

# APIA seeks Aleuts relocated during war

by Anna Pickett

for the Tundra Times

The long awaited World War II reparations have finally arrived, and many Aleuts who were relocated from the Aleutian Chain and Pribilof Islands are now receiving their restitution monies.

## Aleut Reparations

It all started between Dec. 7, 1941, and Sept. 2, 1945 when the Japanese invaded the Aleutian Islands. The U.S. military rushed to Alaska's rescue, moving Aleut families from their homes, saying it was for their own safety. These families lived in Atka, Nikolski, Attu, Unalaska, St. Paul and St. George.

They were placed on ships and taken away with nothing but the clothes on their backs and what little they could carry in their arms. They were ordered to leave, go places they had never been and relinquish their belongings and homes to the military. The people were relocated to places in Southeastern Alaska, such as Funder Bay, Angoon, Admiralty Island and Barnett Inlet.

During this period, the homes were used to house soldiers and for planning their various strategies against the Japanese. Little care from the military left the homes not only without maintenance, but misused and abused.

Personal items were stolen by soldiers. Churches were used and desecrated. When World War II ended and the Aleuts were allowed to return home, there was little or nothing left. Their homes and churches had been damaged or destroyed.

Not only did the U.S. military seize

homes, but they also seized the entire island of Attu. This island received the most damage from the battles waged there. Decades later, Sen. Ted Stevens, R-Alaska, introduced a bill to clean up after the military. These monies were to remove all debris, including mortar remains and thousands of various undetonated bombs. There are still sounds of the raging war as some of these abandoned bombs explode.

Following that, there was a general consensus among Aleut leaders leading to restitution for the displaced Aleuts to repay them for personal loss and emotional damage. On Aug. 10, 1988, such a bill was passed.

This law, called the "Civil Liberties Act" provides the Aleut people with \$15.3 million for Fiscal Year 1990.

The 420 to 450 Aleuts who have actually been displaced and the children born during this period will receive \$12,000 each. The Aleut Corp. will receive \$10 million for the island of Attu, which the corporation was not

able to claim as part of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and the Aleutian/Pribilof Islands Association received \$300,000 for the administration and distribution of the monies.

The \$15.3 million is just part of \$27 million that has been approved by the U.S. government as part of the reparations. The remaining \$11.7 million will be distributed in the following years.

Trustees of the six villages will receive \$1.4 million of that money to restore the damaged churches. One church in Atka was burned. Church icons that have been damaged or destroyed will be replaced or repaired.

Other funds are planned for scholarships; benefit of the elderly, disabled or seriously ill persons; preservation of the Aleut cultural heritage and historical records; improvement of community centers; and other purposes to improve the condition of Aleut life.

APIA has been designated to assist in verifying who the eligible Aleuts are. Two employees, Flore Lekanof

and Cora Steadman, are spearheading the verification process, under the supervision of Dimitri Philemonof, executive director of APIA. They will check names against ships' manifests. These logs are vital in determining who was actually relocated.

Unfortunately, Unalaska's relocation efforts did not include keeping a manifest. Citizens who were relocated from Unalaska are required to provide two affidavits from unrelated people and birth certificates.

One of the problems APIA is running into are the various name changes. Many have been married since the relocation, which is not so difficult. It's the changes given to the Aleuts' names because soldiers were unable to pronounce or spell the Russian and Aleut names that cause the most confusion.

Once the verifications have been completed by the local village councils and a panel of Aleuts, the applications for restitution monies are sent to the Bureau of Indian Affairs Juneau office for final verification and issuance of the appropriate checks.

About 350 Aleuts have been located and are under consideration for the funds. The rest of the people are still being sought with advertising announcements spread across the United States via the International Red Cross, local papers and radio stations, as well as the Cable News Network national News.

There is no deadline to apply, however, there may be a cut-off point if no response is heard over an extended period of time.

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