

The Ill-Fated Hornby Expedition

By The Editor

JOHN Hornby was an enigma—a well-born Englishman who chose the nomadic life of an Arctic explorer-pro prospector-trapper over the comforts of home and family. He preferred isolation, shunned the more frequently travelled areas of the North and looked with contempt on those who took only the normal and sensible precautions necessary for existence in a frigid zone. A tough, wiry man, Hornby's powers of endurance had earned him the respect of seasoned northern travellers. It was his belief that he could live off the land and one veteran trapper said: "Jack Hornby could go farther on a diet of snow, air and scenery than a 'Lizzie' can go on 20 gallons of gas." This callous indifference to danger eventually cost him his life and the lives of two companions in the long and pitiless winter of the northern Barren Lands.

It was in May 1926 that John Hornby passed through Ottawa en route to Edmonton and his last trek into the Arctic wilderness. This time he was heading for the territory south-east of Great Slave Lake where he planned to do some prospecting. His companions were two young Englishmen, Edgar Christian, 18, a young cousin who had accompanied him to Canada, and Harold Adlard, 26. The Hornby party arrived in Fort Smith in June, went from there to Resolution, where they took out a trapping licence, and then left for the east end of Great Slave Lake. Hornby intimated to acquaintances in Resolution that he intended to spend the winter in a cabin in the Thelon Game Sanctuary and then from the Barren Lands, push

on via a tributary of the Thelon River to Chesterfield Inlet and Hudson Bay. Nothing more was heard of the three men for some time.

In December 1927, the North-West Territories Branch notified the RCMP that Hornby had failed to show up at Fort Reliance during the summer, as they had expected. This was the first hint of alarm felt for the three adventurers and it was strengthened by the report of an Eskimo who claimed to have

seen the bodies of four men floating down Chesterfield Inlet on a pan of ice. Since this native was reputable, the Police felt that his story was not to be regarded lightly. Northern detachments at Rae, Fort Reliance, Cambridge Bay and Chesterfield Inlet all reported the outcome of their inquiries and in general the results were

the same. Hornby and his companions had encountered a few trappers and natives during the summer of 1926 and to each had given a rough idea of their plans. There was no question but that they intended to winter in the Barrens. Hornby had shrugged off concern over his meagre supplies; his party was well equipped with rifles and ammunition and their winter quarters would be in the Thelon Game Sanctuary in the direct route of the annual caribou migration. For "Hornby the Hermit" this was an accepted mode of living, but seasoned veterans of the north were concerned about the two "greenhorns" with him.

Winter merged into spring and still there was no word from the Hornby party. Rumors about their fate spread with each conflicting report from Eskimos and Indians about drownings and

From time immemorial man has responded to the call of the wild. Hunters, trappers, prospectors, explorers, all are moved by some inner compulsion that takes them into the uncharted wilderness of the world. A few achieve fame and fortune; others, like John Hornby, meet untimely and lonely deaths.