

Lazaroosie Kyak (1919-1976)

At age 24, when Kyak moved from the nomadic lifestyle of the Inuit into the regimented life of an RCMP Special Constable, little did he realize that he had the innate character of a great Canadian.

Kyak was born in a small Inuit hunting camp near Button Point on Bylot Island, at a time when events in history would have a profound effect on the lives and culture of his people. During this era, gold was thought to exist in the Pond Inlet region. A southern-based Arctic Gold Exploration company was established but no gold was found; however, it was soon discovered that the real wealth of the area lay in the furs obtained from Inuit trappers. News travelled fast, and Robert Janes, a free trader from Newfoundland, arrived on the scene. A disruptive two years of questionable trading ensued, resulting eventually in a shooting incident and the death of Robert Janes. Sergeant Joy of the RCMP investigated the murder in 1921; his arrival in Pond Inlet coincided with that of the Hudson's Bay Company, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Church of England. Clearly, the next two decades would introduce dramatic changes in the Inuit way of life; Kyak matured during this period of influence and change.

Married in 1936, Kyak and his wife, Letia, raised a large family. Other members of Kyak's family were destined to play a role in another chapter of arctic history. In 1944 the RCMP motor schooner *St. Roch*, under the command of Sgt. Henry Larsen, arrived at Pond Inlet on its east-west voyage through the Northwest Passage. Kyak's daughter, brother, and mother, along with several others from the Pond Inlet area, were added to the passenger manifest. Their purpose was to assist with hunting and with the preparation of winter clothing for the crew. However, the *St. Roch* completed the passage in one season, and the Inuit were sent back to Pond Inlet from Herschel Island by dog sledge — a remarkable journey which took several years.

Kyak was engaged by the RCMP to assist many patrols out of Pond Inlet during the early 1940s. Members of the RCMP who had the good fortune to travel with Kyak recognized his sense of justice and protection. His dedication to duty led eventually to his engagement as a Special Constable in September 1943. Being an ardent seaman, he patrolled hundreds of miles of Baffin and Ellesmere island coastline. Kyak realized the potential of the site for the existing community of Grise Fiord and was instrumental in its selection. Few can

boast of putting in as many miles by dogteam and boat patrol. Originating out of Grise Fiord, Pond Inlet, and Craig Harbour, Kyak's sledge patrols encompassed an area from Eureka on Ellesmere Island east to Greenland, and as far south as Foxe Basin and Home Bay. One must bear in mind that the average dogteam trip from Craig Harbour to Eureka could easily extend over several months, depending on weather and ice conditions.

In recognition of his outstanding service to the RCMP and Canada, Kyak was awarded the Order of Canada in 1970, the first member of the Force to receive such an honour. Later that same year, he found himself meeting and conversing with Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on his visit to Resolute Bay.

Kyak retired from active service with the RCMP in 1971 to return to the life of hunting and trapping he had relinquished 28 years earlier. Unfortunately, the long and arduous patrols had taken their toll, and when still a relatively young man, he died suddenly in 1976 while visiting his daughter in Frosbisher Bay.

Unwritten stories about the adventures and achievements of this exceptional man abound. He will be long remembered by those members of the RCMP who served with him. Officers and constables always said that "on patrol Kyak was in complete command" and no one ever doubted the truth of that statement.

The best appreciation of Kyak's contribution to his people has to be understood in the context of the traumatic era in which he grew up. He emerged from a primitive lifestyle to a completely new way of life, and he did so without losing a strong sense of his own cultural values. His one desire, as a member of the RCMP, was to provide a bridge between the old and the new. Many in today's Arctic owe a debt of gratitude for his patience and quiet understanding.

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Special Constable Kyak seen through window of wheelhouse, 22 May 1969. RCMP photo 69-412-C.