

I FOUND



Pilot Chuck Hamilton spotted the downed Americans first.

THE GIRL



"Faith kept me alive," Helen Klaben cried when she was rescued.

Their plane crashed in sub-Arctic wilderness, food gone, and rescue abandoned, a lay preacher and a young woman found strength in the Bible; here is the incredible story as told by the man who heard it first—the bush pilot who rescued them **By CHUCK HAMILTON**

AEROPLANE LAKE was a smooth stretch of blinding white in an otherwise pine- and scrub-covered expanse of mountains. As the lake loomed larger on my horizon, I dipped my Super Cub to about 300 feet, remembering the last instructions of my partner, Hal Komish.

Together we operate B. C. Yukon Air Service, Ltd., a charter flying company with a small fleet of craft based at Watson Lake, Yukon Territory.

"Take a look at the lake, Chuck," Hal had told me. "Those Indians may need more help."

A couple of months before, Hal had been flying over the same area and had spotted a "Help" sign trampled in the snow. He had landed on the lake and found an Indian family whose new baby desperately needed milk.

In the Yukon, where Hal and I fly, families may live 50 or 100 miles apart, and when winter closes in they become locked in a sub-Arctic prison of waist-deep snow, 40-below-zero temperatures, and winds of 40 miles an hour. All of us have learned that to survive we must help each other. That's why Hal wanted me to see if we could help that Indian family any more. It was nothing extraordinary; bush pilots do it regularly

and, when in trouble themselves, know that help is never far off.

Now it was my turn to see what we could do. It was about 11:30 Sunday, March 24, and I was flying an Indian trapper named Jack George to Terminus Mountain, the last of the Rockies; I was also bringing supplies to one of the region's most famous big-game outfitters, Skook Davidson.

I passed over the frozen lake slowly. The brilliant sun, low as it always is up here in winter, glared harshly on the stark snow, but George's eyes and mine were accustomed to it. The snow lay undisturbed beneath us, no sign of trouble. I figured I had better start for Terminus before that low sun spent itself. First, though, one more sweep.

It seems strange now, but in talking about people in danger Hal and I hadn't mentioned one case that had been big news around our home base at Watson Lake seven weeks before. A pilot and a young woman, both from the United States, had taken off from White Horse, capital of the Yukon Territory, for a 600-mile trip to Fort St. John, British Columbia. They had not been heard of since. The Royal Canadian Air Force and bush pilots had scoured the flight path. No trace of the plane had been spotted. Since then, the worst of Arctic winters had fallen on the area. There

wasn't much reason to talk about the lost flyers now: like others before them, the frozen wilderness had swallowed them up.

I made my second sweep, but again nothing. I started to pull up at the southeast end of the lake. As I did, a meadow rushed beneath us. It was crisscrossed with the dark outlines of windfalls—timber toppled by fierce winds—but there was something else that caught my eye! An orderly scar on the surface of snow. I looked down. It was a huge SOS.

"What does that mean?" George asked.

"It's a distress signal! Keep looking!"

We could see nobody. I tried to follow tracks leading from the SOS but lost them in a thicket. I circled, found another foot track, and lost it, too. I came back again, determined to locate the distressed party if it took the waning daylight hours. Then a flash of light caught my eye. I looked down.

"Somebody's flashing a mirror at us—I see him! Must be an Indian."

We See Signs of Life

I flew back to the SOS looking for his family. Instead a wisp of smoke caught our attention a couple of miles beyond. As we approached, George and I strained to see against the piercing white and deep shadows of snow and timberland, and I checked off my observations against George's so my report would be accurate.

"I see a figure near the smoke—a squaw?"

"Looks like one," George confirmed.

"There's a crude tent."

"Yeh."

"And a fire."

"Not a cooking fire—signal fire."

I couldn't risk landing with a passenger and fully loaded plane, so I waggled my wings, hoping the woman would realize she wasn't being abandoned. Then I flew George to Terminus Mountain