Walrus attacks Russian Navy, sinking inflatable boat

Enlarge / The Russian rescue tug *Altai* launches a boat like the one sunk by a walrus off Franz Jozef Land.
Russian Northern Fleet

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Last week, a Russian Navy rescue tug—the *Altai* from the Northern Fleet—dispatched a rigid inflatable boat to Wilczek Island in the Franz Josef Land archipelago, which is an Arctic island chain occupied only by wildlife and Russian military personnel. Aboard the boat were sailors and scientists from the Russian Geographic Society, and as they attempted a landing at Cape Geller, their boat was attacked and sunk by a female walrus, "[which] she probably did fearing for her cubs," an RGO news release noted.

While the boat sank, the crew leader managed to get the boat close enough to land for everyone to get ashore safely, according to the RGO's spokesperson. The Northern Fleet reports the story slightly differently: "A group of researchers had to flee from a female walrus, which, protecting its cubs, attacked an expedition boat. Serious troubles were avoided thanks to the clear and well-coordinated actions of the Northern Fleet servicemen."

The RGO/Northern Fleet expedition was exploring the routes of previous Arctic expeditions in the archipelago and conducting

glacial and biological surveys of the islands. The researchers also recovered artifacts from the Austro-Hungarian expedition of 1874 that first mapped the archipelago and an 1898-1899 expedition by American journalist Walter Wellman (who would later attempt to fly to the North Pole by airship. They also searched for the grave of Russian polar explorer Georgy Sedov, who died en route to the Pole in 1914.

No walruses were harmed, according to the Northern Fleet.

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