

The Chasing of Ayalik — An Arctic Odyssey

By Sgt. Dominick French (retired)

Harsh northern weather conditions, a bludgeoned victim, and a harrowing chase by dogsled are just some of the ingredients in this compelling story written and experienced by retired Sgt. Dominick French. Concerned that he would forget the names and events surrounding this story, the author has written them down for posterity. To assist in the writing of this story, the author referenced a copy of the Patrol Report which he originally submitted to the Force July 3, 1959, shortly after the incident took place. — Editor



The sea ice still had its grip on the Arctic Ocean around Cambridge Bay, in present day Nunavut, on the last day of June 1959. This was a time of 24-hour sunlight at those latitudes, so time means little to the people who make a living off the land.

I was thinking of going to bed around midnight when a dog team could be seen coming up to the RCMP Detachment. It was Angulalakhak and he had sad news. Apparently he had just brought Peter Kinmiuk into the Nursing Station with very severe head injuries. It would appear he had been bludgeoned about the head with a rock and had not regained consciousness. This had taken place in a tent at Kingaliktuk, a popular spring hunting place some 20 miles east of Cambridge Bay. The perpetrator was allegedly one Ayalik, a man known to myself, which meant the likelihood and involvement of alcohol was a distinct possibility.

A check with the Nursing Station revealed that Kinmiuk was indeed in very critical condition and might not survive. The snow was melted on the land at this time and our police dogs were kept where the entering river had opened up the ice. Due to the urgency, I decided to return to Kingaliktuk immediately with Angulalakhak, taking only very bare essentials. We made good time going to Kingaliktuk and arrived at around 2:30 a.m. Here I learned that Ayalik and Kinmiuk had been alone in a tent and had got in to the local “brew,” which was usually made of beans and yeast. There were no witnesses but it appeared a poker game may have been in progress and a bloodied rock was still in the tent.

The exact time of this assault was not known but Ayalik had left with his dogs at around 9 p.m. and Kinmiuk had been found by his son-in-law, Peter Atigoeleak, at around that time. Two hunting rifles were missing from Kinmiuk’s tent. The relatives and friends of Kinmiuk were very agitated and felt that

Sgt. Dominick French, author of the story, while posted at Cambridge Bay, Northwest Territories.

