

A Son of the North

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Wray Archibald Donaldson

THE day was clear and frosty, and the snow, blown into deep drifts by the biting winds, covered the wide expanse of lonely prairie like a glistening carpet. Here and there a dark spot peeped from between two larger drifts where the ground had been swept bare by the cold, wintry wind. Except for these few spots, and a darker smudge on the distant horizon, nothing broke the monotonous whiteness of that vast stretch of rolling land.

It was along this frigid landscape that Ben Carr and his dog team moved slowly in the direction of the now steadily declining sun, far to the south. His dogs were few and haggard, and they seemed to move painfully in the frosty air. Ben himself, wrapped in a great coat, once the grizzly hide of a mountain bear, but on which the hair was now left only in patches, strode thoughtfully beside his slowly moving sled.

Now, as he raised his head, there was disclosed a countenance as haggard and as worn as the bodies of his half-starved dogs. It was the face of a drunkard; the features were those of a wreck of

and to give his drunken and dissipated life to his country, and to the cause of Christianity. From the wide and trackless region of the North he came to try, for the first time, to make some use of his life. As the weary dogs plodded onward toward that one sign of habitation in that rolling waste, the sun sank lower and lower in the southwest. Soon the dog team merged into a shapeless blur in the distance. It grew steadily smaller and smaller, until at last it was lost in the larger blur far away.

Far from that rolling waste, covered with a glaring carpet of white, far from that lonely trading post, and from the fair dominion of the Maple Leaf that lies to the south of it, in the rain and sleet, trying to pierce the heavy darkness with two blazing eyes, stood Ben Carr. His knees were buried in a deep pool of slush and muddy water, and on his right there loomed a high, dark bank, dimly discernible in the misty gloom. He was clad in a rough coat of khaki, caked with mud and soaked with the pouring rain. His form, silhouetted against the dim stars that peeped through the dark clouds, was not the same as when he pushed his solitary way southward on a clear November day over a year before. Strenuous training and constant physical exercise had improved both body and mind, but the old curse was there to remain, until death separated the tired and hopeless soul from the worn and wasted tunic that now held it captive.

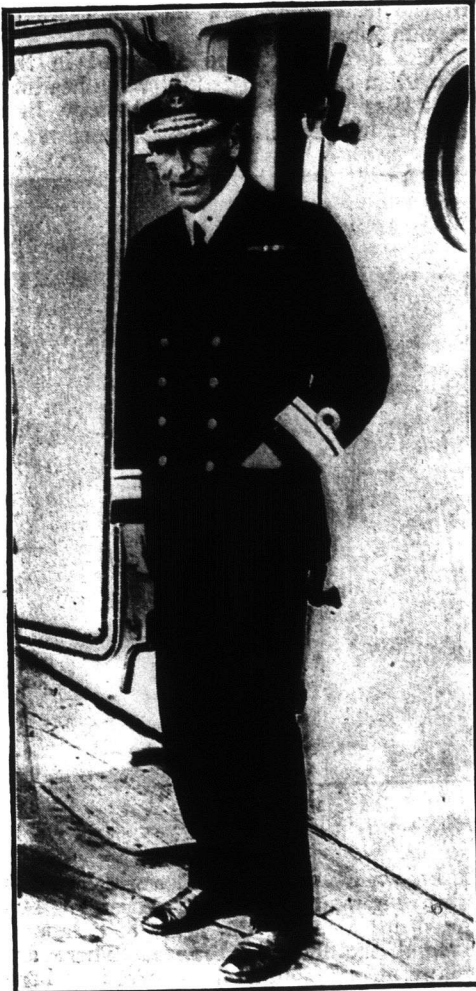
From the pitchy darkness ahead there came the sound of picks and shovels at work. It was to these sounds he was listening. He knew that no Canadian Engineers were at work that night; these were undoubtedly German. After some minutes of careful attention, he turned to his solitary comrade and held a whispered conversation with him for some time. The comrade nodded and left him. He was alone, in the listening post, not fifty yards from the enemy trenches, and more than thirty yards from the nearest Canadian outpost. It was the first time he had ever been on active duty, and, as he listened to the sound of the German workers, he was tense with excitement. Every muscle in his body was alert and every nerve was tingling.

Suddenly a flare shot skyward and hovered over the German trenches. Cautiously he lifted his head and peered over the parapet. On a mound, admirably adapted for defence, were half a dozen German engineers. They were busily engaged in constructing a sort of emplacement. But it was not the sight of the engineers that caused the cold sweat to stand out on his brow. It was not that, that made him start violently and suppress a cry of astonishment and fear. Stealing noiselessly from the German trench, and slipping cautiously in and out of the shadowy shell holes, but ever making their way toward the emplacement, were six German infantrymen carrying two machine guns. He wondered why his comrades did not fire at the party. Just then the brilliant flare died out, and left Carr surrounded by a darkness even more dense than before.

He wondered again why the Canadians did not fire. Then he recollected that a bank of earth, thrown up by the workers, had obscured the party from the view of the outpost as well as that of the Canadians in the trenches, while he, from his advantageous position before the lines, could observe their movements.

Patiently he waited in the darkness for another flare. All was in darkness except for the intermittent flash of the big guns, and the spurt of flame from some rifle, as a shot rang out on either side. All along the front there was comparative quiet. Most of the big guns in the rear had silenced for the night, and their ear-splitting roars were heard but seldom in the darkness.

After five minutes of weary waiting another flare shot up from the Canadian lines, and Carr was enabled once more to resume his observation. The machine guns were now in position, and the party of engineers had retired, leaving the crew of six in the emplacement. The little stronghold was practically impregnable. The fire from the guns would take the Canadian trenches, and an attack by his comrades would be impossible.



Admiral Sir Reginald Y. Tyrwhitt, D.S.O., is shown on shipboard in this British official photo. He led the British forces that covered the daring naval raid on the submarine bases of Zebrugge and Ostend. That naval operation was one of the most glorious of the war and resulted in the complete bottling up of the former port. Admiral Tyrwhitt has earned renown for his work during the war. He has been commander of the destroyer flotillas of the British first fleet.

humanity. The curse had laid its cold hand heavily on his brow. But those features were softened by an expression of sadness. It showed in his sunken eyes, and in the lines about his drawn mouth. He was dissipated and despairing, but some remnant of his former manhood, once so free and so strong, remained in his determined manner, as he clenched his lean, spare hands, and turned his face to the clear, frosty skies.

"My God! Why must this be? The curse, the wretched temptation! After a month, last night I gave in! It is useless. I will give my miserable life to my country. It is better that than spending all my days in misery."

His cry rang on the icy air long after he had ceased. He shook his head mournfully, in hopeless despondency. Turning to his dogs, in a voice that vibrated with suppressed emotion, he bade them make one more effort to reach that dark smudge on the horizon. It was the fur-trading post of the Hudson Bay Company on the Slave River. He was on his way to Edmonton to enlist,

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