

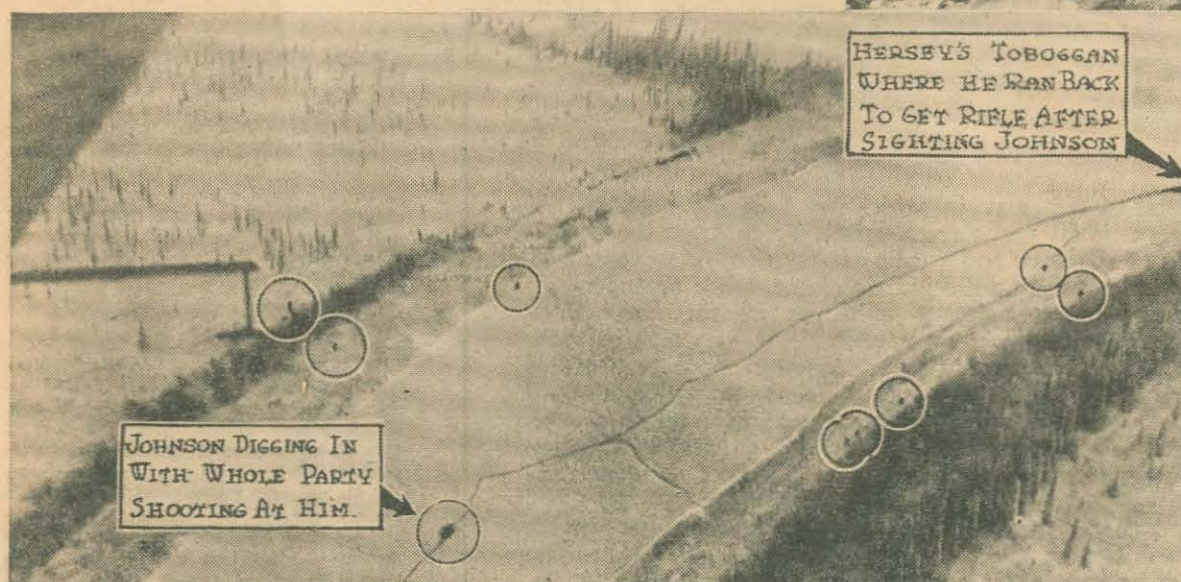
The Rat River Murders

By Marshall Graves

When a Man Runs Amuck in the Canadian Northwest, the Royal Mounted Police Let Winds Nor Blizzard Nor Starvation Stop Them from Getting Their Man. The Killer in This Story of the "Calling All Cars" Series Did Not Reckon on the Power of Radio as Defender of the Law



Typical member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, such as went out to bring back the mad killer of Rat River



Aerial view of Albert Johnson's last stand. The lowest circle indicates the killer digging into snow to escape rifle fire. Top circle shows the spot where he deserted his toboggan to run back to a cabin for "taking a bead" on his Mountie quarry

He came roaring towards the Yukon country with a rifle in his hand, hurled northward upon a bucking log raft on the muddy waters of the River Peel.

To the three silent, startled Indians who were paddling upstream, he looked more like a river-devil than a man. There were snarls in his black beard, flickering yellow lights in his eyes. He clutched a rifle and shouted a hoarse taunt as the current bore him past: "You copperfaces!"

Peter Alexei, the bow paddle, finally spoke to his companions. Peter wore without incongruity a "mail-order" mackinaw, and a turkey-feather in his hair.

"White man got eyes like wolverine," said Peter gravely. "Wear papoose mocassin around neck, but no got papoose. Him plenty bushed."

Bushed! Such is the northland's term for the strange madness which overtakes men who live too long alone. Such men, when they run amuck, can menace an entire district—so it is no wonder that word spread quickly of the mysterious white man who had come into the territory on a log raft, wearing a pair of baby's shoes around his neck, and clutching a rifle in his hand!

Service, the poet of the north, wrote years ago: "For there's never a law of God or man runs north of Fifty-three!"

But that was years ago. Now men in bright red coats, on horseback or behind dog-teams of yipping malemutes, have carried the banner of law and order as far north as the last black frozen point of land which prods the Arctic Ocean; men who have tackled unafraid the toughest police job on record.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police are on the job. And they are interested in strangers.

They learned a number of disquieting things about this one. He had built a strange, huge log house up the Rat River. When Indians stopped to look at it, he brandished his rifle and ordered them away, while snapping savagely in the air—a shiny set of gold teeth! This from a man who had a perfectly good set of teeth of his own!

When cold weather threatened, this strange fellow had appeared at Fort McPherson trading post, and laid in supplies for the winter. Constable Millen of the Mounted happened to be at the post. He learned that the man's name was Albert Johnson, that he was supposed to be a trapper, but certainly was a liar—when he talked at all. "I'm from Arctic Red River," Johnson had



Pistol experts of the Canadian Mounted, more of the sort of men who give all to get their man. Left to right: Corporal Don Foreland, J. D. O'Connell, Corporal A. Ford, Constable W. Mowat and Constable J. L. Dolley

declared—an obvious lie, for that was Millen's own territory.

Then the Indians began to complain that Johnson was breaking up their traplines and throwing traps and all into the trees. At that, Constables King and McDowell of the R. C. M. P. were despatched from the police headquarters at Arctic Red River to pay a call on this man who didn't want company.

It was a long and weary trek over the snows—forty below zero and a gale blowing. But King and McDowell fought their way up Rat River. When at last they reached Johnson's queer cabin, high on a promontory, banked by scrub pines, they stopped short.

This was no cabin, it was a fort! Built of a heavy double thickness of logs, it seemed beyond the power of one man to construct. Towers were at each corner, and loopholes everywhere. Yet no smoke rose from the chimney, and there were no tracks on the snow which had lain for several days.

McDowell got no answer when he rapped on the door with the butt of his service pistol. "Open up," shouted King, "or we'll have to break in!"

Johnson opened up—but with a rifle. Splinters flew into the tanned faces of the two Mounties as slug after slug ripped through the door. Constable McDowell flung himself face down on the powdery snow. But King fell backwards, shot under the heart.

The shooting ceased. All the northland became quiet once more—as quiet as death. But King was not dead. McDowell picked him up awkwardly, tenderly, and carried him to the dog-sleigh. At every step he expected the madman to open fire again, and kill them both. But that was a chance a Mountie has to take. It was now his job to carry the unconscious King to Aklavik—80 miles away—where lived the nearest doctor.

The northland still tells, with wonder, how the comparative tenderfoot McDowell made that trip in 21 hours! Twenty-one hours of hell below zero, without pause for food or rest. At the end of that time he and his straining dogs stumbled into Aklavik. He murmured a few words to the hastily-summoned Inspector—and keeled over.

Johnson had won the first round of his battle with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. But radio took up the fight.

Inspector Eames talked to the doctor, who was fighting valiantly for the life of the wounded officer. He talked to McDowell, who had recovered and was ready to start back, alone—to get the mad trapper of Rat River.

"It'll take more than one man to get him," the Inspector insisted. "I've got a plan." He scribbled an order to the man at the controls of the tiny police broadcasting station. A crisp official voice broke in upon the program relayed from faraway Montreal.

"Station UZK—UZK—general broadcast—trappers throughout Aklavik district report to nearest police post for service in capture of Albert Johnson, mad trapper of Rat River."

There was a brief pause, then:

"Calling Royal Canadian Mounted Police at Fort McPherson; calling RCMP at Arctic Red River; calling RCMP at Fort McPherson and Arctic Red River—report full strength to (Continued on Page 28)

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Inspector Eames at Aklavik—Station UZK—that is all."

Speedily they gathered, troopers, constables, woodsmen, trappers—even Peter Alexei, the old Indian tracker.

Another blizzard raged on that gray January morning when the posse set out. They had four dog teams and supplies for ten days.

Far ahead on the snow-swept trail, in his strange cabin, Albert Johnson made flesh-tearing dum-dum bullets by cutting off the tips of his many rounds of ammunition. He had shot a Mountie. But he had plenty of time to escape northward. The posse would not even be gathered at Aklavik until after this howling blizzard, Johnson knew. He packed his grip and loaded his guns. He had no dogs, so he must travel light.

And then a shot cracked across Johnson's clearing. It was a miracle to the outlaw—who had never heard of police broadcasting.

The voice of Inspector Eames rang out: "I demand your surrender in the name of the Crown!"

Johnson laughed, and fired into the undergrowth. The posse poured a hail of lead at the cabin. But of what avail were bullets against that wooden fort?

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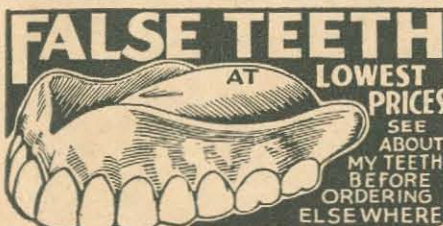
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The Rat River Murders

Eames decided to give Johnson his Christmas present. He had brought dynamite.

There was a tremendous explosion. The door was flung inward. But through the shattered door came such a volley of rifle fire into the clearing that the attackers flung themselves down on the snow, scuttling away for dear life.

Forced to Retreat

Johnson laughed heartily. He had won the second round as well as the first. The attackers were nearly out of supplies, and were weary and chilled from five days of mushing and camping in the clear. They had barely food enough to get back to Aklavik. There was a choice between trying to rush the fortified cabin, and taking the stores which Johnson had laid in, or turning back while they could.

It was hard to swallow, but they had to go back. As the posse swung wearily down the river again, Albert Johnson stood in the shattered doorway of his cabin and gnashed a set of false teeth at them—teeth on which the sun glittered.

But by now this one-man civil war had become a matter of national importance. Back at Aklavik, Inspector Eames ordered a radio message sent from station UZK across the three thousand miles that separate Northwest Territory from the capitol of the Dominion of Canada, at Ottawa.

"UZK calling Royal Canadian Signals Service at Ottawa—UZK calling. Inspector Eames, RCMP, requests authority to employ mobile detachment Signals Service men for tracking down Albert Johnson, mad trapper of Rat River, wanted for assault of Constable King. UZK calling."

Back came the call from distant Ottawa, making history through cutting red tape for the first time by equipping a detachment of Mounted Police with sending and receiving radio sets, and operators to go with them.

Back up Rat River went the original posse, plus the signal men.

But Johnson was gone. The men poured into the cabin. They exclaimed with amazement as they saw that the floor had been sunk three feet beneath the ground level, and the walls built of double thicknesses of logs.

The Quarry Missing

Every stick of furniture had been destroyed by the explosion of the dynamite bomb. But why had Johnson borne a charmed life? The answer was soon found. The wily madman had dug himself a tunnel under one wall, in which he was perfectly safe not only from rifle fire but even from bombs or smoking out.

The Inspector realized the task that faced him. "We haven't enough grub or dogfeed to keep this entire party in the field," he said. "We'll keep four men here to pick up Johnson's trail and follow it along. Quartermaster Sergeant Riddell you'll be in charge. Take Constables Millen, Verville and Gardlund. They're your men for the job. Staff Sergeant Hersey can establish a base camp, set up his field equipment, and keep in touch with me at Aklavik by radio."

Eleven days of fruitless searching followed for those men. Then, at the top of the barrier, where Rat River had narrowed into a trickle, Gardlund said:

"Look! There he is!" A mile or so ahead the four saw a dark figure crouching behind a barricade.

"That's him!" agreed Riddell. "And it's a perfect ambush! He hasn't spotted us, so let's sneak up on him at dawn. It's getting too dark now."

The searchers stirred early next morning. They took up the trail. Within about four hundred yards of the trapper's barricade, they were startled suddenly when Johnson appeared, standing erect, and clearly outlined against the snowy background behind him. One Mountie swung up his rifle and fired. The figure of the trapper toppled backward.

"Do you think you got him?" Millen

gasped. The trooper nodded. "I think so. But it was a snapshot at long range—I couldn't be sure!"

"Well, we'd better lie doggo for a while," decided Sergeant Riddell.

The Fatal Ambush

About two hours later things were still quiet. No sign of life came from the barricade. Then Constable Millen broke the silence. "Well, let's go."

The policemen charged forward. Suddenly Johnson rose like a jack-in-the-box. Millen dropped, shot through the heart; the other two sprang for cover. But immediately on seeing Millen's prostrate form, Riddell dashed out, swung him shoulder-high and carried him to the shelter of the creek bed. Only then did he learn that he had risked his life to rescue a dead man.

"It would be suicide for us to rush that barricade," he said soberly. "I'll mush

In the Beginning

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Threading through the fact and dream careers of many of radio's sons and daughters are sparks of vital courage and grim determination of struggle to beat not only drudgery and boredom and loneliness, but something infinitely more—ill health.

In the cultured, well-to-do home of the Boswells in New Orleans, a great sorrow descended, for Connie, one of three talented children, was stricken with infantile paralysis. The doctors said she never would walk again.

Yet Connie today is one of radio's sunniest persons. Her singing voice and her cheerful disposition have endeared her to the hearts of an enormous audience. The girls—Connie, Vet and Martha—originally started as artists, but their inherited love for music detoured their pen and brush careers.

From Shipping Clerk

Nick Lucas learned to strum the mandolin in his early childhood, but Nick thought the odds on a musical career were a bit too long, so he took positions as a shipping clerk, a factory worker in a tannery, and as a tile setter. His years of hard manual labor drove him back to his first love, music. In addition to the mandolin, he soon conquered the guitar and the piano.

He organized a band and was booked over the Orpheum vaudeville circuit. He followed this by annexing himself to Ted Fiorito's band as a pianist and vocalist. Life was just a bowl of cherries to Nick after that. The musical talkies beckoned, and he became an international star, which set swiftly when the canned music palled. He's making a grand showing in radio, however.

From all this it can be seen that des-

back to Aklavik and get more posse-men. You stay here and hold Johnson inside his barricade."

Two days later, Riddell reported in person to Inspector Eames. Again radio sparked across the frosty northern air.

"We're going to get him this time, Sergeant," Eames insisted. "I've broadcast a request for all trappers to come in on the hunt. The Eskimos on the Arctic shores are on the lookout for him. I sent a radio message to Punch Dickens, superintendent of Airways at Edmonton. He's flying to McMurray with two officers and a supply of tear gas bombs."

"At McMurray he'll turn over to 'Wop' May, who'll be with us until the search is successful. The plane is radio-equipped, so if we get into a spot where he can't land, we can give him instructions from below. A plane might be used to bomb Johnson's stronghold, where a ground party couldn't get through."

And so a radio-equipped bombing plane, piloted by the well-known Canadian flier, Captain "Wop" May, joined the dog-team-and-posse manhunt!

But Johnson escaped by night from his barricade, and a terrific gale, blowing in

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tinies and dreams cannot be controlled by any set plans. Jacques Fray, of the musical team of Fray and Braggiotti, began as a student of banking and finance, while his partner hoped to follow in his father's footsteps and become a concert singer.

Nino Martini was crossed in his intentions of becoming an internationally famous athlete. He was a crack horseman and gymnast, but his real ambition was to achieve prominence as a six-day bike rider!

All Horatio Algers

Edwin C. Hill had a craving for the smell of printers' ink. Wilbur Budd Hulick was a soda jerker, a crooner, an orchestra leader, and a telegraph company representative before he discovered his funny streak. Bing Crosby was a magazine salesman "working his way through college," and a postoffice clerk, before he decided upon singing as a career. Tito Guizar was fated to a life of test tubes and Bunsen burners by stern parental edict, but he kicked over the traces and refused to study his chemistry lessons in the University of Mexico, with the result that he finally won his parents over to music.

Boake Carter used his newspaper experience as a stepping stone to his present job as a radio news commentator. Goodman Ace duplicated Boake's stepping-stone system. Harry Von Zell, veteran announcer, thought he'd like prize fighting until he engaged in a few bouts, whereupon he renounced the squared arena for a less strenuous job as a bank messenger boy. He broke into radio quite accidentally when he visited a studio and "filled in" in an open spot.

And so they have climbed to glory!

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