

THE STORY THUS FAR

Bandits board the steamer "Midnight Sun" on the Mackenzie river. Jimmy Montgomery, who had spent years with the Canadian Mounted, is shot through the heart. Sergeant Alan Baker starts out after the bandits.

At the MacMillan trading post, Joyce MacMillan is thrilled at once more meeting Sergt. Baker. Secretly she had hoped to marry him, then she was stunned by the news of his engagement to Elizabeth Spaulding.

One of Alan's men discovers a bale of the pelts stolen from the "Midnight Sun." The evidence incriminates Joyce's father. Alan leads his expedition up the Big Aloooska. Compelled by Haskell's foolish orders to divide the party, Alan fails to capture the bandits. Haskell, who is Alan's active enemy and is trying to win Elizabeth, blames Alan for the failure and orders his demotion to the ranks. He refuses to let Alan lead a second expedition. Seeing only one way now to go after the bandits and clear Joyce's father from the charge resulting from the obviously planted evidence, Alan buys his release on condition that he signs a paper to the effect that Haskell did not give the order to split the expedition.

Alan starts out of the country in a motor canoe and runs across "Buzzard" Featherof, famous aviator of the World War and now "on his own" with a dilapidated machine. "Buzzard" enlists in the enterprise. Lacking sufficient funds to procure the equipment, they loot government stores, starting their pursuit of the bandits, themselves criminals in the eyes of the law.

"Slob-Ice" Jensen, leader of the bandits, plans to capture Joyce MacMillan and escape to Manitoba. Haskell catches on that Bill Hardsock is caching gasoline and oil for Alan at En Traverse Lake and plans to capture Alan when his plane alights there, but his plan fails. Picking up Hardsock at En Traverse, the plane, with its three occupants, continues to the MacMillan post.

Alan is thrilled to see Joyce once more, but she is cool toward him. Continuing the flight, Alan locates the bandit tent on an island. He leaves Bill in charge of the one bandit found there, and he and Buzzard fly back to the Aloooska to try to head off the other bandits. But they have made their raid, killing old Dad Pence, her sole defender, and with Joyce their prisoner are on their way back to the rendezvous.

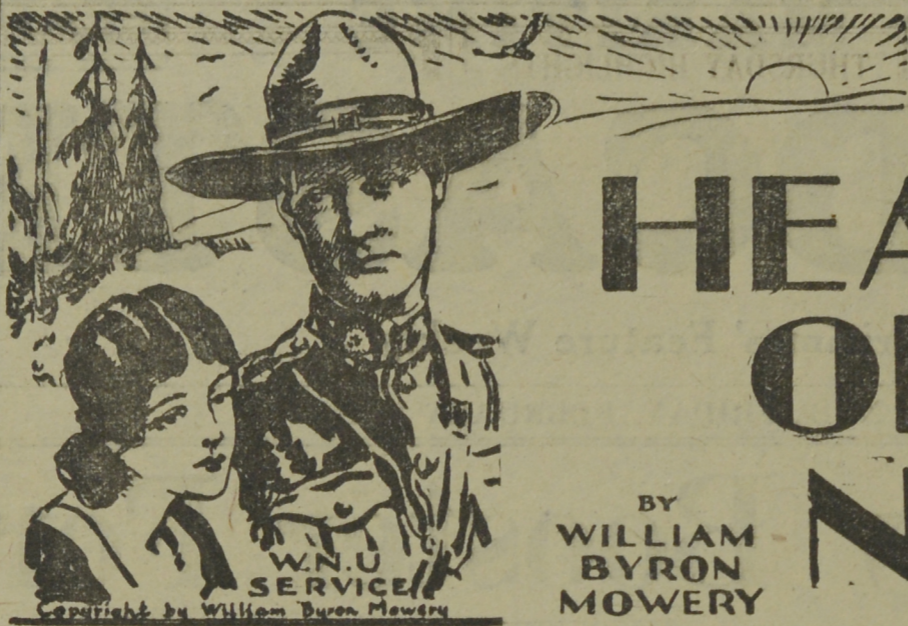
(Continued from last week)

STERN and impartial, Williamson could not help feeling that Haskell, though a newcomer and not fully experienced yet, had been fair, and more than fair, in this trouble with Baker and these other men. Baker had certainly had a fearful moral lapse from the man he used to be. Without doubt his failure to get commissioned had set him brooding and had worked a pernicious harm on a once-superlative man.

As he looked thoughtfully at Haskell, Williamson considered it very creditable of him to praise a man who had done him so much injury. And he thought it showed exceptional stuff in the inspector to remain in service, to stick with his hard thankless work here in the North, when he had come into a large inheritance and might be leading a pleasant life in Ottawa. Playing no favorites whatsoever, but trying to give every man his just dues, the old officer felt that his former uncharitable opinion of Haskell had been entirely wrong, as wrong and misplaced as his faith in Alan Baker.

Presently, in slow decisive tones, he said: "You did right to demote Baker after that patrol. It was foolhardy of him to split his detail. Constable Younge over there will pay the price of that mistake for the rest of his life. And about those other men, I think the rough sledging you've had with them is easily explained. Baker was in charge before you came; he was rather lax on discipline so long as the work got done. One of the things urged against him when he was up for commission was the fact that he was too familiar with his subordinates. When you came and insisted on stricter discipline, I presume they resented it. The fault is theirs, not yours. I'm backing you to the limit against them and against Baker, too, if he tries to stir up any further trouble."

Haskell drew a deep breath. His story had gone across handsomely. In half an hour of skillful talk he had accomplished more than Baker could match in a month of labor and heavy expense and danger.



# HEART OF THE NORTH

BY WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

For Alan and Featherof there at MacMillan's trading post after their discovery of the catastrophe, the waiting was the worst of it—the long hour after hour of grim, self-enforced delay.

"We've got to let them get out of timber country into the open Thal-Azzah," Alan spoke to Buzzard, who was looking to his experience and leadership in this fraught crisis. "There we can be sure of sighting their canoes. They'll have no shelter there when we drop down on them. We'll make ourselves give them a fifteen hour start on us."

It was his cold man-hunting wisdom that spoke; but all his being clamored to start instantly, flinging himself against those men and tearing Joyce away from them before twilight fell.

He forced himself to go up to the trading store and cook a meal, for they had eaten nothing since dawn.

He remembered the little automatic Joyce always carried; remembered the hard bulge of it that time he lifted her down from the window. Knowing her spirited pride, her passionate nature, he had fearfully imagined her choosing a proud escape from her horror.

When he and Buzzard had forced themselves to eat supper and were putting the things in order again, as though for Joyce to come back and find, they heard a far-away drone miles down the Big Aloooska. A breeze whipped the faint sound away for several minutes. When they caught it again, the sound was clear and unmistakable. They once had heard that same low throaty drone approaching across En Traverse Lake to destroy their plane and stop their venture.

Alan rose up, with an expression on his face that frightened Buzzard.

"It's Haskell. He's coming to smash us. He didn't quit with that one attempt. I don't think—even if he knew that you and I are all that stands between Joyce and a horror—I don't think he'd hesitate a second. Buzzard, you stay here. I'm going down to the landing. I don't want you to be involved in—I suppose it'll be called murder."

He went out through the trading hall and down to the landing, and crouched there behind the machine gun. With his hand on the spade grip, training the weapon down river, he waited.

But, as he listened to the launch tearing wide open up the treacherous Aloooska, he grew convinced that Whipple never would or could drive it at so demonic a clip. Frank Pedneault was the man behind that wheel.

Uncertain, in a dilemma, he reasoned: "Haskell might have forced him to make the trip. But Ped would never throw himself into it like that, he'd never risk his life that way, unless it was something he felt like putting all his heart into."

Lifting the binoculars, he focused them on the first bend below. When the launch came tearing into sight and thundered on up toward the post, he saw at a glance that it carried but one man—a man with his hat jammed low on his eyes and a dead pipe in his teeth.

Swinging the launch around in midstream like a toy, Pedneault gently nosed it in beside the plane. "Thank Lord, you're here,

Alan. . . . Was afraid you'd be gone."

"Ped! What are you doing up here? You're on some patrol?"

"Patrol h—!" Pedneault panted, breathless and excited. "I caught onto your idea. Elizabeth told me about it, too. She's aching for you to win out, Larry and I talked it over. I said, 'By Lord, I'm going, Larry! I'm going to be in on that with Alan and Bill!' So I euchred the launch away from Haskell, pitched off, and streaked for here. Brought you some extra gas if you need any." Alan was staggered.

"Good Lord! And you've deserted, too, Ped!"

"But I couldn't miss out on a trick like this, could I?"

Alan winced. Here was Pedneault mixed up in his trouble. Like an eager wolf-hound whom his master has left behind, Ped had chewed his collar and come along on the hunt.

"Where's Bill and Joyce?" Pedneault's face grew long, his eager excitement sobered down. He decided it was better to say nothing just now about Dave's suicide. Alan had enough anxiety preying on him.

"I'm thankful for that gasoline," Alan said. "And for you throwing in with us, Ped, at the price you'll pay. But I don't see how you can help. We can't carry a third person on this trip. I'll have to have room to work the machine gun—"

"Then I'll go in the launch." "You can't make it now. Above the Aloooska forks there's twenty miles of low water that you can't get through."

"I can make it now. I know what the launch can do. After all these heavy rains, draining down that left fork from the Thal-Azzah. . . . Look there—" he pointed at the water stage on a pier—"that's eighteen inches higher than when we made our first patrol after them. I can get through; and once I'm in those deep-water channels of the Thal-Azzah—"

"All right," Alan agreed. "You will be a mighty big help. If they put us out of it, you'll be in position to carry on with them. Let's go up to the post and make our arrangements. You'll be leaving ahead of us."

Meeting Buzzard in the trading hall, he introduced Pedneault and explained. They went on back to the kitchen and worked out their plans.

Pedneault was to leave at dawn in the launch. Then the plane would leave at ten o'clock. Passing Pedneault just inside the Thal-Azzah, the plane would fly on ahead, locate the bandits and bring them to bay. The two craft would thus close in together for the battle.

There was but one hitch in the plan. All three men were aware of it, but no one mentioned it. Those bandits had Joyce with

them; they could and would use her for protection. How could they be swept with a machine gun's deadly spray when she was with them?

It was something which had to be left to luck or fate.

Alan gave final instructions: "If anything happens to the plane, don't try to fight those five men by yourself, Pedneault. Swing wide of them, go on east to that big lake I mapped for you, and join Bill there. The the two of you fight them to a finish."

"One other thing. I don't want Buzzard or myself to be charged with murder. You're in service, Pedneault; you'll not only be on a legitimate patrol, but as you have the power to deputize us as special constables. We'd better put that down in black and white."

It seemed strange to Pedneault, who had sworn in half-breeds and Indian scouts and dog-team drivers on emergency occasions, to be swearing in his former officer commanding in so lowly a capacity. He wrote out the formal authorization: James A Featherof; status, special constable temporary; capacity, a viator. Alan McCleod Baker; status, special constable temporary; capacity, scout and machine gunner.

At the earliest hint of dawn they went down to the landing, inspected the launch and lashed Joyce's light canoe on the stern half-deck. Pedneault shook hands with them, slipped into the wheel sea, and set out alone, a solitary figure, up the Big Aloooska.

Waiting, nervous jumpy, as both had waited for zero hours in France, Alan and Buzzard stalked about the unutterably lonely post.

At nine o'clock, drawn down to the landing, they went over the plane for the third time, and Alan mounted the machine gun in the cockpit. When their zero hour came, he towed the craft out into midstream, held it there while Buzzard warned the spluttering motor; and then, sending the canoe spinning with a kick, he sprang up into his seat.

Buzzard lifted the plane out of the river, climbed to five thousand feet, and headed into the northeast.

(To be Continued)

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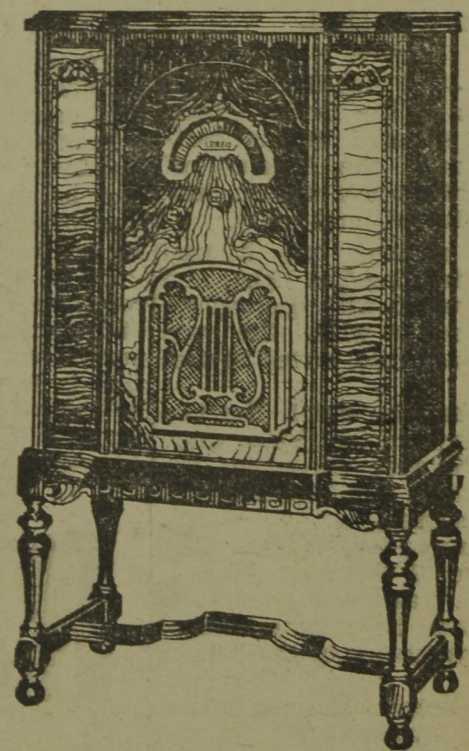
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