



Inside the big transport plane just after the rescue. L. to R.: D. W. Munro, clerk at Fort Ross; the author; W. A. Heslop; Major M. Q. Hancock, medical officer (who was to have followed Capt. Stanwell-Fletcher by parachute if he came to harm). Note the gas tanks.

ARCTIC RESCUE

by Barbara Heslop

IT was in September 1940 that my husband and I arrived at Fort Ross on the *Nascopie*. We had been married in Winnipeg only a few weeks before, so that this was our first home together. We were scheduled to stay there for three years, but in 1942 the Company decided to transfer us to Pangnirtung, a more accessible post on the east side of Baffin Island.

Unfortunately that year the *Nascopie* was very late. Day after day we kept watch, but there was no sign of her—just miles and miles of open sea. But one day a strong northeast wind blew up, and overnight we found the bay jammed with a tumbled ice-pack. This worried us, because it was already late in the season and the temperature was dropping, with consequent danger of the bay freezing over solid. In view of this we were not unduly surprised when we received a radio message from Arctic Bay telling us that, although the *Nascopie* had made many attempts to get through, all efforts had proved futile and the ship was forced to turn back. Our feelings at this news can be imagined,

Photos by Capt. O. D. Packard, U.S. Army

but our food supplies were still adequate and we didn't worry too much about getting by until next year.

In March 1943, we received our mail, which the *Nascopie* had left at Arctic Bay. It was brought by Canon Turner of the Anglican Mission when he made his annual trip by dog-team to Fort Ross and Boothia Peninsula. By April, a year and a half after we had received our last supplies, Darcy Munro, the post clerk, and three natives took two dog-teams to Arctic Bay for mess supplies, ammunition, and a few other essentials for the Eskimos. This was a round trip of five hundred miles, and it was not without its hazards, as part of the journey was made on moving ice in Prince Regent Inlet. With these supplies, supplemented by other food from Canon Turner's warehouse at Fort Ross, we estimated we had sufficient to carry us through until ship time in September.

April 7 proved to be an eventful day at the post, bringing us two visitors. About six o'clock in the morning Constable L. C. DeLisle of the R.C.M.P. arrived by dog-team from Pond Inlet on the annual police patrol. Later in the day an American Army aircraft landed on the sea ice in front of the post. They brought us radio batteries and a few supplies but the crew of four stayed only about an hour. Constable DeLisle used our radio to make his report on a native murder and was ordered by his headquarters in Ottawa to wait at Fort Ross for the arrival of the *Nascopie*, when a proper trial would be held. This meant there would be four of us to share our limited food supply, and we had to plan our rations even more carefully—if that were possible.

About the middle of August 1943, we began to have doubts as to the possibility of the ship reaching us. Although the ice had broken up, it had moved very little, remaining solidly packed in all the bays and harbours. We could not even take our small boats out in the waters around the post. However, in spite of our doubts, we kept the usual close watch.

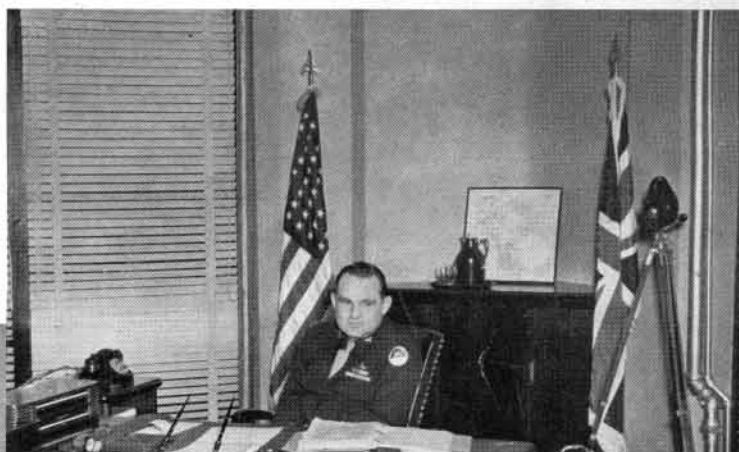
One evening in September, we sighted the *Nascopie* about fifteen miles off shore. We thought our worries were over; but it was not until later that we were to realize they were just beginning. For three days we saw her, or her smoke, on the horizon and it was evident she was having difficulty in the ice-pack. That was an anxious three days, but we didn't give up until we finally saw her heading north with black smoke belching from her funnel. This called for a conference, and after taking stock of our dwindling supplies we recognized our position was definitely not good. Our foodstuffs were low, and our meals had little variation. For some time we had been without butter, milk, coffee, fruits, and canned vegetables excepting beans. We all became very diligent hunters, always hoping to bag any wild game. Seals as a rule are plentiful at Fort Ross, but owing to the heavy ice-pack we were

not able to get as many as we ordinarily would use. Seal livers are very delicious, but seal meat we found too strong for our tastes. Occasionally our day's tramp would be rewarded with an Arctic hare—a real treat.

Radio messages received from Mr. Chesshire, manager of the Fur Trade Department in Winnipeg, buoyed our spirits up. He kept us well informed as to their plans, and we knew that the Company would do all it could to get supplies to us by plane and take us out if that was possible. We realized nothing could be done during the month of October as the weather then is not good for flying because of heavy fogs. But this condition usually clears with colder weather in November. We also knew we would see the last of the sun on November 17, and the days would soon grow short.

On October 19, Const. DeLisle set out for Repulse Bay with his dog-team and such supplies as he could get from the Anglican Mission stores. When those were finished he would be forced to live off the country for the rest of his four-hundred-mile journey. (Two months later in Winnipeg we learned he had got through.)

Then Mr. Chesshire informed us that they were arranging to take us out, and bring supplies to the natives, by air. The Company had approached the Canadian Government for assistance, and the R.C.A.F. had undertaken to do the job if a machine was available. Unfortunately the only planes they had, large



Above: Col. John P. Fraim, Jr., commanding officer, U.S. Army Forces in Central Canada, was the guiding genius of the expedition. He made sure that every detail was planned as carefully as possible, and accompanied the plane on all three flights to Fort Ross.



Above: The first conference, Oct. 21, in Col. Fraim's Winnipeg office. Capt. W. H. Corwin, pilot, is answering questions. Against the window is Air Vice-Marshal Lawrence, Air Officer Commanding No. 2 Training Command, R.C.A.F., Winnipeg (see the following article). Extreme right is R. H. Chesshire, manager of the Fur Trade Department, H B C.

Right: Lieut. J. D. Carroll, navigator (in cap) maps the route of the flight to Fort Ross. Sitting is Lieut. R. Gottschall, communications. The success of the expedition was largely due to the painstaking care with which the plans were made.





The bales of supplies, specially packed at Hudson's Bay House for dropping by parachute, await the plane in a hangar at Stevenson Field. Crosses mean freight for the first flight, circles for the second: black is for the natives, red for the whites.



Above: Bales for the first flight are loaded aboard the big C-47 Douglas "Skytrain" at Winnipeg. 700 pounds of mess supplies were taken for the parachutist and the three whites, and 1500 pounds for the natives.

Below: Ready to leave Winnipeg for the North on October 26. Capt. O. D. Packard, administration and recording, extreme left; Capt. H. Humphries, operations, against door; Capt. Corwin against the doorway; Col. Fraim on his left, then Capt. Stanwell-Fletcher. Capt. D. D. Duff, co-pilot, kneeling. Extreme right S/L J. Hone, R.C.A.F. liaison officer; next to him, W. E. Brown, liaison officer for the Company.



enough for the expedition, were Liberator bombers, and none of these could be released from coastal duties.

This was a great disappointment, after all plans had been made. We soon learned, however, that the Dominion Government had asked for assistance from the U.S. Army Air Forces, and they had generously agreed to help. The R.C.A.F. on their part were willing to assist with the experience of their personnel.

Colonel John P. Fraim, Jr., of Winnipeg, commanding officer of the U.S. Army Forces in Central Canada, was placed in command of the expedition. He secured a Douglas C-47 "Skytrain," specially fitted with four additional 100-gallon fuel tanks, snow and ice tires, and skis, and provided with a picked crew, including Arctic experts. The plane was flown to a northern base, and there awaited an opportunity to make the long hop to Fort Ross.

Weather reports were sent regularly from our end, and when a favourable moment arrived, the Army fliers advised us they were taking off. This was November 1st. As luck would have it, about two hours before they were due to arrive, a strong wind caused such a thick ground-drift of loose snow they were unable to locate us. We heard that the plane had been forced to turn back, although it was within fifty miles of us.

November 4 turned out to be a perfect day for flying, and we were told over the radio that another attempt was to be made. They were to fly over the post and drop supplies by parachute. While Bill and Darcy stayed at the post to keep in radio contact with the plane, I set off for Hazard Inlet, two miles away, with a group of natives, to watch for its arrival. Hazard Inlet was chosen because there happened to be about two miles of flat ice in that place, whereas the bay immediately in front of the post was filled with rough ice and would not have done at all for the landings.

We had been informed that Captain (now Major) J. F. Stanwell-Fletcher of the U.S.A.A.F. was going to make a jump—the first one ever attempted within the Arctic Circle. There was great excitement when we sighted the plane first. When it swooped low over us, dipping its wings in salute, there was a great throwing of hats in the air and a wild cheering that cut the Arctic stillness. After watching the plane circle several

The plane was named INDAC 2, because it was the second C-47 cargo plane donated to the USAAF by the Indianapolis Athletic Club.

Below: For the second flight in search of Fort Ross, the wheels were removed and skis fitted in their place.



Below, L. to R.: Capt. Corwin, Capt. E. E. Stettler, operations base meteorologist, and Col. Fraim, study a weather map. Special weather reports were sent in from the H.B. posts at Cambridge Bay, Arctic Bay, Pond Inlet, Clyde, Pangnirtung, and Repulse Bay.



times at about seven hundred feet, we saw a tiny bundle tumble out of the plane. It quickly took shape, and finally a large yellow parachute, glistening in the sun, settled down gracefully to earth with a large case of supplies. Everyone ran for it, but almost before we reached it another followed, and then another, until seven bales and a "Gibson Girl" radio transmitter had been dropped.

Then the plane circled higher and higher to an altitude of eleven hundred feet. We watched anxiously to see what would happen next. Suddenly we saw another bundle dropping from the plane. It soon took the shape of a man, a huge white parachute carrying him to earth. This was Capt. Fletcher, who, although he may not have realized it, was receiving applause from those few natives and myself equal to that accorded a Metropolitan Opera star. He made a successful landing almost at our feet.

Capt. Fletcher, an Arctic specialist, had come to select a suitable landing place for the plane. After rolling over in the snow a couple of times, he was on his feet to greet us. This was the first jump he had ever made, and he had only one day of instruction with the Canadian parachute training school at Shilo Camp, Manitoba, as preparation. Although he said he had been scared by the drop, he gave no indication of it. He at once sent an "All's well" signal to the plane as it circled over us again. It was soon out of sight.

Then we began to collect the bales and carefully gather up the parachutes. We loaded everything on the sleds and proceeded to the post. No time was lost in getting into those bales, either. No more beans and sausage for us! Incidentally, all we had left to eat was three tins of sausage, six pounds of dried beans, twenty-four pounds of flour, and tea and sugar. In the

bales we found ham, bacon, powdered eggs, milk, butter, fruit, vegetables and other items. Besides this there were essential supplies for the natives—flour, ammunition, tea and tobacco—two thousand pounds in all. So they, too, had a "banquet royal" that night. With supplies at the post running so low, they had feared that the winter would be one of great privation for them; but now they were delighted to find that the Company had furnished food and ammunition enough to last them until the summer.

Capt. Fletcher immediately commenced searching for a suitable landing place for the giant aircraft, which was going to return for us. The sea ice proved too thin for the fifteen-ton plane, so the ice on the lakes was tested. Finally he selected a small land-locked lake about ten miles from the post where the ice was seventeen inches thick. A rough landing field, three thousand feet long and one hundred and fifty feet wide, was marked out with snow blocks covered by coal sacks and levelled off by the natives. Then a radio message



Above: On the second flight, the bales marked with a cross were dropped onto Hazard Inlet. Here one for the Eskimos is pushed out by Capt. H. Humphries, operations officer (left), and Sgt. Weis, crew chief. Note the ropes to prevent their falling out.

was sent advising the rescuers that everything was ready for them.

On the morning of November 7, we were informed that the plane was taking off and should reach us

about noon. All our baggage was loaded on dog-sleds and we took it to the selected spot, two and a half hours journey away. I had with me Hobo, my eighty-pound husky pup, whom I planned to bring out with

Below: Some of the Fort Ross Eskimos. The costumes of the women show that this is the place where Eastern and Western Arctic meet. The short white parkies belong to the East, the long "Mother Hubbards" to the West.
D. W. Munro





Left: After the bales goes Capt. J. F. Stanwell-Fletcher, on his first jump. Two others were ready to jump if he got into trouble. Col. Fraim watches in the foreground.

Below: The landing place chosen by Capt. Stanwell-Fletcher for the plane—a freshwater lake 2½ hours from the post. Capt. Stanwell-Fletcher (right) holds the antenna of the "Gibson Girl" radio, which is held up by the kite seen at the top of the picture. B. Heslop

me. Then came the anxious minutes of waiting. For half an hour we sat in a small snow house we had built at the head of the lake. Bill and Darcy were busy sending out a radio signal on the "Gibson Girl" transmitter. I'll never know who heard the plane first—perhaps we all heard it together. But soon the drone of the engine came plainly to our ears and we could see the great "Skytrain" winging towards us.

There were plenty of fog and low clouds about and the plane slipped in and out of sight. It was soon obvious the fliers could not see us. With Capt. Fletcher outside watching the plane's movements, Bill tried to guide it to the field with directions over the radio—"You're too far north. . . . You're too far east. . . ."

Finally they saw us and the tiny lake, and began circling for the landing. Col. Fraim later said they didn't much like the appearance of the rough little landing area sandwiched between 1000-foot hills.

The plane glided in, making a perfect landing on its huge skis, and came up the runway towards us. From then on things moved quickly. There were nine men in the plane and most of them jumped out while natives helped to swing the tail around. They didn't

On the third flight, the plane comes down on the ice of the freshwater lake. The runway was badly corrugated, and both landing and take-off were extremely hazardous. B. Heslop



dare allow the great machine to stand still for a moment for fear the skis would freeze to the ice.

The first blow came when they told us we couldn't bring any baggage with us. Even the freight parachutes had to be left behind, with all our personal belongings, including the films we had taken over the past two years. We brought only the faithful "Gibson Girl" and a small handbag each. Despite extra fuel tanks lashed in the cabin of the plane, we were going to need every drop of gas to get us out and every ounce of excess weight was a danger.

Supplies for the natives were quickly dumped out on the ice—ammunition, flour and staples to last them the winter. The fliers had brought parachutes to drop these supplies if a landing proved impossible. Even these were thrown out to save weight.

The three of us ran to the plane, and while it still kept in motion we clambered through the door, encumbered with our heavy fur parkis, sealskin trousers and Eskimo boots. Capt. Fletcher had lifted Hobo in, but before the door was closed it was decided his eighty pounds added too much hazard to the safety of the aircraft. I couldn't bear to look as they pushed him out onto the ice, and I don't know what happened to him.

Then we were off, racing down the runway. From landing to take-off the plane had been down hardly sixteen minutes. We cleared the low hills at the end of the runway with only feet to spare.



Arrived at the operations base, Mrs. Heslop climbs down from the rescue plane. With her is Capt. (now Major) Stanwell-Fletcher. The masking over the hinges and door handles prevented entanglement of parachute static lines.

About half way to the northern base which was to be our first stop we had a little excitement. The main tanks ran out without warning. The motors of the giant plane sputtered and went dead. The seconds ticked by as we held our breath and wondered what was going to happen. But quick action by the fliers saved the day. They cut in the spare tanks, the motors sprang to life with a roar and we breathed again.

It was pitch dark when we reached the base. Low clouds made it impossible to pick up the airfield lights until we had circled several times. When we landed we had enough gas left for only ten more minutes of flying. Perhaps poor Hobo's weight made all the difference between success and failure.

At this base we were met by W. E. Brown of the Hudson's Bay Company and Squadron Leader J. Hone, liaison officer for the R.C.A.F. We remained there for three days until weather permitted us to proceed to another northern base. Again bad weather kept us grounded until November 13th, when we finally reached our goal—Stevenson Field in Winnipeg.

So ended our adventure. Many people have been stranded in the far north and many rescue expeditions have been sent out. But this one will go down in history as the first in which one of the rescuers parachuted down on to the icy wastes of the Arctic. Our gratitude to those brave men who risked their lives to bring us out can never be expressed.

Safe home at last! Mrs. Heslop with her husband (right) and Darcy Munro, on their arrival at Stevenson Field, Winnipeg.

R.C.A.F.

