The cold doesn’t bother this crew,” says unit publicist Pru Emery. “They did Silence of the North in Kenora.”

Framing stops while a cold lens is warmed with a small light. Director of photography Richard Leiterman explains that Panavision won’t winterize their prime lenses. “They’ve got a heater case for the zoom lenses, but they say it’s not necessary for the primes,” Leiterman assures. “Here we have to do a fast pull focus as Bob Hays walks towards camera around the front of his jeep, and then away from camera again, and the lens is just too cold for the focus puller to do it smoothly.”

Leiterman points out that this same grip crew worked with him on Silence of the North and Ticket to Heaven, and first a.d. Tony Lucibello adds that most of his crew “just came off Midadel. We’ve worked together many times before – we sort of grew up together in the business.”

The experience of the crew in working together before seems to have made a difference in keeping Utilities on schedule through some difficult shooting requirements. “Principal photography is scheduled to finish by December 18,” says Associate Producer Michael Hadley, and at six weeks into an eight week shooting schedule we’re all starting to feel the stagecoach ride. We have forty different locations, and on the average we’ve been moving two or three times a day.”

“We’ve had a large cast,” says Lucibello, “about 140 speaking parts. A lot of extras were upgraded into bit parts. We’ve used over 2,000 extras, a lot of them ACTRA members, so we’ve got some happy ACTRA members.”

“We had a major scene where the utility company was coming in to shut off somebody’s gas in the midst of a big protest,” says Hadley. “The confrontation had to be built on a number of angles on the protestors and the gas company personnel. It’s really incredible the amount of coverage Harvey Hart (the director) is getting in the time schedule. It’s not being shot like television.”

Sitting in his Winnipeg office between takes, star Bob Hays balances a can of soda on his knee and says, “I like to keep things relaxed, and I find the Canadian crew more enthusiastic to work with than most of those in the U.S. – except perhaps the non-union crews there.”

Back outside it’s time for the close-ups, and the temperature is dropping. Happily it’s a two-camera set-up, and it’s “A marker, B marker” and finished in two takes. In less than an hour the set is empty and back to normal – but with just a little more snow on the ground than in the rest of the city.

Ron Squire •

IN PROGRESS

Utilities

Bucking the elements

The script calls for two inches of snow on the ground, and the stuff that the snow-making machines are spraying out this cold December night on Toronto’s Dupont Street isn’t melting. It glists under the tower-mounted brutes which illuminate a full half-block. The electricians on the towers shout out the time left on their bulbs to the gaffer below. “Four minutes, sir.” The set is still empty except for the gaffer and his helper, “about 140 speaking parts. A lot of extras were upgraded into bit parts. We’ve used over 2,000 extras, a lot of them ACTRA members, so we’ve got some happy ACTRA members.”

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Ron Squire •

UTILITIES


Porky’s

Hot sun, cold chilli

The off-duty extras are trying to catch a few minutes sleep, bundled up against the cold, on the beach or in the back seats of their cars. It’s 3:00 a.m. 60°F. summer time in 1984 and the location is Deadman’s hamburger hangout on the beach of Hollywood, Florida. Inside the cinder block structure are forty extras, who are sitting in an assembly-line prop hamburgers, as a towel is tied ceremoniously into a bib around director Bob Clark’s neck. Work stops and he has everyone’s attention. He tells them he’s going to do the same action for many takes and many camera angles, and to make sure the camera is now set down behind the chilli bowl. Reg Morris, the director of photography, fine tunes the "basher" sitting on top of...
what if it's dark all the time and the swamp is full of flying man-eaters, there's no snow in there," and it's hard to believe that so many parts cars are still roadworthy and want to act.

... Meat comes up for air for what seems like the fifteenth time. He is washed off and Erla Lank helps him on with a T-shirt that's been hand-washed and blown dry at least half a dozen times. P.A. Andy Waxman arrives with yet another cooler full of hamburgers. Tracy Budd pops the top off another prop beer and Lord Langton in threads another short end. Rob glances at his shot cards and calls for "one more and then we've got it." Outside, the lights overhead are starting to take on the shapes of aircraft as day begins to ease into the sky.

Scott Barrie

(Scott Barrie is an 'observer director' on Porky's)


The Panavision zoom and asks for a flag in front of one of the zip-lights. Sound mixer Rod Haykin, working outside the building so he can spot approaching aircraft, gives the all-clear over a talkie-aircraft gives the all-clear over a talkie-building so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can spot approaching aircraft so he can...