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## Cronkite visits "city under the ice"

By Cassi Feldman

January 31, 2016 / 6:40 PM EST / CBS News

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Sheathed in a hooded parka and giant mittens, Walter Cronkite brought television viewers to the "frozen wasteland" of Greenland in 1961. He was there on assignment with "The Twentieth Century," a CBS documentary show, to report on Camp Century, a "city under the ice." It was designed as an ambitious military experiment, a warm oasis powered by nuclear energy and inhabited by roughly 100 soldiers. (An abridged version of that report can be viewed in the video player above.)



**Cronkite visits "city under the ice"**  
(16:06)



To get there, Cronkite traveled with the Army for three days on a giant sled train known as a "heavy swing," avoiding dangerous crevasses, to bring equipment, food



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finally, we're building Camp Century to provide a good base, here, in the interior of Greenland, where the scientists can carry on their R&D activities."



The exact nature of those R&D activities wasn't discussed in Cronkite's report. While Captain Evans said there was no immediate defense aspect to the experiment, some historians have suggested that Camp Century was part of a broader Cold War plan to house nuclear missiles in Greenland.

When Cronkite was there, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was still building the camp, using special snow plows to dig massive trenches in the ice sheet and covering them with corrugated metal arches and snow. The largest of the tunnels, nicknamed "Main Street," was 26 feet wide and 28 feet high, with a wooden floor to accommodate tracked vehicles.

In his book "A Reporter's Life," Cronkite recalled staying overnight in the ice tunnel's accommodations.



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lose their sense of balance and cannot stand up," he wrote. "Immobility in the snow and ice of the Arctic can in short order become fatal."

At the heart of Camp Century was an atomic power plant, capable of providing light and heat for the "city under the ice." If not for nuclear power, Cronkite reported, a million gallons of oil would have to be brought into the camp each year. In his story, viewers see the Army engineers activate the nuclear plant for the first time, switching the camp from conventional energy to nuclear energy. The soldiers, who lived in insulated prefab barracks, could now read, play records and relax in cozy rooms lit by atomic power.



Before signing off, Cronkite summed up Camp Century's mission. "Men will stay behind here, in their city under the ice to continue man's battle against nature," he said. "He has brought his greatest scientific achievement, power from the atom, to the very top of



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The answer, it seems, was no. A few years later, due to structural concerns about the ice tunnels, the nuclear reactor was removed and Camp Century was abandoned. A 60 Minutes team recently visited Camp Tuto, the jumping off point for Camp Century, while on assignment in Greenland for this week's broadcast story about climate research. The road that once led to the camp was closed, and the ice around it had receded.

Learning about Camp Century was fascinating, explains producer Daniel Ruetenik. While Americans' interest in the ice sheet has endured for decades, he said, our motives have changed. "At the time [of Camp Century], the Cold War was considered to be the greatest threat to humanity," he says. "And now the area has become a



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