

Aleutian World War II

History & Culture

The Lost Aleutian Villages

“When the [N]atives were suddenly evacuated they left many of their goods behind. Their looted houses were almost lost in two seasons’ growth of petrusky and the long coarse grasses that were reclaiming the village to the wilderness... Biorka won’t be a nice place for my Aleut friends to come home to.”

—Visitor to Biorka, 1943 (Nutchuk [Simeon Oliver] 1946:217)

At war’s end, the U.S. Government did not allow the Unangan displaced from Attu, Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin to resettle in their home villages. For three-and-a-half years, the Attuans had been held prisoners of war by the Japanese...liberated, claimed the Japanese, from American oppression. Only 25 of the 43 Attuans taken prisoner returned from Japan—entire families nearly exterminated by starvation and disease. The U.S. government had held the villagers from Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin in relocation camps in Southeast Alaska, ostensibly for their safety. But conditions were appalling in the camps, and these villagers too had suffered extreme deprivation, disease, and the death of loved ones. In 2009 and again in 2010, the National Park Service operated a program of “revisitation,” arranging for boat trips for surviving Unangan elders of the four *Lost Aleutian Villages* to see their birthplaces again. Russian Orthodox crosses have been placed to mark the remains of Biorka, Kashega, and Makushin, but revisitation to Attu has so far been elusive. Instead, in October 2012, the three surviving Attu residents and descendants of the village met for an Attu Reunion in Anchorage.



Participants pose for a group photograph on the first day of the Attu Reunion. The three surviving Attuans of the Japanese occupation of the island are: front row, second from right: Nick Golodoff; brother Greg Golodoff to left; and George Kudrin, (in white, center) standing in for his wife, Elizabeth Kudrin, the Golodoff’s sister who could not attend. For other photographs of the Attu reunion and images of historic Attu, please visit: <http://aleutfamily.com/>

In 2012, the National Park Service published the wartime experiences of Nick Golodoff, a six-year-old Attuan boy when taken prisoner by the Japanese in WWII. Golodoff’s *Attu Boy* tells, through a child’s eyes, the story of that extraordinary and tragic experience... The book may be downloaded below in PDF format.

Attu Boy アッツ島の少年

[Nick] Golodoff’s “Attu Boy,” published by the National Park Service...includes historical photographs, commentary by NPS Senior Cultural Anthropologist Rachel Mason and additional first-person recollections from Attuans who have since passed away. It recently received the Alaska Historical Society’s Esther Billman Award of Excellence in recognition for outstanding research, writing, and promotion of Alaska history.

—Mike Dunham, Anchorage Daily News, Oct. 11, 2012



Download *Attu Boy*, a 3.5 MB PDF file.



View Nikolai S. Lekanoff’s return to his birthplace, *Makushin*, a 1.5 MB, ~ 3 minute long Flash video.