

The World's Queerest Murder Trial Held in Canadian Arctic

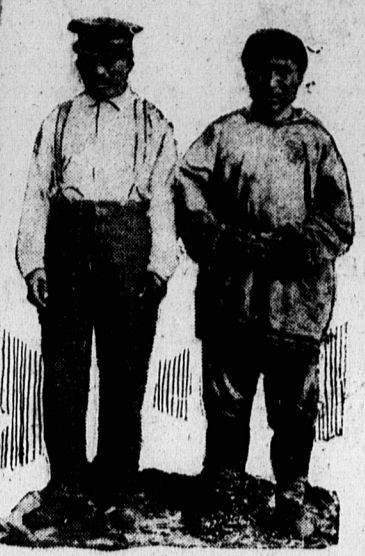


Ekootuk, the amiable lady strangler. She complains that her legs are not as good as they used to be, but otherwise she looks out on life with a broad optimism.

Toktogan, wife of the Hudson's Bay factor in the eastern Arctic. She was a witness to the killing of her man. She has two children, and is a very happy, care-free person.



Eskimo murderers, witnesses and friends after the church service at the mission on Herschel Island. The lady on the extreme right is Ekootuk, found guilty of strangling the bad man of her tribe.



Two of the prisoners: On the left is Amotak, who was freed and goes back to his people. On the right is Tatamigana, the bad man, who will be hanged at Herschel Island on December 7th. He is a sulky person, disliking work, but a dead shot with either a bow and arrow or a rifle.

White Man's Law Enforced With Full Ceremony in the Land of Midnight Sun — Eskimo Language Has No Word For Judge, So He Was Proclaimed "Captain of the Ship," Sent by the King, "Captain of Biggest Ship in the World"—Eskimo Murderers Smilingly Swear Away Their Own Lives.

This description of the most romantic and extraordinary trial ever held in Canada, or perhaps in the world, was written by Mr. Smith, the first newspaperman to have access to the stenographer's notes of the trial, and who was in close touch with those forming the expedition carrying a Canadian judge to the Arctic to try Eskimos for murder.

By A DE H. SMITH

By the poleward-flowing rivers, 2,500 miles north of Edmonton, Alberta, this summer traveled Judge Dubuc and his escort of Royal Canadian Mounted Police to carry the justice of the white man to the untutored Eskimos whose habitat is the barren shores at the top of the map. A tangled skein of blood and hate, tribal wars and fratricide resulted in the rounding up of some five of the natives; justice in the far north is slow, however, due to the immeasurable distance and the wicked weather of the Arctic, and it was only after several years that the mounted police succeeded in finally bringing to Herschel Island from the eastern Arctic all those accused of the major crimes.

It was no mean task that faced the guardians of the north. Some of them laid down their lives in the performance of their duty, and in all the annals of the famous forces there is nothing which redounds more to the credit of the men of the R. C. M. P. than the work of the Arctic patrols. Traveling through the bitter cold of the Arctic winter, with no company save that of the Eskimo murderer, one by one the "mounties" mushed their dogs along the inhospitable coasts; at night they turned their sleighs on edge, banked them with snow, and back to back policeman and his charge slept as best they could in the huskies curled up in the snow drifts, over all the powdery white mantle drifted, but despite the challenge of nature for eight hundred miles and more the mountain push-on to the fulfillment of his duty the Eskimo to his fate.

Others were brought in to Herschel by schooner, the little vessel backing the Arctic gales, and sailing along unknown and unmapped shores, crowded with prisoners and witnesses, who all alike were to learn that even within the shadow of the pole man cannot slay his brother without paying the penalty, "mountie" always gets his man.

For several years the arresting order of the prisoners went forward, and presently the word reached the "outside" that the Arctic had been disposed of the judge by Inspector Wood, at Herschel Island five S. T. Wood, the officer command, men and women accused of murder in the northern detachments of stage was set for a judicial episode in the history of the world.

Thus, on the 12th day of June, 1923, his honor Judge Dubuc, with his party and mounted police of which sat T. L. Cory, counsel for

police possessed good teams of sleigh dogs, more than one suit of clothes, rifles and snowshoes, there in the eyes of the Eskimos their friends and relatives, while throughout the trial the guardians about their business of whaling and the "rich men."

Inspector Wood, in charge of the mounted police, from his position as naturally was a second "captain of the ship," though of a smaller vessel, while the functions of the jurymen had to be explained at length and in simple language by his honor. "These men are people of your country," said the judge. "Some of them are married to your women; they know you, and therefore the captain of the biggest ship has sent them here to help me to find out whether you are guilty of what has been said about you."

As a matter of fact, says Judge Dubuc, the Eskimos regarded the entire procedure as rather unnecessary. "We killed, therefore we do not kill us without all this fuss," being the burden of their thoughts. The various prisoners, clad in their deerskin parkas, slipped in and out soot-footedly in their moccasins and muckluks; a row of shockheaded natives with immobile Mongol faces gazed from the back of the room, but with the first day's proceedings coming to a close, did not appear uninterested. "Our people frankly uninterested. 'Our people killed the white men, therefore the white men will kill them,' they said.

"Alkomiak, your honor," announced the clerk of the court, as the moutie brought forward the first prisoner, a smiling youth of about nineteen years of age. Rather under-sized and entirely affable, Alkomiak, despite that he had an account for the killing of two white men and a number of natives. He is one of the uncivilized Copper Eskimos of Prince Albert Sound, and on December 7 he will be hanged in the old "bone house" of the early whalers at Herschel Island. Out of a welter of blood and murder, Alkomiak was the sole survivor; his relatives had been killed in the feud, and so he killed, too, until there was no one left on whom to wreak his vengeance.

Then appeared Corporal W. A. Doak, in charge of the detachment of Tree River. One of the most famous mushers of the frontier, Doak possessed a reputation which will go down in the annals of the north; added to this he was a man of a most kindly disposition, liked by trader and native alike, and a friend to all men. But simple, kindly, courageous Doak is dead, and for his killing Alkomiak will mount the scaffold in December.

Hearing of tribal war, Doak hitched his dogs and mushed far out on the sea ice, bringing back the surviving murderer with him, keeping him at the Tree River post until such time as he might leave to carry the prisoner through to Herschel Island. Doak and Alkomiak were good friends, but one day the devil possessed the Eskimo. He shot Doak dead while the latter slept, then, running amok, killed Otto Binder, H. B. C. factor, before he was finally again arrested by Constable Woolmans and brought to Herschel Island.

So there stood the smiling native, who grinned broadly when Inspector Wood, in his smart khaki uniform and shining badges, took his stand to furnish the testimony which would send him to his death. Queried by the crown prosecutor, the inspector swore to his official position; the Eskimo's sworn testimony was read, the accused man giving evidence to his own detriment in a manner never yet heard of in any court. He was palpably honest; he sought to hide nothing, and always returned an honest answer.

So also with the other witnesses, and throughout the trial a most extraordinary condition existed due to the honesty of the testimony. At one time an accused man would be acting in his own defense, and again would be giving testimony for the crown, each man bringing evidence against the other as the roles changed, and each Eskimo practically convincing himself as throughout the long days the trial went along in the quiet court.

I said 'Don't cry any more. I can't help it.' So she told me to take her to her people at the sealing camp seven miles away. We dragged Binder along and put him in the police house with Doak.

"We went back to the house for her to dress the two kids when Toketuk and Aglak came in to trade. So I told them I had killed the two white men. These men said it was too bad. I knew Constable Woolmans and Clarke of the H.B.C. were at the sealing camp, too, and I intended to wait and kill them when they returned from the sealing camp.

"Toletuk told me, 'Don't kill them unless they go to shoot you; only listen what they are going to do.' I then took the shells out of my gun and gave the rifle to Toletuk.

"I was in camp, two days' travel from the H.B.C. post at Kent Peninsula, when five people were killed by Pugnana and Tatamigana. We heard that Pugnana said that he was going to kill more men, and he always carried his rifle with him. Pugnana was always angry with us and did not like anyone. We were all afraid of him, and somebody always went with him when he went away from camp for fear he would shoot us from ambush. Tatamigana and I were fishing at a creek when Pugnana told me that he had better kill Pugnana before he killed us, so we went hunting squirrels with Pugnana. I walked behind Pugnana, and when Tatamigana made a sign with his eyes towards Pugnana, he shot him in the back. I did not shoot him through the head as I wanted to talk to him before he died. He died quickly, which Tatamigana said was a good thing. We covered Pugnana's body with earth and rocks, and my father was angry for the killing. He said that if the white men came and took me away he would do nothing to help me.

After having been addressed by the judge, the prisoner stated that he had nothing to say. The jury had previously brought in a verdict of "guilty" with a strong recommendation for mercy, but it was not until some days later that his honor pronounced sentence in regard to the various cases.

The "eternal triangle" is ever present with the Eskimos on the northern coasts. For centuries it has been a practice, with the natives to strangle the girl babies and for this reason there are not enough women to provide a wife for each man, hence the majority of the killings and tribal wars in the north revolve on the question of matrimony. Here, then, is Alkomiak's own story of the killing of Corporal Doak and Otto Binder, Hudson's Bay factor, after the mounted policeman had brought the Eskimo in to the Tree River detachment for the killing of Pugnana.

"I do not know how old I am. I hunted for the first time two years ago this winter, and could not hunt before, because I had no rifle or bow. After I was arrested by Corporal Doak for the killing of Pugnana, I was afraid of Doak, as he sometimes gave me hard little jobs. One time we went to haul deer meat and Doak made me run beside the dog sled with him. I rode on the sled at times and so did things to fix and I did not like it. One time he gave me seal skin boots to fix the bottoms, and when I had finished he told me that I had not done it right. I was mad and did not feel good inside. The next day I think I like to kill that man. I did not think like that before, because Doak gave me plenty to eat all the time. I think plenty I want to kill that man. That morning after I worked on the boots I went to the police store house and got Alkomiak's rifle.

"The sun was just coming up, and I went to the porch of the barracks and looked through a crack and saw that Doak was asleep. I shot Doak from above; ten feet away, but I did not want to kill him while he was awake. I wanted him to get mad. I wanted to wound him, as there was a revolver beside his bed, and I did not care if he shot me, as I did not want to be taken into a strange country. Then I saw that Doak was dead.

"Then I filled the rifle with shells and waited for Binder, and I watched out of the window until the sun was high. Binder was only fifty yards away when I shot him. I went out and felt Binder and he was dead. Binder's woman, Tokogana, had been standing in the porch of the H.B.C. house and she saw me. Binder fell. She was crying plenty.

being traceable to a practice common among the natives. Said Olepsekak in his testimony: "With my tribe I was living around Prince Albert Sound and we were near two lakes inland, when Ahkuk shot and killed his partner, Aglietuk. Nutingnek was wife to both men. They had been angry with each other for a long time, so when I left my rifle outside my Igloo Ahkuk took it and killed Aglietuk. After the killing we went hunting and I moved camp. Ahkuk was a poor hunter, being weak in the legs and arms, so he asked me to become his partner. We got along fairly well together—all three.

"After the killing Ahkuk got bad and was going after the people, wanting to kill someone, like I was hungry. At the freeze-up the people moved down to the sound, and after that Ahkuk moved out of his brother's house.

After this I was in my own house alone when Ahkuk came in and was reaching for my knife, but stopped when he saw me watching him, and I do not know why he wanted to kill me. Then he tried to kill my wife, but another woman stopped him. After we moved out on the ice for the seal hunt Ahkuk tried to kill Alingnuak at a dance, and he also tried to kill Amokuk. Then we decided to kill.

"We talked about the killing in my house, and while we were talking Amokuk was home and got his knife, but he did not go in because he saw someone in Ahkuk's house. Then we went into Ahkuk's house with the rope, but two of the women held him on his sleeping bed and they had a knife under his right thigh. At first Ahkuk struggled, but then he stopped, and he said not to kill him with a knife, but to use a rope. He also said that there was a rope under his sleeping skin, and that it was a good rope. So he put his rope around his neck and held his arms, and Ekootuk knelt on the head forward while she pulled on the rope. Then Ahkuk died and we all went home."

Following the judge's address, the jury retired, and after an absence of five minutes returned with a verdict of "not guilty." Olepsekak is now therefore on his way home by schooner and kayak to tell his people of the wonders of Herschel Island, and also to convey the fact that the whitemen were glad that Ahkuk, the bully of the sound, was strangled.

The others concerned in the same affair were Amokuk and Okootuk, the latter a lady of uncertain age, and a reported sorceress. This old woman took a prominent part in the strangling of the bully, her testimony being as follows: "I am a married woman and have four children, and when the people were coming in to go out on the ice I heard that Ahkuk had killed my nephew Aglietuk. I was very angry with Ahkuk and wanted to fight him. We all went to Ahkuk's house when the time for the killing came, and Olepsekak said: 'All right, come on, and do it.' Olepsekak went into the house first and saw Ahkuk sitting on the bed. Olepsekak stood a little while before he grabbed him. Then Ahkuk struggled, and we threw him on the bed, and then Ahkuk said there was a rope under his sleeping robe which we would use to kill him. There then a knot in the rope already, so one of the prisoners was brought forward and sentenced by the judge, we were killing Ahkuk, and his words into the Eskimo tongue. Even when the death sentence was passed not a native blinked an eye, the condemned men apparently receiving the sentence without interest.

Then the court was cleared, the free native promptly returned to their daily avocations of whaling, mending nets and sewing moccasins, while the two unconcerned condemned men marched off under the escort of mounted police to await their sentence, within the walls of the old house in which the American whalers of an earlier decade were wont to store their whale-

guilty." So this winter Amokuk will again hunt hair seals on the sea ice and will be a "big man" in the igloos when the tribe dances by the light of oil soaked moss flickering in the stone lamps.

Tatamigana, facing the court on two charges of attempted murder in the cases of Hannak and Igkukwak, came to the point with remarkable brevity. His evidence revolved around the "eternal triangle," which in this instance was so complicated as to render it almost impossible to follow. The average white man, who had been shared, exchanged, and passed from hand to hand in the most careless manner, but ultimately at the fishing ground a free-for-all tribal war resulted in which most of the natives took sides and killed one another until the casualties narrowed down the combatants to two or three. Then Tatamigana saw Igkukwak shooting at anyone who came within range. Said Tatamigana: "He had one good eye. The bullets nearly hit me. I shot at him ten times, and he fired about seventy shots." At this time the survivors of the war were breathing their last; women were lying on the ground stabbed to death, men were dying from gunshot wounds, and all around the camping place on the bleak shoreline were scenes of the most revolting description.

To one of the dead combatants belonged Ololitana, a little girl a year old. There was no one to look after her, and as she was a burden on the survivors of the fight it was determined to adopt the usual procedure of putting her out of the way. She was strangled. Then said the accused: "Halalaak said that because the others started the fight it was their own fault that they got killed. He said to put them in the water where their friends will not see them again, so Pugnana and I tied stones on the top of their breasts and sent them all in the water."

After forty minutes the jury brought in their verdict of "guilty" on one count and "not guilty on the other."

Five years' imprisonment at Herschel Island was the verdict decreed by Judge Dubuc, this, however, being nonplussed by the fact that the prisoner was to appear on a second charge of murder, this time to pay for his crime with his life.

On this occasion Tatamigana took the stand charged with the murder of Pugnana, and in swearing his life away calmly stated: "I took part in the shooting with Pugnana, when five people were killed about the time of the coming of the first snow. We were camped one day's travel from the H.B.C. post, and Pugnana was angry about the killing of five people, and said to me that he did not care what happened to him and did not care how many people Pugnana said that we were no good and did not know how to shoot, and then he asked me to help him to kill more people, but I said that I had killed enough." Was not scared of Pugnana at all, but I watched him, as he carried a loaded rifle all the time. Pugnana was my uncle.

"Alkomiak and I were fishing at a creek one day, and he said he would like to kill Pugnana, so I said that I would kill Pugnana because he said I was no good. The second day after we came back from fishing Pugnana asked us to go hunting squirrels, and we started about mid-day. Alkomiak agreed before we went to shoot Pugnana from behind, and I told him I would make a sign with my eyes when to shoot him, so when we had gone a little way I made a sign with my eyes to Alkomiak to shoot Pugnana. He shot him, and Pugnana fell on his face and did not speak. I had my rifle ready to fire, but did not have to do so. We did not shoot any squirrels that day."

After an interval of eight minutes the jury returned a verdict of "guilty," and Tatamigana was then sentenced by Judge Dubuc to be hanged at Herschel Island on December 7 at the same time as his brother in blood, Alkomiak.

Thus ended the first trial for murder of the northern natives by white men, from the distant "outside"; through all the stark capsa that lie at the top of the map will go the word from Igloo to Igloo that no more can the people of the ice kill when they are in the humors. The Eskimos will carry the tidings that a new era has dawned for them; that the weak no longer must suffer at the hands of the strong, for when they kill, will not the great-white-man come again with his strong men and kill them too?

On the last day of the trial the tidings were quickly spread amongst the Eskimos that the great man was about to pass judgment on their brethren, and on that occasion the barrack room was filled with the natives, who, shod in their noiseless moccasins, slipped into the rear of the building, then squatting motionless. One by one the prisoners were brought forward and sentenced by the judge, the interpreter slowing translating his words into the Eskimo tongue. Even when the death sentence was passed not a native blinked an eye, the condemned men apparently receiving the sentence without interest.

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After an absence of eight minutes the jury returned with a verdict of "guilty of manslaughter," Judge Dubuc inflicting a sentence of one year's imprisonment at Herschel Island, where Ekootuk will be engaged in curing meat and making soap for the mounted police.

Next came Amokuk, accused of the same crime, who in the same detached manner as the others illustrated his part in the killing. The jury in this instance remained in consultation for ten minutes, and returned with a verdict of "not