



CHARLES ALAN KENNETH INNES-TAYLOR  
1900-1983

When contemplating his long, colorful, and varied life, it is challenging to speculate on the single most influential action of polar survival expert Alan Innes-Taylor, who died in his sleep at his home in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, on 14 January 1983, leaving his wife Elizabeth and three grown children. His cold-regions survival training of civilian and military air crews directly helped the largest number of people. His five years as a Royal Northwest Mounted Police constable, first in British Columbia and later in Whitehorse, ranks a close second for service. Certainly his saving of the life of a drowning woman off the North Carolina coast in 1941, for which he received a Carnegie Hero Medal, was one of his most dramatic actions. But for himself, the sheer coincidence in 1928 which propelled him from a Vancouver office to the Antarctic irrevocably changed his life. His delivery of sled-dogs to the First Byrd Antarctic Expedition (BAE I) sealed his polar passion and marked his entry into the circle of polar adventures.

Innes-Taylor's childhood held no clues to this future. Born outside of London to an old family (his great-uncle was a prime minister of New Zealand), Innes-Taylor was shortly introduced to the peripatetic life he would lead when his father moved to North America for business reasons. By 1908, the young Victorian was living in Toronto, where his mother gave singing lessons. Since his parents traveled extensively, Innes-Taylor came to be self-reliant in the mold of English school-boys. Animals filled his need for companionship, and he was

interested in animal husbandry from the time he first saw the buffalo/cattle crossbreed raised by friends on a farm in the Trent River Valley of Ontario.

Innes-Taylor enlisted in 1917 in the Royal Canadian Flying Corps. At Camp Mohawk, Ontario, he learned to solo a Curtiss JN-4A in under seven hours — his alternative was re-assignment to the infantry. This introduction to aviation instilled an appreciation for airpower that he always carried with him.

Following post-war jobs as a farmer and surveyor, Innes-Taylor began moving north in 1921 when he joined the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. He trained in Regina, battled "Wobblies" in Vancouver, was posted to Esquimault, and was later stationed in Whitehorse, where he learned dog-mushing. After his departure from the RCMP in 1926, Innes-Taylor worked at a variety of jobs, all of which enlarged his knowledge of the Yukon and proved valuable to the territory in years to come. He was a miner at the Treadwell Yukon Mine in Keno Hill, and later a purser on the British Yukon Navigation Company's SS *Whitehorse* which ran between Whitehorse and Dawson.

It was this northern experience which uniquely qualified Innes-Taylor to journey south in 1929, providing fresh sled-dogs to BAE I.\* On that expedition Admiral Byrd, piloted by Bernt Balchen, made the first flight over the South Pole. Though only minimally involved with the expedition on the

ice, Innes-Taylor did see the autumnal days of the Antarctic whaling industry while on board the Norwegian whaler *SS Kosmos*. Such participation in historic changes recurred throughout his life. He witnessed the passage from heroic to modern exploration with the transitions from sail (on the cutter *Bear*) to steam (on the *Eleanor Bolling*), from manhauled sledges to ski-equipped airplanes, from dogsleds to tractors. Innes-Taylor was also present for such events in the Canadian North. He experienced the switch from riverine roads plied by canoes, steamboats, and dogsleds to contemporary asphalt corridors used by cars and airplanes. He helped to make possible the first commercial air flights over the North Pole from Stockholm to Tokyo via Anchorage.

Innes-Taylor returned to Antarctica in 1933 as chief of field operations for BAE II. This expedition marked a stage in the evolution of cold-regions science from generalized exploration to specialized scientific enquiry. Byrd had an ambitious program for the continued exploration of Antarctica. Part of it was a meteorology study during which he was to live alone for the winter at advance base, 100 miles from the main base. Innes-Taylor, with Finn Ronne and two others, pioneered the route to advance base, marking depots for the tractor train to follow. They built Byrd's hut, and in March 1934 Byrd began the famous solo on which he almost died.

Innes-Taylor's return to Little America was plagued with low temperatures and high winds. The dogs were dying and several had to be shot, even though it took ten minutes to thaw out the revolver. The pemmican was unsuitable and new rations were made that austral winter.

During this time, Innes-Taylor composed detailed memoranda planning the coming field season. There were to be three field parties. The first would carry out a geophysical survey south across the Ross Ice Shelf and up onto the Polar Plateau. The second would accompany the survey to the foot of the Queen Maud Mountains, and then branch east into the peaks to study geology. The third group would also study geology, but in the unexplored Edsel Ford Mountains of Marie Byrd Land to the northeast of Little America.

As logistics were thinly stretched, Innes-Taylor recommended that his support party remain at base to provide any necessary emergency assistance. Byrd wrote of this:

Innes-Taylor, in planning the whole operation, had modestly assigned himself an inconspicuous role. Now these men came forward, volunteering, for the good of the whole operation, to eliminate themselves. I should rather find such bigness in my associates than discover a mountain range (*Discovery*, 1935).

By late December 1934 all the field parties returned from successful field programs. The Marie Byrd Land party, under Paul Siple, had made the first scientific reconnaissance of a land discovered from aircraft. The Plateau party, under Morgan and Bramhall, had introduced the use of seismics for determining ice thickness. The expedition had also accomplished the first high-altitude polar meteorological observations; made the southernmost meteor and cosmic ray observations; and discovered by air the Rockefeller Plateau on the southeast edge of the Ross Ice Shelf, helping to disprove the existence of a hypothetical strait between the Weddell and

Ross seas.

At the start of World War II, Innes-Taylor was commissioned, by Special Act of Congress, as a captain in the U.S. Army Air Force. His first assignment was to southeastern Greenland where he helped to rescue air crews downed on the ice sheet. After mid-1942 and for the remainder of the war, he trained arctic and mountain troops in Colorado and Canada. In this work he became associated with Vilhjalmur Stefansson, Sir Hubert Wilkins, Paul-Emile Victor, the founder of Expeditions Polaires Françaises, Frank Smythe, England's famous Himalayan mountaineer, and Belmore Browne, Alaskan explorer and artist. At Jasper, Alberta, in 1944, Innes-Taylor supervised mountain training of the Lovat Scouts for the intended invasion of Norway. Although the invasion was never staged, Innes-Taylor received a commendation for this operation.

Before the war, Antarctic biologist Carl Eklund had become interested in beaver farming. He had designed pens with flowing water in which the beavers would live on trees cut from surrounding timberlands. The beaver rancher would sell the debarked timber for fenceposts and pulpwood, and the beaver for breeding stock and research purposes. Innes-Taylor tried this novel scheme in 1946 by leasing 1200 acres near Entrance, Alberta, just north of Jasper. He remarked to the *Montreal Gazette*, "We hope to provide live beavers to governments and organizations which might require them for reestablishment of watersheds and zoos." Two years later, design problems and inadequate finances ended this experiment in wildlife management and conservation.

Innes-Taylor never shirked disagreeable duties. He had collected diseased animal tissue for a study of equine encephalitis by the Lederle Laboratories, for which he worked from 1937 to 1941, and had embalmed bodies during his expeditions. Perhaps his most dispiriting experience, about which he wrote a poignant article for the second issue of *Arctic*, was his service as executive officer at Isachsen Land, latitude 78°N on Ellef Ringnes Island in the Canadian Arctic. Isachsen was part of Operation Arctops, a joint American-Canadian arctic meteorology project designed to provide weather reports from the strategic High Arctic. Innes-Taylor and his party of six spent almost a year at this station, which had been visited only once before — by Stefansson, thirty years earlier — and which was inaccessible during the summer. In addition to supervising daily weather observations, Innes-Taylor banded birds and observed tidal and sea ice fluctuations. But he lamented the loss of simplicity, almost of innocence, that this new, spiritless, mechanized exploration brought to the unchanged land.

In 1950 he was recalled by the U.S. Air Force to command survival-training schools for Korean War flight crews, first in Colorado and later in Idaho. This work eventually brought him to Ladd Air Force Base, now Ft. Wainwright, in Fairbanks, where in October 1953 he became a researcher in charge of the Environmental Protection Section of the USAF Arctic Aero-medical Lab. His section was responsible for improving techniques and equipment for cold-weather survival. Innes-Taylor also advised physiologists and biochemists developing new survival rations, and participated in their field trials. It was his

suggestion that led to microclimatic studies of the snow/ground interface, which resulted in the development of snowmound shelters at ground level.

Though self-educated, Innes-Taylor understood the difficulties and challenges of scientific research, having so often critically supported it. He valued new scientific techniques and encouraged newcomers in their application. He was especially helpful in pointing out unforeseen problems. As one biologist from this period has remarked, Innes-Taylor was an inspiration in the practical solution of applied research problems.

After 1956, Innes-Taylor applied his knowledge of polar survival as a consultant to international airline companies, especially Scandinavian Airlines which pioneered the trans-polar air route in 1957. He trained many air crews for this mission, and wrote for SAS the highly acclaimed manual *This Is the Arctic*. He also introduced special survival gear such as exposure suits and circular, multi-person sleeping bags.

Innes-Taylor always maintained his interest in science, and as a Fellow of the Arctic Institute acted as factotum for its field operations out of Whitehorse and later Kluane Lake. He advocated an integrated arctic science policy and wrote in 1961 for the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*:

It would appear there should be an overall plan for scientific investigation of the Arctic...it seems that none of this can come about until the University attracts students to an Arctic Department which embraces all the interested sciences and some of the practical problems...let's have a plan and let us have people trained to live in the Arctic.

During those years Innes-Taylor lived in Eagle, Alaska, and later in Dawson and Whitehorse, Yukon. He ran Yukon River float trips for the public, and was ahead of his time in using the trips to teach conservation and ecology. As an outgrowth of his long association with the area, he documented historical sites all along the Yukon's rivers for the territorial Department of Tourism. He was instrumental in saving the Dawson archives when they were flooded in 1966. Because of this work and his general contributions to the North, he was awarded the Order of Canada in 1977, and the Yukon Commissioner's Medal in 1982.

Innes-Taylor remained bewitched by the North. Though an adventurer, seizing new and diverse opportunities, he wrestled to temper his life of innovation with the lessons of the past. To some degree he came to regret the changes in the life of the North, changes he himself had helped to bring about. Such a contradiction was natural for Innes-Taylor, a remarkable mixture of the practical and theoretical, domestic and exotic, realistic and romantic, old and new.

*Philip S. Marshall*

\*Editor's Note: Innes-Taylor's account of that venture, "Empty Boots", follows this obituary.