

NICK'S CONNECTION TO JAPAN

When I was in Japan, every morning I would see my picture on TV and in the newspaper...

—Nick Golodoff

I CALL THE AUTHOR "SAM." He came to Atka three or four times. He sent me that picture. The last time Sam came, they took me back to Japan. I don't know the name of the soldier whose back I was on in the picture. I met him in Japan in Sapporo when I went in 1995. A year later the soldier died. The people who brought me to Japan brought the soldier to Sapporo. He didn't speak English but had a translator. The only reason the soldier was alive was because before the battle of Attu he was captured in China and became a POW. He was a POW until the war ended.

The picture shows me as a kid and the soldier has me on his back. We weren't close friends. The picture came out in Japan somehow and stories were created about the photo. I didn't know the picture was even taken until Sam came to Atka. They knew it was me because I was the only kid that age on Attu. Somehow they knew my name. When I was in Japan, every morning I would see my picture on TV and in the newspaper, so I went down to the front desk at the hotel and they cut out the article for me. I really wanted to know what it said.

Commentary

A Japanese author named Masami Sugiyama has written a book about Nick and the other Attuans, published in Japan in 1987. The English title on the cover is “Meetings between Aleutian and Japanese People,” although the book has also been called in English, “On the Trail of the Picture.” The author was inspired by a picture he saw of Nick Golodoff, then six years old, riding on the back of a Japanese soldier. The picture was taken in 1942 by Kiri Sugiyama (no relationship to Masami Sugiyama), a military photographer who accompanied the Japanese soldiers on Attu. In the early 1980s, to research his book, Masami Sugiyama traveled to Atka to meet surviving Attuans who still lived there. He also went to Otaru, on Hokkaido Island, to visit the places the Attuans had stayed and to look for the Japanese people who had known them in those days. Upon meeting Masami in Atka, Nick Golodoff called him “Sam” because it was easier to pronounce than his full name. When Nick went back to Japan in 1995, he met Sam in Tokyo.

Nick was invited in 1995 to go to Japan to attend a conference on wartime compensation. All his travel expenses were paid so that he could speak at the conference on behalf of the Attuans. A number of newspapers and TV stations ran stories about Nick, and he still has some of the clippings about his visit to Japan. After his trip, he received calls and letters from all over the world. While he was in Japan, Nick visited the places he and the other Attuans had stayed in Otaru. He met with the doctor who had treated the Attuans, who although quite elderly was still working. Nick asked for the medical records from his father’s stay in the infirmary, and subsequent death, but was told that giving them to him would be against the law.

Sylvia Kobayachi, from Anchorage, came with Nick to Japan and acted as his translator. Both she and her husband had been in Japanese-American internment camps in the United States during World War II. In Japan, some people asked Nick if Mrs. Kobayachi was his wife!

While in Japan, Nick also visited the soldier who had carried him on his back in Attu when Nick was a little boy. He met the soldier, Mr. Kamani, and his wife in Tokyo. Since 1995, the soldier has passed away.

Masami Sugiyama does not wish his book to be quoted, because it has been misquoted and plagiarized in the past. However, Hiroko Harada, a professor of Japanese at the University of Alaska Anchorage, has written a summary in English of parts of the book. It contains valuable information about the Attuans' stay in Japan from the perspective of the Japanese policemen, doctors and nurses who had contact with them. Sugiyama also visited both places where the Attuans had stayed in Otaru, the railroad dormitory on Wakatake-cho and the Shinto priests' quarters on Shimizu-cho. During his 1995 trip to Japan, Nick was able to visit the house on Wakatake-cho, but the house on Shimizu-cho and the clay mine where the Attuans had worked were both gone.

Here are some of the people Masami Sugiyama interviewed in Japan:

- Takeshiro Shikanai – police officer who lived with the Attuans and was their friend. He spoke the Tsugaru dialect and taught Japanese to Elizabeth Prossoff. When the Attuans were released, Shikanai accompanied them as far as Atsuki. Shikanai's wife was Toki Shikanai, who died in 1978. Takeshiro Shikanai had already died when Nick visited in 1995.
- Toshikatsu Endo – higher-ranking police officer who arrived at the Otaru Police Station later in the war. He may be the officer "E," mentioned by Henry Stewart, who was more abusive in his dealings with the Attuans and hit Angelina Hodikoff in the leg with a rock because she would not do housework or laundry at the house.
- Ms. Moto – a nurse who remembered Attuans hospitalized at the Otaru Tuberculosis Clinic, especially a woman named "Arsa" and a two-year-old named Elizabeth.
- Ms. Kusakabe – a nurse at the tuberculosis clinic. Innokenty Golodoff remembered her as "Kasha-san" and called her his girlfriend.
- Ken Hattori – a linguist teaching at Hokkaido Imperial University, who visited the Attuans in summer 1943 and researched their language.



Photos 45 & 46. Nick on soldier Kamani's back; soldier on Nick's back. (Source: Nick Golodoff)

- Dr. Ishibashi – director of the Ishibashi Hospital, who treated one Attuan who was infected with diphtheria.
- Dr. Minoru Yamauchi – treated the Attuans at the Otaru Tuberculosis Clinic. He remembered Mike Lokanin very well and was friends with him.
- Dr. Noguchi – director of the Otaru Tuberculosis Clinic.
- Yuriko Tanaka – head nurse at the Otaru Tuberculosis Clinic.