

# Final Treadwell rescue attempt: a disaster

By JANE GAFFIN

**Keno, the venerable old gentleman mine, refuses to die a natural death as long as a probable hundred million ounces of silver keep its heart beating. Yet, the federal government is bent on subjecting the mine to euthanasia.**

**I believe the mine deserves a dignified burial.**

**In a series of articles being published in the *Star* each Friday, I'm saying last rites and farewell to a great mine that served as the Yukon's lifeblood off and on for more than 80 years.**

**Here's Part 5.**

In a last-ditch effort to save Treadwell Yukon, Livingstone Wernecke was flying down the west coast and stopped in at Hyder, Alaska, to check out a tungsten property. It was the only worthwhile metal commodity during the war years.

Charles Gropstis, Treadwell's Englishman pilot, evaluated the sky that resembled the inside of a white enamel bucket.

He was not a seasoned bush aviator but could handle an aircraft with finesse. He had been a war pilot before Wernecke hired him in 1936 to captain the newly-purchased five-place Bellanca Skyrocket float plane, powered by a 550-horsepower Pratt & Whitney radial engine.

Wernecke had decided on departure from Hyder for Seattle, Wash., regardless of the foul coastal weather as unpredictable as Wernecke's disposition.

Whenever Wernecke wanted to go, the pilot better be ready. Wernecke was always in a hurry. Brusque and busy, he recklessly rushed to get everywhere. He drove cars with maniacal hit-the-ditch tactics, landed airplanes bellyside up and rammed mines into production.

Pilots such as Everett Wasson, Goldborough and Stevens had pioneered air-support reconnaissance prospecting junkets in Fairchild and Bellancas for Wernecke's 10-man crews he managed to keep in the bush until 1933.

Now, Treadwell Yukon was bankrupt, a disaster blamed on a combination of orebody exhaustion, bad marketing position and insufficient working capital.

The mining company sank \$10 million in debt, thanks to a board creaming the profits from the Mayo district to reinvest in other properties like the Errington near Sudbury, Ont.

The Black Thursday stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression years were less than helpful. Since the impending war made selling assets impractical, the books were closed on Oct. 21, 1941. It was as though Treadwell and Wernecke never existed.

Wernecke had put his soul into the company he nurtured for 20 years — sometimes inattentive to his wife, Mabel, and their two children, Theodore and Claire.

He had immersed himself in holding the company together. Caught in circumstances beyond his control, he was closing a career that had produced invaluable knowledge and experience.

The outcome might have been different if company president Fred Bradley had lived past 1933. His



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**PREPARING TO TAKE OFF – Pilot Everett Wasson refuels a Fairchild, one of Treadwell Yukon's aircraft.**

death shocked Wernecke, who bickered incessantly with Fred's younger brother, Phil, who didn't give a hoot about Mayo mining. Neither did his board of directors.

The pilot took off down the British Columbia-Alaska coastline that fall day in 1941. The weather socked in around Alert Bay. Lowering altitude, Gropstis spotted two victims clinging to an upside down Waco float plane in the ocean.

The rescue would have been a cinch, except when Gropstis was coming around for a final approach into the wind, he did not see the fog-shrouded tree. The Bellanca splintered into pieces.

Two days later, search and rescue personnel located the bodies of Charles Gropstis and Livingstone Wernecke and rescued the two Waco survivors, who had benefited from the Bellanca's survival gear.

After Wernecke's funeral in Berkeley, Calif., Treadwell Yukon was dismantled. The Errington Mine at Sudbury and other satellite properties were sold; the last Elsa concentrates were marketed; camps were stripped, except for the mill and tramline; other gear was sold for Alcan (Alaska) Highway construction; and leftovers were stored in a Vancouver warehouse.

The derelict mines, mill and tramline iced, caved and sagged for five years before Thayer Lindsley gained control of Treadwell's assets in 1946.

Lindsley wanted to revive the silver burrows through Ventures Ltd.

Initially, his offer was refused by the Treadwell decision-makers as too low. But Lindsley didn't accept rejection easily.

That was why he was president of 10 companies, director of 15, controlled 50 more and was Canada's mining hero, though he was not a household name outside mining circles.

Lindsley was born Aug. 17, 1882, in Yokohama, Japan, where his father was employed with Canadian Pacific railroad. The family returned to the United States when Lindsley was a youngster.

He earned a civil engineering degree from Harvard and a geology degree from Columbia. His preference was consulting rather than salaried jobs. He was contracted by McIntyre Mines to come to Canada to evaluate a property at Sudbury.

Lindsley didn't pass up opportu-

nities. He latched onto some ground for himself and joint-ventured with Joseph Errington, a director of McIntyre Mines. They reworked some of Errington's previous failures and managed to peddle one to Phil Bradley of Treadwell Yukon.

In 1928, Lindsley had been determined to break the nickel domination controlled by International Nickel (Inco) and Mond Nickel. Siphoning off Ventures and Sudbury Basin money and shares, Lindsley used Falconbridge Nickel to cultivate Giant Yellowknife gold mine, develop Sudbury deposits and purchase a refinery at Kristiansand, Norway — the key to breaking Inco's North American nickel refining patent.

Work was Lindsley's passion. For recreation, he studied mines owned by other companies. As a collector of corporations, he was a shrewd, ruthless businessman. By contrast were his materialistic wants.

He never owned an automobile and never worried about pocket cash. Yet he donated millions, often anonymously, to war-effort funds; air searches for mining associates; and funds and foundations for hospitals, universities and individuals.

His keen sense for world economics envisioned a good post-war metal market. The Alcan Highway, under construction during the two years Ventures negotiated for Treadwell's leftover, was a bonus. Ore transportation would be cheaper and spell higher profits for the mining company.

In search of a partner, Lindsley stirred the imagination of a friend and Canada's metal comptroller, Fred Connell.

In 1945, the two men co-sponsored Keno Hill Mining Company, financed by Connell's Conwest Exploration and Frobisher Exploration Company Ltd., which was an offspring of Lindsley's Ventures Ltd.

Reviving the old silver caverns wasn't fun in the dead of winter. One problem was followed by another.

At Elsa, Keno Hill Mining floundered as inexperienced men mined the buildup of polychromatic ice. They had to replace buckets and broken cables on the tramline frost-heaved out of alignment.

The only heating source was a scarce, expensive supply of wood that was soon depleted. Keno Hill Mining had to seek an alternate source of energy.

Yukon Coal Company was formed to extract coal from the Tantalus Butte Mine on the Yukon River bank at Carmacks, a village located about 160 kilometres north from the transportation centre of Whitehorse.

Thayer Lindsley thought bigger



THAYER LINDSLEY

than a dinky coal mine. He turned attention to the Yukon River and found an annual hydro power potential of 35 billion kilowatt hours.

The Yukon River, with its headwaters near the adjoining borders of British Columbia, Yukon Territory and southeastern Alaska, flows in a giant, 3,200-kilometre arc before emptying into the Bering Sea.

In 1945, a colossal hydro system was proposed by Ventures' companions, Frobisher Exploration, Quebec Metallurgical Industries and Northwest Power Industries in conjunction with Aluminum Company of America (Alcoa) and Reynolds Aluminum.

The proposal included 17 sites in the largest North American untapped watershed; three other power proposals were of less magnitude.

To encourage mining, the federal government established a power commission act in 1948. It constructed and operated electric-power plants in the Northwest Territories. The first customer was Giant Yellowknife Gold.

In 1953, an amended act extended the mandate of the power commission to the Yukon. The first hydro development was on the Mayo River to serve Keno Hill Mining.

The Crown corporation was renamed the Northern Canada Power Commission (NCPC). The first steps of its massive hydro development plans had started at Whitehorse Rapids with a 15-megawatt generating plant in 1946.

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*Next week: Keno Hill Mining is refinanced into United Keno Hill Mines.*

## College names new chancellor

Sam Johnston, leader of the Ishkitan Clan and an executive elder of the Teslin Tlingit Council, is Yukon College's new chancellor, the board of governors announced today.

He succeeds Ken McKinnon, a former Yukon commissioner and territorial council member.

Johnston, born and raised in Teslin, is a former speaker of the Yukon legislature and a former chief of his own people.

He is well recognized for his dedication to the Tlingit language and culture and to the transmission of these to future generations. He has been active for many years at the college encouraging and teaching students in traditional native studies.

McKinnon, who served as chancellor for four years, will transfer the chain of office to Johnston in a special induction ceremony at the college on Sept. 9. "Ken McKinnon has been a won-

derful asset to Yukon College," Suzanne Henry, the board of governors' chair, said in a statement.

"He was extremely active in promoting the college to the greater community, as well as offering wisdom and guidance to board members, students, and staff at Yukon College. Ken will be missed."

The ceremony will begin at noon in the "pit" on the main floor of the Ayamdigut Campus in Whitehorse.