 1961 in the Cumberland Sound area led to the death of hundreds of Inuit Dogs.” MacRury also states that, “the occurrence of a dog disease led indirectly to the depopulating of the traditional hunting lands.” Epidemic outbreaks of canine disease still continue in the Eastern Arctic and MacRury refers to a severe outbreak that occurred in the 1980s, “In all, over 1320 Inuit dogs died in the 1987-88 epidemic with losses of up to 80% in some locations where vaccination was carried out too late to be effective” (Bohm et al. 1989).

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<sup>2</sup>*The Inuit Dog: Its Provenance, Environment and History (Master Thesis)*. Third Printing 2003, pg. 29.



### **Socio-Economic Factors:**

- The Inuit population went through wrenching social change during the time frame in question. Factors such as,
  - social benefits that the Inuit had access to for the first time, such as education, health care and government family allowances within settlements;
  - the collapse of the fox fur trade;
  - the introduction of the snowmobile; and,
  - various other socio-economic factors,contributed to a reduced need for the Inuit sled dogs.

Special Constable, Johnny Lyall who worked for the RCMP in Cambridge Bay and Iqaluit, Nunavut in 1964-1984 provided a statement. He states, “...*that when the military DEW line sites were constructed in the north, snowmobiles became the main form of transportation and many sled dogs were abandoned.*” He also stated that during the time period in question, dogs were only shot when they were loose or when complaints were received which warranted shooting. He went on to say that he had no knowledge of any mass slaughter of dogs.

Lew Philip, retired RCMP member who worked in Nunavut stated, “...*in the 1950s there was vast starvation throughout the north and people killed and ate their dogs to survive.*” He also stated that he observed in the 1970s that snowmobiles began to arrive in the north and people needed fewer dogs. He said that often the dogs were not tied up, which posed a danger to people in those communities.

### **Sûreté du Québec:**

- The Sûreté du Québec has responded that they have no record of an organized slaughter of Inuit sled dogs, by their own members or by the RCMP.

### **RCMP Internal Reports:**

- The RCMP review team has located and reviewed routine RCMP internal reports from the Eastern Arctic. One of these reports indicates that one regular RCMP member was informally disciplined for the manner in which the member destroyed two Inuit sled dogs. The action for discipline was based on concerns that the RCMP member's treatment of the Inuit sled dogs was not appropriate. All RCMP discipline files and public complaint documents pertaining to the Eastern Arctic during the time period in question will be thoroughly reviewed as well.
- There has been no reference to a systematic cull of Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic in any of the RCMP records and files that have been reviewed to date.

## Conclusion

Despite significant challenges, the RCMP review team continues its effort to establish an accurate and complete historical record of this period in the Eastern Arctic. There is an increasing risk that these recollections may be irretrievably lost with the deaths of elderly witnesses. To date, the RCMP review team has found no evidence to support the allegations that the RCMP conducted an organized slaughter of Inuit sled dogs in the Eastern Arctic between 1950 and 1970.

Much more research, analysis and documentation is necessary to ensure this matter is addressed completely and objectively in the form of a final report by May 2006. Next steps include more interviews to be conducted by the review team in collaboration with RCMP divisional members. The interviews will be focused on retired RCMP members who have served in the Eastern Arctic, with civilians who worked in the Eastern Arctic, with Inuit elders, and with employees from other federal government agencies who were active in the Eastern Arctic. The geographic and socio-economic factors of the time, as discussed in some academic books and research papers, will be reviewed and analyzed in more detail to determine the contributing factors that led to the malnourishment and diseases that significantly affected the Inuit sled dogs. An extensive review of all RCMP related documents, relevant material from federal government departments, and media reports will also be conducted to ensure a complete final report.