



Eyes filled with hate, the madman glanced over his sights as the 'plane raced towards him

MURDER FLIGHT

**A Dramatic Story of an Aerial Man-Hunt
in the Barren Lands of the Far North**

By EDWARD GREEN*

A COLD wind swept down from the Barren Lands. It sent clouds of stinging snow against the walls of the tiny radio shack on the bleak shores of Dog Rib Lake.

Inside the shack, however, all was snug and warm. "Pike" Hollings, the operator, sat with his "cans" to his ears and listened to the chatter of the air waves. Nine hundred miles southward a dance band was dispensing music. At another spot on the dial a squealing soprano was wailing about her lover being unfaithful—or something. Outside, a lone wolf was howling his woes to the frozen wastes. Pike smiled, and suddenly he stiffened.

His call letters were coming through, strong and insistent. He adjusted his set

and snapped back a reply.

The message was from Tukatyuk, a village two hundred miles to the north.

Pike's fingers flew over the paper as he wrote. He was tense, alert, and as the message concluded he emitted a whistle.

"Phew!" he breathed through tense lips. "Larson's at it again. This time he's done it properly. They'll get him now."

He pulled the "cans" from his ears, and listened intently. Above the howl of the wind he could hear the deep-throated roar of a powerful engine. He looked out of the window in time to see a big Junkers bank sharply, slip over the edge of the spruce trees, and blast through a smother of snow for a fast landing. He watched the all-metal monoplane zip across the ice and

come to rest.

Pike glanced at the thermometer. It registered forty-five degrees below zero. He knew the mechanic would have the oil drained from the engine at once if he didn't call out to stop him.

"Hey," he yelled from the door of his shack.

A tall figure stood with one leg poised over the edge of the cockpit. It was Jeff Hardy, veteran pilot of the Northern Air Lines. He turned a wind-tanned face toward the operator.

"What's the matter?" he called.

"Plenty; never mind draining that oil. You're about to fly again."

Jeff grinned. He told his mechanic to put his buckets away, and, swinging down from the wing, he walked to the shack.

PIKE looked at the tall, lithe figure. He admired Jeff greatly. He liked the good-natured grin of the big pilot, and, most of all, he liked Jeff's easy acceptance of all odds.

"What's the trouble, Pike?" Jeff asked, drawing his thick gauntlets from his hands.

"Plenty," the operator replied, thrusting a slip of paper towards him. "Read that."

Jeff glanced at the paper, and his eyes widened as he read:

Larson, trapper at Mud Rapids; gone mad. Shot and killed one Indian, also shot and badly wounded R.C.M.P. constable. Is now on way down Moose River; well armed and desperate. Relay message to get officers. Rush medical aid at once. Weather bad; visibility poor, thousand-foot ceiling, but help imperative. Please rush.

McDonald, Tukatyuk Post."

Jeff folded the paper. His bronzed face broke in a smile.

"This is the second time Larson's gone screwy," he said quietly. "The last time he shot up 'Little Panasis,' the Cree girl, but now, well, it's going to be just too bad for Larson."

"If they find him," Pike put in

"We'll find him," Jeff muttered grimly. He walked to the door and called to his mechanic.

"Keep the torch under her."

Turning to Pike, he said crisply:

"Call Kapiskuk and pick up a doctor and a Mountie. Tell them to be waiting on the lake. I'll be right over in a little while."

The operator sat down to his instruments, and a moment later Kapiskuk replied.

Pike snapped a message out, and soon received a reply that a doctor and a Mountie would be waiting for Jeff when he arrived.

Jeff looked at the map on the wall of the shack. Kapiskuk was one hundred and thirty miles northwest of Dog Rib Lake. Tukatyuk was two hundred miles north of the same spot.

"I can make Kapiskuk in an hour, and then angle across to Tukatyuk. I'll be there in two hours," he looked at the rising storm, "if I'm lucky," he added.

Jeff was no longer the big, easy-going pilot of the north. His blue eyes were hard as steel as he walked towards his machine. He knew that when death struck, the Mounties would get their man, no matter where he hid in that vast waste. They would follow him relentlessly to the rim of the Arctic Circle if need be.

For nine years he had followed the northern trails. He had seen many queer things, and knew the ropes.

"All right, Archie," he said to his mechanic. "Douse that torch and we'll 'gas up.' We're pushing off again."

The mechanic never moved a muscle. He merely glanced at the weather, and set

about opening petrol drums. Drama, stark and grim, surrounded every rock and tree in that country, but as far as Archie was concerned such a thing had never existed. Mechanically he went about his task.

Pike looked out the window in time to see Archie lift the heavy canvas hood from the nose of the Junkers. He heard the high-pitched whine of the inertia-starter and saw the "prop" turn over slowly, and then the engine "caught." He rushed from the shack with a small parcel.

"Here," he called, clambering on to the wing. "Here's a package that an Indian runner brought for you. There'll be a doctor and a Mountie waiting at Kapiskuk. Good luck."

He leaped from the wing and gazed anxiously at the low-lying clouds. He saw the grey forms scudding before the wind. Too well he knew the risks involved in getting a machine off in this weather. Anything was likely to happen; a drop of water in the petrol lines would mean disaster; frozen oil lines would be the equivalent of a death sentence. There were emergency rations aboard the 'plane, but the country was rugged and rock-bound, with little hope for a successful forced-landing.

The sudden bellow of the big engine brought Pike out of his black doubts. He saw Jeff "wagging her tail" to free the skis from the snow. There had been, no time to place spruce branches under the ski shoes, and consequently, when the 'plane stopped, the small amount of heat generated by the skis running across the ice had caused the snow to melt and then freeze.

Pike shook his head in wonderment as the big Benz roared and shook the 'plane like a terrier shakes a rat. He saw the Junkers lurch forward, gather speed and head into the wind.

Bellowing defiance to the gale, the

Benz took full throttle. Vicious gusts showered the surroundings with icy particles that wiped out vision in a blinding smother. The Junkers took the air, buffeted by the gale, and disappeared over the fringe of spruce. The hunt was on.

SIX hundred feet above the sharp rocks that would wreck his machine if he were forced down, Jeff flattened out. As far as the eyes could see, the country was wrapped in a blanket of snow and ice through which spires of rock and spruce bluffs jutted. As they neared the edge of the Barrens the full meaning of the word "loneliness" was forced on him. No wonder it was called the Barren Lands! If ever a scene of utter desolation greeted the eyes of the explorer it surely must have been this. There was not a living thing in sight, and yet, somewhere in this desolate waste, human beings lived for a short time and died. Tragedy stalked each stick or rock. The cold hand of death reached out and was always filled. In this Great Lone Land humanity struggled and suffered to bring wealth and happiness to they who lived in the cities "under the rim of the Arctic."

A forty-mile wind was leaping into the pitot tube, cutting the ground speed to one hundred and twenty miles an hour. Jeff checked his compass and brought the nose of his machine around to the northwest.

It was Jeff who had brought Larson in the last time. He had been taken without trouble, and after spending six months in the asylum he had been returned to his little cabin on Moose River. He was a dead shot, and Jeff knew there would be trouble before he was caught. Larson would fight to the bitter end.

Fingers of death clutched at the drumming wing as the Barrens sped below. Archie touched Jeff's arm and pointed to the north. A tiny black dot

resolved itself into a lone caribou that gave a startled glance upward at the 'plane, and then raced towards a spruce bluff miles away. Jeff grinned.

"Is the rifle in the emergency kit?" he asked.

Archie shook his head.

"Naw, I took it out; had to cut down on weight. I took a lot of other junk out, too."

An ominous sputter of the Benz distracted Jeff's attention from Archie's reply. He glanced at the tachometer and noted that the revs. were falling off. Archie rose in his seat. He looked below. Jagged rocks awaited them.

The engine suddenly "caught" again and resumed its comforting roar. Archie settled back in his seat and looked at Jeff.

An anxious frown was gathering on the brow of the veteran pilot. He didn't like the sound of the engine despite its seeming perfection at the moment. He knew that no engine should falter. If only he could get to Kapiskuk he would check up on the fuel lines.

Fitful gusts battered the Junkers as Jeff banked above the lake at Kapiskuk where two tiny dots showed on the ice. Closing his throttle, he jockeyed his machine for a long glide. At that instant the sun burst through the grey clouds and set up a snow glare. Jeff cursed softly and shaded his eyes.

The snow glare was fully as bad as a mirrored lake in the summer time, when the sun is reflected and the lake looks like a huge mirror. Only six months before, a veteran pilot had been caught in the glare and had driven his 'plane full into the lake.

Jeff glanced to the side and saw the fringe of thin spruce. He judged his landing from them and came in under full throttle.

With a harsh scrape the skis touched, sent up a shower of snow that resolved into a tiny whirlwind as the Benz dragged

the 'plane to where the doctor and the Mountie awaited them.

While Jeff loaded the passengers, Archie inspected the fuel lines. Pulling a filter out he dislodged a tiny piece of ice.

"Condensation from the damned heaters," he grumbled.

That was that. Each and every time the greatest care must be exercised in flying in the sub-arctic climate. Nothing must be left to chance. Distances were too great to hope for survival in a struggle against the elements.

With the Law safely aboard, Jeff settled down to the grim business at hand. From now until Larson was captured he would be at the disposal of the Mounted Policeman. It might be weeks before he landed at Dog Rib Lake again. There were plenty of petrol caches all over the country where he could replenish his fuel supply, but to find a single person in the huge waste was going to take time.

JEFF thrust the throttle wide open and kicked the rudder-bar. Heading down wind for the take-off, the Junkers trembled in every joint. It was asking a lot from a machine to expect performance in that gale, but with a challenging roar it rocketed off the lake and into the frost-charged atmosphere.

For an hour and forty minutes Jeff fought his 'plane across storm-tossed skies. At times a white smother from the north blotted out all vision, and blind flying was necessary. It needed all Jeff's resourcefulness to keep his 'plane on an even keel, and the dreaded pink haze hung about despite the storm.

That haze, familiar to all northern pilots, blots out the horizon. One has no means of telling just where one's 'plane might be, for all sense of direction is erased; ground and sky meet in a shimmering white mass.

Jeff, however, watched his instruments. He was bound on a dangerous mission, and he must not fail. Somewhere in that wild, abandoned land, a madman, well armed and ready to kill, was racing from the scene of a murder. He must be caught at all costs.

Radio messages crackled through the ether. 'Planes from other bases rose into the sky and carried Mounties and supplies to vantage points where they would be certain to intercept the trail of the madman should he escape the police in Jeff's 'plane. The net of the law was closing in rapidly, borne on drumming wings.

Mud Rapids passed below, and a moment later the flag of the Hudson's Bay Company on the Tukatyuk Post was sighted. Groups of men stood on the ice watching the 'plane, and as soon as the skis touched, willing hands aided Jeff in making the 'plane safe against the strong winds that howled down from the Barrens. A moment later he was hearing the story of the maddened trapper.

He had become crazed and fired at an Indian, killing him instantly. A Mountie, attempting to effect an arrest, had been shot and severely wounded. The trapper had then gathered his supplies, loaded them in his sledge, and headed down Moose River.

That was all there was to the story. It was the opening scene in another great drama of the frozen north. The Mounties would get their man, but this time they were using modern equipment. There would be no more months of tireless "mushing" behind snarling dogs; singing wings would carry them on the hunt.

To take Larson alive would be a dangerous job. Canadian law was very strict, and specified that the Mounties must take their man without force, if possible. It would be comparatively simple to locate the trapper from the air and then

shoot him down, but that was not the way of the law; besides, the man was insane. He must be taken alive unless he offered violent resistance.

The Mountie checked his equipment carefully. His revolver and service carbine were examined, and he tested his "webs" (snowshoes). A radio message instructed him to locate and arrest the trapper. He must stay on the trail until he caught his man. Satisfied with his examination, he signalled Jeff he was ready to start.

The big Junkers swept into the air and disappeared in the pink haze. The men at Tukatyuk shook their heads. They feared for the outcome of the hunt. But Jeff had few doubts on that score. He had learned that Larson had a ten-hour start. He had a six-dog team and was last seen racing down Moose River. At the best possible speed Larson couldn't be more than fifty miles away.

TWENTY miles from Tukatyuk small clumps of stunted spruce appeared. Jeff circled above the mouth of the Moose River and his keen eyes searched the whitened wastes. He nosed the Junkers down and was soon skimming a few feet above the frozen surface of the river. A thin line of tracks was visible. Larson had passed this way. He would catch up on him in a few minutes.

Jeff's eyes were fixed on that line of tracks. He followed them relentlessly. The spruce clumps thickened, and soon patches of heavy brush fringed the winding course of the river. Larson was somewhere ahead.

A tug at his sleeve caused him to take his eyes from his instruments. Archie waved his arm, and far ahead Jeff saw six tiny dots hitched to a cariole and followed by another dot, larger, which turned a white face towards the roaring Junkers.

As the roar of the Benz reached the dogs they milled about in confusion and

tangled their harness. Larson's arm snaked out, and he cracked the caribou-hide whip around their ears and haunches, but they refused to stir. Frothing with rage, he glared at the shadow of the wings overhead, and reached under the covering of the cariole.

"That's him!" Archie yelled, "and he's getting a rifle out."

Jeff nodded a silent reply. His eyes narrowed to slits as he banked hard and cut across a wide strip of land where the river took an abrupt turn. Heading into the wind, he dropped the Junkers to the ice and warned the Mountie that Larson was just around the bend, ready for battle.

The Mountie nodded. He leaped to the ice and fastened his "webs" to his moccasined feet. He slung his carbine across his back and loosened his Webley in its holster. Then, grim and determined, he advanced to meet his quarry.

Once again Jeff took the air. He must watch and see Larson did not leave the river and seek the shelter of the brush. As he swung north again he could see the form of the Mountie swinging along on his "webs." He looked for Larson, but the trapper had disappeared from sight.

Sweeping low, Jeff signalled the officer that his man had sought the shelter of the bush. The Mountie waved an acknowledgment and continued.

With the cunning of a fox, Larson vanished in the brush. His eyes glittered with an insane light as he watched the Mountie stop and examine the tracks on the river. There was a sneer on his lips as he sped to the opposite side of the strip on the hairpin turn. Like an animal of the jungle, he was doubling on his tracks, and would attack the Mountie from the rear.

Jeff caught a sudden glimpse of the madman as he darted from beneath the drooping branches of a spruce thicket. He saw his intentions at once. The Mountie

followed the trail unsuspectingly.

The Junkers spun on a wing tip, but the Mountie had vanished into the brush. Thrusting the throttle wide open Jeff roared down as close as he dared above the tree tops and attempted to signal the officer. Archie clutched the seat in excitement. He sensed the deadly import of Larson's manoeuvre.

The officer broke cover and glanced upward. He saw Archie wave his arm frantically from the cockpit. He grasped the situation at once, and commenced back-tracking. Turning to the river surface once again, the Mountie proceeded cautiously. At that instant Larson stole from the brush along the shore and sneaked towards the officer.

Jeff was helpless. From the front seat of the 'plane he saw the two men as they neared each other. Closer and closer they drew, neither guessing the nearness of the other. The bend of the river prevented them from seeing more than one hundred feet ahead, but from the Junkers the drama was unfolding with startling clarity.

AT almost the same instant, hunter and hunted rounded the bend in the river. They stopped and faced each other. Closing his throttle, Jeff nosed down, his keen eyes taking in every detail of the dramatic scene below. Larson moved his rifle. He edged it forward; carefully. The officer raised his hand, and called. Then he advanced slowly, though he could not see the insane blaze in the eyes of the trapper. On the bare surface of the river he was without cover of any kind, but that did not deter him. His "webs" moved forward, and the distance narrowed.

Suddenly it happened. With lightning-like rapidity Larson flung his rifle to his shoulder. His finger squeezed the trigger. A sharp crack shattered the cold air, and with a panther-like movement Larson

leaped for the brush again.

At the report of the rifle the Mountie staggered and unslung his carbine. His jaw jutted forward, as he followed his quarry. There was another sharp crack from the brush. A wisp of smoke curled upward, and the Mountie threw both arms above his head and plunged face downward to the ice.

Larson trembled with rage. He gathered his dogs, and shook his fist at the 'plane circling overhead. Whipping his team, he raced down the river.

The cold brutality of the shooting enraged Jeff. Turning to Archie, he yelled:

"Now, what about that rifle?"

Archie shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing about it," he answered. "We haven't got it; that's all."

Jeff's blue eyes froze. He clenched his fists in impotent rage. He was unarmed, and practically helpless. There was only one thing left for him to do; to pick up the body of the Mountie and return to Tukatyuk. Sweeping low above Larson he peered overside, and at that instant the trapper whirled, his rifle poised.

Eyes filled with murderous hate, the madman glanced over his sights as the 'plane raced towards him. Too late Jeff saw the danger, and he sought to avoid the shot by a sharp zoom. A spurt of flame leaped from the muzzle of the gun, and Jeff felt a tremendous blow strike him near the heart on his left side. Instinctively he drew back on the controls, and the racing 'plane zoomed still higher. Jeff turned imploring eyes on Archie.

The mechanic was equal to the occasion. The 'plane was fitted with dual controls, and Northern air mechanics are almost as adept at using them as are the pilots. Archie seized the wheel just as the machine reached the stalling point. He succeeded in nosing down, gaining flying

speed, and finally reached an even keel. He looked anxiously at Jeff.

The big fellow was breathing heavily, but there was no blood in sight. Archie's trembling fingers probed beneath the thick folds of the heavy fur-lined suit, but he could discover no wound. Slapping the throttle wide open, he headed for Tukatyuk.

THE quick rush of cold air and the increased roar of the Benz brought Jeff out of his coma. His eyes opened and he gasped. Struggling valiantly, he recovered consciousness. Before Archie realised what was happening, Jeff had taken the controls from his hands and thrown the Junkers into a wing-bending bank. His eyes glowed with the fighting spirit, and he hurled his big machine down Moose River. Mad or sane, armed or not, no man was going to shoot at him and get away with it. The Benz roared a song of battle as it pulled the 'plane down the backtrail at more than two hundred miles an hour.

A plan suddenly occurred to Jeff. It was a desperate chance, and might easily end in disaster, but he was used to those chances. With a responsive engine and skilful flying he would take Larson alive, knocked senseless but alive nevertheless. The many hours spent in tricky landings in dangerous places would now stand him in good stead.

Banking the Junkers sharply, Jeff turned towards Larson. The madman stopped and whipped his rifle out. His blazing eyes peered over the sights, and he pressed the trigger. Jeff was ready for him this time, and the bullet sped harmlessly by. As the machine surged upward like a leaping tuna, Jeff leaned far over the side and thrust the control column forward quickly.

In a split second the Junkers dived with a terrifying howl from the Benz. Larson threw up his arms and sought to avoid the roaring monoplane. He was too late. A corner of the heavy metal-clad ski struck him a glancing blow on the side of the head and stretched him senseless in the snow.

Archie was astonished. By masterly handling of his heavy machine, Jeff had used it as a club and stretched Larson out cold. He shook his head in wonderment as the veteran pilot slapped his 'plane down on the ice beside the trapper, who was quickly tied and loaded aboard. His dogs were also loaded, and a few minutes later Jeff was putting his 'plane down alongside the Mountie.

The officer had been hit in the thigh and left breast. He required medical attention, so, placing him beside the bound form of the mad trapper, Jeff took-off at once for Tukatyuk.

MEDICAL attention was given the two men at the trading post. As the doctor emerged from the room, Archie prodded Jeff's arm.

"Go on," he said, "it's your turn now."

Jeff grinned.

"I'm not hurt," he said quietly.

"But didn't Larson hit you when he fired back there?"

Jeff reached in the front breast-pocket of his flying suit. He ruefully regarded a tattered mess of buckskin and beads. In the

centre of the mass was a nickel-jacketed bullet.

"That's what saved me," he said, and once again he read the note enclosed.

It was from "Little Panasis," the Cree girl whom Larson had shot some time ago. In queer characters she said she was grateful to the big pilot for taking her out to the white man's hospital, and she had made these gauntlets as a token of her gratitude.

"This," Jeff said, "is the parcel Pike gave me just as we hopped off."

"I always knew that guy gave us more weight than we needed," Archie grumbled, "but it's all in the day's work."

Slowly Jeff took out his log-book and entered up his report.

"Mounted police from Kapiskuk to Tukatyuk. Trailed trapper down Moose River. Policeman wounded. Brought both trapper and policeman to Tukatyuk Post. Weather bad; visibility poor."

As Archie had remarked, it was "all in the day's work" for a pilot in the Canadian North-West.

*Mr. Edward Green is a pilot with wide experience of the Far North of Canada, where he is at present flying with a new airline company manned exclusively by veteran pilots of the Great War. His story is based upon an actual incident in the career of the famous Canadian pilot "Wop" May.-Editor's Note.