

The Greed for Land

The embattled old man, Chief Andrew Isaac of Tanacross, continues to fight for the Indians in his area. The old chief is attempting to hold on to the land of his people against odds that seem at the moment too great for him to handle alone.

Although Chief Isaac is an effective old fighter, one serious handicap has been his lack of Western education. Outside of this, he is a man of great knowledge of the land of his forefathers and the land of which he is most intimate. As do his peers and fellow chiefs in Alaska, he knows every landmark whether it be a creek, a bend of the river, crags of mountains and any distinguishing mark of the country he knows.

Chief Isaac knows why villages were established in certain places. They were put there for the greatest convenience of their inhabitants—a knowledge that always seemed to have met with the greatest respect by outsiders. This precise knowledge has also invited covetousness for lands.

Those who covet native lands have a way of getting around the Indians, Aleuts and Eskimos. Although they have respect for such men as Chief Isaac who, although speaking in broken language can make eloquent speeches in defense of his people, they also know he lacks knowledge of Western education type legal matters.

Chief Isaac is not alone who has suffered because of the lack of Western education. There are many others like him throughout Alaska, and because they have had no proper education, they have been taken advantage of. This is the "Achilles Heel" for those who covet the lands of Alaska's native people. The covetous people, groups or agencies, both state and federal, have access to legal staffs and can cause legalistic mumbo-jumbo drawn up even an educated person would have trouble understanding let alone the great mass of native people. These legalistic papers are often used as first steps toward acquiring the accustomed land areas that have been historically used by the original Alaskans.

Although it is questionable, the state is in the process of acquiring land around Tanacross including the soil on which Mansfield Village, a few miles from Tanacross, is located. All this even when regulations declare that NO selections of lands will be made in those areas used by Indians. And, too, the Tanacross area Indians laid claims to their lands back in November 30, 1950 and submitted it to the Bureau of Land Management. This claim is apparently being ignored although it had been appealed and reasserted in 1964. The 1950 claim, however, had been rejected by the BLM but no official action on the land assertion has been made by the Department of the Interior after it received it sometime between 1959 and 1962.

Individual villages, oftentimes, have had trouble getting proper attention on such things as having their claims processed, or have had them processed after an unduly long time. They are often powerless to have their demands acted on because they are pretty much alone. Such things, perhaps, could be funnelled through the Alaska Federation of Natives. The federation, through a properly authorized person, can

help to process the land matters of the villages therefore, very likely, expediting them.

Men, such as Chief Andrew Isaac and his people, need the assistance of the AFN or their regional organization. Chief Isaac, although a great old fighter, needs backing.