

front, I take in the unusual interior: the radar is set out right next to a hot plate, on which a pot is bubbling away, and the dining table's neighbour is an instrument panel. Can you imagine what this is all about?

It is an IL-14, an ice patrol plane. It has just taken off from Pevek and is headed due North. The task is to find an ice-floe for a new drifting research station - the "Severnyi polyus-31" ("SP-31" - "North Pole-31"). The station itself, with all the equipment and staff, will be delivered to the Arctic by a special vessel, the "Vladimir Arsen'ev", but first the unloading location has to be pinpointed. Hence our flight.

The flight is to be a long one, which is why the plane is equipped not only with flight instruments, but also with everyday appliances. And as the soup bubbles on the electric cooker, there is time to interview the director of the future station, Vasilii Semenovich Sidorov.

- Is SP-31 a "standard" station or is it special in some respect?

- We will be making the usual weather observations, but this time the station's personnel will also include geologists, as the polar marine geology expedition. Their goal is to study the bottom of the ocean.

- It would be interesting to know the SP's cost. Or is that a secret?

- Take a look - this sheet shows all the figures. The fittings, equipment and clothing will come to 1,250,000 roubles. Leasing the ship