

Chapter XXVI

Northward, Ho!

Just as any consideration of the “cradle of the winds,” the North Pole, must go beyond its geography and its vast, trackless wasters into the obstacles that nature has set up as defenses against exploration and development, so must any actual view of the Arctic be indelibly marked by four great shadows of men and machines.

There is, primarily, the shadow of Uncle Sam, as represented in the successful thrusts to the Pole, first on foot by Admiral Robert E. Peary, in the era of the dog sled, and lastly by Rear Admirable Richard E. Byrd, in a swift and successful flight to the Pole and back, with the late Floyd Bennett as companion.

Next, there is the shadow of those intrepid Soviet flyers who demonstrated to the world that, while Russia’s Five Year Plan may have fallen short of desired success, the aeronautical program was carried through to a magnificent conclusion, a little bewildering under the difficulties of a changing government coping with unstable conditions.

Then, there is the shadow of Charles E. Lindbergh who, on what had the appearance of a casual pleasure trip with his wife – a jaunt that was to precede disaster in his own family circle – flew across the Arctic Circle, pointing the way for the development of commercial lines.

Finally, and most tragic, there is the shadow of a dauntless soul; a visionary man of action who, like the Biblical Job, was best with more troubles than seemed equable for

one man and yet who, harried, discredited, and scorned, kept his head high, his eyes on the goal, and his spirit staunch – Sir Hubert Wilkins.

It was as plain Captain Wilkins, adventurer and idealist, scientist and explorer, that this courageous Englishman emulated a new Moses and led his aeronautical followers to the threshold of the Promised Land, and who was never permitted by the gates to enter it himself. The world of science owes Wilkins a great debt.

It is unfortunate, but nonetheless true, that behind all successful exploration there must be equally successful promotion and salesmanship. Expeditions into unknown lands and over uncharted courses require great financing, and government has few agencies of this character. If men are to explore, other men must provide the where withal.

As long ago as 1913, Wilkins voiced the opinion that aircraft would one day conquer the Arctic Ocean and play an important part in polar expedition. But he was not primarily concerned with the feat of making the crossing. He was more concerned with the development of an airway that would lead to better international understanding. He had trudged more than 5,000 miles over Arctic ice and snow with various expeditions and he knew how to maneuver an airplane in flight. Thus, he considered himself competent to undertake the work and, in time, he convinced financiers. Because they were more interesting in reaching the Pole by air than anything else, he agreed to make the attempt.

However, in the back of Wilkins' head was a much more important program. He aimed to chart a course across the Arctic; to discover if land lay where tidal experts estimated it to be, and if meteorological stations could be established so that flying would one day become as safe as it was swift, and the world would benefit from long-range forecasting.

Man's ingenuity has devised many a scheme for exploration of that great unknown area. Staunch vessels had been built only to be destroyed in the ice pack. Men had harnessed themselves to sleds, plodding ever onward toward their goal. Still, despite its proximity to civilization, lands bordering on the polar region remained, up until a few years ago, virtually a sealed book. Until airmen began to explore its vast interior, that almost trackless region that lies well within the Arctic Circle had been seen by no white men at all. Yet, Wilkins realized that the great cities of this North Temperate Zone must one day be linked by air over this same Arctic.

The shortest air route between Russian ports and those on the west coast of North America, as well as the air routes from Chicago to Calcutta, India, lie very nearly across the North Pole. By these air routes, not only several thousand miles might be saved, but the resultant saving in time would be inestimable in this day of keen competition.

But the North that Wilkins knew so well was to prove his worst enemy, and the world of finance of which he knew so little was to prove a constant menace. While he was battling with bankers and the elements, Byrd made the first round trip to the Pole by airplane; Amundsen, Nobile, and Ellsworth crossed the Arctic Circle in a dirigible; Lindbergh charted a useful commercial airway, and the Soviet airmen virtually established bus service from Moscow to California.

For Wilkins, who was left applauding on the sidelines as his colleagues passed in unending procession, there remained the small glory but important scientific contribution of the first long distance flight from west to east; the discovery that land planes, equipped with skis, could cope with forced landings, and that a continental shelf did not exist. Roald Amundsen undoubtedly provided Wilkins with one of his greatest heartaches.

Wilkins was already on the threshold of the Arctic in the spring of 1925, when the famous Norwegian explorer, who had conquered the South Pole on December 14, 1911, by means of dog sled, and who had made several unsuccessful attempts to reach the North Pole, became air-minded.

While Wilkins battles with his backers; saw one machine after another wrecked in trials, and struggled along in the face of discouragement, Amundsen succeeded in interesting the American sportsman and explorer, Lincoln Ellsworth, in an air journey to the Pole. Ellsworth provided two flying boats, and the aerial expedition left Kings Bay, Spitzbergen, on the afternoon of May 21, 1925.

Thus began the first human flight in history which actually had the North Pole as its objective. As the planes sped onward on their climb to the top of the world, the nations of the civilized globe listened breathlessly. But as careful as the two explorers had been, they had underestimated the fuel requirements. At midnight, on the 22nd, their failure was evident. Amundsen was informed definitely at 1 a.m. that morning that he must return to Kings Bay, as half of his gasoline supply had been used. At that time, the goal was within a hundred miles. Soon after heading back, Amundsen ran into further difficulty. One of his motors began to miss badly and he signaled Ellsworth that he must land on the polar ice.

To land a sea plane with its pontoons on the rough pack ice of the polar sea was an impossibility. The men were facing certain death when Amundsen spied an “open lead” and in the nick of time landed his craft on the pool of water between two huge floes of drifting pack ice, which instantly began to close upon it. From the air, Ellsworth saw what had happened and he hastened to make a safe landing. On landing, however, his

craft sprang a leak and had to be hauled on firm ice before the crew could go to Amundsen's aid. Here were six puny men matching their wits and strength against the angry Arctic. Finally, they won, and Amundsen's craft was pulled to safety.

What picture can now describe their dreary position? Neither plane was able to take off from the grinding ice floes except under very favorable conditions. This required time and patience. Close inspection revealed that Ellsworth's ship was damaged beyond repair and must be abandoned. Amundsen's could be repaired, but could it be flown again?

Celestial observations disclosed their position to be about 400 miles from Cape Columbia, the nearest known land – too far for six men without dogs or sleds to travel. Furthermore, their provisions were low. Their only chance lay in combining the fuel and provisions of the two planes and attempt to make a makeshift runway. On this thin hope, they pinned their faith and set to work. They gave themselves a time limit of three weeks to repair Amundsen's ship and build a runway out of rough, corrugated ice. Those were three weeks of intense suffering and hardship. It was bitter cold. They toiled all day and part of the night in sub-zero weather.

Deep snow was stamped and rough ice was scraped with meager tools to make the runway. At night, they would huddle together inside of the imprisoned craft to keep from freezing to death. Without warmth of any kind, and with a rapidly dwindling food supply, they battled desperately against the grim forces of the Arctic. With courage, they calmly faced the elements in their last stronghold, through many long hours of stillness, listening to the song of bitter cold winds changing to a strident wail, which caused the heavy ice floes to boil up menacingly.

So it was with mingled emotions that the night of June 14 arrived. The next day was their deadline. The runway was finished. That night the mercury fell, but they didn't mind the cold. The wind was coming in from the right direction. That meant that the runway on which they had tramped for so many weary days would be as hard as glass in the morning.

On the morning of June 15, they started the motor in a freshening breeze, and joined in a silent prayer of thankfulness and hope. All climbed into their seats. The heavily –laden plane gathered speed like a proud horse tugging at a heavy load, and rose into the air. They were free men again, awakened from a bad dream.

About the time the Amundsen-Ellsworth expedition returned to Kings Bay amid the delighted shouts of the populace, the MacMillan Arctic expedition was getting underway. This was comprised of two vessels, *Peary* and *Bowdoin*, and carried on board a separate unit of four United States Navy planes, under the charge of Commander Byrd.

Not averse to a polar flight, Commander Byrd's immediate objective was the survey of some 5,000 miles of Arctic wasteland, and he established a base at Etah, Greenland. He agreed with Wilkins that aircraft alone could function successfully in the highest altitudes. Wilkins, in the meantime, was having new difficulties. He had been unsuccessful in his attempt to purchase the Amundsen plane after its return to Kings Bay, and he could not find another suitable craft.

Eventually, he decided to forego further Arctic exploration for that year. Given time, he hoped to raise new capital in order to have the right kind of ship built, aiming to return to the North in the spring. In Detroit, he found new friends who aided him in securing a Fokker monoplane, a tri-motored plane of special design, with a 72-foot wing

spread. So, while Byrd continued with his scientific work and Amundsen investigated the possibilities of the dirigible, Wilkins took a new tack. His plane was built in Holland under the personal supervision of my late friend, Anthony Fokker, and finally arrived at Fairbanks, Alaska, where Wilkins and Lieutenant Carl Ben Eielson, Alaska's flying idol, started experiments.

The spring of 1926 was destined to be an historic one for the Arctic. Wilkins and Eielson made a number of flights from Fairbanks to Point Barrow, Alaska's northernmost trading post, near where Wiley Post and Will Rogers met their tragic end nine years later; Byrd and Bennett were at Spitzbergen, and Amundsen and Ellsworth were en route in a dirigible.

On March 31, Wilkins and Eielson made the first long nonstop flight in the Arctic when, after crossing the Endicott Range they flew a distance of nearly 1,000 miles between Fairbanks and Point Barrow. They flew over the polar ice pack, 100 miles from land, and later landed amidst a howling blizzard at their original destination.

To the outside world it looked as if there would be a race between Amundsen, Byrd, and Wilkins to be first to reach the North Pole by air. It was, therefore, both exciting and historic on May 9, 1926, when news flashed to the world that Byrd and Bennett had flown from Spitzbergen to the Pole and back in a tri-motored Fokker plane, a distance of 1,600 land miles in fifteen hours.

Seventeen years before, on April 6, 1909, Admiral Peary had actually reached the Pole on foot after months of struggle. Now, Byrd and Bennett duplicated that feat in a few hours. They returned to be cheered by Amundsen and Ellsworth who, with General

Umberto Nobile, had just arrived with the Italian dirigible *Norge* for a polar flight sponsored by the Aero Club of Norway.

On May 11, four days after the *Norge* landed at Kings Bay, with the assistance of the crew of the Norwegian steamer *Heimdal*, the airship was taken from its temporary hangar, given a final check, and at 8:50 a.m. GCT, rose slowly into the air with sixteen persons aboard. The weather was excellent and the sun shed its dazzling light upon the nearby snow-capped mountains of Spitzbergen, from which the explorer Andree had started 29 years before on a disastrous balloon flight.

The *Norge* carried seven tons of gasoline and 800 pounds of oil, sufficient to cover a distance of 4,300 statute miles in calm weather. Also on board were 1,100 pounds of provisions, sufficient to maintain the sixteen on board for more than a month. The airship soon rose to an altitude of 1,350 feet, and with the temperature of 14 degrees below zero, proceeded at a 60 mile per hour clip toward the pole some 800 miles distant.

For two hours, the log of the *Norge* reveals that the ship floated over a few sea with scattered ice floes. Soon the polar pack ice was sighted. At first, this uniform ice field was marked only by occasional narrow tortuous channels to the northeast. Later, they became more frequent and the passengers saw glimpses of white fish in the free water, as well as polar bears on the ice. When latitude 80° N. was reached all traces of life had vanished. Only the desolate polar desert stretched to the horizon.

The magnetic compass functioned efficiently and the sun compass, invented by Albert H. Bumstead, of the National Geographic Society, confirmed its reputation as a controlling instrument. At about 9:00 p.m. that night the cold began to make itself felt. The *Norge's* speed was then 37 statute miles an hour and it was flying at an altitude of 1,

650 feet. In the hope of finding less headwind, it descended to lower levels. The wind continued unabated.

Rising again to 1,350 feet, clouds were observed gathering on the horizon, and after 9:30 p.m., the sky was overcast. Shortly after 10:00 p.m. it began to snow. The ship had approached latitude 88° N. Presently, the *Norge* was enveloped in dense fog, a desperate situation, since such a condition causes the formation of ice on all exposed metal parts.

In order to avoid the menace of ice, the dirigible rose to more than 3,000 feet, and by 11:15 p.m. it was only a degree and a half from the Pole and the fog began to disperse, giving a clearer view of the frozen sea below. The temperature was 12 degrees above zero, at an altitude of 2,500 feet, and at 1:30 a.m. the next morning, the sun's altitude showed that the *Norge* had reached latitude 90° and was directly over the North Pole. With motors throttled down, the airship descended to within 700 feet of the frozen ice in order to drop the national ensigns of the three participating nations, the United States, Italy, and Norway.

It was an impressive moment for these gallant explorers, particularly Amundsen, who had discovered the South Pole fifteen years before. Aircraft had conquered the Arctic, and the *Norge* flew on through an unexplored region, on its way to Alaska, 2,700 miles away. The sky was now overcast, brightened only occasionally by fleeting glimpses of a cold, colorless sun.

All that day, the Arctic had the shadow of the *Norge* on its bosom as the dirigible continued on toward Teller, Alaska. At times, it ran into seemingly endless fog banks, often forced to fly below or above them. Its course was directed toward Nome and, as the

ship approached civilization, crowds of cheering specks could be seen. One of these specks was Wilkins.

Whatever his emotions as the shadow of the *Norge* fell upon him, he had the satisfaction of knowing that the scheme he had been told was fantastic a dozen years before had proved practical. Disaster did not cross the path of the *Norge* until it reached the Bering Straits. Bad weather and a pitched battle with the elements made landing advisable, and the craft finished its journey on the ice near Teller, where the dirigible was subsequently deflated and dismantled for shipment home.

Thus, the first east-to-west crossing of the Arctic Ocean from Spitzbergen across the North Pole to Alaska had come to a successful end. Wilkins became convinced after a test flight crash that his tri-motored plane was too heavy for two men to move about in the event of a forced landing. He felt the need of a smaller, lighter plane for his proposed west-to-east crossing. The *Norge* flight had established that there was no high land between the Pole and Point Barrow. He intended to explore the other route.

It was Wilkins' plan to fly some 600 miles out over the polar ice in a northwest and northeast direction to search for reported land there and determine the extent of the continental shelf, if it existed. In order to do this, he must make landings on the ice to determine the depth by soundings. To do this successfully, he must wait for another spring – and additional finances. He got the latter in Detroit. ON March 12, 19927, represented by a Stinson bi-plane, he was ready to start with Eielson.

The hard luck that had characterized all of the Wilkins flights did not desert him. He and Eielson flew over the arctic ice for a distance of about 550 miles from Barrow, taking observations and making a landing for soundings. But on their return to Barrow

they ran into bad weather, had engine trouble and, within 65 miles of their destination, ran out of gasoline. Expert manipulation by Eielson in the face of a howling blizzard achieved a safe landing on the ice.

It was thirty degrees below zero when they started to build themselves a snow house for protection against the elements. For several days they floated on the rapidly crumbling ice floe, which carried them landward. At last, when the ridges started to pile up, they decided to undertake the arduous trek to shore. It took them eighteen days to reach safety at Beechey Point, Alaska.

But the flight had certain compensations. Wilkins proved that a forced landing on the polar pack was possible, and that it was also feasible to walk over the pack ice to safety with neither dogs nor sleds. He had also determined the approximate limit of the continental shelf north of Siberia. But these results were not enough for his backers. They demanded that the expedition come to a summary end.

Disheartened, Wilkins set about ridding himself of all surplus equipment in order to recompense those to whom he was financially indebted. The Fokker plane for which he was so severely criticized, despite the fact that Byrd had used a similar ship on his North Pole and trans-Atlantic flights, was sold to Kingsford-Smith and later became the famous *Southern Cross*.

Wilkins was apparently fed up with the Arctic and proposed to explore the Antarctic. Finally, he listened to his friends and decided to return to the north when he could secure a swift, light plane capable of a 2,400 mile radius. With that in mind, he visited the Oakland Airport, which was in the throes of preparation for the Dole-Hawaiian flight of 1927. It was there, in my capacity as navigational advisor, that I had

the opportunity of renewing acquaintance with Wilkins. He was intensely interested in the new instruments and the new type of plane construction. There, he saw the trim, streamlined Lockheed Vega plane which had been entered in the Dole Race by George Hearst, its owner - a plane subsequently lost in the Pacific with its occupants, Mildred Doran and Augie Pedlar. (Insert photo of Capt. George Wilkins and Capt. W.B. Voortmeyer checking Wilkins' flying course just before Wilkins left San Francisco).

When Wilkins saw the Lockheed Vega, he became interested in at once. It was the ship of his dreams, and when he learned that it was being manufactured in Los Angeles, he lost no time in visiting the factory. After consultation with Allen Loughead and Jack Northrup, of the Lockheed Company, he ordered his plane built to specifications. Meantime, I helped to negotiate the sale of the Fokker to Kingsford-Smith.

Before long, the Lockheed Vega, named after that bright North Star which was destined to become the Pole star, was ready for flight. It was powered with a Wright J 5 whirlwind motor and equipped with two specially built gas tanks in the cabin and extra ones inside the wings; a Heitz-Kaufman short-wave radio set, and two glass windows in the cabin floor for observing group spread and drift.

Wilkins was on his own in this expedition, but in compliment to the Detroit News, which had previously financed him, he included the name of that newspaper on his fuselage. After the required test flight at Los Angeles, the plane was dismantled and shipped to Fairbanks, where it arrived on February 26, 1928. There was little or no publicity between then and March 19 when, with Eielson at the controls, they set out for Point Barrow.

The trip was cold and uneventful. Three weeks of waiting for good weather remained; three weeks during which the ship rested on the frozen lagoon at Barrow while Eskimos build a mile-long runway in the snow. Wilkins' course was from Barrow to latitude 84° N., longitude 75° W., and thence direct to Spitzbergen, a distance of 2,200 miles.

This course would cross the area where Peary and Stefanson believed land might exist and, although Wilkins had small faith in a compass, depending chiefly upon sextant observations, he did equip himself with an eight inch ship's compass and a prismatic surveyor's compass. The variation of the magnetic compass at Point Barrow is 30 degrees east. On this trip half way round the top of the world, the variation rapidly increases to 180 degrees and then on to 15 degrees west of north, or a total of 315 degrees, 45 less than a completed circle.

With a calculated speed of better than 100 miles an hour and the distance to be covered about 2,200 miles, it was proposed to change direction every 100 miles. The various changes of the compass courses were noted, together with their hourly positions deduced from estimated speed. When projected on stereographic charts, such courses as straight lines are practically arcs of Great Circles.

Sunday, April 15, brought good flying weather. Wilkins and Eielson were at last ready to start the first west-to-east crossing of the Arctic Ocean in a ship that weighed 4,050 pounds and carried 365 gallons of gasoline. The ship quickly gathered speed as she taxied down the snowy runway, slowly rose into the air, and was off into the mysterious North which, silent like death and dark as a grave, lies across the top of the world.

I was at radio station 6-ARD with Fred Roebuck, the veteran short-wave operator, and was able to follow the ship's course until it landed. The radio set on the plane did not function as well as hoped because an armature had burned out, but it was sufficiently revealing. The two explorers encountered cold weather right at the start and by the time Grant Land had been passed, the north wind was behind them with a temperature of 48 degrees below zero. They then ran into a storm accompanied by a terrific blizzard.

Wilkins' last radio message to be received was that they were "within a hundred miles of Spitzbergen amid heavy storm clouds with gas running low." Another sentence, cut short, was "Spitzbergen in sight – we will make it." It was subsequently developed that they had sighted two sharp mountain peaks amidst the swirling snow and, after circling several times within that grim whirlpool of destructive forces, Eielson, with steady nerve, brought the ship to rest. The coast-to-coast nonstop flight ended at Green Harbor, Spitzbergen, with a distance of 2,200 miles covered in 20 hours and 20 minutes.

It was a remarkable flight considering the equipment and the instruments used. They had managed to demonstrate the advantage and practicability of trans-Arctic transportation without such modern aids as the artificial horizon, the directional gyro, the retractable landing gear, or the radio direction finder. Had they been forced down anywhere it would have required months, perhaps years, to locate them. But they had charted the shortest route around the world. Wilkins had justified the hopes of his friends.

Short-wave radio communication between a land station and a ship in flight, so ably demonstrated by the crew of the *Dallas Spirit* in 1927, was to play an important part in Arctic aviation. Had it not been for the short-wave radio, the dramatic story of

Umberto Nobile's rescue would never have been told. Nobile owed his life to the invention of a fellow countryman, Marconi.

On Nobile's second voyage to the polar region in the spring of 1928, the *Italia*, on the return trip from the North Pole, encountered strong headwinds, accompanied by sleet and fog which enveloped the ship and weighted her down with ice. Unable to gain altitude, there was an unavoidable crash on the rugged ice floes. After some delay, Nobile acquainted the world by radio with his plight. Amateur radio operators picked up the signals and radioed them to official sources.

Immediately, flyers from various nations started on rescue flights. Amundsen, true Viking that he was, flew to the aid of his friend, accompanied by a gallant French crew. They were never heard of again. The Arctic that Amundsen loved so well conspired to keep him permanently. Nobile was rescued in time, only to be condemned by his country and finally forced into virtual exile. In the end, he found refuge with the air-minded Russians.

That Soviet Russia was to find in Nobile a man of tremendous value was indicated within the decade when Stalin's air forces demonstrated to the world that they had been cognizant of the opinions of Wilkins and the work of his colleagues. They began by establishing expedition camps in the Arctic, locating one on an ice flow at the North Pole. Then they pointed the way for a vast transport service that will eventually link the far northern ports with the markets of the world.

As Wilkins had said, the Great Circle track, the shortest distance between any two points on the globe, made the air route from Moscow to San Francisco shorter by several hundred miles than that across the North Pole. By following it across Lapland and the

northern part of Greenland, across the McKenzie River basin in Canada, and down through Spokane, Washington to San Francisco, the route is 6,000 miles.

It was now left to Russia to prove that this might be made in a nonstop flight if commercial airliners were ever to ply between the U.S.S.R. and the United States. So, in 1937, less than ten years after the last important flight of Wilkins, the first Soviet plane bearing Chief Pilot Valery Chkalov, co-pilot Georgi Baidukov, and navigator Alexander Beliakov flew a specially built, single-motored monoplane on June 17 from Moscow, Russia to Vancouver, Washington via the Pole, a distance of 5,500 land miles in 63 hours.

Within the month, a second plane containing Mischeal Gromon, Andrei B. Yumasheff, and Sergei Danilan, all veteran Russian pilots, set forth on a flight that carried them without mishap from Moscow to San Jacinto, in southern California, a distance of 6,625 statute miles. The flight log, in part, tells the story succinctly and dramatically, with Pacific Standard Time as a reckoning measure:

At 4:22 p.m., Sunday, July 11, 1937, the second Soviet trans-polar flight started from Schlemov Airport in Moscow, headed for an unannounced destination on the Pacific Coast. At 2:00 a.m., Monday, the flyers headed into Arctic wastes, passing over the top of Kola Peninsula, the northernmost point in Russia. Two hours later, just 12 hours after their takeoff, they were over Barents Sea, off the southwest coast of Nova Zembla, directly on the projected course.

At 11:01 a.m., Monday, July 12, the Russian colony on Rudolph Island, the last bit of land to the north, heard the plane winging on its way. Twenty minutes later, the flyers reported themselves within 400 miles of the North Pole and, at 4:14 p.m. they had

crossed over the Pole. By 6:40 p.m., the plane's position was 200 miles on the American side of the Pole and at 10:20 p.m. it was 550 miles below the Pole.

Tuesday, shortly after midnight, the ship's position was given as latitude 74° N., longitude 120° W., approximately over the north of Bank's Island. At 4:21 a.m. the plane radioed its position over Great Bear Lake, Canada. At 8:35 a.m. it was flying between Fort Nelson and Budson's Hope. At 11:20 a.m. it was but 400 miles north of the United States boundary line and the single motor was functioning efficiently.

At 5:30 Tuesday afternoon, the flyers radioed their intention to land at Oakland, California, shortly before midnight and asked for a weather report. The weather was not ideal and the Russians, by this time inured to loss of sleep, decided to add further distance to their flight. They calmly asked for weather reports on Los Angeles and San Diego. Prompt to the dot, the plane passed over Oakland Airport shortly after midnight on Wednesday and, at 6:30 that morning, settled down in a pasture near San Jacinto, having established a new world's distance record of 6, 625 miles.

These nonstop Soviet flights were not only splendid endurance tests of personnel and aircraft, but proved beyond question the practicability of polar air routes and marked the passing of the dog sled into that same oblivion which enveloped the ox cart and the horse. Today, aircraft delivers mail and collects furs in hours where dog sleds required weeks. Already, the colorful old Arctic trading posts to which trappers have been coming for centuries to barter their furs for supplies are being replaced by flying trading posts. Pan American Airways established regular Alaskan service directly after the Lindbergh flight. Now, other agencies fly along the trap lines, saving the trappers long journeys to te post.

These trading post planes fly scheduled routes, often landing in front of the trappers cabins. The plane usually carries a complete stock of food, ammunition, trapping equipment and other trading goods, ranging from medicines to straw hats. The trapper makes his selections and barter with furs. Less than a quarter of a century ago, a war was started, fought, and finished before news of it reached trappers in remote outposts. Today, with radio and plane, they have today's news today.

Yet, what of the men who blazed these trails? Some of them were knighted, as in the case of Hubert Wilkins. Some were honored and decorated as in the case of Rear Admiral Byrd. Some were repudiated and damned, as in the case of General Nobile. Many lie in unmarked graves in the frozen north they sought to conquer, and others must be satisfied with a passing line in the history books. Nations rushing on to new things in the far northern regions are inclined to treat them with the flippancy of the jingle: "In days gone by, the dog was supreme. Now wings in the sky make a better team."