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## RCA Giant Step

Communications throughout Alaska took another giant step forward when RCA Alascom cut over its Fairbanks toll center to Direct Distance Dialing one minute past midnight on Sunday, May 21.

Now telephone users in Fairbanks and almost every major community in a wide area stretching east to Canada, west to Nome and Kotzebue, and north to Barrow and Prudhoe Bay, far above the Arctic Circle, can dial their own station-to-station to almost anywhere in the U.S.A. and Canada.

RCA Alascom's executive vice-president, Fred D. Chier, hailed the DDD cutover as another significant step in the development of a modern long distance telephone system for Alaska.

Among the primary advantages of DDD Mr. Chier cited speed, convenience, and accuracy. "DDD," said Mr. Chier, "can handle a heavier volume of traffic and reduce the risk of human error in the placement of calls and in timing and billing."

On DDD calls, the long distance operator will enter the line only to ask the number from which the call has been placed. As local companies convert to an automatic number system, this will be eliminated.

Speaking in Fairbanks, Mr. Chier also discussed the Bush Telephone Program. He announced that installation is near completion in 44 of the 142 villages which will receive phone service. At each of these sites one or two public telephones are installed in convenient central locations. The base charge per call is 50 cents.

RCA has activated additional crews to speed up installations but flood conditions in some areas may cause further delays.

Chier emphasized that RCA's function is that of a common carrier. It does not get into the business of local operation. "If a village wants to operate its own telephone company, we encourage them."

He foresees a time when the central phones now being installed in the villages could become switchboards with phone service extended to each home in the community. As a locally operated industry, this could, in effect, create new jobs.

Mr. Chier commented briefly on a proposal for domestic satellite system, now pending before the FCC. He was hopeful that a decision would be forthcoming by the end of the year.

Canada, which faces problems similar to Alaska, has already initiated such a system, and it is now nearing completion. By means of a commercial satellite system, it would be possible to reach all bush communities with radio, TV, and phone communications. The possibilities are exciting and unlimited.

Commercial communication really began in Alaska about last year. There were many inherited problems in taking over a government-run operation. Even today, Mr. Chier estimated that "about half our traffic depends on the White Alice System."

Anytime there is a conflict between government priority and civilian use, military needs pre-empt all others. Alaska must come of age in being willing to build an independent statewide communication system, serving not only major urban areas but the many widespread rural communities as well.

Modern communication will be a major force in altering the quality and possibilities of life-style for rural Alaskans, not only by meeting education and entertainment needs but serving as a critical health and emergency link to the outside.

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