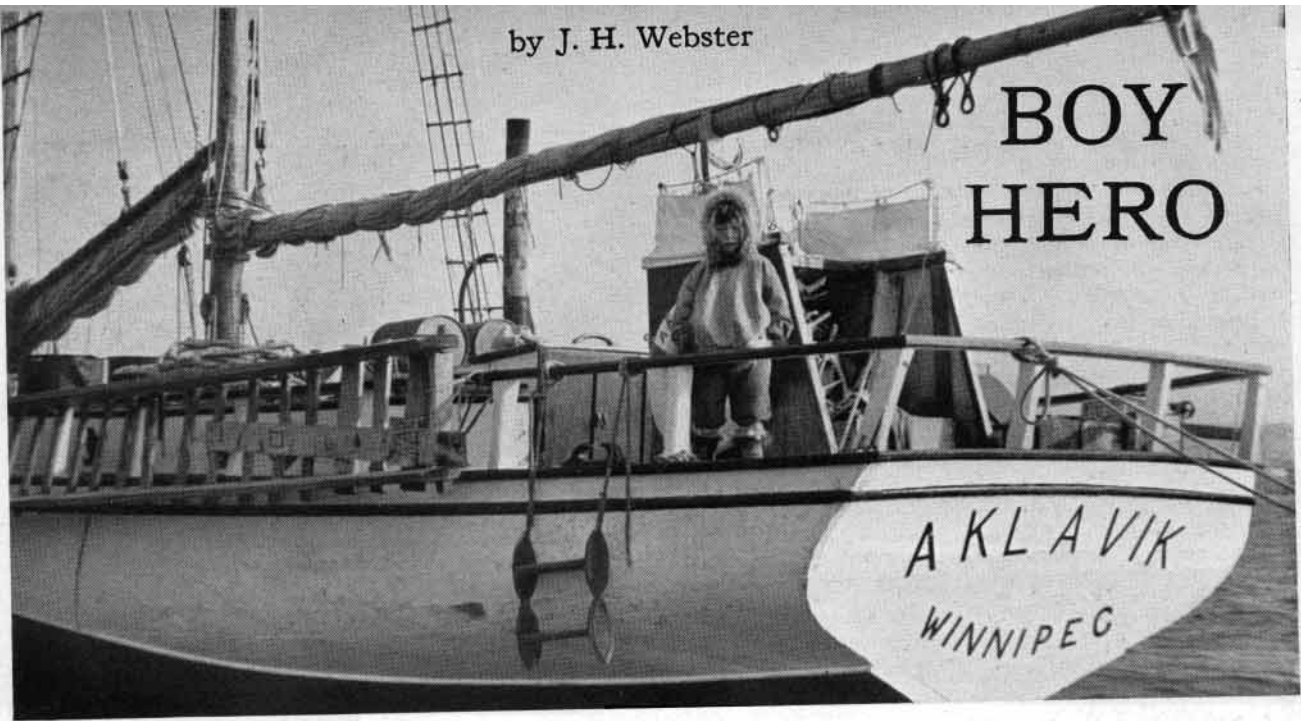


# BOY HERO



Donald Ayalik on the *Aklavik* in 1938. He also appears on the cover of the *Beaver* for March 1939, and on page 47 of the September 1946 issue.

**M**ANY brave deeds have been recorded in the annals of the Arctic, but the heroism of individual Eskimos has gone almost unnoticed. Perhaps one of the most outstanding deeds in Arctic history was performed by Donald Ayalik, an Eskimo lad of fourteen years, who last year tried three times to rescue his foster father, Patsy Klengenberg, from the burning schooner *Aklavik*.

The *Aklavik*, a veteran of the Northwest Passage, owned and operated by Patsy Klengenberg, had been chartered by the Hudson's Bay Company to take much needed supplies to their King William Island post. On Friday, August 30, 1946, after battling heavy ice in the Queen Maud Sea, she arrived at Cambridge Bay. All day Saturday she took on supplies, and late that evening she left the wharf and anchored in the bay. It was Patsy's intention to leave for King William Island about five o'clock next morning.

It is believed now that Patsy arose at four o'clock and began a minor repair on the engine's clutch, prior to sailing. But shortly after four he awakened his adopted son Donald and two other members of his native crew, told them there was a fire in the engine room, and advised them to get ashore with all speed. After that Patsy was not again seen alive.

When Donald reached the deck, he noticed that Patsy was nowhere to be seen, and concluded that he must be trapped in the engine room. The engine room by then was a raging inferno, but that did not prevent Donald from trying to enter. Flames and heat drove him back. But his foster father, he thought, lay somewhere insensible in that holocaust, and he must try again. So a second time he made the attempt; and for the second time he was driven back.

He was now quite badly burned, but summoning all his young courage, he forced himself for the third time to enter that blazing room. It was no use. He could see nothing but smoke and flames, and at last he had to abandon his efforts.

A few minutes later there was a terrific explosion.

The noise awakened everyone in the settlement, and "Scotty" Gall, the Hudson's Bay post manager, at once sped out to the *Aklavik* in his boat. He found Donald in a terribly burned condition, and after taking

him off and rendering first aid, he repeatedly called Coppermine radio station for help, until he made contact about nine a.m.

L. A. Learmonth, district inspector for the Company at Coppermine, was advised of the accident, and also of Donald's major burns. Coppermine was then asked to contact Yellowknife and arrange for a C.P.A.L. plane to leave immediately for Cambridge Bay and fly the injured lad to hospital. Chief Pilot Capt. Ernie Boffa left Yellowknife at 11.30 a.m. in a Norseman plane. He arrived at Coppermine about three, and after refueling, left for Cambridge Bay with L. A. Learmonth and myself.

Donald, we found, was severely burned over the whole back and trunk, limbs and face. Dr. Stanton later classified them as seventy to seventy-five percent burns. Thanks to the speedy transport of the air, Donald was delivered in Yellowknife at 12.30 p.m. Monday. He received treatment at "Con" Hospital there for six weeks, and then was flown to the Charles Camsell Indian and Eskimo Hospital in Edmonton, where he is undergoing further treatment. The medical director of that hospital, Dr. Meltzer, has reported that he is a grand patient, and although he has required a great deal of attention and expense, he is worth it all.

There are not many boys of Donald's age who would have so heroically entered such an inferno, even to try and save the life of one he dearly loved. At first it was believed he would never recover from his burns; but there is little doubt that some of the same spirit of fortitude he showed in trying to rescue his foster father is again standing him in good stead during his long fight for recovery.

Thirteen days after the loss of the *Aklavik*, the body of Patsy Klengenberg was found in the bay. It is believed that he must have perished when he tried to swim to shore, as there were no marks of burns on his body. Meanwhile, the boy who tried so desperately to save him from the flames is recovering step by step. He is far from his beloved Arctic, but one day he will return. And before he does, it is hoped that wide recognition will be given his heroic feat, through an award by some organization such as the Royal Humane Society.