

# Tunguska Retro

By E.S. Strout MD

*In 1908 something exploded in an isolated area of Siberia. What was it? More than 100 years later, debate concerning the Tunguska Event continues.*

S. Wagner. About.com

1.

Tuesday, June 30, 1908:

The early morning solitude of Russia's Central Siberian Plain was shattered by a thundering explosion. Bright multicolored lights permeated the cloudless sky.

A rapid sequence of detonations over a distance of several kilometers followed. Thousands of square kilometers of coniferous taiga were flattened in an instant. Wildfowl and other indigenous creatures were incinerated in milliseconds.

Astronomers at the time determined that the anomaly had approached at an azimuth of 115 degrees east-southeast with an approximate entry angle of 30 degrees. The impact registered on seismographs in St. Petersburg as well as in several European capitals.

2.

Thursday 10 April, 2008

The e-mail read:

From: Lobovskii, Leopold Isaevich, Corresponding Member, Department of Earth Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences.

To: Professor Leland Schmidt, Department of Geology, University of Minnesota Duluth Branch.

Subj: Proposed scientific investigation at Tunguska Event location.

Dear Professor Schmidt.

I am pleased to inform you that your proposal has been accepted by the Academy's Board of Regents. Your plan to examine deep core sampling with new cutting edge boring tools and radiation detection instruments has received high praise by all Review Board members. They also cited your agreement to share all findings with the Academy.

Professor Del Rosario, with his knowledge of anthropology and desire to communicate with Tungus natives will be most welcome as well.

The Kremlin was duly impressed as well, and officially concurs.

Sincerely,  
L. Lobovskii

3.

Monday, June 30, 2008. 1035 hours:

Twenty-four year old Associate Professor of Geology Karen Mosby, U. of Minnesota Duluth Branch dodged a strafing attack by a squadron of aggressive mosquitoes. The assault abated when she applied insect repellent spray to her exposed skin surfaces.

Karen was a tall girl with gray-green eyes and a sprinkling of freckles across her upper cheeks and nose. These were partially hidden by lightly tanned facial skin. Her auburn hair was neatly tucked under a brightly colored bandanna. She wore a dark blue UMD polo shirt over a plaid cotton shirt and Levis.

Her work boots were smudged by mud and ground level plant life..

"Kinda spooky, this hundred-year anniversary of the Tunguska event," she said.

"Not many celebrants. Just us, our team and these voracious insects," Professor Leland Schmidt, her Department Head said as he swatted at a mosquito. He viewed the site from their grime and vegetation-splattered Land Rover.

"We're lucky these ancient logging trails were cleared for ground travel. I couldn't have handled another Russian helicopter flight," he said.

"Good thing it's a dry summer," Karen noted. "Otherwise we'd be hip deep in boggy marshland with no chance to sink deep cores."

Professor Schmidt nodded. “We’ll answer some old questions. Russian scientists investigated the site in 1927, came to no verifiable conclusions. They did report slightly increased readings on an early Geiger counter model.”

“Very interesting,” Karen agreed. “Those investigations by teams of Western European researchers in the early nineties? You know how I’ve bugged them, but they won’t share data. Got some nasty responses when I asked about radiation.”

“Screw them. We’ve got more advanced technology now,” Schmidt said.

“We’ll get our own answers. Our core samplers can bore half a mile deeper than theirs.”

“There were reports of unexplained deaths in the native population. Survivors wouldn’t submit to physical exams,” Karen said.

A sigh of frustration. “Darn ancient taboos. I don’t think those European teams tried very hard. Probably neglected to have any linguists along to communicate.”

“Be tolerant now,” her boss admonished. “Primitive culture, very suspicious of modern technology.”

“There might have been evidence of radiation poisoning, Lee.”

“Life is full of setbacks, Kari,” Schmidt said with a benevolent wink for his protégé.

“You remember the Japanese group who believed the explosion was caused by a crashed spacecraft?”

Karen returned an enigmatic raised eyebrow.

“Godzilla alive and well in Siberia, Professor?”

Schmidt smiled, pointed. “Here comes the truck with the rest of our field lab equipment.”

“Oh good. Our anthropology nut Augie is with them. About time. Hope they brought a ton more bug spray,” Karen said.

“Thank God for enthusiastic graduate students,” Professor Schmidt said. “They arrived two weeks ago, began drilling last Friday. We’ll have some good deep core samples. Right, Augie?”

U. of Philippines Manila professor Augustine Del Rosario was a stocky dark-skinned man with piercing brown eyes and coal black hair brushed straight back. He wore a tan crew-neck sweater over military style khakis and high, laced work boots.

He shrugged. “If you say so, Lee. I’m here to look for old settlements. Nomadic Tungus tribes won’t be easy to find. Have you seen any signs of native encampments, Kari?”

“I’ve heard that natives won’t come very close, Augie. Generations of shamans have convinced them that the gods are still pissed. Can’t blame them. The radial symmetry of the flattened forest at ground zero is pretty weird.”

She paused, took a swallow from a canteen and passed it to Dr. Del Rosario. He took a drink and passed the canteen on to Dr. Schmidt. “And what’s ever weirder, there’s been no new timber growth at ground zero since the event. Have you noticed the ground cover?”

“These shrubs do appear a bit stunted,” Dr. Schmidt said as he took a close-up squint through wire-rimmed bifocals.

Karen tucked unruly auburn back under her bandanna. “A bit stunted? Are you serious? Every leaf is different. This is a bizarre mutation. Could be radiation effect.”

She plucked an oddly leafed twig and dropped it into a clear plastic specimen bag. “This is going for DNA mapping. I will admit though, shaman gibberish does put me a little on edge.”

“You’re uneasy?” Del Rosario asked with a Groucho Marx wiggle of dark eyebrows. “Ph.D. candidate Mosby, the scientific purist?”

Dr. Schmidt smeared insect repellent over his thinning hairline, then handed the tube to Karen. “Kari’s from Windsor, Ontario, Augie. Canadians believe Bigfoot is alive and well, roaming the Yukon Territories.”

“How about your Paul Bunyan and his odd relationship with that blue ox, Lee?” she asked with a smug grin. “Babe, isn’t it?”

“Hah. How about you get busy with that subatomic particle detector you’re so enamored of?”

“You betcha, boss. I’ll start at the rim.” She raised a fist as she sped off across the dry marsh in the Land Rover.

The deep-cleated tires spewed clods of grassy tundra, making the two men to duck for cover.

“Be back late,” she yelled. “Site’s as big as Rhode Island. Save me some chow, okay?”

“If she were my daughter . . .” Schmidt muttered as a grin struggled to escape his dour features.

“My Teresa is about the same age,” Del Rosario said. “She’s in South America again, tramping through Mayan ruins. Just recovering from her second bout of malaria in two years.”

“Why do we do this, Lee?”

“Beats the crap outta me.”

## 5.

2130 hours:

“Thanks for saving me dinner,” Karen said as she bit into a warm biscuit. She stirred warmed over franks and beans over a Coleman gas stove.

“The Russians are sending a helicopter for your botanical samples. They should be stateside in a week. No charge since you are sharing results,” Augie said as evening gloom descended over the camp.

Karen washed her plate in running water from a small stream and dried it on some handy rags saved for towels.

“I’m gonna walk around ground zero. Join me?” she asked.

“Soon as I put on gloves and head netting,” Lee said. “The Russians have Guinness World Record mosquitoes.”

Del Rosario declined protection.

“Mindanao has bigger ones,” he said with a chuckle. “They can carry away small rodents.”

Fireflies blinked yellow-green abstract swirls over the grassy tundra. “Tomorrow I’m firing up the particulate isotope detector here at ground zero for comparison with my peripheral samples,” Karen said. “I was out about a hundred-fifty kilos this morning. I got some faint radioactive traces there.”

Augie’s eyes lit with interest. “You see any native villages, Kari?”

“One small encampment about ninety-five kilos out. Wanna take the Land Rover tomorrow?”

“You bet. Come along, Kari? Lee?”

“I’ve almost got the field lab set up. Gonna look at deep core samples,” Schmidt said. “I’ll need Dr. Mosby here.”

## 6.

July 1. 2120 hours:

A hissing Coleman lantern brightened the mosquito-proof camp dwelling the following evening. “Were they Tungus natives, Augie?” Karen asked.

“Sure enough.” Dr. Del Rosario dug in his knapsack and produced a digital recorder. “Their language is an old Mongolian dialect, very similar to my native Tagalog. We connected. I look sorta scruffy, like them. And they liked my granola bars.”

“These folks have no written history,” he said. “What they told me has been passed down for four or five generations. Their ancestors at the time of the event were camped near Vanavara. It was a fur trading post near the Stony Tunguska River, a hundred kilos or so from here.”

He pushed PLAY, listened for a few seconds, then forward-skipped the digital chip.

“Here’s where it gets interesting. This is from a much older guy, a shaman he told me. The voice-over is my translation.”

*“Loud noise like thunder. Bright light in sky from near where sun comes up. Hot, many fires. Blistered our skin. Animal skin huts burned to ashes. Trees down, like with a God’s hand.”*

“Bigger than Hiroshima,” Karen whispered, eyes wide with wonder.

“Listen up,” Augie said. “It gets better.” He pressed PLAY.

*“More lights. Blue, white. Like lightning. Came down many places in a long line. Ground shaking like earthquake. Purple glow for many days, then gone. Many died right away, others days later. We move far from there, never come back. Gods angry.”*

“Multiple impact sites,” Karen whispered again. “And linear.”

Augie clicked the recording off. “He tells me their ancestors stayed about two hundred fifty kilos from what we’re calling ground zero. Some moved closer when vegetation recovered and the animals came back. About half of the exposed people died. I spotted several smaller radial tree fall patterns identical to ground zero. Like you said, Kari. Multiple impacts.”

“Whew. Lucky it didn’t hit a population center,” she replied.

7.

Two days later:

“Please show us the results from the cores at ground zero, Dr. Mosby,” Professor Schmidt said.

Karen set a plastic sample envelope next to the microscope on the low camp table. Multiple tiny crystalline fragments glittered in the lantern’s light. “These are from the deepest cores we could get. More than a mile deep into a crust rock layer before the bit broke.”

She lifted one with a fine forceps and placed it on the microscope stage and condenser illuminated by a bright, focused light. “Take a look, Augie.”

Dr. Del Rosario peered through the binocular eyepieces and adjusted the focusing knob, blinked a couple of times. “Quartz crystal. What am I missing, Kari?”

“See any fine cracks in the surface?”

“No. Is that important?”

“Any cracking would suggest Earth impact by a very large object. Like an asteroid or meteorite.”

“Or a crashed spaceship?”

She ignored Augie's gibe, placed a second fragment on the scope. "Now this. Augie?"

His eyes widened in surprise. "It's round. Like a little translucent bead."

"It's still quartz, but it's been melted. Had to be something very hot. Something not solid. Opinions, guys?"

"You tell me, Kari," Del Rosario said. "I'm better with primitive cultures."

"So far the surface findings are identical to those at old meteorite impact sites. Particulate calcium, silicates, alloys of iron-nickel, cobalt-tungsten and lead," Dr. Schmidt said.

"And that concerns us?" Del Rosario asked.

"We know that similar findings have been present at known meteor collision sites, like the big one in Arizona," Karen said. "With some oddities."

"This one is different?" Augie asked.

"Much."

"How so?"

8.

"Karen's been trying out a new isotopic trace detector," Dr. Schmidt said.

"It was developed by her and some folks from U. C. Irvine in California. Much more sensitive than those used in the '92-'93 expeditions. Professor Mosby, if you please?"

She plugged the device's interface connector to the field computer port and tapped a key. Complex graphics appeared on the monitor screen. "These spikes show elements and isotopes previous investigators found at the surface of known meteor impacts. Then we tested the deep cores."

Karen brought up another page. "See these little deviations? They are not present in the surface samples."

Lee and Augie stared, faces pale in the gas lantern light. “Background noise?” Dr. Del Rosario asked.

“That’s what I thought at first.” She tapped a key. An enhanced readout appeared.

“Definite spikes. From the same depth as the melted quartz.”

“I’m impressed, Karen” Dr. Schmidt said. “What are they?”

“Uranium 234 and Plutonium 239. These are radioactive isotopes. The accompanying report shows that no radioactive ores or mineral deposits have ever been discovered in this area of the Siberian plain. ”

She passed out copies from the printer tray. “Fresh this morning from the Nuclear Physics folks at the Minneapolis-St. Paul campus, courtesy of our Russian colleagues who flew them there a couple of days ago.”

Schmidt turned pages and read.

“Elements first seen in nuclear research labs like Los Alamos during the ‘60’s and ‘70’s. They turned up more recently as byproducts in military tests of advanced fusion weapon and propulsion engine prototypes.”

“What about half lives, Kari?” Schmidt asked. “Those traces have been buried at this site for a hundred years.”

She handed out another printed page. “Thousands of years.”

“Hah!” Augie said with a self-satisfied smirk. “Maybe the Japanese were right about a crashed spaceship.”

“Oxidized metallic traces of such a craft would remain, Augie,” Karen insisted. “I found nothing of the sort.”

Del Rosario regarded her with a skeptical eye. “So you say. Got anything more convincing?”

Smile and a nod from Mosby “Glad you asked.”

She began to sketch diagrams on a small chalkboard. “I’ve recalculated the angle of entry of the anomaly based on our current findings. Ninety, not thirty degrees. From directly overhead.”

Dr. Schmidt swatted at a mosquito. Then another. “Why is this significant, Kari?”

“I’m getting there,” she said with an intimidating glare. “Bear with me, please.”

Schmidt and Del Rosario nodded.

“Okay. Disturbances in the Earth’s magnetic fields were reported at the time of the Tunguska event.”

She passed around another printout from the U. Minn. Geology lab.

“It was called a magnetic storm.” She read. “The Bikini atoll A-tests back in the 1950’s produced identical findings.”

“Put it all together, guys. We’re dealing with a nuclear incursion.”

“You’re kidding,” Lee said. “The Russians couldn’t have made a fusion bomb in 1908.”

Augie agreed. “He’s right, Kari.”

“True,” she said. “But we’ve excluded all other possibilities. Asteroid, meteor, comet, dark matter. Even pissed off Tungus gods or a crashed spaceship.”

“Which leaves us where?” Dr. Schmidt asked.

Her answer was a whisper. “Something not of Earth.”

Augie stifled a giggle with a hand over his mouth. “Martians, Dr. Mosby?”

Karen blew strands of loose hair from her face. She placed both hands on her hips in defiance.

“Got a better idea, Augie? You, Lee?”

Nobody spoke.

“Let me hazard a guess. Suppose it was a test of nuclear weaponry with Earth as the target range. The linear pattern of vertical impacts fits, along with those deep core findings. And the magnetic storm.”

“If that was what it was, their test sure as hell worked,” Augie said,, his face suddenly draining of color.

“If so, Karen,” Dr. Schmidt asked, “Why did they quit?”

“I don’t know,” she admitted.

“Yeah,” Augie said. “Where did they go?”

9.

“Let me check something out,” Dr. Schmidt said. He pressed computer keys, scrolled pages on the screen. His face grew pale after he completed viewing his references.

“Of course,” he stammered. “Time compression. The Einstein relativity theory.”

Karen covered her mouth to stifle a gasp. “Oh my God.”

Dr. Del Rosario shrugged. “They have a time problem?”

“No,” Karen said. “We do.”

“Whoever they were traveled near to or greater than the speed of light,” Dr. Schmidt said.

“Einstein’s theory of relativity predicts that time will be compacted at such velocities,” he continued. “What would be a few seconds to those aboard the spacecraft would appear much longer to us.”

“We’re on a much slower time scale. It might be measured in years.”

“Oh no,” Karen gasped.

“Suppose they just took a quick trip home to reload.”

The End