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# ALEUT VILLAGE OF ATKKA LOOKS FORWARD

By LAEL MORGAN

Last year a large cloud shadowed the future of Atka, the western-most native settlement in Alaska. It had no regularly scheduled transportation, no

communications system, no viable economy, and many of its 84 residents were considering relocation.

Today the isolated community still has no regularly sched-

uled transportation, no communications and no economic base, but the future looks viable indeed. The population now stands at 94 (with three new babies). More people are expect-

ed to take up residence before the new year and Atka is definitely going to stay on the map.

The reasons for the Atkans' optimism are subtle. Oh, the Land Claims Settlement will

net the village about \$100,000 in the near future but that's not enough to start the fishing operation they hope to establish or even bring the village much need-

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# Aleutian Village . . .

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ed electricity.

What Atka has going for it is a newly-awakened sense of pride and identity. And with it is a growing awareness of, and participation in the politics a village must play in order to survive.

Until last year the speaking of Aleut was not allowed in the Atka school. For generations the Atkans have quietly passed their language on in the most perfect form known in all the Aleutian islands but they were discouraged in speaking it by school-teachers from outside who have controlled their school system and there were predictions the language would soon die.

Then, last year, the villagers voted to institute a bilingual program (See "Phenomenal Bilingual Program," Page 1) and in an incredibly short time the young people of the village were polishing their native tongue and learning to write it. The older people of the village, although fluent, cannot write Aleut and are now considering an adult education course.

At the same time the village planned the bilingual program, it decided to send a delegation to attend the Aleut League convention in Anchorage. This worked a hardship on the families of the delegates for, having no refrigeration or transportation from outside, the Aleuts must hunt and fish continually to survive. And those who leave the island must stay at least a month for there is no way home except by a Navy tug which runs on a casual monthly basis.

But the Aleut League had largely been overlooking Atkans because they sent no representatives to voice their problems. The time had come to state their case, the Atkans decided. And so six village spokesmen left the job of subsisting to their wives and older children and made a march on Anchorage.

As a result, the problems of Atka have been getting more attention and, last month, for the first time, Aleut Corporation president, Mike Swetzof, made a visit to the island with Larry Merculieff, Aleut land specialist, and Bill Childs, corporation manager.

It cost them \$1,500 to charter a plane ONE WAY but they stayed three days and by the time they left the Atkans were satisfied that at last some outsiders had a grasp of their problems.

Everyone realizes there are no easy solutions. Atka has never been allowed a post office because it has no regularly scheduled transportation and the population is so small and the location so remote that there's little incentive for commercial enterprise to run out there.

The U.S. Navy has always lost money on its contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to provide Atka monthly tug service from Adak. It's a sore point with them and with the Atkans who find the Navy screening all their visitors as security risks to protect the military base.

However, the Aleut Corporation is about to undertake a study of the transportation situation and hopes an extension of the State Ferry System might be a solution.

The corporation is also working on possibilities to bring better communication, better housing and electricity to the island. And Atkans, themselves, are negotiating with several interested fish companies in the hopes of attracting a cannery or freezer plant.

Outsiders, who don't understand Atkans' love for their island, claim the only solution is for villagers to relocate. Other Aleut village corporations have been trying to lure Atkans to move in with them and swell their rolls for Land Claims, but the Atkans have been stubborn about leaving home ground.

A new lure is a fish processing plant built in Adak on ground leased recently by the U.S. Navy to a group of businessmen which includes Adak's former base commander.

"Last year he suggested that the Atkans move the village to Finger Bay (Adak) to work for him," reports Mike Snigaroff, village president.

"But we've held out through some pretty tough times and we're not leaving now.

"We gotta win! We just can't lose!"