

HEROES OF THE FAR NORTH

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10.

Many stories of heroism and devotion to duty are recorded in the annals of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. These brave men have faced dangers, hardships, death itself, in the performance of their duties. One of these stories will be told of interest and will show you the spirit of these brave men.



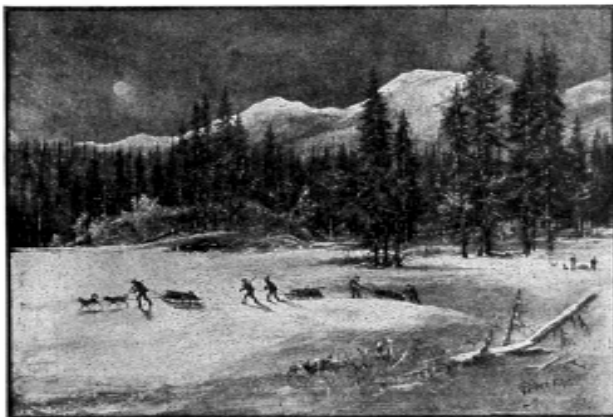
In the year 1910 the Mounted Police had two headquarters, or posts, in the Far North, or Arctic region, one of them at Herschel Island, and the other at Fort MacPherson on the Peel River. Fort MacPherson was their northern headquarters, and was five hundred miles from Dawson City in the Yukon. These five hundred miles separating the two points were of the most forbidding nature, the worst in the world, we are told. Between these two posts lay the great Rocky Mountain range, turbulent rivers, unmapped forests, and great lakes.

By order of the Department, mail must be carried once a year between Dawson, the Yukon metropolis, and Fort MacPherson, over these five hundred miles of wild, rugged, uninhabited country.

It was in December, 1910, that a company of four men with their dog teams set out from Fort MacPherson, carrying the mail and a small stock of provisions. In the party were Inspector Fitzgerald, Constables Kinney and Taylor, and ex-Constable Carter, who was retiring on a pension.

As might be expected, it was bitterly cold. The cruel north wind whistled and shrieked as it swept down from the icebound Arctic, and the thermometer dropped to 65 degrees below zero. It was not promising weather for such a trip.

Falling in by chance with a company of Indians who were headed for Dawson, they made good time



and managed to hire one of the Indians as a guide to lead them to a pass in the mountains. Having traveled much in the North, when they reached the Wind River Valley, they felt quite sure of their position, therefore paid off the guide on New Year's Day and started on alone to find the way.

Had they kept to schedule, they would have reached Dawson late in January; but the month passed, and there was no word from the men. About the twentieth of February some Indians told Superintendent Snyder that they had passed the party of Mounted Police in the Wind River section and that they should have reached Dawson



long before.

The news was flashed to Regina to the Mounted Police headquarters there, and the word came back as follows: "Nothing is to stand in the way of your acting immediately to get in touch with the party." A man named Dempster, the best snowshoe runner in the whole Yukon Territory, was secured, and he reported at once with his famous Husky dog team to head the rescue party. He was bidden to find the men at any cost. At a crack of the whip the Huskies bounded into their harness and were away on their long, hard run of rescue.



The weather had not moderated in the least. It was bitter cold, and the dead of winter, in the cruelest region in North America. Much of the way lay along the bed of streams, and the intense cold had cracked the ice, making traveling difficult and dangerous. Every moment was tense with risk and excitement.

There was no time to lose, for the lives of these brave men were at stake; hence the rescue party urged their dogs on. They stopped now and then for a few hours to eat, feed the faithful dogs, and get a little sleep; then the cry was heard, "Mush on!" and the party was off again. Two hundred fifty miles, half of the distance, had been covered, and not one sign or trace of the missing men had been seen. They were encouraged in the Wind River section by finding the first faint sleigh track, but it indicated that the sleigh had been headed toward Fort MacPherson instead of toward Dawson.



Dempster thought it all out, for he knew the ways of the North, and came to the conclusion that the Fitzgerald party had become lost and had started to return home to Fort

MacPherson. Since Fitzgerald was an experienced northern traveler, the rescue party now felt quite confident that he would make the return trip safely, and that he must be, at that very time, safe at home.

They came to a campsite on the sixteenth of March, and there they found the skeleton of a dog, which had evidently been killed and eaten. This told the searchers that the police party must have run short of provisions and were suffering for food. Dempster now quickened his already hurried pace. He found that the camping places were getting closer together, indicating that the men were growing weaker and could travel only a few miles each day.

March 20 brought the rescue party to an abandoned cabin of some trapper or prospector, within sixty miles of Fort MacPherson. Here the police had left a sack of mail, something they never would have done had not their condition been serious. Their tracks were plainly seen now, and Dempster and his party urged their dogs on, each hour expecting to come upon the party.

Ten miles from the deserted cabin, in the lonely forest, Dempster found a camp, and there, lying side



by side, wrapped in their blankets, were Kinney and Taylor, both dead. There were evidences that they had suffered much. Their feet had been frozen before they died, and it seemed that Taylor had cut off one of his toes.

Covering these bodies with brush, the rescue party hastened on, hoping to find the other men alive. They might still be pushing on toward the fort. They came upon a broken snowshoe in the trail, and a little farther along, a blue handkerchief tied to the branch of a tree. Close by they found the bodies of Fitzgerald and Carter. Carter was evidently the first to perish, and Fitzgerald had tenderly folded the dead man's hands over his breast, covered his face with a handkerchief, and then he himself died.



Dempster and his party covered the two bodies as best they could to protect them from marauding animals and hastened on to Fort MacPherson, arriving there the same evening, March 22. A party was quickly organized and sent out to bring in the bodies of the four men. When they were brought back to the fort, rough lumber was sawed from the surrounding timber, and coffins made. These four heroes of the Northland were then tenderly laid to rest in one large grave, the funeral sermon being preached by a minister, and a firing party of their comrades taking part in the last sad rites.

Fitzgerald had kept a diary faithfully up until a few hours before his death, and it gives us a glimpse of the hardships and dreadful sufferings through which they passed. After they had discharged their Indian guide, they lost their way in the Rockies and were unable to find the trail again. In crossing the rivers, they broke through the ice again and again, and, in order to keep from freezing to death, they had to stop often to light a fire and dry their wet clothing.



The intense cold had driven all the wild animals to shelter, and they could shoot no game for food. Their food supply gave out, and they had to retrace their steps. Weak and almost starving, they struggled and staggered toward Fort MacPherson. At the last camp, Kinney and Taylor could go no further, and it is supposed that the other two men made them as comfortable as possible, and then hurried on, hoping to cover the remaining sixty miles and get help. They misjudged their own strength. They were too weak to finish the trip and fell by the wayside, victims of the trail.

Fitzgerald thought of his mother during those last hours and scribbled on a small piece of paper his will, leaving all his worldly possessions to her. Enduring hardships and facing death itself, this brave man thought of his mother and planned for her future comfort. His last thoughts were of others.

This devotion to duty on the part of these courageous men of the Mounted Police Force touched the hearts of the people of Dawson, and they erected a monument in memory of Fitzgerald and his brave men. They, and others of these heroic guardians of law and justice in Canada, have performed many deeds of daring and heroism. Many, many stories such as this might be told. They "get their man"; they are faithful even unto death.

Courtesy of: God's Minutes
Southern Publishing Association
Nashville, TN

