

## **Chapter 15**

### **The Approach of War**



**A**s the story of Biorka, Makushin, and Kashega enters the war years, there were so few residents that it is possible to describe the communities in detail without overwhelming confusion. The events at Makushin had decimated the village. When the federal census was taken May 14, 1940, only two households were left. Pete and Tatiana Olsen lived with their thirteen-year-old adopted son John. Elia and Eva Borenin's home included Natalia Borenin and her four children: Nick, Eva, Akenfa, and Matrona—although Nick, then sixteen, was listed as the adopted son of Elia and Eva. Nick's sister Eva was thirteen while Akenfa and Matrona were six and two.<sup>1</sup> On October 20, 1941, Natalia Borenin died from tuberculosis.

#### **Makushin Households in 1940 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940)**

J.P.H [John Peter Halberg "Pete"] Olsen, age 58 (head of household)  
Katie [Tatiana] Olsen, age 43 (wife of Pete Olsen)  
John Olsen, age 13 (adoptive son of Peter and Katie Olsen)

Elia Borenin, age 46 (head of household)  
Eva Borenin, age 51 (wife of Elia Borenin)  
Nick Borenin, age 16 (adoptive son of Elia and Eva Borenin)  
Natalia Borenin, age 35 (sister-in-law of Elia Borenin)  
Eva Borenin, age 13 (niece of Elia Borenin)  
Akenfa Borenin, age 9 (nephew of Elia Borenin)  
Matrona Borenin, age 2 (niece of Elia Borenin)

The seven families in Kashega, on the other hand, were doing well. The twenty-six residents included Sophie Kudrin and her eleven-year-old daughter Eva who were living with her brother-in-law George Borenin. Mike and Dora Kudrin lived with their three daughters: Polly, Vassa, and Alice Esther. Mike's brother Cornelius had a twenty-year-old lodger at his home, Sergie Borenin. The chief of

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<sup>1</sup> Natalia's son Sammy had eaten poison and died at the age of five the previous year.

the village, John Denisoff, was getting up in years. He was 69. Staying with him was fourteen-year-old George Gordaoff.<sup>2</sup> John was in failing health and spent time with his daughter Alice who had moved to Unalaska with her husband and daughter. Carl and Eva Borenin had a three-year-old daughter. The widow Efemia Kudrin had the largest family that included four adults and two teenaged children. The patriarch of the village was the old sea otter hunter Nikefor Denisoff, whose age was given as 77 in 1940 but who might have been even older. Peter and Nellie Yatchmenoff and their young daughter were living with him.



Three Borenin sisters:  
Left to right: Oleta,  
Dora, and Sophia.  
Photograph courtesy  
Mary Diakanoff.

Biorka had four families in 1940. The chief was Alex Ermeloff, and his household reflected the diverse nature of this village. In addition to himself, it included his son Ruff and Ruff's wife Agafia, an adult daughter (Sophia, 35), an adult adopted son (Akenfa, 27), and a ten-year old adopted daughter (Irene Lukanin). Two years younger than Alex Ermeloff, Andrew Makarin was now 52. He and Eustina were raising their adopted daughter, Irene. Fourteen-year-old Nick Galaktionoff, having temporarily escaped Unalaska, was living with them. George and Elsie Yatchmenoff's family included three children: William, 17; Feodor, 5; and Marianna, 4. Peter and Molly Lukanin with their infant son Moses comprised the youngest family in the village. Molly had been a Galaktionoff from Makushin, and her younger siblings, Peter and Marina Galaktionoff, were living with them along with her mother and stepfather, Parascovia and Innokentii Borenin. Parascovia (Polly) had married Innokentii Borenin in April 1938.

Nothing has been said so far about Andrew Makarin's younger brother Elia. Born in 1892, he grew up at Biorka and became a hunter, trapper, and fisherman. Around 1914 or 1915 he married Agrafina Petikoff from Akutan. They eventually had six children, and, sometime after 1930, established a home at Unalaska that served as a base for visiting Biorka people. As more and more people from the three villages were drawn to Unalaska, housing for visitors and new residents became critical. Unangax who had lived at Unalaska for generations were physically unable to absorb the new arrivals as most houses were small. In addition, as Mary Diakanoff has pointed out, many Unalaska Unangax saw themselves as culturally distinct from villagers, better educated, better able to deal with the increasingly bureaucratic nature of business and politics. The importance

2 The census report calls him George Denisoff, John's adopted son.

of homes like the one established by Elia and Agrafina Makarin cannot be overestimated.

**Kashega Households in 1940 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940)**

George Borenin, age 40 (head of household)  
Sophia Kudrin, age 31 (sister-in-law of George Borenin)  
Eva Kudrin [Tcherpanoff], age 11 (niece of George Borenin)

Mike Kudrin, age 35 (head of household)  
Dora Kudrin, age 24 (wife of Mike Kudrin)  
Polly Kudrin, age 7 (daughter of Mike and Dora Kudrin)  
Vasa [Vassa] Kudrin, age 3 (daughter of Mike and Dora Kudrin)  
Alice Esther, age 2 months (daughter of Mike and Dora Kudrin)

John Denisoff, age 69 (head of household and acting chief after death of John Yatchmenoff)  
George Denisoff [Gordaoff], age 15 (adopted son of John Denisoff)

Carl Borenin, age 39 (head of household)  
Eva Borenin, age 24 (wife of Carl Borenin)  
Mary Borenin, age 3 (daughter of Carl and Eva Borenin)

Nikifor Densioff, age 77 (head of household)  
Peter Yatchmenoff, age 34 (lodger of Nikifor Densioff)  
Nellie Yatchmenoff, age 24 (wife of lodger, Peter Yatchmenoff)  
Laura Yatchmenoff, age 2 (daughter of lodgers, Peter and Nellie Yatchmenoff)

Efemia Kudrin, age 53 (head of household since husband, John Kudrin died)  
Peter Kudrin, age 28 (son of Efemia Kudrin)  
Mike Kudrin, age 25 (son of Efemia Kudrin)  
Olga Kudrin, age 22 (daughter of Efemia Kudrin)  
Sergi [Sergie] Kudrin, age 20 (son of Efemia Kudrin)  
George Kudrin, age 15 (son of Efemia Kudrin)  
Tatiana Kudrin, age 18 (daughter-in-law of Efemia Kudrin and wife of Peter Kudrin)

Cornelius E. Kudrin, age 41 (head of household)  
Serge[Sergie] Borenian [Borenin], age 20 (lodger of Cornelius Kudrin)

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**Biorka Households in 1940 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940)**

Alex Yermenof [Ermeloff], age 54 (head of household)  
Reus [Ruff] Yermenoff [Ermeloff], age 31 (son of Alex Ermeloff)  
Akenfa Yermenoff [Ermeloff], age 27 (adoptive son of Alex Ermeloff)  
Agafia Yermenoff [Ermeloff], age 19 (daughter-in-law of Alex Ermeloff and wife of Ruff)  
Sophia Yermenoff [Ermeloff], age 35 (daughter of Alex Ermeloff)  
Irene Lukanin [Ermeloff], age 10 (adoptive daughter of Alex Ermeloff)

George Yatchmenoff, age 46 (head of household)  
Aprensia [Elsie] Yatchmenoff, age 29 (wife of George Yatchmenoff)  
William [Willie] Yatchmenoff, age 17 (son of George Yatchmenoff)  
Fedor Yatchmenoff, age 5 (son of George Yatchmenoff)  
Marianna Yatchmenoff, age 4 (daughter of George Yatchmenoff)

Peter Lukanin [Lukanin], age 24 (head of household)  
Molly Galaktionoff (Lukanin), age 19 (wife of Peter Lukanin; originally from Makushin)  
Moses Lukanin, age 1 month (son of Peter and Molly Lukanin)  
Peter Galaktionoff, age 10 (lodger of Peter Lukanin; sibling of Molly Galaktionoff)  
Irene Galaktionoff, age 6 (lodger of Peter Lukanin; sibling of Molly Galaktionoff)  
Inokenti Borenin, age 36 (lodger of Peter Lukanin; father of Molly Galaktionoff)

Andrew Makarin, age 52 (head of household)  
Estenia [Eustina or Esther] Makarin, age 48 (wife of Andrew Makarin)  
Nick Galaktionoff, age 14 (lodger of Andrew Makarin; moved from Unalaska)  
Erenin Borenin [Irene Makarin], age 8 (listed as lodger of Andrew Makarin; adopted daughter)

Because Unalaska was the magnet for people living in the outer villages, it is important to understand the type of community it had become. "This was a fairly quiet and respectable camp till the Alaska Dry Law was repealed a year ago," wrote U.S. commissioner Durell Finch in 1935. "Now it is one of the toughest towns in all of Alaska...[where] every business place [is] just like a water-front saloon."<sup>3</sup> After Alaskan voters had approved banning alcohol in 1916, the measure had gone to the

U.S. Congress for ratification. The so-called "Bone Dry Law" went into effect in 1918, two years before prohibition became national policy, and ended only with the repeal of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1933.



Peter Galaktionoff.  
Photo courtesy Jennie  
Lekanoff.

When Nick Galaktionoff arrived at Unalaska in 1937 he discovered dogs and drunks. "I didn't like dogs, and there were too many people," he said. There had been only two well-trained sheep dogs at Makushin. "I saw people staggering sideways," he said. "I had never seen them do that before.... In Makushin my dad never drank."<sup>4</sup> Alcoholism began to infiltrate the lives of new arrivals just as it had enveloped several local residents. Both Parascovia (Polly) and Innokentii Borenin were in jail on alcohol related charges when the 1940 census was taken—with Innokentii having been sentenced to five additional days for talking with one of the women prisoners, probably his wife. Nick himself spoke openly about his long struggle with alcohol that lasted into his fifties.

At Unalaska outsiders were installed in every position of authority except village chief. Traditional Unangȃ found themselves relegated to manual laborers. For decades even "traditional" jobs such as sea otter hunting and fox trapping had been controlled by white men who either owned vessels or had access to markets. They alone held jobs in government, commerce, education, and regulatory enforcement. Deputy U.S. commissioners were always outsiders as were game wardens, medical staff, store owners, and (except for

3 Durrell Finch to Dear Nephew Gerald, Unalaska, April 4, 1935. Marine Works Collection, Museum of the Aleutians, 1998.001.432.

4 Nick Galaktionoff in Hudson, ed., *Cuttlefish Two*, 33.

Bill Brown) deputy U.S. marshals. With brief exceptions, this was also true of teachers and postmasters.<sup>5</sup> If Unanga̱ worked in these areas, they were janitors at the school, nurse assistants at the hospital, clerks at the stores. The better paying positions not only provided a guaranteed income, but in several instances they were part-time jobs that allowed the non-Native office holders to spend considerable energy in private economic ventures and in warring with each other. During a visit in 1936, Olaus Murie, working for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, noted in his diary, “Am learning much about the intrigues and shady side of life here. Not pleasant to think about. All over commercial greed.”<sup>6</sup>

Few Unanga̱ were able to move up the economic ladder. Women who married white men may have seen an improvement in their standard of living. However, if their children excelled, this was credited to the father’s “white” blood, not to anything the mother brought to the family. Bill Brown’s wife, though Bill was Unanga̱ on his mother’s side, would not allow their children to associate with village children.<sup>7</sup> Unanga̱ who integrated into the general white community were those with enough Scandinavian, Germanic, or Russian ancestry so as to literally pass for white. Victoria Gardner, for example, thought Henry Swanson was a Scandinavian fisherman. Economic barriers mirrored other discriminatory practices. Seating at the movie theater was by race, with better seats reserved for whites. If a non-Native woman welcomed an Unanga̱ visitor into her home—even the chief—she faced disapproval from other whites.<sup>8</sup>

Unanga̱ at Unalaska, whether long-time residents or new arrivals, found themselves in situations similar to people who emigrated from villages into cities such as Anchorage or Fairbanks. Dorothy Jones, examining the catastrophic consequences of ineffective social service agencies in the 1970s, wrote how urban immigrants faced “several stressful transitions simultaneously.”

...from rural to urban, from one culture to another, and from one set of class and racial definitions to another as they learn that poverty and minority racial status are stigmatized in the white-dominated urban setting far more than in the villages. The urban transition of Natives is accompanied by serious social problems—poverty, unemployment, underemployment, family disorganization, alcoholism, and other emotional disorders.<sup>9</sup>

5 The exceptions were Kathryn (Dyakanoff) Seller who taught school briefly in the 1920s and Olga (Rankin) Bolshain who served as postmaster around 1910. Both were married to outsiders.

William Brown, a deputy U.S. marshal in the 1930s, also had Unanga̱ ancestry.

6 Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks. Olaus Murie Papers, MS-230, Box 8, FF#29. *Diary*, page 58, June 2, 1936.

7 Philip G. Armstrong to Commissioner Kernes. Alaska State Archives. RG 05, RS 1 box AS4477. The child was eventually enrolled in the public school.

8 Violet V.N. Assenmacher, letter to Ray Hudson, October 8, 1979.

9 Jones, *The Urban Native*, 1.

Her findings paralleled what was happening at Unalaska in the 1920s and 1930s as the village of Iliuliuk made its circuitous and white-dominated way towards incorporation as a first class city in 1942. Among the changes and challenges facing Natives and to which she attributed far-reaching social consequences were

- the loss of social controls to which people had been accustomed (the family, peer groups, respected elders, and formal authority)
- a loss of role function for some men and women
- the stigmatization of poverty
- the loss of shared economic responsibility balanced between husband and wife
- the loss of social supports
- the presence of new technologies
- unemployment and underemployment

The federal policy of assimilation had, in significant ways, been accepted by Unalaska Unangȃ. Linguistic differences were critical because the presence of non-English speaking children threatened the local school. Nowhere was assimilation more institutionalized than in education. The school system was a paragon of uniformity. Beginning in 1887, a school that was open to all students had operated at Unalaska under the federal Bureau of Education. In 1905, however, Congress passed the Nelson Act establishing two sets of schools, one for Native children and one for white children along with “children of mixed blood who lead a civilized life.” In Alaska the “white” schools became the responsibility of the territorial government. Because the Unalaska school served both Native and non-Native students, it was closed in 1905 for non-compliance with the new law. White residents attempted to elect a local school board, a prerequisite for establishing a territorial school, but the minimum twenty registered voters could not be found. In 1906 the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ school reopened, with the few non-Native students attending as they had before. By 1923 the number of non-Native children had increased, reflecting a proportionate growth of immigrant residents. The white community was finally able to get everything in order to transfer the school to the territory’s department of education. Enrollment stood at 87 in the spring of 1923. An increase to about 100 was expected to accompany the opening of the territorial school that fall. Clara Goss, a community activist and former teacher, wrote to the territorial commissioner of education. “It is understood locally,” she said, “that all the children of the community will attend.... it is a certainty that no children would attend the Gov. school if they could by attending the Territorial school be classed as ‘Whites.’”<sup>10</sup>

“The public or Territorial schools are for Whites and half-breeds,” wrote a 1931 report from the Department of the Interior, “the Federal schools for the natives alone. Native children of unusual promise are sometimes transferred to the Territorial schools, where a higher standard can be maintained than in the

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10 Clara Goss to L.D. Henderson, Commissioner of Education, Juneau. April 21, 1923.

Federal schools. Thus the way of possible development is pointed out; but the road will undoubtedly be a long one for these simple and extremely primitive people.”<sup>11</sup> In the face of such strident government sanctioned racism, it is no wonder that Unangañ parents welcomed the closing of the federally operated school and the opening of a territorial one.

In 1917, on the fifteenth anniversary of his role as chief of Unalaska (and, it could be argued, paramount chief of the eastern Aleutians), Alexei Yatchmeneff had urged his people to remember their Unangañ heritage and to not attempt to pass as whites. This was directly at odds with federal Indian policy. Yatchmeneff’s counsel, delivered long before this policy was formally replaced in 1934, was clearly at odds with the political, economic, and social requirements for advancement in the dominant society. If taken to mean that Unangañ culture, values, and language were to be practiced to the exclusion of “western” skills, it was clearly a handicap to “upward mobility” for his people. This, however, was not the case. Yatchmeneff had successfully integrated much of western culture into his own life. He was fluent in *Unangam tunuu* and Russian, and he had a workable command of English. In addition to having been a successful sea otter hunter in his youth, he was proficient in several “western” vocations. He was a skilled carpenter and wooden boat builder. (The 1910 and 1920 census reports listed him as a carpenter.) In addition, he repaired shoes and glasses to supplement his family’s income. Exactly what he meant remains a mystery but his life suggests a center founded on Unangañ values. He could incorporate western skills while practicing traditional subsistence activities, retaining cultural components unique to Unangañ life, language, and the Orthodox religion.

Non-Unangañ residents and government employees, on the other hand, were emphatically monocultural. They made no attempt either to learn *Unangam tunuu* or to understand the culture. They saw the practice of any Unangañ cultural component or the use of the language as evidence of inferiority. By the time Yatchmeneff died in 1937, Unalaska had been transformed.

Five days after his death, Jessica Jorgensen, beginning her third year as the primary teacher, wrote to the commissioner of education. She was overwhelmed by the arrival of eight new students who had come from Makushin and who spoke no English. Although four of the Lekanoff and Galaktionoff children were over ten years of age, with the eldest soon to turn sixteen, all of them were crowded into her primary classroom with twenty other students. The four older ones sat at a table while the younger ones used chairs without writing desks.

“I was in the first grade,” Mary Diakanoff recalled, “when the Makushin people came.” She remembered Eva and Marina Galaktionoff and that the Makushin children were kept at the back of the room.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, the new arrivals were

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<sup>11</sup> U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Annual Report of the Board of Indian Commissioners to the Secretary of the Interior for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1931. GPO, Washington, 1931: 45.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Diakanoff, conversation with the Ray Hudson, June 22, 2012.



Chief Alexei Yatchmeneff and his daughter Pauline. (Identification by Katherine Grimness.) Alice Moller Collection, courtesy AB Rankin.

good-natured and, according to Jorgensen, enjoyed what they perceived as “an entertainment specially put on for them.” The other children delighted in the pantomimes and chaos that enveloped the classroom. Jorgensen did what she could. She drafted an older student as an interpreter during the first weeks. In her letter, she wrote, “Out of the entire enrollment in school, there are only two or three children who can actually speak Aleute. They understand it but never speak it on the play ground or at home.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the Makushin children, there were 52 other students including 18 in the intermediate grades (3, 4, 5) and 14 in the upper grades (6, 7, 8). Only six were non-Native children. Jorgensen was not a teacher who held herself aloof from Unangaꝝ culture. The year previously she had invited two local women to teach basketry in the school and the classes continued in the fall of 1937. At least one of these women, Anfesia Shapsnikoff, was a strong proponent of her language and may very well have used it in part while teaching. The other, Annie Stepetin, was originally from Makushin. An examination of the names of students confirms that while many of them, as adults, understood the language, their actual fluency in the spoken language was restricted.<sup>14</sup> This lends credence to Jorgensen’s estimate that “only two or three” students were able to speak *Unangam tunuu*.

“I was scared the first time I came to school,” remembered Nick Lekanoff. “I didn’t know what to do. I couldn’t speak English.... The only thing I used to say was, ‘Yeah.’”<sup>15</sup> Nick and his brother Steve stuck it out, however, and the records show that these fifteen and sixteen year old boys spent 173 days in first grade. Eventually, the teacher had had enough. “Your dad needs your help out there,” Nick was told.<sup>16</sup> Simeon Lekanoff was ill. He had returned to Unalaska, the village of his birth, and been elected to the church committee. In 1941 both he and his brother Stephan, who had become a much-respected elder on St. George, died.

For all the difficulties and challenges Unalaska presented to newcomers, there were elements of Unangaꝝ culture that remained integral to community life. There were gatherings at which Sergie Tutiakoff would perform Aleut dances while his mother, Jennie Galaktionoff, sang.<sup>17</sup> During the Christmas season, there were five or six stars, each with its own group of carolers that would visit homes late into the night. If the stars met on the street, they would sing to each other. Sergie Tutiakoff often took children around staring during the day. Games were played after the conclusion of Great Lent and Easter services. In summer, men and boys competed in *angaayuꝝ* [partners], a type of baseball played with

13 Jessica Jorgensen to A.E. Karnes. October 27, 1937. Alaska State Archives. RG 05, RS 01, box AS4477. Folder: Unalaska 1937-39. 4586-60.

14 Record of Grades, 1937-1938. Unalaska City School records, in the collection of Ray Hudson.

15 Nick Lekanoff in *The Beginning of Memory*, 107.

16 *Alaska’s Village Voices*, a supplement to Alaska newspapers, Bill Hess, editor. November 2002:28.

17 German Stepetin, an accomplished Unangaꝝ dancer, died in 1935.

a bat and a ball made by wrapping grass around a stone and covering it with seal skin. There were two teams. One person was the batter and a good many of the others were runners who had to dash between two bases without being hit with a thrown ball. Visiting teams would come from Akutan to play.

Marva Borenin, Nick Galaktionoff's grandmother, died in August 1939 after a short illness. On the day of her death, she asked to bathe, and Nick went outside the house. Later, Marva called him to her side, hugged him, and told him that if God called her, she would go. "So, I asked her, if she got there to call me also," he said. Then Marva gave him a dollar and he went to the store to buy candy. "When I got to the store, I went to Ted Sherebernikoff because he spoke Aleut," Nick said. By the time he had eaten the candy and explored the beach, it was evening. His mother met him, took him to her house for dinner where she told him his grandmother had died. He rushed back to the house and found her body had been prepared and laid out in the living room. "I ran to her and cried," he said, "but someone took me away."<sup>18</sup> Years later, he named one of his daughters after her.

Nick Galaktionoff's stay at school was even shorter than Nick Lekanoff's.

His sister Molly had married Peter Lukanin of Biorka in January 1938. Their son Moses was born at the Unalaska hospital a year later, in September 1939. Nick persuaded his sister and brother-in-law to take him to the village. "I was looking forward to seeing Biorka," he said. They hiked the trail from Unalaska to Ugadaga Bay. After a rest and something to eat on the beach, they took a small double-endner with an inboard engine across the inlet. At the village he found "five wooden houses, the church, and one barabara." Andrew and Eustina Makarin had room in their home and so Nick moved in with them. He spent that summer in the village, often playing with seven-year-old Feddie Yatchmenoff. Before the men went to the Pribilof Islands that summer, Andrew showed him a number of former house sites across the river

One morning in Biorka, while the men were still in the Pribilofs, Nick saw three or four strangers talking with Sophie Ermeloff, Alex Ermeloff's adult daughter. Later villagers saw smoke, possibly from a campfire, at a point further up the bay. When Andrew Makarin returned home from the Pribilofs, the villagers told him what they had seen. "But seems like, he didn't believe us," Nick said. That winter when Andrew went to his camp, he found it disturbed. He still used a baidarka and he went to Ruff Ermeloff's camp on Dushkot Island. From that islet they saw a trail of smoke rising from a bay on the Unalaska side of the inlet. They took a skiff and, leaving one man in it, two of them walked toward the campfire. "When they got there," Nick said, "they saw a bird was being cooked, but no one was there, but they knew they were being watched." Their conclusion was the same as that made by men at Atka and Attu. "It was the Japanese," Nick said. "They were on this island because they knew the island had a military build-up."<sup>19</sup>

18 Nick Galaktionoff, recorded in 1980 and translated by Ishmael Gromoff. Collection of Ray Hudson.

19 Nick Galaktionoff, recorded in 1980 and translated by Ishmael Gromoff. Collection of Ray Hudson.

Stories about sightings of Japanese men, about Japanese scientific explorations that were actually sent to map the islands, about the Japanese landing on St. Paul in 1906 when a number of them were killed by Unangax̄, and about the disappearance of men on Attu in 1910, all these continued to be shared topics of conversation. In June 1911, Biorka men found four Japanese sailors who managed to convey that they had come from a wrecked vessel. The Biorka men brought them to Unalaska where they were cared for by the deputy marshal while the Revenue Cutter *Manning* went in search of other survivors. A few days later, however, their undamaged ship sailed into Unalaska bay, revealing that the four men were deserters and not survivors from a wreck.<sup>20</sup> The presence of Japanese fishing boats and surveying parties throughout the Chain gave rise to speculations. John Denisoff told these stories to his granddaughter and warned her that she could be captured and used as a slave.<sup>21</sup> This made young Mary so nervous that she and other children would hide even when Japanese teams off visiting ships played baseball against local teams at Unalaska.



Left to right: Eva Kudrin, Alice Moller, and Tatiana [Nevzoroff] Kudrin.  
Photo courtesy Mary Diakanoff.

Innokentii Borenin, Nick's stepfather, was visiting Biorka with Nick when they joined several Biorka men to go hunting seals and sea lions just past Old Man Rocks at the north end of Sedanka Island shortly before the war. It was during Lent and the men planned on being gone from home only a few hours. The

20 Davenport, Clara Ellen and Noah Cleveland Davenport, *Unalaska Days: A Diary* (August 7, 1910-August 7, 1912). Xerox copy, Unalaska City School Library.

21 Arnold, *The Legacy of Unjust and Illegal Treatment of Unangan*, 34.

eight men had two dories belonging to Andrew Makarin and Ruff Ermeloff. No sooner had they landed in a small bay, about 100 feet wide, than the wind began blowing. They rigged up a block and tackle and hoisted the dories high onto the beach. A camp house, suitable for two men, had been built there some years previously. The men crowded into it, living on tea and a little seaweed. Over the next couple of days, Andrew crafted a stove from oil drums that had washed ashore. He was a skilled tinsmith and even managed to make a chimney. The beach on this island was poor. Blue fox that had been planted here had starved to death. One of the men managed to shoot a sea lion, but it sank before it could be recovered. There was small lake nearby where they collected fresh water. After almost two weeks, the weather improved, and even though the swells coming in were huge, they decided to leave. Nick hopped into Andrew's boat with other men, and, once beyond the swells, they waited for the second dory. Andrew shouted at them to be sure to jump in as soon as the dory hit the water. But as the skiff headed into the waves, Innokentii Borenin slipped. The boat took off, leaving him stranded. The other two boats hovered just outside the reach of the swells for an hour before they were able to rescue him. They arrived back at Biorka a week before Easter.

Two significant changes occurred at Kashega in the early 1940s. The first was the death of John Denisoff, who had served as chief for almost a decade. He died at Unalaska. The second was Mike and Dora Kudrin's move to Unalaska. After their daughter Alice died in infancy, they brought Polly to Unalaska where she could receive medical attention for a persistent eye ailment. Mike had made several trips to Unalaska by skiff and then on foot to secure needed medicine. They also wanted Polly to be able to attend school. However, her eye problem reduced her attendance.<sup>22</sup> Although living at Unalaska, they retained a home at Kashega.

On April 8, 1940, a few months after he had arrived as the new deputy U.S. marshal, Verne Robinson was listening to the radio and heard that Germany had landed troops in Denmark and Norway.<sup>23</sup> While Japanese aggression in Asia had worried many in Alaska, it was not until the invasion of Scandinavia was followed by the occupation of Holland and Belgium a month later that Congress began the fortification of Alaska. Surveys of Amaknak Island and Chernofski were made that summer, after which strong disagreements arose over the suitability of Dutch Harbor as a military outpost, primarily because of the mountains surrounding it. The value of a deep anchorage won out, however, and authorization to construct Fort Mears on Amaknak Island (within Unalaska Bay) was issued on October 10, 1940, a month after construction of a runway at Cold Bay had begun.<sup>24</sup> Fort Mears would provide an Army garrison along with

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22 Eva Tcheripanoff in *The Beginning of Memory*, 53.

23 Diary of Verne Robinson, 1940. Unbound forms. Pat Locke Archival Collection, Museum of the Aleutians.

24 NARA, RG 338 (U.S. Army Commands), Alaskan Dept. Drafts of the Official History. *Fort Mears*. Endnote 1.

fixed harbor defenses for the protection of the Navy base. In August 1940, 59 civilian Siems-Drake workers began construction of barracks at Dutch Harbor for a unit of Marines scheduled to arrive to defend the nascent Navy base. Word that construction jobs were available quickly spread and men arrived from several Aleutian communities. By October 5 the barracks was completed and a detachment of slightly more than 120 men arrived only to discover “there was little to defend.”<sup>25</sup>

Construction continued and the work force grew. As Fort Mears rose from the flats surrounding Margaret Bay on Amaknak, the military began hunting for a suitable site for an airbase west of Cold Bay. The surreptitious construction of Fort Glenn at Otter Point on the eastern end of Umnak Island began in January 1942. Chernofski Bay was used as a staging point from which everything had to be barged eleven miles across to Umnak.

In the meantime, Unalaska boomed with civilian and military personnel. Housing was at a premium. The little used Russian school building was subdivided into apartments and rented primarily to men who had brought along their wives and children. Bars flourished. A house of prostitution was opened on Expedition Island, in the inner harbor between Unalaska and Amaknak. Most of the military construction was restricted to Amaknak Island, but attention began to be given to sites surrounding the village itself. Hoping for more leverage when negotiating with the military, businessmen drafted a petition to incorporate the village as a first class city. Dated August 18, 1941, it was circulated during the late summer and early fall during a time when many Unangañ men were still working in the Pribilof Islands.<sup>26</sup> This may account for the absence of several signatures that might have been expected. Two days before Christmas, voters approved the motion and on March 3, 1942, the City of Unalaska was declared incorporated by Judge Simon Hellenthal.

Unangañ men were skilled mariners and several, including Nick McGlashan of Akutan and Henry Swanson of Unalaska, were employed on vessels. Nick, in addition to doing electrical work, was a deckhand, mate, and later a captain for the Army transport service.<sup>27</sup> Henry was a pilot on several vessels. Andrew Gronholdt was among workers who came from Sand Point on Popof Island, just off the Alaska Peninsula. He worked on the Marine barracks and afterwards found employment on a vessel ferrying supplies from Chernofski to Umnak. In February 1942 they stopped at Makushin and he went ashore. He didn’t know Pete Olsen, but, in addition to a man from the army, the only people he saw were a man who was “German or something” and his wife. Andrew recalled that they were restricted to staying right in the village.<sup>28</sup>

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25 Denfeld, *The Defense of Dutch Harbor*, 35.

26 The first group did not leave St. Paul for Unalaska until August 9. Others left on August 20, September 21, December 11. *St. Paul Log*.

27 Bereskin, Peri, “The Akutan Whaling Station,” in Ruberg, ed., *Taniisik*, Vol. IV. 1984:5.

28 Andrew Gronholdt, conversation with Ray Hudson, April 18, 1996.

Kashega, Biorka, and Makushin were included in a set of Native Family Record Cards, dated August 5, 1942. The assessed value of the seven homes at Kashega was \$2,125. When personal property, valued at \$2,041.50, was added to this, the total value of the village came to \$4,166.50. The four houses at Biorka were valued at \$1,475; personal property at \$2,512.50, for a total of \$3,987.50. Only the Borenin house at Makushin was included in this survey, valued at \$400.50, with personal property at \$367.80, for a total of \$768.30. The Borenins' home was valued slightly higher than those at Biorka (averaging \$368.75) and slightly lower than those at Kashega (valued at \$425). Specific personal property included saws, axes, carpenter tools, shotguns, fishing lines, and sheds. The total assessed value of the three villages was \$8,922.30. This did not include property owned by Olsen, Jacobsen, and the sheep ranch at Kashega.

A July 1940 report described Kashega in detail. The comment that the chief also read services in the church suggests George Borenin had replaced the ailing John Denisoff. The twenty-six residents were divided equally between male and female. "Most of them speak English and quite a few of them are able to read and write," wrote Lieutenant E.S. Endom of the Coast Guard cutter *Shoshone*.

The village has a Chief for government purposes. There is a Russian Catholic Church located here, but no Priest. However, the Chief remarked that he "read at the Church" on Sundays. Water is available from a stream in the rear of the village. Light is provided by kerosene lamps and the houses are heated mostly by coal provided by the local store. The dwellings are frame houses and appeared to be kept fairly clean. Out-houses are provided for toilet purposes.... No radio facilities for communication with the outside are available at this village.<sup>29</sup>

Endom wrote that while men worked at St. Paul Island each summer, women caught and smoked fish for the winter. Back in the village, men hunted and trapped fox during the winter. A succinct summary of these villages was given by Captain F.A. Zeusler. After declaring that he had been "in practically every barabara and in every native house from Unalaska to Attu" he said people at Biorka, Makushin, and Kashega (along with those at Akutan and Nikolski) "had clean homes, electric lights, running water. Their villages even had their own light plant. Their villages were clean and progressive."<sup>30</sup> Even as the military buildup at Unalaska and Chernofski increased, the residents of Kashega and Biorka had achieved a balance between subsistence and outside employment that had proved sustainable.

Men from Biorka had the most direct encounter with military personnel during their regular trips for supplies when they crossed Beaver Inlet and left their skiffs at Ugadaga Bay before hiking the trail to Unalaska. A temporary outpost

29 NARA RG 26. Records of the U.S. Coast Guard, Records of the Bering Sea Patrol 1926-1940. Census and Sociological Reports, Alaska Villages. U.S.C.G.C. *Shoshone*. 1 August 1940.

30 *The Alaska Fishing News*. Ketchikan, Alaska. May 24, 1943.

for antiaircraft guns had been built outside Ugadaga by 1942 and the Biorka men were intercepted on the suspicion that they were Japanese. Irene Makarin recalled that the first time this happened, it took almost two weeks before Andrew Makarin, George Yatchmenoff, Ruff Ermeloff and his brother Akenfa or "Candy" were able to return home. Only Candy Ermeloff was fluent in English.

By June 1942 every flat piece of ground on Amaknak Island had been used.<sup>31</sup> Fort Mears carpeted Margaret Bay with twenty-eight barracks, "mess halls, recreation buildings, a theatre, PX, library, chapel, warehouses, a Station Hospital and adjacent to the garrison a camp of 30 Quonset huts." The hospital had a 270-bed capacity spread over 28 buildings. A naval station was built at Dutch Harbor, supplemented with the S.S. *Northwestern*, anchored and then beached just off shore, where many of the Siems-Drake workers lived. A bomb-proof power plant was constructed. A 500-man mess hall was completed in March 1942. Roads veined the small island, climbing up the two highest elevations (Bunker Hill and Ballyhoo) where defensive outposts were built. Cement ramps and hangers for seaplanes neared completion. At its peak in 1942 Siems-Drake workers numbered 5,157.

"This place is nothing but armies," Irene Makarin said, remembering the Unalaska of 1942.

Looking toward Beaver Inlet from the top of Ugadaga Pass in a photograph taken circa 1944. The Quonset huts were erected after the attack on Unalaska. Photograph courtesy Ray Hudson.



31 Denfeld, *The Defense of Dutch Harbor*, 30-59.



Storm. Biorka. Photograph by Carlene Arnold.