



Santa's sleigh too heavy

Weather delays Santa's arrival in St. Paul

By BOB KOWELUK

Air National Guard pilot, Major Will Thayer was forced to advance the throttles of the powerful four engines of the C-130 he was piloting and begin a climbing turn for Anchorage, leaving St. Paul islanders still awaiting the arrival of their airborne Santa.

Last Friday, December 19, the Air National Guard and the Salvation Army got together again to deliver toys with Santa Claus to St. Paul Island, one of 11 places in Alaska they make deliveries to each year.

"We will have to fly back to Anchorage. We cannot see the ground from our minimum approach altitude of 1,000 feet," Major Thayer said. "St. Paul is reporting a 700-foot ceiling with rain and fog. There is no question about it. We cannot land."

As the aircraft was climbing, Santa was not happy. Santa, played by Air National Guard Sgt. Jay Cross, looked out the window seeming to see through the clouds, rain and fog at the island's 160 children waiting for his appearance. A tree laying on its side was held to the aircraft's floor with a nylon strap. It would have decorated St. Paul's recreation center. Several cardboard boxes filled with gifts for the children were strapped to the floor, also, untouched.

"We will try again on Monday morning the pilot said.

As legend goes, the reindeer won the magical power of Christmas flight, for as long as there has been a Santa Claus at the North Pole, there have been reindeer to pull his sleigh.

But why reindeer? In the

North, the husky sled dogs were the main way of traveling over the land covered with ice and snow in wintertime. Maybe musk ox or moose could have been the ones to help Santa, but they are big and heavy. . . and would make more than a racket and such a fuss as they landed on the roof tops of houses. And then there is the elk, but he is a big, big fella too, and the Sitka white-tailed deer is too small, although fast.

And why not the husky sled dogs? Maybe Santa thought they barked and howled too much and were hard to quiet down, sometimes. I think Santa didn't want to frighten all the little children and especially their parents. Because Christmas is for love, for giving and receiving graciously, for being thankful

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and for celebrating the birth of Christ; not to be frightened by sled dogs barking, howling or growling about who would be in front of who, or musk ox falling through the roof.

And there are so many animals that live in the north, everything from the wise old walrus (who is too fat and only likes to swim and eat clams) to the seals (who can't make up their minds where all of them

should go when they get together) to the polar bears (who are hunters, and would maybe like to eat little kids up!) to the swans and snow geese (but even though they are strong and already know how to fly, they spend winters in the south). Poor Santa. He didn't want to hurt all his animal friends feelings so he made a test.

And that's why we know so much about animals today. Well, even though

there's big school, biologists, and stuff, long time ago there was everybody's friend, Santa. He chose the reindeer to pull his sleigh because the reindeer were quiet (giving out only a grunt once in a while and stamping their feet), and quick (seems they always pull Santa's sleigh from

housetops before you get a chance to see them) and generous (they all told Santa they would pull his sleigh every year even it was pretty full and even if the weather was bad).

Santa liked the reindeer. It is said the spirit of Christmas looked and listened while Santa gave all the

animals living in the north a test to see who would pull Santa's sleigh and granted the reindeer the magical power to fly at Christmas time. Another legend says elves granted the reindeer the magic of flight, another legend says nymphs granted reindeer power to fly.

Santa's mascots, imbued with the magical power of flight each Christmas, were given the honor of traveling the world on the night before Christmas.