



Hoagak's house on wind-swept Richardson Island and the tent in which he committed suicide. The pile of goods to the left is a cache belonging to natives.

Settling himself down in his caribou sleeping bag, he had evidently attached a string to the trigger and tied it to the little finger of his left hand, then placed the rifle on a ledge which ran parallel to his body, with the muzzle pointed at his right ear. Lying back and folding his arms across his chest he had beckoned instant death by jerking his finger.

Subsequently another letter written by Hoagak came to light in which he confessed that he was a murderer and that his conscience was bothering him. His son, blind 18-year-old Anagalik, told the police that just after Christmas his father had sent him away from the camp to gather some grass sod (used for burning). When the boy returned some three hours later his father told him that his mother had died of influenza.

"Daddy said that her heart just stopped beating", the youth stated.

Anagalik went on to say that Hoagak had wrapped the body in deerskins and stowed it away until a day or so after New Years when some visitors to the island helped him inter it.

On Aug. 20, 1946, in the R.C.M.P. detachment office at Coppermine Mafa appeared before Stipendiary Magistrate A. H. Gibson of Fort Smith, N.W.T., in answer to a charge of Murder s. 263 Cr. Code. The prosecution was conducted by F. J. G. Cunningham, stipendiary magistrate of Yellowknife, N.W.T., while J. Parker, a Yellowknife barrister appointed by the Crown, appeared for the defence. The judicial party and a court reporter had been flown to the venue by a Grumman Goose plane of the R.C.M.P. Aviation Section; when their work was completed, these officials were to depart in the same manner. The

six-man jury was empanelled from an R.C.A.F. crew that had stopped at Coppermine en route to Holman Island.

Formal gowns, stiff collars and other trappings lent the proceedings all the austerity of ordinary Canadian courtroom scenes. But this note extracted from one reporter's account of the case shows that an Eskimo trial in the Arctic may have high lights peculiarly its own:

"In typical Eskimo woman style, Mafa was wearing two cotton print dresses; the one on top of the other, extra voluminous and completely shapeless. As she sat in the court-room, her year-old son crawled around her, and over her and under her chair. Neither 'house-broken' nor weaned, he provided the only high lights of human interest of the proceedings.

"Occasionally the child would make a special kind of grunt-sound, which signified his need to Mafa. Mafa would then bring forth from under her skirts an empty tobacco can (W.D. & H.O. Wills, if you must know), plunk the child upon it and gaze calmly on at the court proceedings. When 'Operation Tobacco Can' was completed, the child would continue his playing, Mafa would file the can out of sight and that was that.

"Only other incident to break the monotony occurred when the baby got hungry. He'd approach Mafa with the special sound which signifies a meal-time overdue, and Mafa would swoop down, clutch him firmly, stick him up under the outer skirt. Following this a wriggling procedure would take place and presently there would be satisfied suckling noises heard plainly throughout the court-room. A few moments later, a sagging outline of a child's head would appear against the outer dress and the youngster was asleep."

Defence counsel entered a plea of not guilty in behalf of the accused and argued successfully that the prosecution had failed to dispel the doubt that someone else could have committed the crime.

Mafa was acquitted.