

## **The following text was written by Ian Todd on 23 May 1993:**

The Eskimo mukluk is made up of fitted and stitched layers of reversed sealskins tied tight just under the knee with thongs. Patiently built up and extravagantly comfortable. The U.S. services mukluk is equally luxurious but constructed differently. First there is the long woollen sock and a shaped sock made of felt to size. There is then the overboot which is made of thick neoprene rubber. This is stitched to a canvas legging which is laced (laboriously) from toe to knee. To cover the lacing there is a buttoned-up flap. They are incredible and I am quite sure should one die in a blizzard as has sometimes happened, one's soul would be long flown before feet and legs had stopped flapping about.

### **NAUYOPEE**

The weather here often surprises us and on a particularly cold morning I am often reminded of November 1959 in Montreal. Just having completed a rigorous three-month training course in Streator, Illinois, I was in transit heading for a one and a half year tour of duty above the Arctic Circle. The airport was a large hut with a few seats and tables. The refreshments consisted of soggy biscuits and muddy coffee. It was cold and draughty, and I felt like a badly stuffed kit-bag, in my mukluks, parka and fur-trimmed hood yet I was sweating slightly. Soon I would be flying over tundra and arctic waste in a noisy, four-engine North Star with no air-conditioning and the fact that the craft was still grounded with engine trouble three hours after intended departure maybe accounted for the sweating.

There happened a lull in the conversation and I noticed a magazine called the "CIRCLE" lying on the table. Skipping through it I came upon the Nauyopee article and just managed to complete reading it when there developed in the smoky atmosphere a general feeling of apprehension. The flight had been called and the lurching stomachs were audible.

Several hours of heart-stopping turbulence later the craft arrived over Cape Dyer, Baffin Land, eventually depositing us in the whiteness of DYE Main Station, one mile North of the Circle.

Because of previous experience on another Radar Line further South I was put on Sector crew. This meant flying to and fro in Dakotas and Choppers between the different stations in our Eastern Sector, trouble-shooting and carrying out modifications. I enjoyed the work but having sailed deep-sea, fearlessly because I could swim, for eight years and albeit sometimes at a slant I could walk tall ashore, I considered continual flying to be only for brave creatures like the vulture Condor of the Andes, the majestic Golden Eagle of our own Highlands, the dramatically graceful Albatross skimming over the South Atlantic waves or even the dieting Norfolk Turkey. After three months I asked for a shift and was sent out to a station called Fox Delta as its sole Radician. It is 150 miles North of the Circle, on top of a 1500-foot hill, with a complement then of ten men - four of them being Eskimos. The station then comprised a 60-foot Doppler Tower, a building made up of modules housing diesel generators, kitchen, living and sleeping quarters, lavatories and showers and huge fresh water tanks. It also had a garage to maintain the CATS and snowmobiles, a warehouse to hold all the parts to maintain the station, with a refrigerated section to store perishables.

During my stay there, the longest period without aircraft support due to bad weather was 41 days so logistics and maintenance were critically important. There was also then a very large kitchen-tent and smaller live-in tents for the summer workers who came in with the yearly sea-lift.

It wasn't long before I discovered the mainly tented collection of about 14 families of Eskimos near the airstrip. The tents, of sufficient size to house quite large families were made with materials (timber and tarpaulins) left over from the construction of Fox Delta and although this was now summer with temperatures sometimes in the seventies, I was assured that snow-blocks built over the tents kept the occupants well insulated during their winters when temperatures could drop to 60 below zero. I also observed one house made completely of wood and soon learned that the small village was called Kivitoo. You will understand my excitement when you read the enclosed copy of the article I had come across some months before in Montreal.

The Radician was responsible for checking on the health of all Eskimos living in the region of a DEWLine station - reporting the information back to the main station. We had been trained for this in Streator (even how to deliver a baby) but I was never a successful practitioner although I did work very hard at combatting a heavy flu epidemic which swept the village killing several of the younger Eskimos. One baby growing up over the two and a half years I was there cried whenever she saw me simply because I broke a needle in her bottom and had a heck of a time getting it out. There was blood everywhere, yet she survived - but I digress. Because of these regular visits down to the village I soon met Nauyopee, by this time in his late seventies, living with his third Wife.

It was warm summer afternoon when I walked into the tarpaulin covered annexe of Pitchforth's wooden house to meet Nauyopee. Lying just inside the entrance was a seal carcass slit open from neck to tail stewing in the heat. I galloped outside again and immediately threw up-ye Gods! What a pong. You have to remember that here was a man accustomed to nonchalantly lounging in the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec City sipping liqueurs or dining in Calcutta Hotels where waiters in white jodhpurs, crimson turbans and dark blue knee-length kurtas with gold piping and buttons carried silver tea-trays to bamboo tables - a man who has even had the honour and privilege of drinking wine out of cracked tea-cups with the elite of Govan by candle-light because the electricity had been cut off - yet the noxious fumes emanating from that carcass eventually became of no consequence for not a few weeks later I was eating seal-meat with my host - but right there and then I was being sick noisily when Nauyopee came running out quite concerned but grinning one of the most beautiful smiles out of a wrinkled and weather-burred happy face. He was a wee man of about 5 feet in height, stocky and seemed slightly bandy - although this may have been affected by his mukluks. We got on famously - his English was good, and he introduced me to his Wife, adult sons and the young boy and girl of his third marriage; there was also a baby. The house was quite near the airstrip and on the shelves were eight alarm clocks, some ticking away and others stopped but all at different times reminding me of some way-out international airport. He remembered Gavin White for it was only a few years before that they had met but he was quite vague about London and Peterhead. He could still tell stories

about them but he was struggling and covered his failing memory with smiles, so we gossiped and laughed and the caribou stew he offered me was surprisingly tasty although the smell in the hut was pretty awful. His main joke that seemed to tickle him no end, forestalling the question, was that he had seriously considered moving South with his family to a more temperate climate then discovered that the white man was moving North. So he decided to stay where he was. Things must be pretty bad down there. And there were evenings when Eskimos would visit from other villages drinking endless cups of tea, exchanging stories - fascinating ones - stories mainly of the hunt and their struggle for survival in the old days - the days before the DEWLine and the arrival of the hospital ships which now came every summer break-up. These ships had helicopters to ferry the villagers aboard - even hunters away from the village were looked for and brought aboard for x-rays etc. Tuberculosis was quite common and many of them tearfully left on the ships for Montreal, eventually being put on a train for Hamilton where the sanatorium is located. I still have a letter in my possession from a **Tommy Kemeksana** of Tuktoyuktuk, who was undergoing the treatment down there. I was the Station Chief then and managed to get him returned to Fox Delta for he was the best cat-skinner in the Northern Territories and actually happened to save my life once - but that is another story...

Nauyopee had me out often in a double kayak hunting seal - a very insecure craft but I enjoyed the experience although goodness knows what I would have done if we'd actually got hold of a seal. Arctic Char by the dozen though - a cross between a trout and a salmon and considered a delicacy in Quebec and Montreal eating places - were available for our mess every day from spring until late summer.

After a nine-month period on the line I flew South for two weeks R & R with the family in Toronto then back to Fox Delta this time as Station Chief. I still managed the odd evenings blethering with them in the village over innumerable cups of tea and I never actually lost my feeling of awe for them. Every Sunday Nauyopee would reciprocate by trudging up the switchbacks to the modules for a can of beer with me and the rest of the crew. Christmas was always a big occasion and the whole village was packed into the modules where our French Canadian chef always managed to lay on a bug-eyed spread for them.

My first contract lasted eighteen months after which I sailed back to the UK on the return maiden voyage of the "Empress of Canada" with the **family**. After a two month

leave having got the family domiciled in the **UK** I flew back for another contract of one year and although offered a better position I opted for Fox Delta. There I finished my time on the DEWLine having learned to like and respect the Eskimo very much. Hospitable, exceptionally friendly with a humour almost childlike. Not childish for these men were hunters of seal, bear and caribou, surviving in a hostile environment. They were no part of the Frobisher fiasco.

The following year after my return home the children wanted to go to Butlin's in Ayr and it was there that I met one of the summer construction workers who had been at Fox Delta only the previous month. He told me that Nauyopee and his two sons, **Joahnasee** and **Isiahsee** had died in a blizzard while out on a hunting trip the winter after I left. The Earth has no crueller

testing ground than the Arctic. The cold can kill in seconds and errors of judgement are rewarded with death. There must have been an extreme temperature inversion and terrible storm for it to happen to men such as these - I was shocked and greatly saddened. I wrote to the Hudson Bay Post at Broughton Island but received no reply.

I know nothing about market research but having sailed all the seas I have met a lot of fine people and include the Innuits of Baffin Land among them and, if Pitchforth's house is still standing, I wonder - do the present occupants know of the adventurous "Little Seagull"? Do they know what a joy the wee man was?

Djarsky: "If you think that snow is a wolf in sheep's clothing you are mistaken. It is a tiger in lamb's clothing."