

J. Reginald H. Noble

1911-2001

Reg Noble, head of the federal government's meteorological service from 1964 to 1976, died in Toronto on March 19, 2001. He appeared to have been in excellent health before he died from a heart attack.

John Reginald H. Noble was born on December 15, 1911, on a farm near Clinton, Ontario. He graduated with a B.A. in Honours Mathematics and Physics from the University of Toronto in 1934 and then took a graduate degree (M.A.) in physics (meteorology). With the Depression there were no positions available in meteorology in 1935 so he went to the Ontario College of Education to train as a teacher. But, in February 1936, when the Meteorological Service began hiring meteorologists, Reg applied and was hired that month..

After working at Meteorological headquarters in Toronto for more than a year, Reg's first posting, in July 1937, was to Botwood, Newfoundland, where Pat McTaggart-Cowan was about to begin forecasting for British and American experimental transatlantic flying boat flights. The weather forecasts proved to be most useful, two more meteorologists arrived and, a year later, Reg was brought back from Newfoundland and posted to Montreal. There he became officer-in-charge of a new District Aviation Forecast Office at St. Hubert airport where Trans-Canada Airline (now Air Canada) had established a terminal and was about to begin a transcontinental air service. .

But Reg was moved again the following year. When war broke out on Labour Day weekend 1939, he was called to Ottawa on the holiday and given instructions by the Deputy Minister and John Patterson, then head of the new Meteorological Division, to proceed to Halifax at once and establish a weather forecast office to provide services for the Royal Canadian Air Force and the Royal and Royal Canadian Navies. As he related years later it was a daunting task for a young meteorologist to deal with the Armed Forces, the Department of Public Works and other government and private organizations when all he had was a piece of paper as authority. But with the help of teletype operators, meteorological technicians, and meteorologists sent from Montreal and Toronto he

obtained the necessary telecommunications, furniture and space at the Halifax RCAF headquarters and the office began issuing forecasts before the end of September.

In the spring of 1940 Reg was presented with another challenge. A few months earlier, Patterson, with the support of his Department of Transport, had concluded an agreement with the Department of National Defence under which the Meteorological Division would provide full meteorological support for the RCAF. Besides providing weather reports and forecasts this meant seconding meteorologists to the RCAF bases. At first it was thought that only a few would be required but then, with the British Commonwealth Air Training Plane beginning, it was estimated that thirty or so meteorologists would be needed. Most would go to flying training bases but a senior meteorologist would be needed as a liaison officer at RCAF headquarters in Ottawa. Reg Noble was selected for this position and went to Ottawa in April. As air force needs for meteorologists grew nearly 400 new meteorologists had been trained and posted to RCAF stations. For nearly six years Reg was the pivot point in all dealings between RCAF headquarters and John Patterson and other meteorological officials in Toronto. Since he was central to all meteorological requirements from Eastern and Western Air Commands as well as from the Training Commands Reg was appointed Meteorological Advisor to the RCAF Chief of Air Staff.

After the war Reg moved to Toronto meteorological headquarters early in 1946 as the Chief of the Planning and Administration Section. Here he had responsibility for finance, personnel, and all the other support services necessary to operate the national service with offices in every part of the country and more than 2,000 employees. The next 20 years were growth years in meteorology. The Service expanded to meet the needs of Canadians for weather services and Reg was the one behind Andrew Thomson and then Pat McTaggart-Cowan in handling the administration, especially the financial matters. In 1959, Reg was appointed Deputy Controller (the official name for the director of the service was Controller to fit the Department of Transport's nomenclature system at that time) and in 1964 he succeeded Pat McTaggart-Cowan as Controller of what was by then the Meteorological Branch.

The Meteorological Branch continued to expand during the late 1960s with Reg at the head. Plans for the long-awaited new headquarters were finally approved and construction began on the new Downsview building. Reg was highly regarded in Ottawa and when a major reorganization of the department was deemed necessary he was named Project Manager of the Intertrans Team. This team met for six months or so in 1970 to study and make recommendations concerning the introduction of a ministry system in Transport. In the new system meteorology was taken from Air Services and became the Canadian Meteorological Service with Reg as the Administrator. But this nomenclature was not to last as the government soon announced the formation of a new Department of the Environment with meteorology a part of it. Accordingly the new department and the Atmospheric Environment Service came into being in July 1971 with Reg as an Assistant Deputy Minister responsible for AES.

In October 1971 the Downsview headquarters were opened and the Service celebrated its 100th anniversary. The new Service became responsible for more than meteorology - air quality observations and research at first and then expanding into such fields as acid rain, ozone layer and global warming studies. The 1970s proved to be somewhat competitive days in the new Environment Canada. Several Services had been brought together in the department and other new Services launched. Most wanted more resources, even at the expense of the established Services. AES was considered a source of man-years since the other research scientists and administrators could not grasp the fact that AES needed hundreds of employees across the country to man operational offices twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. But Reg defended the AES turf well and it was fortunate that sufficient resources were available to allow AES expansion to handle the added responsibilities until after he retired at 65 years of age in December 1976.

Reg enjoyed taking part in World Meteorological Organization activities: this was a part of his professional life that few Canadians saw. He had not participated in the work of the technical commissions but once he became head of the Service he took very seriously the responsibilities of being Canada's Permanent Representative with WMO. As such he was Canada's Principal Delegate at the month-long WMO Congress Sessions

Geneva in 1967, 1971 and 1975. Since he was usually elected to the Executive Committee (now Executive Council) or was president of Regional Association IV, he attended weeklong annual meetings in Geneva from 1967 to 1973 and again in 1975 and 1976. As regional president he led the Canadian delegation to Asheville, USA, in 1966, Geneva in 1971 and Guatemala City in 1973. By no means a radical at international meetings Reg's quiet commonsense was appreciated by the representatives of other national meteorological services.

The Canadian Meteorological and Oceanographic Society was important to Reg Noble. In 1940 he had been a charter member of the Society's predecessor, the Canadian Branch of the Royal Meteorological Society and a member of its first executive. Later, in administrative positions, he insisted that support be given to the Society by having the Service look after such things as printing and mailing, by authorizing attendance at meetings in office hours, by supporting travel to annual meetings and congresses. Later, when the Society had a secretariat, he always made sure the Service's annual financial estimates included provision for a grant to the Society. He was a life member of the Society and after he retired he told his friends that he planned to go to the annual meetings and stay for days, something he never been able to do before.

Reg did not undertake any meteorological work after retirement from government service but he retained a keen interest in the Service and was a regular attendant at Downsview retirement parties and other celebrations. He became very active in the affairs of his church and was well versed in its administration, especially its finances. His wife Muriel predeceased Reg: they were married September 1940 when he was at RCAF headquarters in Ottawa. Reg leaves a son, Jim, and grandchildren.

Morley Thomas March 2001

