

'Chukhotka Calls an Ambulance'

On August 15 at 19:52 local time, an anxious message was received by the air medical service of the Chukotskaya District Hospital from the Anadyr' Sea Port. It said that the captain of the fishing freezer-trawler "Vulkan" [Vulcano], located 60 miles from the Beringovsk settlement, was asking for help. It reported that a sailor on board was in serious condition -- an open forearm fracture and a skull injury.

Judging by the records, at 19:55 this information from the air medical service was directed to the traffic control centre of the airport, and two minutes later to the traffic controller. At 19:59 the medical staff got in touch with the doctors of the Beringovsk region. The meaning of all these negotiations was basically the same: "A rescue group flight is urgently needed!" But the reply from the Beringovsk was: "The airport does not have an equipped helicopter at its disposal." At 20:30, pleading insufficient daylight time, pilots at Anadyr' also refused. At 21 hours a message was received from aboard the "Vulkan": the 27 year old sailor K.N. Topchyi has died...

Would the physicians have arrived in time to save the patient if they had flown out to the "Vulkan" immediately upon receiving the "SOS" signal? We shall not engage in guess-work. It is important to understand another thing: why did the struggle for a patient's life, which continued on the air for a good hour, finally end in defeat? In the opinion of air medical service workers, that August case exposes the most burning problems in the organization of emergency aid to residents of the North.