

Close Friend Mourns, Praises Bush Pilot

Star Route, Box 78-A
Ashland, Oregon 97520
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Dear Howard Rock & Readers,

I feel much as I did five years ago today when we received word in Barrow, that President Kennedy was dead. . . overwhelmed with grief. For this morning the radio informed me that there had been a plane crash in Barrow, with several persons killed, and immediately I felt that I must know who the pilot had been. My call to a local newspaper confirmed my very worse fears. . . it had been Bobby Fischer.

I am certain that one cannot possibly wholly understand nor appreciate what a bush pilot means to an isolated village, unless he has been a part of this way-of-life.

A truly dedicated pilot, as was Bobby Fischer, is much more than a pilot; he is a public servant who goes above and beyond the call of duty, requesting nothing in return.

In Wainwright, where we received no radio reception, had no telephones, and very often could not contact Barrow by 2-way radio for days at a time, he was not only our mailman, but our only contact with the outside world.

When, after days of bad weather, he flew into Wainwright three times on a dark Christmas Eve day, his plane full of gifts for the school children and ours, he couldn't have been more of a Santa Claus, had his little red Cessna been a sleigh.

Several weeks later, ailing with a sprained back, he made an emergency flight to pick up his seriously ill father-in-law, Rev. Roy Ahmaogak, and within the next week made nearly 20 round-trips between Barrow and Wainwright, hauling grieving relatives and friends to Dr. Ahmaogak's funeral, at a cost per person which scarcely paid for his gas, and with his back suffering under the pressure of so many flight hours. . . yet, he did all this in his ever-generous, non-complaining manner.

And when both the base and the village airports in Barrow were closed down in May, leaving the entire Arctic slope without any transportation to the outside world, it was Bobby and his fellow pilot Joe Felder, who made the more than 1,000 mile round trip to Fairbanks, sometimes each of them making a trip a day in their one little Cessna. And even though the amount of freight, mail, or passengers they were able to haul was relatively small, they prevented any real emergencies from occurring, made it possible for us to receive some mail, and performed a real public service.

He never refused a favor requested, hauling a package of muk-tuk, delivering an important message, or sending a telegram for anyone who asked.

On more than one occasion I heard persons discuss the fact that most bush pilots found it necessary to gamble occasionally; yet Bobby Fischer seemed an exception. Although he had done years of what seems to me as treacherous flying requiring super-human

of what seems to me as treacherous flying requiring super-human skill and courage, for the Arctic Research Lab, out to the ice islands, he never seemed willing to take a chance.

Perhaps it was because of his love for his lovely wife and beautiful children; or maybe because he felt a deep sense of responsibility to the passengers he hauled, who possessed great faith in him as a pilot; or it could be that he had been in the Arctic long enough to acquire the great patience most of the natives have, and was able to wait out a storm or the fog, knowing that they soon would pass.

I personally am inclined to believe that all of these were responsible for his caution, along with various other things I have no way of speculating about.

The sound of the Cessna engine circling the village, brought cries of "airplane" from every Wainwright child, except at our house where our excited toddlers would, without fail, run to the window screaming, "Here comes Bobby Fischer!"

While in Anchorage for a BIA workshop, we took our children to the Top of the World restaurant at the Westward Hotel so that they might see the city from a lofty view. Yet three year old "Sielak," after months of seeing an average of two planes a week, had eyes only for the sky, and when he realized he was seeing three planes all at once, he squealed excitedly, "Look at all the Bobby Fischers!!" His name was a household word, and to our little ones

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LETTERS to EDITOR

Dear Editor:

While we were sitting around all over Alaska, things start happening. One side of the Continent BLM were selling our land piece by piece. I started praying. God, please help us get our land back. My people have no jobs, we need help.

Then my prayers were answered. Things started to happen in the Interior. The country started to burn up. Then that's how we started to get some of the money back that they were selling the land for. Every able bodied man worked.

They cannot hold us back too long. We'll find out after this new President. All we need is money to fight them. I can't see how they can win.

—FRED STICKMAN, SR.

FRIEND MOURNS BUSH PILOT

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he was, Santa Claus, Mickey Mantle, and Roy Rogers, all rolled into one. . .

And although months have passed since circumstances placed us many thousands of miles from our Arctic home, and we now reside on a mountain top rather than on the flat tundra, their hero has not faded in their sometimes short memories. Every small plane overhead is greeted with, "Hi, Bobby" or There's Bobby

plane overhead is greeted with, "Hi, Bobby" or "There's Bobby Fischer," and their favorite pretend game consists of transforming a large chair into his plane, for an Arctic visit.

While writing a Thanksgiving letter to our Wainwright friends yesterday, I asked each of my three pre-schoolers what they missed most about the village. One of my little Eskimo sons looked at me thoughtfully and then replied, "I miss Bobby Fischer!"

Won't we all. . .

JUDY FISHER