

Albert Johnson

Badass of the Week



Life in the frigid temperatures and untamed wilderness of Canada's Northwest Territories, especially in the 1930s - a time when things like "propane heating" and "not getting eaten by bears" were unheard-of luxuries - was pretty much a miserable experience for anyone who didn't enjoy freezing their nuts off and/or being forcibly kicked in the abdomen by a bunch of angry moose. Survival in this hostile, almost-inhabitable environment was far from guaranteed, making the foolhardy venture of frontier life one that was generally only undertaken by those who possessed an iron will, a hardy constitution, a modest arsenal of kill-crazy weapons, and a tenuous grip on their own sanity. Unfortunately for the officers of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the man known only as Albert Johnson, the infamous "Mad Trapper of Rat River" possessed all of these things and more.

Albert moved to the Northwest Territories for some strange reason in July of 1931, and immediately went to work being a total jackass and pissing everyone off with his crazy antics. Living by himself in a log cabin he probably built out of wood he harvested with little more than a series of devastating karate chops and operating a small series of traps on the Rat River, he lived the lonely life of an eccentric badass frontier mountain man - hunting for food, selling animal pelts, fucking with the natives, and generally rocking out like a Depression-Era Unabomber.

Well, one day the local Inuit tribe filed a formal complaint with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, claiming that some local nut was jerking around with their strategically-placed animal traps, so the Mounties decided to pay Big Al a little visit. On December 26, 1931, two RCMP officers traveled roughly 80 miles by dogsled (a two-day journey in temperatures that hovered between negative-40 and negative-50 degrees) out to the middle of goddamned ass-nowhere to ask Mr. Johnson a few harmless questions about why he was being such a jackoff to the Indians. After banging on his door for a half-hour with no response, the Mounties decided that they didn't basically travel half of a fucking Iditarod just to go home empty-handed, and opted to kick down the door and bust their way inside Albert's log cabin. This proved to be a tactical error. Mr. Johnson politely declined comment to the nice officer by putting two bullets through the door and wounding one of them. The cops got pissed opened fire on Johnson's cabin, but he had strategically drilled gun ports through the walls of the cabin and successfully fought them off in a brief but decisive firefight.



A crappy log cabin in the middle of nowhere.

That was fucking it. The RCMP went back, licked their wounds, and put together a totally sweet frontier posse capable of assaulting pretty much anything this side of Omaha Beach. A few days later, nine men, forty-two dogs, forty pounds of TNT, and more handguns than the local NRA chapter arrived outside the home of the Mad Trapper. Once again, Albert Johnson decided to give the RCMP a warm reception by busting a few hundred caps in their direction. For fifteen hours (!) the cops exchanged fire with Johnson, who was firing out of the gun ports, and basically making his unassuming log cabin into an immobile 20th century version of the goddamned Killdozer.

Seeing as how this shitty little log cabin was seemingly impervious to bullets, the Mounties decided to whip out their home-made TNT grenades and shove them up Albert's ass with the realness. They thawed out a huge-ass stick of dynamite (remember, this is all taking place in temperatures that make the walk-in freezer at the local liquor store look like Miami Beach in mid-July), lit the fuse, and chucked it through the window of the cabin. In a flash of flame, splintered wood, and billowing black smoke, the entire log cabin went up like the White House in *Independence Day*. The roof collapsed. Three of the four walls were blown into sawdust. Children and small dogs were weeping silently to themselves. Sad orchestral violin music was playing in the background. Finally, when the fog of war cleared, the Mounties casually strolled up to the wreckage, half expecting to shovel whatever was left of Albert Johnson into an unmarked body bag and call it a day.

Unfortunately for the Mounties, this guy had other plans.

As they neared the smoking crater that had once been *Chez Johnson*, the Mad Trapper jumped up out of a fucking insane bomb-proof foxhole he had dug (by hand) in the middle of his living room, clutching an automatic pistol in each hand. He opened fire, shooting the flashlights out of the Mounties' hands and basically scaring the ever-loving shitballs out of anyone unlucky enough to witness this insanity. The cops turned around and did their best impression of that thing Shaggy and Scooby-Doo do where they jump up in the air, kick their legs like they're running, and vanish in a cloud of smoke. They didn't slow down until they'd reached civilization.

Well the RCMP may wear funny uniforms and ride around on horseback, but that still doesn't mean you can arbitrarily go off and start shooting at these guys for no good reason and not expect them to want to shove a boot or two up your ass. These guys always get their man, and a little something like "almost being fragged into gibs by a bomb-proof lunatic in a homemade nuclear fallout shelter" isn't going to deter them from bringing this nutjob to some righteous Canadian Justice. They put together a massive posse of pissed-off motherfuckers, and went out to show Mr. Johnson what happens to bitches who mess with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The problem is, when they arrived at the remains of Johnson's cabin, he was nowhere to be found.

You see, Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper of Rat River, took the only possessions he needed to survive in the harsh, unforgiving Arctic climate of the Northwest Territories

– a pair of showshees, and a couple firearms – and made a run for it on foot through one of the most inhospitable lands on the Planet Earth in the dead-ass middle of Winter.



The Northwest Territories in Winter.

If this sounds suicidal to you, then you need to learn some shit about Albert Johnson. This guy was fucking nuts - and apparently also unkillable - with like a +10 Resistance to Cold and/or Starvation. In what is now known as "The Arctic Circle War", this guy led the Royal Canadian Mounted Police on a wild goose chase that would last for 48 days through temperatures so ball-shatteringly cold that it could probably flash-freeze a polar bear. He covered hundreds of miles, on foot, while being relentlessly pursued by the RCMP, the Canadian Army, civilian trappers, dogsled teams, crazy vigilantes, Indian trackers, and goddamned surveillance aircraft. Twice he led the cops on chases through intense blizzards and complete-whiteout conditions, including one time when he somehow avoided capture by scaling a 7,000-foot mountain in a raging blizzard with no climbing gear or extra food.

Even if you don't particularly like this guy (you know, because he's a crazy criminal whackjob who needlessly opened fire on police officers), you really have to respect the fact that he was the ultimate survivalist. It is believed that this dude, traveling alone on foot, actually covered ground twice as fast as the RCMP dogsled teams. He continually doubled-back on his trail to throw off his pursuers, lived off the land, and caught or foraged all of his food with his bare hands (firing a gun would have given away his position), all the while constantly evading the ever-searching eyes of Canada's Finest.

Well, as they say, all good things eventually must come to an end, and after evading the authorities for nearly two months, the fuzz finally caught up with Albert Johnson. He was spotted by an airplane and cornered by the police. He opened fire on them with his rifle, of course (did I mention he was fucking off his rocker?), and was only brought down after the RCMP plugged nine bullets in him.

Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper of Rat River, lives on today in the folklore of the Canadian wilderness. This crazy bastard is notorious for his rampant insanity, and his epic flight from the police - and the fact that he is almost completely shrouded in mystery only helps to bolster his legend. This guy never spoke a single word to police during the entire engagement... and shit, if it's not bad enough that to this day they don't even know if he was the guy responsible for tampering with the Inuit traps, the government of Canada can't even verify that Albert Johnson was even the man's actual name! He's like the Snake Eyes of crazy frontier mountain men.



Links:

Wikipedia

Mysteries of Canada

The Mad Trapper of Rat River

Sources:

Ferrell, Ed. *Frontier Justice*. Heritage, 1998.

North, Dick. *The Mad Trapper of Rat River*. Globe Pequot, 2005.

The Ted K Archive

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