

# "Two of Ours are Missing"

In Alaska, in the bush, the only way to travel is by plane and the word "Overdue" is the most feared by all. All life seems to pause and all speak in whispers. Everyone tries to cheer each other in order to keep hope alive but in the back of everyone's mind is that fear that something tragic has happened.

When such an overdue is due to an airplane, everyone who flies, whether they know the pilot who is missing or not, offers themselves, their plane and their time to search.

As our two people were not back as scheduled Tuesday night, and Wednesday broke clear and crisp, Henry Deacon notified the State Troopers that his son, Rodney and son-in-law, Tommy Leffew were missing. Planes went up immediately from other villages, searching in all directions. By noon the weather turned bad and all planes had to return and report an unsuccessful search. Thursday was another bad day. Everyone tried to comfort each other saying that both men were experienced outdoorsmen and had probably holed up in some trapper's cabin waiting for the weather to break.

Friday morning was beautiful and sunny after a night of heavy snowfall. Planes were already warming up in Anvik, Aniac, McGrath and Shageluk to begin the search. When the weather conditions were known they set out on their search.

At about 11:30 AM, Henry came to the school and told us the plane had been found on the flats 10 miles north of Iditarod Mountain. People seemed happy and gay as the light of hope grew stronger. At 12:45 PM, Henry arrived at the school again to tell us that all hope was gone and that the search party had found the two bodies.

The village seemed paralyzed. People met in little groups to hazard a guess as to what could have happened. At 2:45 PM, the investigating State Troopers arrived at Henry and Dolly's home and told them that the plane had crashed through the ice of the Irronoka River and the men were frozen inside their plane. They also reported that they had died instantly.

In a village as small as ours we are one family and there is not one soul that isn't

touched by another's grief. We, in search of mortal wisdom, ask the question, "Why?," so often forgetting that our lives are just temporary and in God's hands, He is the one who decides when our work is through and it is time to rest. We know not when He will call us home, we can only live in love for our families and others around us so as to be ready when the time comes.

The people in the village realize God's calling and they have a very special saying to account or express their grief and that is "I am so stingy for him, that I hate to let him go."

Have you ever heard deep sorrow expressed in the Indian language by a beautiful old lady, a grandmother mourning the loss of her grandson? I have. I understood every word, I felt every feeling and my soul joined in the chant.

Two of ours were over due. Soon they will be home, back in the earth that nurtured them.

Johnnie and Pat Shaw  
Grayling, Alaska  
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