

Introduction: Telling the Story of Attu

By Rachel Mason

WHEN NICK GOLODOFF WAS SIX YEARS OLD, he and his family were taken from Attu, Alaska to Japan, where they were held captive until the end of World War II. Nick has recorded and written his memories. His granddaughter Brenda Maly transcribed and compiled them, and they are intertwined here with several other first-hand accounts of the Attuan experience.

I learned of Nick Golodoff's memoir in 2008 while working on the Lost Villages of the Aleutians project of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area, National Park Service. The project documents the history of four Unangan villages left empty in the evacuations and relocations of World War II, and never permanently resettled after the war. The residents of three villages in the Unalaska Island area (Biorka, Makushin, and Kashega) were removed to Southeast Alaska in 1942 and were resettled in other Unangan villages upon their return in 1945. Attu had a different and more tragic story. In September 1942, the Japanese army took the 42 Attu residents to Otaru, on Hokkaido Island, where they stayed until war's end. Many of them died, mainly of starvation and malnutrition. The twenty-five surviving Attuans were not able to return to their former village. Those who were not hospitalized (or sent to boarding school, as were several young people) were resettled in Atka.

In 2008, the Lost Villages project had already collected considerable material on the Unalaska Island area villages, thanks to a series of oral history interviews Ray Hudson collected in 2004. However, we had no first-hand information about Attu. At a meeting of the project's steering committee in Anchorage, I learned from Crystal Dushkin that Nick Golodoff had been working on a memoir entitled *Attu Boy*, about his experiences as a young boy at the time



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Fig. 1. Map of the Attuans' Journey

of the Japanese invasion, during the internment in Japan, through the Attuans' release and return to America, and finally to his life in Atka after he moved there at the age of nine. Crystal knew that Nick was looking for a publisher, but she did not know the status of his manuscript. She suggested that the National Park Service might be able to work out an agreement with Nick to publish his memoir as the Attu volume of the Lost Villages project.

This account comes from tapes Nick made and sent to his granddaughter Brenda Maly. Brenda transcribed and edited the accounts. I rearranged Nick's statements in chronological order and wove them together with other first-hand accounts of the Attuans' experience. Besides Nick Golodoff, these include Innokenty Golodoff (Nick's father's brother), Olean Golodoff Prokopeuff (Nick's mother), Mike Lokanin, and Alex Prosoff.

Name	Age in June 1942	Year of Birth	Year of Death
Nick Golodoff	6	1935	
Innokenty "Popeye" Golodoff	25	1917	1998
Olean Golodoff Prokopeuff	31	1911	1976?
Mike Lokanin	30	1912	1961
Alex Prosoff	29	1916	Before 1949

Fig. 2. Table of Five Personal Narratives of the Attuans' Experience in Japan

Innokenty Golodoff, Nick's father's half brother, was born in 1917 on Attu to Metrofan and Anastasia Golodoff. Anastasia was Metrofan's second wife. Innokenty was known throughout his life as "Popeye." After the Attuans were settled in Atka, Popeye married Vasha Nevsoroff there in 1947. They had two daughters and a son. Popeye died in Anchorage in 1998.

Olean Golodoff Prokopeuff, Nick's mother, was born Olean Horosoff in 1910 in Atka to Peter and Anna Horosoff. She married Lawrence Golodoff in Atka and had seven children, all of whom were taken to Japan. Lawrence and three of their children died in

Japan. Nick's older brother John survived, as did his younger siblings Gregory and Elizabeth. Olean and her children were resettled in Atka after the war, and in 1947 she married Ralph Prokopeuff. They had three children. Olean died in Anchorage, sometime after 1976.

Mike or Mihie Lokanin was born in 1912, either in Attu or Unalaska, to Ephem and Anna Lukanin. His mother was from Makushin. Mike's first marriage, to Mary Tarkanoff, ended in divorce in 1939. In 1940 Mike married Parascovia Horosoff, Olean Golodoff's younger half-sister, on Attu. Their first three children died, two of them in Japan. Parascovia had six more children before Mike died in Unalaska in 1961.

Alex Prosoff was born in 1916 on Attu. His parents were Mike Prosoff and his first wife Marina. Alex married Elizabeth Prokopeuff aboard the Coast Guard cutter *Itasca* in 1939. Elizabeth already had a daughter, Fekla, who took her stepfather Alex's name. Alex died before 1949.

The first-person accounts of wartime events are quite different in style and form. Innokenty Golodoff's story was published in the *Alaska Sportsman* in December 1966, "as told to" Kent W. Kenyon, a biologist for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Olean Golodoff Prokopeuff was interviewed by Knut Bergsland and her account appeared in the Aleutian-Pribilof Island Association newsletter. The translation was later revised by Moses Dirks and published in *The Aleutian Invasion*, a project of high school students in Unalaska (Unalaska City Schools 1981). In 1946 or 1947 Mike Lokanin and Alex Prosoff wrote their own stories, which were published verbatim in Ethel Ross Oliver's *Journal of an Aleutian Year* (1988).

Much of the Attuans' experience in Japan has remained obscure, partly because few of the survivors were inclined to talk about their experiences there. There is not much of a written record either. They did not keep diaries or write letters from Japan. In addition, participants in the wartime events have divergent memories of what happened. Perhaps especially because they have not discussed their experiences with one another, there are multiple accounts of these traumatic events. It is more important to preserve the authentic voices of the tellers than to make sure their stories match.

To provide a context to the first-hand accounts, I added background material, culled from published and unpublished sources, about Attu history and prehistory and about the events during World War II. Nick Golodoff's is the most complete account yet of the years in Attu, from the unique perspective of a young boy. His book is a gift not only to the descendants of Attu and to other Unangan, but to all of us who need to hear this previously untold story.

Thank you to all those who helped assemble this memoir. I would like particularly to thank Shannon Apgar-Kurtz, Anna Bateman, Francis Broderick (designer), Omar Chavez, Janet Clemens, John Cloe, Linda Cook, Debbie Corbett, Crystal Dushkin, Nicole Ferreira (cartographer), Ray Hudson, Janis Kozlowski, Bruce Greenwood, Jennifer Jolis, and Dirk Spennemann.

Published by the United States Department of the Interior
Government Printing Office with the assistance of Debra A.
Mingeaud, Printing Specialist.