



Mark Olak helped us search for the lost Russian plane. Our boat was the Pandora, shown passing Grillon Glacier en route home.

We Tried to Solve an Arctic Mystery

By Homer Flint Kellems

ONE year after the six Soviet air-
men led by Sigismund Lev-
evsky disappeared in the Arctic,
we participated in one of the
greatest man-hunts in history. As a re-
sult of our part in that hunt, which was
unofficial and on our own responsibility,
**WE BELIEVE WE KNOW WHAT HAP-
PENED TO THE SOVIET AVIATORS!**

We are not alone in this belief, for two
of the keenest-minded white men in the
Arctic: famed Master Sergeant Stanley
R. Morgan, U. S. Army Signal Corps op-
erator, and Rev. Fred Klerekoper, Arctic
missionary to the Eskimos for the Pres-
byterian Church, both living at Barrow,
believe as we do.

The story of this search is not known to
the general public, but we made a re-
port to the Union of Soviet Socialist Rep-
ublics and the condensed account here
given is substantially the same as sub-
mitted in full to its embassy at Washing-
ton, D. C.

The mission that brought us into the
Arctic was the building and dedication of
a memorial marker for Will Rogers and
Wiley Post at the site of their fatal crash
at Walakpa Lagoon, sixteen miles south-
west of Barrow. On August 15, 1938, the
third anniversary of the death of the two
"American Ambassadors of Goodwill,"
we dedicated the memorial marker.

As director of the expedition, and own-
er and captain of the Pandora, the little
38-foot, diesel-powered cruiser that made
the 4,600-mile journey from Santa Mon-
ica to Barrow, perhaps I should have

given orders to start the 3,300-mile re-
turn trip to Seattle immediately. Winter
and the ice freeze-up were not far away.

Instead, with the approval of every
member of the crew, I ordered the prow
of the sturdy little vessel turned in the
opposite direction.

An Eskimo—Foster Panigeo—had come
into the village of Barrow the previous
spring, telling a strange story; a story of
how, the fall before, he had stood with
others on the mainland at Oliktok and
watched a large, fast-moving object that
"make loud noise like Evinrude" sud-
denly "disappear with big splash" into
the Arctic Ocean between Thetis and Spy
Islands, two of those in the Jones group.
He had told his story to Klerekoper and
to Morgan.

Sergeant Morgan, as we had sat at din-
ner in his home the day before the Mem-
orial dedication, had said, "I believe
Foster is telling the truth. He's an honor-
able Eskimo, and his word is unusually
dependable."

Here is the story Foster Panigeo had
told: In August, 1937, he was camped at
Oliktok, sealing and fishing. His wife and
six other Eskimos were with him. On
August fifteenth—he jotted down the
date at the time in the diary he religiously
keeps—they all heard the sound of a mo-
tor or motors, the sound seemingly com-
ing from the open sea, apparently in the
direction of Thetis Island, six miles off

shore to the west. The wind was out of
the east, and blowing hard.

The water of the lagoon between the
mainland, where they were camped, and
the outlying islands was rough, as was
the water of the Arctic Ocean beyond.
They decided the sound they heard must
be that of an outboard motor—an "Evin-
rude," as Foster described it—so they all
scanned the waves to find the boat. They
thought it strange a small boat should be
out in such heavy weather.

Unable to locate it from where they
were standing, they climbed up on the
ice-house, a better vantage point. Mrs.
Foster Panigeo hurried into the tent and
got the binoculars and handed them to
Roger Cloud Kashak, keen-eyed Eskimo
youth of perhaps twenty years.

In a moment, Roger discovered a mov-
ing object traveling east, passing very
rapidly past, or over, Thetis Island. He
watched it until it cleared the east end of
the island, then handed the glasses to
Foster, who watched the object move on
with great speed toward Spy Island, six
miles northeast of Thetis Island.

Amazed at its speed and loud noise,
Foster watched the object through the
glasses until it had traversed about half
the distance between the two islands. He
then saw a great splash in the water, and
the object disappeared.

They all watched for a long time, but
the object did not reappear, nor did they
again hear the sound. The next day, when
the storm had abated somewhat, the men
went out in their oomiaks—Eskimo wal-

The Alaska Sportsman

NOTE.
April 11, 1974
Victor - This is a copy of a report mailed to Soviets
in 1938. I have copy of the original.
This report is very convincing that the N-209
was near Thetis Island. Walter Kurichyk