



SKY TRAPPERS

by FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

Ringed by wolves on the frozen waste, his only hope lay in the birdman who dared the arctic solitudes.

AS "RUSTY" WADE BROUGHT his *Air Musher* to the Gold Poke Airport he knew that something unusual had happened. The big commercial plane touched lightly, then as the full weight settled on the skis there was a screaming protest from ice and snow.

Rusty taxied into the hangar and leaped from the plane, followed by Akiak, his wolf dog mascot. The *Air Musher* was empty. The trip out had been in response to a sudden need of grub at a new mining camp. Aside from three cheers from the hungry miners when the craft arrived, the trip had been without incident.

The lanky pilot threw back the hood of his

caribou-skin parka and drawled, "What's the excitement?"

Sam Goldman, badly excited, attempted to answer. "The worst thing in the world has happened, Rusty. Right away you should go on my pay roll as a fighter and flyer."

Goldman had paced back and forth through the snow until he now had a packed trail.

"They left, not a half hour ago. that robber of a 'Hawk' Breed and his brother, 'Kid' Breed. How two such bums could be born into the same family is a mystery."

"Hawk Breed and his brother, *eh?*" Rusty was all attention now. No one knew better than he that some day, high in the air, or possibly on the ground, there

would be a finish fight between Hawk Breed and Rusty Wade.

Rusty had bested him in several encounters and Hawk was out for revenge. Revenge he must have if he were to save his face among his own crowd.

Hawk Breed had come North for several reasons. First, the authorities in the States had been making it rather hot for him. Secondly, he figured his chances of getting the drop on Rusty were better. And, lastly, there was money to be made in the freight and transportation business.

Alaska had quickly turned to this method of travel. New uses were constantly being found for the plane. Miners and supplies were being landed at remote creeks in hours when it used to take days. Schools of salmon were located from the air. The government was trapping from the air, instead of sending survey parties crawling over the ground. Pilots turned their planes into ambulances on occasion and many a life had been saved through prompt care. The demands on Rusty were so varied that nothing surprised him.

"Now, Sam," he said, "tell me what happened."

RUSTY'S voice calmed the little man to some extent.

"That fur buyer, Pete Lick, said he was going to run me out of business. For years I've given the trappers fair prices and there ain't been any trouble. Wherever Lick goes there's trouble.

"He pays big prices until rival buyers are ruined, then he makes the trappers take what he'll give them. And it ain't so much, Rusty. Oi, oi! And it should happen on the day when I was willing to forgive everybody, even Pete Lick."

"What's happened?" Rusty demanded again.

"When there's plenty of fur, I make big contracts outside so the boys won't have fur on their hands all summer. When the trapping ain't so good, I go easy. This year I make it a lot of big contracts, putting up bond as usual to protect my people outside. And now this robber of a Lick hires that air pirate, Hawk Breed, to go into the Wolf Lake country and buy the fur. Rusty, ain't you got no brains? Can't you see it'll bust me?"

"Sure I have brains," Rusty responded cheerfully, "and once in a while I use them. But I thought you'd sent in 'Buck' Brodie, your buyer, a couple of weeks ago?"

"That's it, rub it in. Ask me why I didn't hire a plane instead of sending Buck with dog teams and Indians afoot. Two weeks to the day, Buck left and maybe he's a

hundred miles from here. In an hour that Hawk Breed and his brother will be that far along. And it's been a half an hour since they started. Already, fifty miles."

"Hardly that," Rusty answered. "But what do you want me to do?"

"Beat the Breeds into the Wolf Lake country and take Buck Brodie with you if you can find him. If you do it, Rusty, I'll give you five thousand dollars." Then as Rusty seemed to hesitate, he added, "Six thousand dollars. Anything you want. Rusty. If I've got to be ruined I'd sooner a friend like you ruined me than a robber like Lick."

"I'm not trying to force up your price, Sam," the young pilot replied hastily. "Holding a man up doesn't pay, and aviation is no exception. I'm putting things on a business basis up in this country. I'll charge you regular freight rates, Sam. Any extra cost to me will be charged up against the fun I'll have fighting it out with Hawk Breed. I'll start in the morning."

"In the morning?" Goldman groaned. "In the morning it will be too late."

"No, it won't! And I can't take a chance on getting the *Sea Scout* smashed up in a high speed landing in the dark."

"The *Sea Scout* can't carry much fur," Goldman protested.

"The main thing is to get Brodie into the Wolf Lake country so he can start buying," Rusty explained. "Transportation will come later. Go on home, Goldman, and get a good night's sleep!"

But sleep was not for Goldman that night. As he left the airport a signal corps man handed him a message that had just come over the wire. It read:

Sam Goldman,

Cold Deck, Alaska.

War broken out between Logan stores and the McCoy chain. To protect our people I am coming by plane to buy. First shipment to reach Gold Poke gets business.

—Angus McCoy.

"Some more of that robber, Lick's work," Goldman's voice rasped out. "For years I've supplied the McCoy's." And yet he did not blame McCoy. Competition was fierce and undoubtedly Lick had resorted to trickery to undermine McCoy's confidence. If something happened that Goldman did not get the usual output of fur, the McCoy group of fur stores would suffer seriously.

Goldman piled into a dog sled and mushed down to Rusty Wade's cabin to further impress on him the importance of winning this fight.

"I told you to go to bed," Rusty answered, "and quit worrying. We have planes as good as theirs, and if we're able to outguess the Breeds and sidestep the traps they'll lay, the fight is won. I've got reason to believe the pilot who spends his time thinking in terms of flying can beat the fellow who takes his mind off flying to think of tricks. Good night, and don't snore!"

Sam Goldman shrugged his shoulders helplessly.

"There's no answer to such a feller," he groaned. Had he known Rusty better he would have known the rusty-headed pilot's success was largely due to his refusal to worry. It was Rusty's contention nothing broke down a man as soon as worry. For that reason he let the other fellow do it.

THE dawn of another day found Rusty's mechanics warming up the *Sea Scout*. This swift little combat plane contained a few pointers that Rusty had added, as a result of his flying experience in the North.

To get the best results in cold flying, Rusty had covered the motor with asbestos to keep it warm. His flying suit, which was composed of the conventional parka, plus electrical pads, was unusually warm. In addition he carried snowshoes, sleeping bag, rifle, and light rations. When a plane is forced down in the North the pilot is usually in for a long walk.

His relief pilot, "Chink" Dunbar, was standing near with a hopeful expression on his face.

"Won't there be a chance for me to get into this scrap?" he inquired. "There are two of the Breeds and only one of you. Of course you're equal to any two Breeds, but——"

"If there's a chance you'll get it," Rusty promised. "And if I don't show up in a few days, grab the *Air Musher* and use your own judgment. Don't waste time looking for me. Get the furs in to Goldman first, then think of me. I can live off the country if I'm alive. And if I'm dead, a few days won't make any difference anyway."

Chink nodded. He had won his nickname fairly enough, because in learning to fly he had flown Chinese fashion a lot of the time—Wun Wing Low.

From Rusty's remarks Chink decided that the tall pilot did not underestimate his opponent's ability to put him out of commission. That, he decided was a healthy sign—for Rusty.

A few moments after taking off, a frozen river went speeding, like a twisting white tape, under Rusty's wings. As soon as the motor had thoroughly warmed up, he opened it up to a hundred-mile-an-hour clip.

He continued on at this speed for a half hour, then he began climbing.

Ten minutes later he shot through a mountain pass at ten thousand feet. As though the plane were sliding down hill on the skis, he roared into the valley beyond and again picked up the river, which had gone out of its way nearly a hundred miles in an effort to break through the mountain range.

The instant he picked up the river, he slowed down and began searching the shore for signs of sled tracks. Twice he descended to the ice, only to take off instantly. It was another ten minutes before Rusty caught sight of something that caused him to swing back immediately.

At a bend in the river a lone musher was fighting for his life. Ringed in by a pack of wolves the man was selling his life as dearly as possible.

Rusty saw the man's head turn upward as he passed over, but it was the barest glance. The pilot banked and returned, with motor barely turning over. When barely a hundred feet from the ground, he opened the motor wide. The roar was tremendous and the swift passage of the plane dragged a swirl of frost and snow in his wake.

When he swung back again the man was legging it for the river. The pack had fled, frightened by the roar of what the beasts must have concluded was many guns.

As Rusty brought the plane to a stop, the musher, none other than Buck Brodie, came up.

"You saved my skin that time. Rusty! The roar of that motor almost lifted 'em off the ground."

"Well, Buck, what's become of your outfit?" Rusty inquired, as he stretched himself.

The man's eyes flashed.

"Hawk Breed!" he cried. "Hawk and that brother of his got the drop on me."

They turned my dogs loose, dropped my sled through a hole in the ice and turned me adrift with three days' grub and a gun with no ammunition. It sure was lucky you showed up. Rusty."

"It wasn't luck," Rusty answered, "it was Sam Goldman. There's a fight on. I'm here to pick you up and take you to the Wolf Lake trading post. Forget your debt to Hawk Breed until we win this fight. Ever ride in a plane?"

"No, but I've always wanted to."

"This'll be a different ride. My *Sea Scout* is a one-seater. You ride in the baggage compartment. All you've got to do is to lie still and reflect on your sins."

I'll do the rest. We've got to beat them there and then return to Gold Poke with the fur. What did Hawk Breed have, the two-seater?" asked Rusty.

"Yeah!" Brodie replied grimly. "They got me last night. It wasn't long until the wolves were on my trail. I figured the devils would get me, so I took to a tree. Spent a tough night there. They left at dawn. I figured they would keep under cover, but I guess the hunting hasn't been good. They caught me in the open this morning and you know the rest. A man hasn't much chance with a pack when he's only armed with a useless gun. At that, I got three of 'em."

Rusty completed the job of stuffing the musher into the baggage compartment of the plane, then headed for Wolf Lake. By this time Hawk Breed was probably very much on the job.

HAWK BREED stepped from the plane and looked with interest on the clump of cabins that marked the trading post of Wolf Lake. The lake proper extended nearly a hundred miles and contained numerous bays and inlets, some of them ten miles in extent.

A dozen trappers hurried down to the plane. Hawk sized them up with just a trace of contempt in his manner.

"I'm here buying fur for Lick," he announced. "Well take them out by plane."

"Where's Buck Brodie, Sam Goldman's man?" LaRue, who seemed to be a sort of factor at the post, inquired.

"I don't think they're coming this year," Hawk answered. "But if they should, we'll meet their terms."

He saw them exchange glances which seemed to indicate they would wait for competition. "In the meantime," he added, "I'll pick up what I can. When I get what I need, then I'm through. The rest goes to Brodie—if he comes." This had the desired effect. "We have fur," LaRue announced. "There is plenty down the lake, but it'll have to be freighted up."

The trapper led the way to the largest structure. "Come! We'll give you a bunk and a hot meal."

Kid Breed whispered to his brother out of the corner of his mouth.

"Some of this fur will have to be freighted in, Hawk. That takes dogs. You can figure Rusty Wade will be in on this. One way of making it tough for Rusty on this end is to hire all the dogs."

"Good idea!" Hawk agreed. "And we'll do it now. We might as well work fast and get the jump on him."

When Rusty appeared in the southwestern sky,

Hawk and his brother had the situation fairly well in hand. They had every dog and sled under contract, though they did not need them. They had also taken the cream of the catch at the post. Indian runners were hurrying to the nearest trappers with instructions to come in with their catch.

There was something commanding about the *Sea Scout's* roar as the swift craft passed overhead. And there was also something masterful in the way in which the craft was handled. It's skis touched the ice a quarter of a mile down the lake and the craft taxied up to the post.

Hawk and Kid Breed watched the arrival with interest mixed with a sense of triumph—Rusty appeared to be a poor second in this race. Their expression changed, however, when Buck Brodie squirmed from the baggage compartment. He shook himself, like some furry animal, blinked, then charged. Rusty made a flying tackle and brought him to the ice.

"Let me work on that pair," Brodie snarled, "just let me work on 'em a few minutes and there'll be no competitors in this fur stampede."

"You're going to listen to me," Rusty countered, "beating, not beating up, is the important thing right now."

"I guess you're right," Brodie admitted, "I'll lay off unless they start riding me. Then, look out!"

"Any fur left, LaRue?" Rusty inquired.

"There was some doubt," the factor explained, "and we sold to the first man."

"Extraordinary good business, for often there's not a second man. Fast work, Hawk!" Rusty tossed the compliment at his enemy. "How about dog teams, LaRue?"

The factor shrugged his shoulders. "Breed has hired them all."

"Fast work, Hawk!" Breed complimented himself with a trace of contempt in his tone. A silent challenge was thrown in Rusty's face—a challenge that he accepted equally as silently.

"Come up to the post," LaRue said, "we can find room for you."

"If you don't mind," Rusty replied, "I'll bunk with Buck in his old cabin to-night. We'll accept a meal, however. Here are the latest copies of the *Gold Poke Nugget*."

This was a thoughtful gesture Hawk Breed had overlooked.

As they moved toward the post, LaRue dropped back.

"Breed," he addressed that worthy. "You and Rusty Wade are enemies. Any man can see it. No trouble here, understand. I am an officer and won't stand for it."

"Don't worry," Hawk answered in his thin, cold voice, "when we settle it—and there'll be a time and don't you forget it—it'll be settled a mile or two in the air. It'll be a finish fight. No quarter asked by me, nor none given." He bared his teeth in an ugly snarl.

BUCK favored Rusty with a scowl when they were alone.

"If you hadn't stopped me," he said sulkily, "I'd have settled this competition business. Now what are we going to do. No fur—no dogs!"

Rusty had been doing some hard thinking. Defeat was right around the corner, too close for comfort. He expected to take an occasional drubbing, but he did not relish one from Hawk Breed.

"Get busy and draw a chart of the lake. Note the unusual mountains and inlets, mark the cabins on the lake and add anything that will help me to find them. If we work fast we'll win this scrap yet. Right now Breed thinks he has us licked. Let him think so. He won't do anything until more trappers arrive. I've sized up what he's bought, but it's not enough."

"And you're heading back for Gold Poke and get the *Air Musher*, eh?"

"I can't! I've got to stay and round up fur—enough to fill the *Air Musher* when she arrives. We've got to take a chance and see if Chink Dunbar can bring the *Air Musher* here. I think he can."

Rusty pulled on his parka, hopped onto the *Sea Scout* and flew ten miles down the lake. Here he stopped, broke out a portable, short-wave radio transmission set. Rather impatiently he waited for some action. Ten minutes elapsed, then, "Gold Poke speaking."

"Get hold of Chink Dunbar. Tell him to load the *Air Musher* with gas and oil and fly to Wolf Lake. And, listen, tell him not to fly Wun Wing Low over the mountains. If he does he'll never get here."

The operator at Gold Poke repeated the message and promised immediate action. Rusty hopped back to the post where he placed a native on guard over the plane and joined Buck Brodie who was laboring over his chart.

"I'm going to turn in now, Buck," he announced. "I've got a tough day ahead of me to-morrow. See you in the morning."

Three minutes later Buck glanced up from his work. "Well, I'm a son of a gun," he exclaimed. "With defeat staring him in the face he drops off to sleep like he didn't have a care in the world. Gosh, I wish I could do that. I don't expect to get a wink of sleep tonight."

They were up early the following morning. And so was Hawk Breed and his brother. Rusty made no attempt to disguise his movements.

"I'm going down the lake and see if I can pick up a pelt or two, Buck. Keep an eye on things and go as strong as you think best if there's any fur to bid on."

Rusty's casual, "Keep an eye on things," meant to Buck certain very definite instructions.

The Breeds smiled as the *Sea Scout* vanished.

"That bird is the prize believer in Santa Claus," Hawk stated. "If he thinks the trappers can mush from the lower lake in time to do him any good, he's got another think coming. And he can't pack much fur on that June bug he's flying."

Hearing this remark, Buck Brodie had to bite his cheeks to keep from laughing. Fifteen minutes after Rusty left the post he was taxiing up an inlet. An amazed trapper emerged from a snow-covered cabin.

"I can only give you a minute, brother," Rusty Wade announced, "pile the best of your fur on a sled and start up the center of the lake toward Wolf Lake Post."

"I haven't any dogs and—"

"Then neck it, if you want to make a sale," Rusty answered hurriedly. "You won't have to neck all the way."

The ancient and honorable art of necking a sled consists of dragging it with the rope passed over the shoulder. This may be done either with or without the aid of dogs. It is a tough job at best when kept up all day.

The next cabin was tucked up on the side of a hill. Rusty dropped a note and hurried on.

NOON found him enjoying a moose steak an inch thick while a trapper spread out a choice assortment of beaver.

"I'll take the beaver," Rusty said, "beaver's going to be high this year. Better throw in that ermine, too."

By the time he had finished the meal there was sufficient fur to fill the baggage compartment of the plane. He hopped ten miles toward the post before coming down again. In the center of the lake a trapper awaited. Two bales were strapped onto the plane's wings, close to the fuselage.

Fifteen miles farther on, a group of three trappers

with heavily laden sleds waited. Rusty taxied up and stopped.

"How're you going to get all this fur on that contraption?" one of them inquired.

"I'm not! I don't know how this is going to work, but the lake is wide," answered Rusty.

With misgivings they watched him fasten the sled lines to the plane. "Now, men, give a heave to break the sleds loose, then pile on—those that want to go to the Wolf Lake Post."

"Just a minute; brother, how high and fast can that plane go?" asked the inquisitive trapper.

"It's been thirty thousand feet in the air," Rusty answered, "but this time she's going to stay on the ice. How fast it'll go, dragging these sleds nobody knows. It's never been tried before. Hang on, and we'll see what happens."

For a moment the plane seemed fastened to the ice, then slowly she began to move. "Pretty slick," said one, piling onto his load.

The next instant he was hanging on for dear life. By leaps and bounds the speed increased until the scenery became a blur and the snow and frost kicked up by the prop became a blizzard.

Two miles up the lake a trapper in the act of finishing a bottle of moonshine that he had made, took one look at the plane towing the sleds and tossed the bottle away. "I'm through," he announced, "this stuff seems to affect the eyes."

BACK at the post Buck Brodie spent an anxious day looking into the southwestern sky. Chink Dunbar wasn't the best pilot in the world; and that range was a bad one. As night came on he hired a number of Indians to carry wood onto the lake. Hour after hour he stood near the fuel and listened. No sound broke the silence, except the occasional groaning of the ice as it contracted. Nor was there any sign of Rusty.

At the post he could see Hawk Breed dickering with a group of natives. All day they had outbid him. It was evident they figured to control the business now and make the trappers pay later with low prices.

Suddenly he grew tense. A faint drone came to his ears—the sweet, low tone of a powerful airplane motor, running perfectly at high speed.

"Chink Dunbar and Rusty's *Air Musher*!" he shouted.

The next moment the flames were licking the fuel piled high on the lake.

Three times the *Air Musher* thundered overhead

before attempting to land. Then she came down, rushed across the ice into the darkness, turned around and approached almost timidly. Chink Dunbar dropped from the cabin with a sigh of relief.

"Well, I got her here without cracking up. Air pockets in the pass were terrible. I dropped a thousand feet once. Thought sure I was done. Just to play safe, I turned back and followed the river here. Where's Rusty?" he asked.

"Down the lake somewhere. He'll be here to-morrow."

THE unexpected appearance of the *Air Musher* threw a bad scare into the Breeds. Hawk took command.

"Listen, Kid," he said, "he figures to take the *Air Musher* down the lake and pick up the stuff he's been buying today. We've got to move. By using our plane and relaying the stuff, we can beat him in.

"Load her up to-night and I'll hop off for Moose Creek Post first thing in the morning. I'll drop my fur there and come back and pick up the rest later in the day. You'll have to stick around here until I come back for you—weight counts big now. Even driving the *Air Musher* at top speed he can't pick up a full load and beat us in to Gold Poke."

"O.K., Hawk!" Kid Breed answered. "You turn in and I'll stow the stuff and keep watch on the plane! Buck Brodie is just sore enough to jim the motor if he got a chance."

Hawk Breed, somewhat relieved now that he had studied the situation, turned in.

A very excited brother awakened him at dawn. He was swearing. "Pile out and see what's coming!"

"It's the *Sea Scout*, I can tell by her motor," Hawk answered, "but why the excitement?"

He followed Kid Breed to the ice. Most of the post had gathered. Buck Brodie and Chink Dunbar were yelling like Indians. Coming swiftly over the ice was the *Sea Scout* towing a string of laden sleds—enough to fill the *Air Musher* to overflowing.

As the motor gave a dying gasp the familiar rusty head appeared, and called out:

"Hello, Chink, is the *Air Musher* O.K.?"

"Ready to go—tanks full," answered Chink. "All you've got to do is to warm her up."

"We've had some wild old night of it," Rusty said grimly. "The plane could tow the load, but we had a sweet job steering in the right direction at times. We'd stop to straighten things out, then the runners would freeze to the ice and we'd have a sweet job to break 'em loose."

Rusty shot a quick glance at Hawk Breed.

"No rest for the wicked Chink. You've got the job of flying the *Sea Scout* back to Gold Poke. I figure to be close behind you with the *Air Musher*. We've got to collect from Angus McCoy before somebody else does.

Hawk Breed in moments of stress thought in terms of aviation. His practiced eye sized up the pile of fur the trappers were stacking near the plane's cabin door.

"It'll take a full load of fuel to fly from here to Gold Poke," he quickly informed his brother. "And with a full load of fuel and all that fur he can't much more than take off, let alone go over the mountains. That means he figures on going around—following the river. And to do it he'll have to refuel!"

"I get you," Kid Breed whispered excitedly, "he'll stop at either Moose Creek Post or Big Nugget."

"It'll have to be Big Nugget," Hawk answered, "the Moose Creek field isn't long enough for so large a machine, fully loaded, to take off. Warm up my plane, I'm flying to Big Nugget and I'm going to buy up every gallon of gasoline in the camp! That'll stop him!"

A HALF hour after Hawk took off, Rusty Wade took the controls of the *Air Musher*. Her cabin was jammed with furs until he had but little room for himself. Additional bales of fur were lashed to the wings, snug against the fuselage. The very ice seemed to groan under the burden, as the plane roared down the lake. Breathlessly they waited for the craft to lift. Once she cleared, then settled back again, as if tired.

Back she came, to dump precious gasoline and try again. With mitts gripped tensely, Buck Brodie and Chink Dunbar awaited the second attempt.

"Oh! Almost made it that time." Chink was talking to himself. "Steady—steady now! She's clear!"

Then Chink legged it for the *Sea Scout* and soon took off.

"And what a surprise they'll get at Big Nugget when they attempt to refuel," observed Kid Breed jeeringly, now that all interested parties were in the air.

"And what a surprise you're going to get right now," rasped Buck Brodie, starting a punch at his knees and stopping it flush on Breed's jaw. Kid Breed left the ice and landed flat, dead to the world. Buck tossed him over his shoulder and carried the unconscious man to the post to be revived.

"What a great day it's been for me," Buck sighed. "And what a great day it's going to be for Rusty Wade and Sam Goldman."

SAM GOLDMAN paced the field at Gold Poke. A tri-motored job turned out by the Boeing aircraft concern had bought Angus McCoy to the mining camp. Angus was feeling better. Regardless of who arrived first, his people would be protected. But Sam was not feeling so good. This was partly due to Pete Lick's cheerful disposition.

"My name's Lick and I've never been licked yet," he announced. "When I start to take a man, Sam, I usually take him. I've had my eye on you for a long time. At first Hawk Breed planned to relay the fur he bought—the cream of the season's catch to Moose Creek Post—but he's changed his mind. He's stopping at Big Nugget for fuel." The big man chuckled. "He's buying all the fuel before he comes on."

Pete Lick continued baiting the little man, without result. Goldman was talking, but he was talking to himself. It was time a plane was due—some plane. The days were short and darkness was fast settling over the field.

A messenger handed Lick a wire. He read it and smacked his lips.

"Hawk has left Big Nugget, Goldman. It won't be long now."

An hour elapsed, then suddenly the field was dazzling with flood lights.

Goldman put his hand over his heart. "Oi, oi, I hear it, a plane! Somebody look when it lands and tell me who it is. I can't look!"

Out of the arctic night came a giant bird with widespread wings.

"Oi, oi!" groaned Goldman again. "I know who it sounds like, but I'm afraid it ain't. Somebody look—quick!"

A half dozen keen eyes caught sight of a plane.

"It's the *Air Musher*—Rusty Wade and the *Air Musher*," some one shouted. "And look at the load the boy's packing. The old plane is loaded down like a truck."

From the darkness above, as though on guard, came the *Sea Scout*.

SAM GOLDMAN was not a large man, but he was the first to push his way through the crowd to greet Rusty Wade.

"Never once did I doubt you," he shouted, "never once did I worry. I say, Sammy, you fool, Rusty will turn the trick."

"Angus, give a look, the best pilot in the North and the best shipment of fur that's ever come out of the

Wolf Lake country. Angus, you should be interested in Pete Lick now. Pete Lick is *licked!*”

Again the lights searched the sky, and another airplane emerged from the darkness, and landed. Hawk Breed leaped to the ground.

“Hello. Lick,” he shouted in high glee, “we’ve licked ’em to a finish. I bought every gallon of gasoline at Big Nugget. I’d give anything to have seen Rusty’s face when he landed there and tried to refuel. Say—*er*—Lick, what’s the matter?”

“Matter? Why, you miserable, half-baked excuse of a pilot—Rusty Wade has landed, washed, eaten and gone to a movie,” retorted Lick, his eyes blazing at the bewildered pilot.

“But—but—he couldn’t get over the mountains with that load. He had to go around and he had to refuel. He couldn’t take off at Moose Creek Post. Why—why, he had to refuel. I don’t believe it.”

“Don’t, *eh?* Then take a look at the crowd coming out of the theater and see if you don’t recognize a man that can outguess you any day in the week.”

The barb went home—the barb one crook throws into another to drive him to greater future efforts. Hawk Breed’s face seemed even more hawkish. His eyes glittered and he half advanced on his enemy.

“Don’t be a fool, Hawk,” Pete Lick warned.

Rusty Wade was not given to rubbing it in to a defeated enemy. He nodded briefly and would have passed, but Lick stopped him.

“Just a minute, Wade,” he asked, “with no fuel available at Big Nugget, we want to know just how you ever took off that short field at Moose Creek Post?”

“I didn’t,” Rusty answered, “it looked as if you had us beaten for a while, then we took a page from the book of aviation progress—Chink Dunbar refueled me in the air.”