An Arctic Outpost

By Herbert Patrick Lee.

What happened to three members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, forming the "Top-of-the-World Patrol," while stationed at the loneliest outpost in the world. "The facts are true in every detail," writes Mr. Lee, "and can easily be confirmed by reference to the annual report of the Mounted Police for 1924."

In 1923-24 there were three of us garrisoning the Royal Canadian Mounted Police post at Craig Harbor, Ellesmere Land—Corporal Michelson, Constable Anstead, and myself. We were, with the exception of two families of North Greenland Eskimos brought down from Etah, the only inhabitants of the vast eighty-thousand-square-mile area of frozen Ellesmere, the last land before the Pole, and one tiny group of frame shacks on the shore of Jones Sound constituted the most northern permanent habitation of white men and the loneliest outpost in the world.

After we had built the post, in the summer of 1922, seven of us were left behind when the Canadian Government patrol steamer Arctic sailed for home. But when the stout old ship returned the following year, on her annual trip to the Mounted Police posts in the Eastern Arctic, she carried off Inspector Wilcox and three men to build another new post in Southern Baffin Land. The remaining three of us were left at Craig Harbor.

It is impossible to convey to home-keeping folks the utter desolation, bitter loneliness, and terrible isolation of that little post. When the Arctic steamed south for Quebec after her short visit with the yearly mail we stood on the rocky shore and watched her go, waiting until her tall masts slipped out of sight behind a towering blue-green iceberg and the hoarse boom of her siren sounded a last farewell.

It was strange to feel, when at last we turned toward the little group of shacks—a frame house, a store, and a blubber-shed—that we were alone in a million square miles of wilderness, left to spend twelve long weary months until the Arctic came again to Ellesmere. Northwards no human being existed; for six hundred and fifty miles to the Pole and beyond, down into the plains of Siberia on the opposite side of the earth, no living man breathed.

Westward stretched a vast area of frozen sea and barren island, half of which had never yet been scanned by the eye of white man. Southward lay three hundred and fifty miles of rugged ice and treacherous open water between Craig Harbor and Pond's Inlet, itself a mere scattering of native igloos on the northern tip of Baffin Land, almost as completely isolated as our own wretched habitation.

Such was—and is—Craig Harbor, the most northerly post in the service of the Mounted Police. There is no way of escape; no means of communicating with the outside world, except by long sled journeys through an uninhabited wilderness, across treacherous moving ice-floes, and over steep glaciers to avoid stretches of icy black water along the barren coasts.

As for Ellesmere Land itself, it is a huge, rugged expanse of desolation, half covered with heavy glacier ice, swept by terrible gales which bear down upon it from the Pole, and studded with huge glaciers, bare, naked cliffs, and barren valleys. That is Ellesmere Land, the home of three white men and half-a-dozen Eskimos.

It used to make us laugh when we read about the Barren Lands—the so-called uninhabitable wilderness of northern Canada and Alaska—hundreds of miles to the southward, where there, were trees and flowers, flies and mosquitoes, and where the heat in summer causes discomfort to animals and human beings. The nearest tree to Ellesmere Land is over a thousand miles away.

But we made the post as comfortable as possible, and if we could have only been dead-sure that the ship would come each year to Craig Harbor, life would not have been so bad. Even the long, dark winter, when the sun sank below the southern horizon for three and a half months, could be borne with patience, heartened with the knowledge that when summer came again the glorious life-giving orb would shine above the horizon for a similar period without setting.

And there were hunting trips to obtain meat for ourselves and the forty-odd dogs we kept at Craig Harbor, and exploration journeys into the unknown interior and along the little known coast, with our shack on the rocky shore of Jones Sound as "home" and centre of life in that frozen wilderness.

In winter, soon after the harbor froze in September—to remain solid until the following July—we would build a wall of snow packed six feet thick about the living-house and lay flat blocks on the sloping roof to make the structure airtight. For water we used ice, huge chunks of it, chopped from icebergs stranded in the bay and hauled ashore by dog team and stacked beside the post. When we needed it for water it was placed to melt in a big steel drum beside the cookstove in the kitchen.

The house itself was composed of three rooms: a general living and sleeping-room, an "office" where we kept official papers, and the kitchen. A porch built of sacked coal, brought up from Quebec for the three stoves which kept the building warm in winter, protected the door from the blizzards which at times swept down from the north with a fury unheard of in civilization.

At the beginning of February, 1924, Corporal Michelson was alone in the post with the Eskimo women and children, who lived in a shack built of empty packing-cases, banked with snow, beside the blubber-shed.

The dark months of winter had exhausted our fresh meat supply, and several days before the sun returned to Ellesmere Anstead and I started out with our dog-teams to search the valleys of western Ellesmere Land for musk-oxen or caribou. Anstead took the younger of our two Eskimos, a man named Klisshoo, while I took Panik-pa, the old walrus-hunter from Etah, who years before had been one of Peary's dog-drivers on the trip to the North Pole.

I returned to Craig Harbor on February 20th, after an absence of fourteen days, bringing in several hundred pounds of musk-ox meat obtained in a fiord a hundred miles west of the post. Anstead came back the following dal, having drawn blank after a trip up a sixty-five-mile inlet never before seen by a white man.

The fateful 22nd of February was bitterly cold. Outside the shack a blizzard raged as the fierce wind drove clouds of snow down upon us from the mountains. We could not venture outside and sat beside the stove, drying and repairing the fur clothing brought back from the hunting trips.

Corporal Michelson and I were planning another journey, to get the remainder of the musk-oxen meat I had cached in a snow igloo at the mouth of Grise Fiord. We intended, if the weather permitted, to start the following day.

At three o'clock in the afternoon we were all in the kitchen. Anstead was cooking dinner, the corporal was laying the table, and I was making a new coal-oil stove to take with us on the trip.

Suddenly Anstead noticed smoke pouring from the living-room. In a flash we dashed from the kitchen into the other room to find a mass of smoke and flame—the building was on fire! The heat from the stove-pipe had apparently caused the inner ceiling to burst into flame, and in a trice the whole roof was ablaze.

It was a terrible shock. For a moment we stood horrified, too stunned to act. Then Anstead rushed for the fire extinguishers, tearing them one after the other from their brackets on the walls, only to find them frozen and useless. We had no water in the house. The steel drum beside the kitchen stove was still full of ice and the only liquid available was a half-empty bucket of slops.

Snatching up the pail, I climbed through the trap-door in the kitchen ceiling and into the loft, now full of acrid smoke in which it was well-nigh impossible to breathe. Down at the other end of the tunnel formed by the sloping outer roof, the inner ceiling was burning fiercely and the outer tar-covered roof had begun to catch.

Creeping as near as I dared, I flung the water on the flames, and then, half-choked by the smoke and fumes, I crept back again along the tunnel and almost fell into the hatchway. The little drop of water had scarcely affected the ames, and as I descended to the kitchen I could see them leaping higher, for the wind was catching them and sucking them through the cuter roof.

Meanwhile, down below, the other two men were waging an unequal battle against hopeless odds. Outside the storm raged fiercely. It was impossible to see a single yard through the blinding snow, hurled down from the huge glacier behind the post by the hundred-miles-an-hour gale. Snatching up a heavy parka of fur, Anstead forced open the door and ran into the storm, struggling across the storm-swept valley to rouse the Eskimos. It seemed to the corporal and I that we should never see him again, and how he found his way to the blubber-shed in that awful blizzard I do not know.

There was little time to dress in furs, and, halfclad as we were, we tried to cut a hole in the outer roof through which we could throw snow-blocks down to the burning shack below. Aided by the others, I climbed to the snow-covered sloping roof, striving desperately to keep my balance in the teeth of the storm. But it was worse than hopeless. Try as I would I could not prevent myself from being blown bodily from the roof, nor could the others pass up the blocks with their half-frozen hands. And as we worked the gale increased in violence.

Numb with cold we ran to the coal-sack porch, sick with fear that the entire house was doomed. There was no way of fighting the fire, and we set ourselves to the task of saving as much as possible before the building was totally destroyed.

Forming a line, we passed out what we could to the Eskimos, who, muffled in their furs, crouched in the shelter of the snow-wall outside. Altogether we managed to save the bedding, the sleeping-bags, a little personal kit, rifles, a case of ammunition, some kitchen utensils, and other things which we simply hurled through the windows as the storm drove the flames higher.

The Eskimos worked like mad, ignoring the frost-bite which stung their wind-lashed cheeks as they pushed the salvaged gear across to the blubber-shed on one of the big sleds.

It is useless to attempt to describe the scene properly, for this was no ordinary fire. Even had it been fine weather, it would have been a calamity to lose the hut—our only home in this vast wilderness of desolation. But in such a storm as this the destruction of the shack threatened to become a tragedy. We could not even see. The gale drove the snow into our eyes, freezing our lashes, while the bitter cold blackened the flesh of our exposed cheeks and wrists. The thermometer, I may mention, registered fifty-five degrees below zero.

Stumbling blindly across the snow, away from the doomed building—now a glowing mass set in a whirling blanket of white—we reached the cliffs, and literally felt our way along the rocks to the blubber-shed. Here we rested for a few minutes, utterly exhausted. Then I remembered two mother-dogs and their puppies, crouching in small snow-houses we had built for them beside the door of the house. The mothers would perish, I knew, rather than leave their little ones.

Somehow or other I found my way across the valley to the burning house and reached the frightened dogs, hugging their howling puppies to them in the shadow of the crumbling snow wall. It was evident that in a short time they would all have been buried beneath the mass of melting ice, which froze almost immediately it struck the ground.

The porch had long since collapsed, and the ten tons of sacked coal with which it had been built was now a mass of red, blazing embers, licking up weirdly through the storm. Dragging the dogs out, I carried first one set of pups and then the other to the blubber-shed, sheltering them in my arms while the mothers ran to find shelter as they alone knew how.

The blubber-shed was filled with a heap of half-frozen walrus meat, upon which lay the pile of snow-filled bedding and other gear salvaged from the burning shack. Corporal Michelson, we discovered, was badly frozen, and when his hands and face thawed they were covered with large and painful blisters.

Somehow we made a meal, and then, dog-tired, we lay down to sleep, the corporal and Anstead on some boards laid over boxes, and I on a bench on which we kept the carpentry tools.

The following day broke calm and clear, with the brilliant winter sun—still low in the sky after its return on the 13th of February—shining on the banks of white snow, iron-hard after the pressure of yesterday's wind.

It was strange to look out to where the house had been. Only a shell of the old snow wall remained; of the house itself not a particle was left. Only the blackened ruins of the stoves and the twisted iron of the bedsteads remained to remind us of what had been our home for eighteen long weary months.

Here and there in the snow we saw articles which we had thrown from the window in desperation the day before. Later we found other things as far as two miles out on the sea-ice, where time within twenty-four hours.

Next day we fitted up the blubber-shed as best we could to serve as our home until the ship came in August—if she did. We plugged the many holes in the flimsy structure through which the wind howled, and built a huge snow wall about the entire building. Luckily we had a spare cook-stove. It had been sent up for another post, but left at Craig Harbor by accident. We dug it up from beneath a ten-foot snow-bank and fixed it in the shed, but we could not find the accompanying box of fittings, and lack of these nearly proved our undoing for the second time within twentyfour hours.

From the wreck of the kitchen, lying amid the debris of the burned house, we took the bent and cracked stove-fittings and fixed them on the new stove. In stite of the cracks they seemed to fit fairly well, and for the whole of that day they functioned perfectly.

That night before going to bed we banked the fire with coal and turned in. I retired to my bed on the bench; the other two men occupied an improvised bunk they had built against the wall.

The other fellows were asleep, and I was about to blow out the candle and doze off, when I noticed the yellow flame flicker and grow dim, as if it were going out. At the same moment my head began to swim and I felt dizzy.

Suddenly it dawned on me that there must be something wrong with the stove. Weakly I slipped from the bench and started to walk across the shack to see what was the matter. My knees wobbled, and before I could reach the stove I fell in a dead faint against the door, striking it with such force that it crashed open and I pitched out on to the snow outside.

The noise awakened Anstead and he leapt from his bunk to investigate. Corporal Michelson, too, woke up, and groggily dropped from his "upper berth"—only to collapse and fall unconscious.

Feeling himself giving way, Anstead quickly thrust on his sealskin boots and rushed for the open air. In a few minutes the shed was cleared of the deadly fumes from the stove and our lives, for the second time, were saved, but only by the narrow margin of the flickering candle flame.

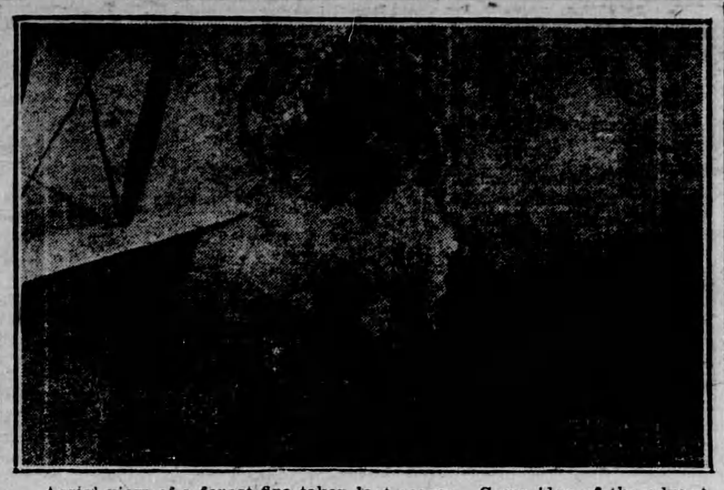
The cold air speedily revived the corporal, and Anstead dragged me inside the shed, where for some minutes I lay on the floor with a blanket over me while the other men extinguished the fire in the stove.

It had been a very close call, and one we did not wish to have repeated. For the remainder of the night we lay in our sleeping-bags without a fire, preferring to shiver until daybreak rather than run the risk of being "gassed" again.

Next morning, the Eskimos, whose home of boxes was next to the blubber-shed, told us that they had heard strange noises during the night, but had been too frightened to come out and see what was the matter. We wondered rather grimly how they would have been an awful shock to after a couple of days or so, dead in our beds in the gas-filled shed. It would haveb een an awful shock to them, and there is little doubt that they would immediately have packed their sleds and returned three hundred miles across the ice to Etah, too terrified to remain at Craig Harbor.

Then, when the Arctic returned in August, there would have been no answering rifle-shots when her siren boomed across the harbor, and only a deathly silence would have greeted her landing-party.

But the proverbial "luck of the Mounted" was with us again, and from then on until the ship duly arrived things ran smoothly; there were no more near-tragedies. The Arctic brought lumber, more coal, and ample supplies, and when she sailed again for civilization a new post had been built to house the two men who during 124-25 composed "The Top-of-the-World Patrol."



Aerial view of a forest fire taken last season. Some idea of the advantages of the use of the aeroplane in detecting and suppressing fires in our forests may be gained from this picture. The fire-fighters, summoned by radio message from the detecting plane, are rushed to the scene in a larger aircraft. Before they land the warden in charge is able to locate the nearest water supply, note the direction of the wind, and generally lay out his plans for attacking the fire.

Hill Purple.

Consider, first, the difference produced in the whole tone of landscape color by the introductions of purple, voilet, and deep ultramarine blue, which we owe to mountains. In an ordinary lowland landscape we have

"I never have any trouble in meeting expenses," says the small-town philosopher. "In fact I meet them, as you might say, at every turn."

STEADY PROGRESS IN HISTORIC SITES WORK

The making of historic sites which are deemed to be of national importance by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and which are recommended by that body to the Department of the Interior, for action, is going forward steadily. This work along with that of restoration and preservation is being carried on by the Canadian National Parks Branch. Eighteen sites of this nature have already been dealt with in the Maritime Provinces.

Where possible a suitably engraved bronze tablet is affixed to a wall or pillar of the building with which the event to be commemorated is associated. In the case of a site of a destroyed building or of a battlefield the tablet is placed on a standard in the form of a large boulder or a cairn constructed of rubble stone conveniently located for the visiting public. The sites referred to above are situated as follows:—

NOVA SCOTIA.

Louisbourg, Cape Breton, ruins of old French fort erected 1720.

Fort Cumberland, near Amherst, formerly old French Fort Beausejour, erected in the middle of the seventeenth century.

Fort Edward, at Windsor, erected 1750, on the site of old French Fort Piziquid.

Fort Anne, Annapolis Royal, one of the most notable sites in North America, dating back to 1604.

Fort Lawrence, near Amherst, erected in 1750.

Champlain's Habitation, Lower Granville, site of building erected 1605.

Halifax, tablet on the wall of the Province House commemorating the setting up of the first printing press in Canada, March 23, 1752.

Halifax, tablet in the dockyard marking the site of the first dockyard in Canada, 1751.

Shelburne, tablet on a large boulder to recall the founding of this United Empire Loyalist town of Nova Scotia. 1783.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND.

Charlottetown, tablet on a pillar at the entrance to the Provincial Building to commemorate events of outstanding importance associated with the history of Prince Edward Island.

NEW BRUNSWICK.

Fort Meductic, near Woodstock, chief stronghold of the Maliseet Indians in Acadia in 17th and 18th centuries.

St. John, tablet in market square to commemorate the landing of the United Empire Loyalists, 1783.

Fort Charnisay, St. John, erected 1645.

Fort La Tour, St. John, erected 1631.

Campbellton, tablet to commemorate the last naval battle in North American waters in the Seven Years War, Restigouche River, 1760.

Fort Monckton, near Port Elgin, formerly old Fort Gaspereaux, erected by the French, 1750.

Fort Nahwaak, Devon, erected 1692.

Bathurst, tablet to commemorate the public services of Nicolas Denys, appointed Governor and Lieutenant-General of the Coasts and Islands of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, 1654.

One Way.

O joy, joy, joy to fill
The day with leagues! go thy way, all things say,
Thou hast thy way to go, thou hast thy day
To live; thou hast thy need of thee to make
In the heart of others; do thy thing; yea, slake
The world's great thirst for yet another man!
And be thou sure of this! no other can
Do for thee that appointed thee of God.

—Dixon, in "Christ's Company."

Jersey Justice in England.

While the Hall-Mills trial dragged through one solid month of trivialities and technicalities, a similar murder trial was prosecuted in England, says an American writer. Alfonso Smith, former officer of the Dragoon Guards and grandson of a Canadian railway builder, was charged with the murder of John Derham, hockey player and fellow-student with Smith at Eton and Cambridge. It was a murder as sordid as that in New Jersey, Smith's wife having been the object of Derham's attentions. On the first day of the trial the King's Counsel outlined his case and called four witnesses. On the second he called three witnesses and wound up his argument. That same afternoon the defence put the accused on the stand, ending its case before the court adjourned at tea time. The judge finished charging the jury by the following noon, and on the afternoon of this third day the prisoner was acquitted.

In the New Jersey trial a prosecutor who paid as much attention to the newspapers as to the Court took sixteen days to present his case, after which the defence took eleven more days. More than a hundred witnesses were called, and when their testimony was given there followed five days of finishing touches before the accused were acquitted. It took the American court, in a commonwealth celebrated among our states for its speedy administration of justice, more than ten times as long as it took the British court to do exactly the same thing. Perhaps if our courts did their work with the dispatch common in England we would have less occasion to talk about the crime wave. The fact that we have more cases than England has makes the argument for speedy justice just that much stronger.

Airmen get just as hungry as anybody else, which explains this splendidly equipped kitchen of the United States dirigible Los Angeles, presided over by Eddie Cook, who is said to be famous for his Irish stew.

Nipped in the Bud.

One of the tragedies of spring is the frequency with which promise is nipped in the bud. A few days of sunshine come together, and we cast our "clouts" and delude ourselves into thinking that summer has arrived. Then the east wind returns, our hopes are nipped in the bud, and we are lucky if we do not spend a few days under the sheets and under the doctor.

The funny thing is that Nature makes the same mistake. Birds are often deluded by false signs of summer. In the orchard the apple trees deck themselves in blossom as for a bridal; then comes a frost, and the promise of fruit is nipped in the bud and the orchard grass is strewn thick with pink petals.

And what Nature does in the garden and orchard we too often do to our children. We nip them in the bud. The frost of our sternness and lack of understanding and kindly sympathy blights their childish enthusiasms and kills their premature hopes and aspirations.

Children are often made very miserable in this way, and often permanent harm is done. The nature that was blossoming so sweetly is suppressed and brought to nothing.

I am convinced we have much room for improvement in this respect, not only in regard to little children, but to our big boys and girls, and even to our young men and women. Distrust and criticism are frosty things. They are the east winds of life; very destructive.

There is evidence that every age has been hard on its rising generation. It is time this age tried a different course. Occasionally we get a propitious spring, when hardly anything is nipped in the bud, and it produces a bumper year for crops. Why, then, be scornful and biting with youth, losing no opportunity of railing at them, belittling them, calling them names?

It is a bad habit, with perhaps a little of jealousy and envy in it. In any case, it is time it stopped. Older people have had their springtime, and have forgotten the great exhilarations that stirred their blood, fired their imagination, and raised their hopes and expectations.

Consequently they lecture the youngsters, take the insternly to task, and tell them taradiddles about what they did, and didn't, when they were their age; how they reverenced their parents and obeyed their slightest wish; how they respected their superiors; how they worked like galley slaves and seldom took a holiday; how they rose with the lark and came home early! It's very funny.

I would not like to assert that the youngsters, take them sternly to task, think they are. They're not! But for heaven's sake let them think so, for a boy may often become what he thinks he can become. Do not nip their young shoots of bombast and brag in the bud. They do no harm, and may bear good, sound fruit.

They need more encouragement: not suppression and "sitting on."

No flower ever bloomed the better for being nipped in the bud. It wilted and died; proved a failure and disappointment. Buds flourish best in the sunshine and warmth.

Mount Armour situated on the International Boundary between British Columbia and Alaska has an elevation of 8,776 feet. It is named after Hon. Mr. Justice John D. Armour, Chief Justice of the High Court of Ontario, who was one of the original Canadian members of the Alaska Boundary Tribunal in 1903