

Arctic Survival—

# Dramatic, Dangerous Whale Hunting Days Recalled

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(Editor's Note: Last week, the Arctic Survival article, "DRAMATIC, DANGEROUS WHALE HUNTING DAYS RECALLED," ended as the bowhead whale was struck by the whaling captain, Sam Rock.)

## Part Two

### Huge Black Mountain

The momentum of our umiak took us right up on the rising whale where we stopped abruptly.

Feeling the impact of the darting gun, the great whale humped for a deep sound. The massive, glistening black body seemed to rise out of the water steadily creating a veritable black mountain that dwarfed our 24-foot umiak.

At the instant of the strike, three inflated seal skins were thrown overboard. They were attached to a long harpoon line that would tell the crew where the whale was if he did not dive too deep.

The crew began to back-paddle away from the powerful

flukes the whale might whip out of the sea.

### An Awesome Sight

The massive round body of the bowhead began to disappear under the sea—an awesome sight. It went under in a swirl, sucking in the water with it.

The speed of the sounding whale was so great that my father and his crew did not attempt to hold on to the inflated seal skins.

Uncle Nayukuk set his course and the crew paddled hard in pursuit. The whale increased its speed beneath the sea. After what seemed a long time, the animal surfaced ahead of us beyond range.

### Help Appears

Three whaling crews became visible from the direction we were going. They had seen my father strike the whale and they were coming to assist. I could see that my father and the crew were happy to see them.

The crew nearest to us began to maneuver rather leisurely figuring and cal-

culating the next probable surface area. They did this well and were in the immediate area of the whale's next appearance.

As we saw the harpooner strike, my father and the crew exclaimed, "They have struck! We may get the whale yet!"

According to tradition even if that crew killed the animal, the catch would belong to my father because he had first struck the whale.

The harpooner struck accurately and the projectile exploded. The bowhead failed to dive although it was still alive. The harpooner struck again. Our crew paddled closer.

The dying whale swam ahead slowly. As we approached, we could see that its breath was mixed with blood as it geysered into the air, showering the men in the immediate area. Their parkas were stained red.

### Electrifying Moment

The whalers knew that no further strikes were necessary. They waited in suspense. No one hardly spoke and a

strange quietness ensued.

Even as we watched, the great animal started to roll over. It was turning turtle—a sign of death. The whalers seemed to hold their breaths collectively.

As the rolling continued, the white spots under the chin of the bowhead became visible underwater. The animal had turned over completely.

Suddenly, a great shout rent the quiet, suspenseful atmosphere. It was immediately followed by others and the air was filled with stentorian outcries of delight, cries of great happiness and utter achievement.

I could feel prickles in my back and in my hair. My father had caught a whale! What a great moment that was!

The shouting was followed by happy laughter and congratulations were shouted to my father. How proud I was. I ached to get to my father—to touch him and hug him. My father—a great whaler!

### The Tow

As the shouting subsided, some of the men began to fasten inflated seal skins to the dead whale to keep it from sinking. This was done quickly. A harpoon was plunged into the snout of the animal. Then the four umiaks fastened on to the line to tow the great whale to the shore ice about a quarter of a mile to the north.

The men paddled hard, singing Eskimo whaling songs that echoed in the crisp atmosphere.

The tow progressed slowly even with the combined strength of 24 men in the

crews. After what seemed a long time, we reached the shore ice. A messenger was sent to the village immediately to tell the women, children, the sick and the old people that Weyahok, my father, had caught a whale.

### My Son...

As preparations for the cutting of the whale were progressing, my father took me aside and put his right hand on my shoulder. He smiled down at me.

"My son, I'm very proud of the way you handled yourself during this catch," he said quietly. "I saw the necessary calmness and bravery in you. I'm quite sure you will make a good Cmealik when you get to be a man."

I began to envision myself exactly as my father looked at that moment—a man of great ability, strength and calmness under stress.

"I will be a whaler just like my father," I thought to myself. "I will have a crew of my own and strike whales. I will conquer them just like my father did today."

Weyahok, with his quiet words, had instilled in me the burning zeal of carrying on the tradition of the family—the annual spring whale hunt at Tikiqak. He didn't need to make a long speech. He drove home the point with his personal deed that day.

### And, Now

"Yes, Allen, I think I know exactly how thrilling catching your own whale can be," I said to my brother. Allen Rock smiled but didn't say a word.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Part Three: Senator Gruening, Assistant Enjoy Savoonga Walrus Carnival

Blond, capable Andy, according to his mother, wishes desperately he could become an Eskimo and frequently asks his parents, hopefully, if they don't think his hair is turning dark. He is very unhappy about leaving Savoonga.

This morning, a sunny still day, when I saw him rolling up the sleeping bag in which he slept on the schoolroom floor because there were guests in the house, I observed that it was a nice day, to which Andy replied "This is a good day for hunting." But it is a school day and he cannot go.

**BEST HUNTER**—Nathan Noongwook, 57, is Savoonga's best walrus hunter. Last winter, the teachers say, he fed the whole village. Andy hunted in Nathan's boat. The usual trip takes 8 to 10 hours, but twice they had to travel far from the village and stay out all night.

A captain like Nathan is in complete charge of the boat's operation. He buys the ammunition. The first shot is always taken by the striker. He is followed, on command by the captain, by the No. 1 gun and then the No. 2 gun. The strict protocol applying in the hunting boat is part of the distinctive culture of the St. Lawrence Island Eskimo. The anyak is propelled by a 33 or 40 horsepower outboard motor until game is sighted.

**AN ENCOUNTER WITH RUSSIANS**—Young Andy Perala was in Nathan Noongwook's walrus boat last year when 45 miles out in the pack ice they sighted a wooden ship with two masts. This mother ship, about 80 feet long, was accompanied by eight small hunting boats, each carrying three men.

The Savoonga hunters came up to one of these boats and found it to be manned by European Russians, who tried unsuccessfully to run away. Their outboard engine put out a heavy cloud of yellow smoke because of the poor grade of fuel it burned.

The Russians were petrified with fear, as they were

badly outnumbered by the Eskimos, who were 22 men in four skin boats. The old men had cautioned Andy not to speak in English. They always speak to him in Eskimo, which he understands, but does not speak well.

The Russians, who were an oily, greasy lot, had been seal hunting. They took only the heads and skins. There was only one rifle in the boat.

By sign language the Russians said they were out of ammunition and they asked by signs when the ice would open up and from what direction the wind would blow. When they attempted to leave and were blocked by a narrow neck of ice between two huge floes, the Russian leader lifted his "ammunitionless" gun and fired four shots rapidly into the ice in an unsuccessful effort to break it apart.

All the Russians were young. One looked pretty smart. The Savoonga people are all afraid of the Russians.

**CARVERS**—Every adult in the village, women as well as men, do some ivory carving. The best carver, by general agreement, is Floyd King-eekuk, 32. He is also a good dog racer. He was taught carving by his father. He would start with a large piece of ivory and often end up with only a very small animal, but it would be done right. His seals are real works of art. He always has many advance orders to fill.

**THE PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER**—The Rev. Alwin E. Gall, who was born in the Black Forest of Germany, is the pastor of the Savoonga Presbyterian Church, part of the Church of St. Lawrence Island which was founded by Dr. Sheldon Jackson in 1892. He preached to a full house, mostly women and children. His sermon was translated into Eskimo at great length by a woman of the village.

Senator Gruening was introduced in church and invited to speak. He described the great service of Sheldon

Jackson as a missionary, educator and the man who introduced the reindeer to Alaska.

**OLDEST MAN**—Amos Penayah, an uncle of Nick Wongittilin, is the oldest man in the village of Savoonga. He is 88. Amos was the first reindeer man on the island and served in the ATG. His sister Yarie, who lives at Gambell, is two years older and probably the oldest person on the island.

Amos's friend, Logan Annogiyuk, is 77. He was born at Southwest Cape. The old men, who wear white cloth parkas with dark fur collars, are given places of honor at the village dances.

(to be continued next week)

## State Accepting Trainees for Practical Nurses

James O'Rourke, Manager of the Fairbanks Office of the Alaska State Employment Service, indicates that they are presently accepting applications from individuals who are interested in becoming Licensed Practical Nurses.

The one-year course will begin June 26 at Anchorage.

All of the trainees must have at least 10th grade education and possess the necessary aptitudes and interests for working as a Licensed Practical Nurse. Applicants should be at least 17½ years of age. Graduates will be eligible for Licensure by the State Board of Nurses upon satisfactory completion of the course and examination. Priority in selection will be given to heads of families and MDTA allowances will be available to most applicants.

Persons interested should contact Alaska State Employment Service, Room 131, State Court and Office Bldg. Sixth and Barnett in person.

## Sears Sponsors Native Youths

Fourteen native youngsters, throughout the state will be attending the Alaska Festival of Music at Anchorage this year through an annual grant from the Sears-Roebuck Foundation.

They will attend concerts, a banquet, a picnic and a special teen party. They will tour the Igloo-puk, Alaska Methodist University and the municipal buildings. They also will have special music lessons.

All scholarship recipients have musical interests. They are:

Geraldine Antioguia, 17, Sitka High School, Carl Anvil, 16 Kilbuck School, Bethel; Elizabeth and Elena

Charles, 18 Copper Valley School; Ruth Dexter, 16 Nome Public School; Susan Feller, 17, Wrangell High School; Carol Hatch, 17, Seward High School.

Also Ellen Katelnikoff, 16, Kodiak Public School; Wassillie Mute, 18, Mount Edgecumbe School; Gardenia Ruiz, 17, Valdez High School; Ventura Samaniego, 17, Juneau-Douglas High School; Lemuel Savok, 16, Beltz Vocational School, Nome; Martin Smith, 16, Sheldon Jackson School.

Others are Gloria Watson, 17, Bethel State School and Sally Woods, 17, Mount Edgecumbe.



**THE LAST ARE FIRST**—These Mount Edgecumbe students had to wait until everyone else had gone home before space was found for them to fly out of Sitka. But they were first in one respect. They rode the first commercial jet from Sitka to Fairbanks on Alaska Airlines' inaugural flight north. Right to left are Irene Titus, Minto; Tudy Honea, Ruby; Adam Linn, Barter Island; Dick Etageak, Unalakleet and Dennis Kennedy, Fairbanks.