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THE MYSTERY
; of the
MISSING GOAT HUNTER

On September 18, in an area between Seward and Moose Pass, Alaska, three mysteries occurred, each with a potential for tragedy.

First: One did end in tragedy, a young hunter was lost and later found dead high on a mountain.

Second: A woman in Moose Pass crossed a bridge over a small creek to visit a neighbor. On her return home her friend happened to look out and see the woman recrossing the bridge. That was the last time anyone saw her.

Third: Two prisoners escaped from the federal jail in Seward and disappeared. At that time some people speculated the woman's disappearance may have been connected to the jail break? that is the convicts may have taken her.

The jail break was also considered as a possible factor in the first tragedy. People speculated the convicts may have somehow abducted the boy as a possible hostage.

I was involved in the first case. I wanted to be involved because a story I wrote for the Alaska Sportsman was the cause of the tragedy. Two boys, Mark and Joe, read the article and decided to go hunting in an area described by the article. Mark never came back alive.

From the first the reason for, or cause of, Mark's disappearance was surrounded by a mystery focusing on Joe. He was vague and uncertain when questioned by a Highway Trooper and Mark's father. The first thing they wanted to know was why Mark
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didn't come home with Joe. Joe couldn't give them

an answer.

Alaska was still a Territory, and Territorial law in the area was represented by a Territorial Highway Trooper. He and

Mark's father realized Joe was hiding something, but could get no

clue as to what it was, or why he wouldn't tell them.

First Day: Joe came home from the hunt late, and alone.

Second Day: When questioned by the Trooper and Mark's father

Joe insisted that Mark was alright and would eventually return.

This puzzled the two very much. It didn't make sense that Joe

couldn't, or wouldn't, tell them where Mark was. From that time

on they were sure Joe was hiding something serious.

The father and Trooper had Joe take them back that day to

the mountain where the boys hunted. Joe described his actions of

the day, including where he was on the mountain the last time he

talked with Mark, and what was said. This still left a big

question: What had happened to Mark, where was he, and why didn't

he come home? Nothing was resolved. Joe was hiding something;

but what? All of his responses were vague, uncertain.

A town meeting held that evening included all volunteers who "

were willing to be part of a search party. I attended and observed

the group display an alarming transition from favorable to

hostile.

The meeting began with the Trooper relating all known facts.

He described that days search on the mountain with Joe and Marks

father. They found a dead mountain goat at the bottom of a rock

slide which came down the east side of a shoulder. This

"shoulder" was a massive high cliff which stood out from the side of the mountain, and overlooked Ptgarmagin Lake. As he

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described the locality I could see it. Tom and I looked up at the

west side of that shoulder from the saddle so I knew exactly where the dead goat was.

But what did the dead goat mean? How significant was it in

the mystery? It turned out to be very significant, eventually helping me understand why Joe wouldn't tell all he knew.

But

during that meeting the goat seemed unimportant.

The Trooper then opened the meeting for anyone to tell what

he knew about Joe. Milo Martin said Joe had worked for him and

was a hard worker. Others described Joes character as dependable

and good. He was a quiet boy, a hard worker, he was religious,

and had other good qualities.

But as the meeting progressed the group was continually

confronted by a mystery? the gap in Joes story. A gap which should contain information, or clues, about where Mark was, and why he didn't come home. I saw the gap cause a mood shift to develop in the group. It was, in a way, a natural development because people were trying to make sense out of the little bit of vague information Joe gave.

The initiating factor in this mood shift was the obvious fact that Joe was not telling everything he knew. The groups mind kept focusing on the question: WHY WASN'T HE TELLING^LL HE

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KNEW? The logical conclusion was that Joe had done something he wanted to hide. What had he done?

It seems to be a natural trait of human nature that when faced with the questions of innocent or guilty, when too much is left to speculation, people never give the accused the benefit of

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the doubt. We seem to always want to believe the worst, and so it was in this case. An ominous mood developed. Someone said in a suggestive tone of voice:

"Ye-a-a-h, he's quiet, alright". "Quiet and Strong".

Someone else emphasized, "Yeah, he's STRONG. But you cant tell what he's thinking". Another one said, "Ye-a-a-h, he keeps everything to himself". And another? "you never know what he is going to do". Another one: "He could be very hard".

Others built on this negative tone, making suggestive insinuations and dark hints. That first complimentary support for

Joe now sank quickly in the mire of ignorance and suspicion. Joe's

good character faded into the shadows of imagination.

As time passed he was described as one capable of foul

play. Someone said, "he could have shot Mark accidentally, but

isn't willing to admit it. A hint of mob spirit developed. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He was first portrayed as

an innocent, quiet, hardworking boy, but since that characterization could not accommodate the apparent reality that

he was dishonest and devious, public opinion soured. It saw

him as a reclusive person, one not to be trusted, a person capable of anything. I had watched this happen in movies, but

never in real life.

The meeting ended with the organization of a search party. I

volunteered to be aboard a float plane which would land on Ptarmagin Lake. A friend of mine, Freddy Richardson, would also

be on the plane. He, like myself, fancied himself as an amateur mountaineer, and he had a 150 foot nylon climbing rope.

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Day Three; After landing on the lake I looked up towards the Saddle where Tom wounded our goat. And then a little to the right, and higher, I could see the "shoulder" the Trooper described as being above the dead goat. This shoulder was a massive cliff.

I didn't think I would find Marks body but maybe I could find some clue to help solve the mystery. We seperated, Freddy went one way, I went another, climbing toward the Saddle.

After about an hour of zig-zag climbing I discovered a second dead goat. Looking up I could see it wasn't below the Saddle, but it too was almost directly below the Shoulder, so the goat came down from that direction. This fact gave me an

idea of

where to look the next day. Now, what is the significance of two

goats when Joe admitted to only one? The two were a fact.

The boys had killed TWO goats. Joe was afraid to tell us

this, why? I felt sure this secret somehow fit into the puzzle,

then I remembered something that happened to Joe the previous

year. It explained Joes strange behavior.

He got into serious trouble with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service when he was involved with other members of the Church of

the Nazarene in a goat hunt. After the hunt the group had chucked several goat carcasses into Resurrection River. Not that

they expected them to be resurrected but their improper handling

of the meat caused it to sour.

It is a great sin, in the eyes of the U.S.F.&W.S. to kill a

game animal and then dispose of it improperly. Such an act is

against federal law. There had been a conviction and Joe was

put on probation—which he had now violated. To me, this explained

Joe's fear and peculiar behavior.

He had killed a goat but couldn't find it so he came home

without it. THIS IS WHAT HE WAS HIDING. He was so concerned by

the gravity of this crime that all consideration for the welfare of his partner was overshadowed in his mind. I believe he

was truthful, but impractical, when he said he expected Mark to

come home. He may have felt Mark would finally find his way down

to the highway and catch a ride home. My mind was now at ease. I

was convinced Joe had not committed any foul deed.

I prayed at that time that I might be led to Marks body for

the sake of his bereaved parents. They had no idea of where he

was. They couldn't even be sure his body was on the mountain. By

having his body to bury they would eventually be able to reconcile their loss. I received a feeling I would succeed.

All other searchers that day, led by the Trooper, were on

the other side of the mountain. They had gone in by way of the

old Crown Point Mine road. Following the route Tom and I used

they were to search the high ridge where we killed our goat.

Another meeting was held that evening (still day three) to

compare notes and discuss further plans. I described my discovery

and expressed my convictions as to Joes innocence. The group accepted my theory and were relieved on that point, but were very concerned about the impending, annual freeze-up. A heavy storm was already working up in the south, and preliminary clouds were beginning to explore the mountain where our search was still unsuccessful.

The freeze-up in that part of Alaska comes with one big storm and deep freeze, which would end the search like a great

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icy door. It completely halts all outdoor activities which don't take place on top of snow and ice. If Marks body wasn't found before the freeze-up it would never be found. Avalanches would sweep it down onto the lake where it would sink with the spring thaw. This compelling urgency forced continuation of our best efforts to find the body.

Day Four: Freddy had to go to Anchorage so I borrowed his 150 foot nylon mountain rope. It was in a big coil which I put my right arm and head through to let it hang on my left

shoulder.

I would drive in on the Crown Point Mine road with the others.

They would scatter across the mountain and continue the search.

My effort would be focused on a certain small area. I knew where the two goats were located, and had drawn an imaginary

line directly up the gravity path of each carcass. I was quite sure these lines converged at the peak on top of the Shoulder. If

I stood there and could see both goats I may be able to calculate where Marks body would be.

Every searcher had access to a firearm. In case of discovery

two shots were to be fired as a signal, enabling the rest of the

searchers to get down off the mountain as soon as possible. As we

drove in on the Crown Point road I looked up and saw the top half

of the high ridge obscured by dense, moving clouds. Alternately

the top would be visible, then hidden. I almost panicked.

Atmospheric conditions were deteriorating rapidly. The freeze-up

may occur within the next 24 hours.

Leaving the car I took Donny Heinbaugh, a teenager who

had a pistol, and the climbing rope, not knowing whether or not I

would need it. I planned to climb up to the Shoulder and if Mark

had fallen from it I would certainly need a rope to reach him.

The face of the Shoulder, broken with pinnacles and deep crevices, dropped over 500 feet. If Mark was in there I would

have to lower him to a more gentle slope below, where other

searchers could receive him.

A rescue helicopter had been arranged for from the 71st Air

Rescue Squadron at Elmendorf Field in Anchorage. It arrived but

the clouds and air currents were too tricky, and uncertain for

it to hover near the cliffs so it soon returned to Anchorage.

Donny and I climbed directly up the high ridge to the Saddle. Others spread out over the mountain, not having any

particular idea of where to look. I had a definite plan.

It snowed lightly the previous night. That snow was now

melting leaving the rocks wet, slippery, and cold to hang onto.

Our gloves were soon soaking wet and almost worse than nothing.

We passed through the Saddle and found the ridge on up to the

Shoulder to be a series of rough outcrops of angular boulders.

It was hard going. We climbed steadily, eventually passing all

other searchers. I was pushing myself to my utmost limit.
Donny

was young enough that he had no limit.

When we reached an elevation equal to the Shoulder
we found

it extended about 50 yards out from the main ridge. The
traverse

was easy and I soon found myself standing in a small level
area

on the peak of the Shoulder. The cliff dropped vertically
before

me, being less difficult on either side. Looking east I was
pleased to see a goat far down at the bottom of a slide? the
Troopers goat.

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I looked southwest down towards the lake and. in a
short

time located the second goat, my discovery of the previous
day.

Everything lined up as I had hoped it would. Final proof of a
shooters presence on the peak would be empty rifle shells.

Looking down I was excited to find five empty rifle
shells

scattered around my feet. It really didn't matter which boy
the

shells came from. I knew I was now at the site of the
tragedy.

I borrowed Donny's binoculars and began a careful
search among

the pinnacles and crags down the face of the cliff. I didn't
think I would actually see a body, but there was a good
chance

I might locate a piece of his gear.

My search was interrupted several times by cloud masses

dragging themselves across the mountain. During clear intervals I

continued my careful scrutiny but saw nothing. The next cloud

was massive, obscuring everything for ten minutes—a long time.

The next clear interval was shorter while I vainly searched the

cliffs below. Another cloud swept in again cutting off all visibility.

Donny was getting very nervous so when the air cleared

again he wanted to get off the mountain and asked me if he could

leave. I said yes, deciding to follow. About halfway back to the

main ridge the air was still clear so I decided to go back for one last look. Back on the peak I changed my position, crawling

forward to cling precariously on the very edge of the cliff. I had a momentary feeling of panic but this was my last chance to

find Mark. Soon a large vapor mass drifted across the main ridge

and loomed over my perch. My vision began to fade but just before

the haze cut off my view my stomach did a flip-flop: There was a

bright red object! It was small? I couldn't tell what it was
but

it indicated I was on the right track. I felt sure I would now
find his body. The red object was proof that he had gone
over

the cliff, but I never saw the red object again.

I yelled at Donny to fire two shots. As they
reverberated

down the mountain Marks father heard them far below. He
made one

frantic, stumbling effort to run up the mountain, then
collapsed

crying from grief and relief.

Donny yelled to see if he should return and help me.
I knew

that with no mountaineering experience he would only be
an extra

hazard. I yelled to him to get off the mountain as the
weather

was getting worse. He disappeared down the ridge into the
clouds.

I decided that after killing the goat on the west slope
Mark

had tried to go down to it, and in his haste had slipped to
his

death. I had on good climbing boots and began to
cautiously work

my way down. After descending about 50 feet I found a
positive

clue? wedged between two rocks was the leather sole and
heel of

an army shoe. Leather is slick and unreliable for mountain
climbing. ^

The sole and heel, with nails protruding, had been
ripped

from the upper shoe after jamming between the rocks,
evidence
that Mark had been travelling fast when it happened. I
knew now
that I would find Marks body somewhere below. The cliff
was so
steep I had to belay myself on the rope. I looped the middle
of
it around a rocky projection, then after reaching the end of
the
doubled rope^ I would stop in a safe place and pull the
other

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half of the rope down. Near the end of the third belay I
dropped
across an overhang and swung down into a deep declivity
to land
beside Marks body. My emotions boiled over.
What a pitiful, heart wrenching sight he was. His body
was
in a fetal position, wedged into a crevice. His head was
crushed.
When a body falls into rocks the head is always demolished.
Two
ptarmagin still hung from his belt. The emotion of seeing a
young
boys life so violently and untimely ended, and the joy of
finding him for his distraught parents, overcame me and I
broke
down and cried. My prayer had been answered.
In a few moments I knew I must regain complete
control of my

emotions in order to carefully plan what I had to do. I dug a can of tomato juice out of my backpack and opened it.

Taking one

big mouthful I instantly spat it out, almost choking. It must have been nearly half salt. Something had gone wrong at the

cannery. I set the can on a small projection and my emotions

subsided. The salt-shock served to effectively steady my emotions. I knew clearly what I had to do, and how to do it.

I heard searchers calling to each other somewhere on a

nearby ridge. When they had heard the shots they wisely began to ^

work in my direction. I called and they answered. They were coming toward the base of the cliffs below me. That was exactly

what I needed. I could lower the body down to them by a series of

belays.

I could do this the same way I came down to the body. I

would tie the body on one end of the rope, let it down nearly half the length of the rope, belay the rope around a suitable

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body, with the rope running up and across the tips, making a

loop for a helicopter pickup.

Day Five: A small crew returned with the necessary equipment

and prepared the body, as planned, for a helicopter pickup.

I

didn't go. The 71st Air Rescue Squadron at Elmendorf Field dispatched another chopper but it also failed. Arriving in the area the engine developed magneto trouble. It couldn't land in

the rocks in case of engine failure so it quickly disappeared, much to the disgust of the rescue party. They returned home with

plans to go back the next day with a toboggan and lower the body

down to Ptarmagin Lake where a float plane could take it to Seward.

Day Six: I was on the plane to Ptarmagin Lake and climbed

with the others up to the body, dragging a fiberglass rescue toboggan. Once the body was secured on the toboggan it was an

easy matter to take it down. We followed an avalanche chute, with

two men on ropes behind checking the toboggans descent.

I stayed with the body when it was delivered to the morticians. An interesting thing happened as I helped undress the

body. A school teacher named Cook, happened to be present and as "•

we removed the shoe-and-a-half Cook remarked what a pity it was

that the boy was killed because he had on the wrong kind of shoes.

The curious thing about this remark was that the next year

I would go up on mount Resurrection to find and bring down Cook's body after he was killed in a fall because HE WAS WEARING

THE WRONG KIND OF SHOES, (this event described elsewhere under

the title, "Death on Resurrection")