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**Introduction**

The Aleuts are an Alaska Native people that historically inhabited a few small villages in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands. During World War II the villagers were evacuated and interned at six locations in southeast Alaska, where they endured considerable hardship (the villagers of Attu Island were interned by the enemy in Japan, where they suffered even more hardship). The experience of the Aleut relocation during World War II has been told by Kirtland and Coffin (1981), Kohlhoff (1995), and others based on archival research and oral history. This volume focuses instead on the places, using archival material and oral history to supplement onsite observation and photography at each of the six relocation camp sites.

### Alaska at War

On December 7, 1941, airplanes from Japanese Imperial Navy aircraft carriers attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, forcing the nation into a war that would last almost four years and affect Alaska deeply. Alaska was still a territory administered by a federal governor, and its sparse population and vast spaces created challenges for military planners. Though Navy submarine and seaplane bases had

been authorized at Sitka, Kodiak, and Unalaska in 1939 (Morison 1982:30-34), Alaska was poorly prepared to defend itself against Japanese attack.

On June 3 and 4, 1942, Japanese fighter planes and bombers attacked the U.S. Naval base at Dutch Harbor, on Unalaska Island in Alaska's Aleutian Island chain (Cloe 1991:109-135; Thompson 1987:29). The engagement coincided with an epic and decisive four-day naval air battle between U.S. and Japanese carrier-based planes near the U.S. naval base at Midway Island that resulted in the sinking of all four Japanese aircraft carriers and one U.S. aircraft carrier (Cloe 1991:140-143). Japanese Navy and Army troops on June 7 and 8 invaded the far Aleutian islands of Kiska – where the personnel of a U.S. Navy weather station were captured (Rearden 1986:18-20; Takahashi 1995:37), and Attu – whose Native villagers were detained and eventually sent to Japan for the remainder of the war (Figure 1). The seaplane tender *Casco* arrived at the Aleutian island of Atka on June 10 to service PBVs – the Navy's primary amphibious aircraft – assigned to strafe and bomb the growing Japanese positions (Cloe 1991:159). When a Japanese observation plane found the source of

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#### Figure 1.

*Attu villagers were detained by enemy forces and sent to Japan for the duration of the war. After war's end, they were shipped roundabout to Alaska and were not allowed to return to their village. Some Attu villagers resettled at Atka village.*





*I was born on Agattu Island on December 19, 1935...When Japanese came [to Attu], we went to church in the morning, and after that was nice calm day. No wind. We can hear all kinds of noise in next bay. Engines. And then maybe three, four young teenagers went up the hill to take a look and see what was going on. We were waiting for them to come back down, and then a plane flew over, real low. It was a Japanese plane. Me, I didn't know it was Japanese or not, but it was very low. I could see his face when he went by. I was on my way down to the beach because I liked the ocean water all of the time...On the way down, this one person, Alec Prosoff – I followed him down to the beach, and he walked the beach towards the church and by this time we got closer to the church we hear some noises. Different language spoken. We got by the church and we heard some shooting and we started running. Alec was running so I thought he was trying to get away from me so I ran after him...He was running to the house, and while we're running I could see mud flying in front of me. They were shooting at Alec but the bullets needed only one more feet to reach Alec but they didn't. I could see mud popping up in front of me. I stop and look and then when Alec stopped he looked right where bullets were coming from and he started running again. So I kept running after him until he got to house and went under the house...Early in the morning an American plane goes by, early, early in the morning, and then I hear a lot of shooting. It happened a couple times....He comes in on the water and comes up and go over. I think he was taking pictures. And then I can hear a lot of shooting and Japanese running all over the place. When I look out my window one morning a Japanese – I don't know where he was sleeping, but – he didn't have no pants on! He was running for his foxhole. I remember he had a hole back of my house there. I saw him jump in there....And then the Japanese left Attu and they took us with them...in the cargo hold.*

Nick L. Golodoff, talking with Charles M. Mobley at Atka, April 17, 2005, University of Alaska H2005-05

their torment, enemy planes bombed and strafed the hastily evacuated Native village at Atka (Oliver 1988:xvii-xviii), cratering the hillside (Mobley 2006:29-30). In one week Alaska was plunged into war.

### Evacuation

The U.S. military knew that confronting the enemy in the Aleutians would risk civilian – particularly Native – lives, but the responsibilities for civil authority were not clear. Civilian evacuation had been discussed among various agencies for months (Kirtland and Coffin 1981:9-12). Villagers on St. Paul and St. George Islands in the Pribilof Islands were clearly the responsibility of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as they had been for decades; the superintendents for the federal government's exclusive franchise to harvest pelts from the northern fur seals that birthed their pups on the islands' beaches wielded a very strong hand in the lives of the Pribilof Islanders – including whether they and their families were allowed to stay on the islands. Federal exposure to other Aleut villages was largely through the territorial school system – hardly



**Figure 2.**

The U.S. Army Transport (USAT) *Delarof*, here anchored off the Pribilof Islands in May of 1943, carried St. George, St. Paul, and Atka villagers to Admiralty Island in southeast Alaska.

Alaska State Library Evan Hill collection PCA343-468

the authority to demand that villagers leave their homes. By May of 1942, however, military opinion publicly favored the idea that civilians were to be evacuated if the Japanese threatened Alaska.

Ultimately the decision to evacuate Aleut villages was forced amid chaotic circumstances. By June 12 of 1942 the enemy had twice attacked U.S. bases at Dutch Harbor by air, they were building naval and air bases on Kiska and Attu Islands in the Aleutian chain, they'd captured a U.S. Navy weather station team at Kiska and detained the villagers of Attu, and they'd just menaced the Native village of Atka. The Navy seaplane tenders USS *Gillis* and USS *Hulbert* were in Nazan Bay off Atka on the evening of June 12 when they received orders issued by Commanding General Simon B. Buckner to remove the villagers and burn the village. The U.S. military viewed the buildings as a potential asset to the enemy's advance.

The orders were carried out almost immediately, while villagers were mostly scattered at distant fish camps for safety from Japanese air attack, so that when the Natives reassembled they had almost no personal possessions (Kirtland and Coffin 1981:12-13). They were shortly removed to the village of Nikolski by the U.S. Army Transport (USAT) *Delarof* (Figure 2).

At St. Paul on the morning of June 14, 1942, the USFWS agent dutifully logged three aircraft sightings, the arrival of a small U.S. Navy boat, and the brief visit of the U.S. Coast Guard cutter *Onandaga*. Later that day orders were received "to evacuate the entire population of St. Paul Island," and on June 15 the *Delarof* arrived to execute that mission (Figures 2-3). On June 16 the vessel left the Pribilof Islands with the communities of St. George and St. Paul, along with one suitcase per person, the destination being...unknown (Figure 4). Fearing

*In 1942, I was age 17 years old...after the church I went out to visit. One gunshot was shot. I took my baby and went out. The one shot started and then all of the shooting. It surrounded the village. One girl, a lady sat beside me and I was holding my child. The lady's leg was shot. The bullet did not touch me, it just tore my clothes and they [Japanese military] took all of the people to the school ground and took the American flag down and burned it up and they put the other flag up.*

Parascovia Wright, Attu, in 1981 testimony

*Atka was bombed. There are bomb holes still there existing there from the war. There is one right behind my house. Five places were bombed at Atka.*

George Kudrin, Atka, in 1981 testimony

*I was only eight years old when they bombed Atka. We were in camp. When everybody left, we did not know – about five or six families were left behind. After two or three days, we seen five Japanese planes bomb Atka. After two days, I think, two American planes came to get us. We were the first ones to get to Dutch Harbor.*

Vera Snigaroff, Atka, in 1981 testimony

*They said we got to Dutch Harbor just in time, that the Jap submarine was following the transport [USAT Delarof]. We got there just in time and closed the [antisubmarine] gates.*

Martha Krukoff, St. Paul, in 1981 testimony

his logbook could aid the enemy if it fell into the wrong hands, the USFWS agent began writing his daily entries in shorthand as the exodus through the war zone began.

The *Delarof* stopped briefly at Unalaska to take on the residents of Atka, who had been forwarded there from

Nikolski. Before the ship was midway through its voyage, an agreement was reached with the owner of a cannery in southeast Alaska to house the St. George and St. Paul Natives there. On June 24, 1942, the villagers of St. Paul and St. George disembarked at Admiralty Island's Funter Bay, where they were to spend most of World War II. After the hold was cleared of the Pribilof villagers and their baggage, the *Delarof* departed Funter Bay that same day and motored south along the west side of Admiralty Island to the derelict herring plant at Killisnoo, near the Tlingit village of Angoon. There they left the Natives from Atka.

The remaining Aleut villages were evacuated in a more orderly fashion, after military orders were received at the Dutch Harbor naval base to do so on June 29. The villagers of Nikolski, Akutan, Kashega, Biorka, and Makushin, totaling 160 Aleuts, were transported to the Wrangell Institute in southeast Alaska by the Alaska Steamship Company's SS *Columbia* and disembarked on July 13, 1942 (Kirtland and Coffin 1981:33-34). Aleut residents at Unalaska boarded the Alaska Steamship Company's SS *Alaska* and arrived at the Wrangell Institute on



July 26, 1942. In late August the smaller village communities were forwarded to the Ward Lake CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) camp north of Ketchikan, while the Unalaskans were sent to the Burnett Inlet cannery about 40 miles southwest of Wrangell (Figure 4). The Wrangell Institute resumed its normal school function, and the Aleuts settled into their makeshift quarters at five sites scattered across southeast Alaska.

### **Southeast Alaska and the Internment**

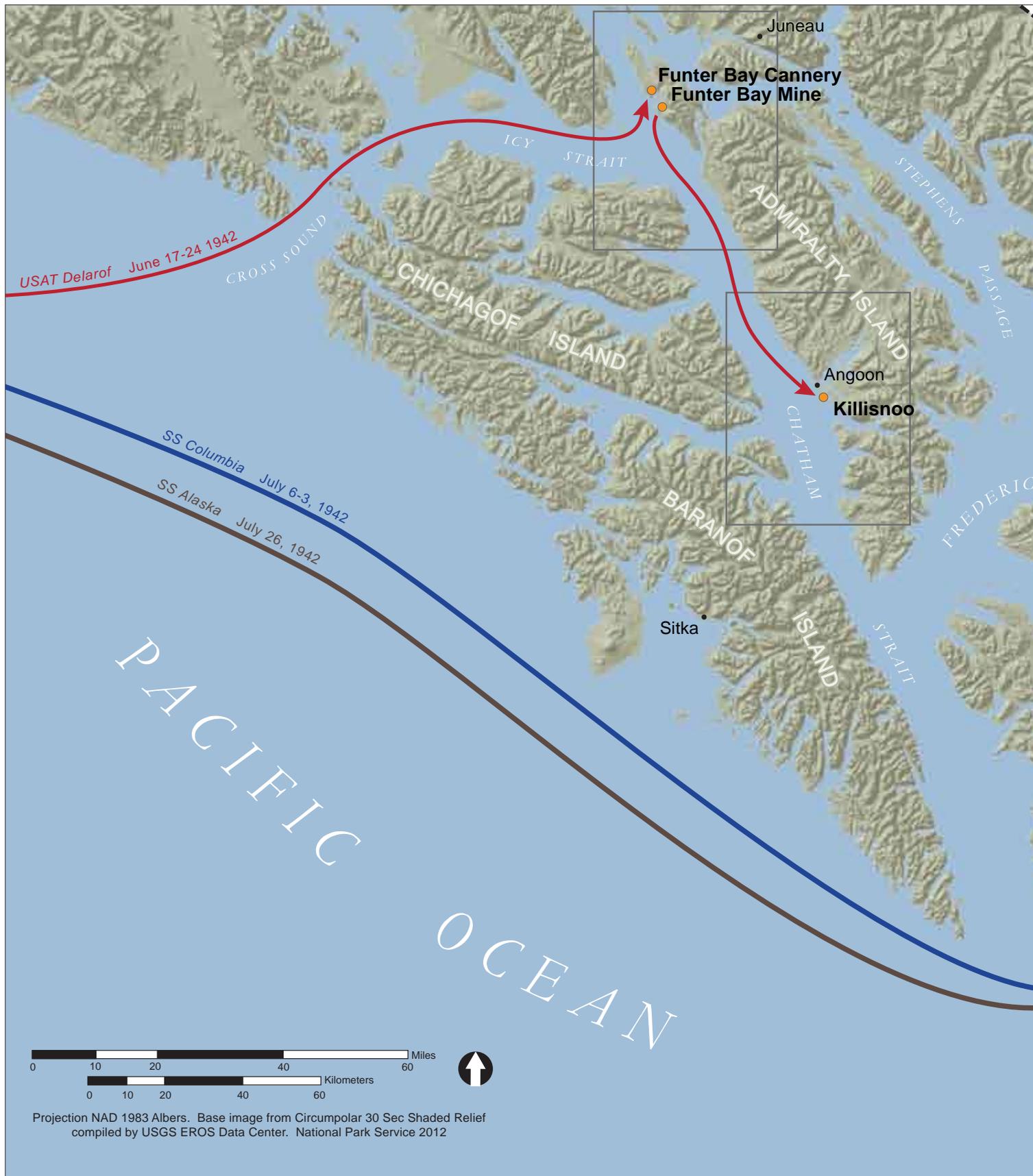
Southeast Alaska in mid-1942 was a committed participant in Alaska's war preparations. The Coast Guard station at Ketchikan was turned over to the Navy and became a busy base for ships

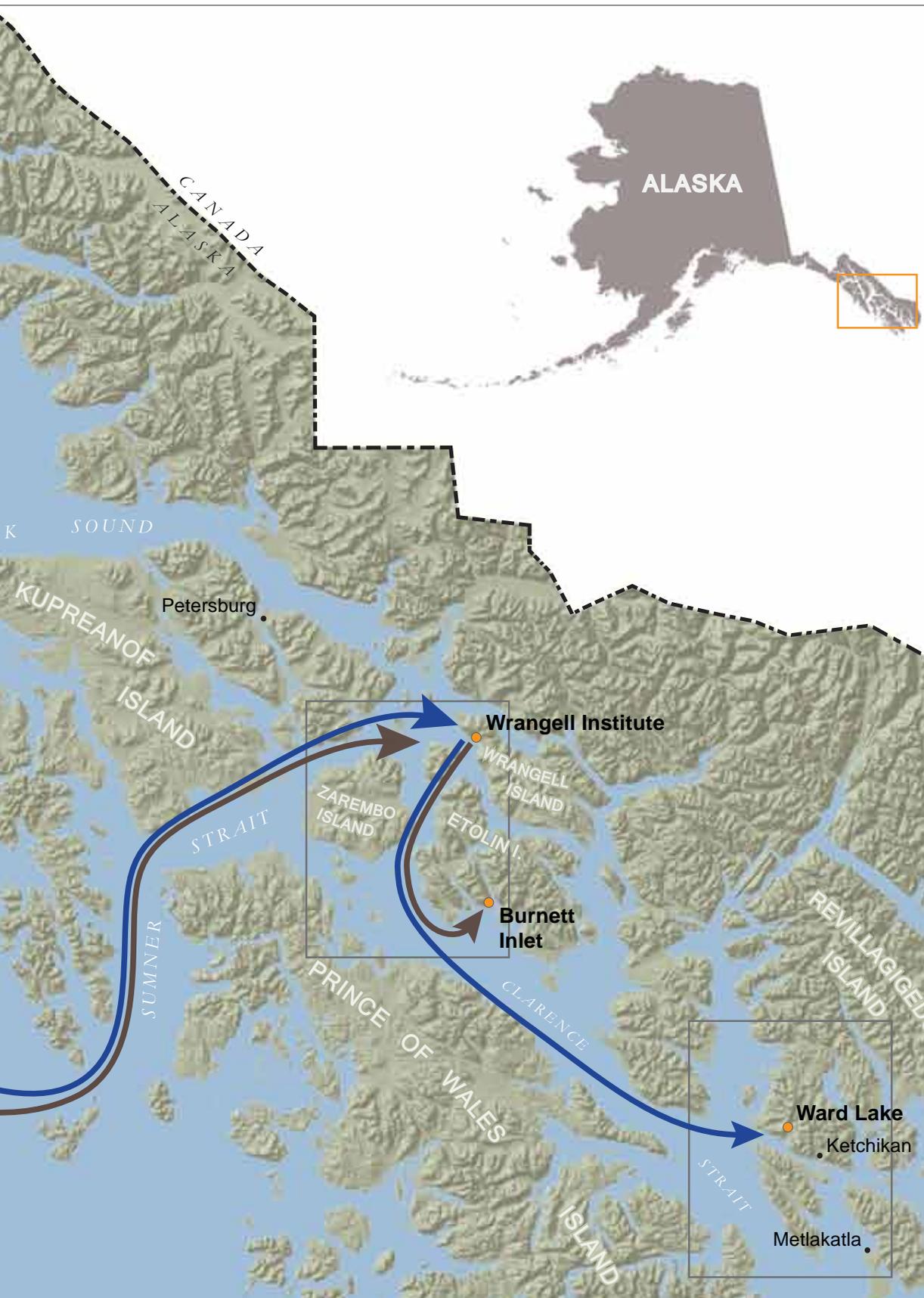
going between the ports of California and Washington to Army or Navy bases at Sitka, Seward, Whittier, Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, and beyond (Mobley 1995:14-21; Leahy 1995:127). Alaska's 60-year old fishing industry was in a slump in the 1930s, but canned food was needed for the war effort, so commercial salmon fishing continued (King 1995:212). Similarly, commercial logging in southeast Alaska, which had primarily supported regional sawmills and local construction, saw a slowdown due to shifting priorities and labor shortages, with a new interest in select Sitka spruce for manufacture of military aircraft (Rakestraw 1981; Sisk 2007:4). Mining, which had contributed considerably to the economy of southeast Alaska in the

**Figure 3.** Pribilof villagers, here lining the railing of the USAT *Delarof* on the day of their departure (June 15, 1942), were evacuated with only a few hours notice and no idea of their ultimate destination.

National Archives 80 - G206194

WORLD WAR II ALEUT RELOCATION CAMPS IN SOUTHEAST ALASKA





**Figure 4.** Aleuts were evacuated by village and sent to relocation camps in southeast Alaska. Pribilof Islanders went to Funter Bay – St. Paul to a defunct cannery, and St. George to an unused gold mine. Villagers from Atka were housed at the derelict herring factory at Killisnoo, on Admiralty Island south of Funter Bay near the Tlingit village of Angoon. The remaining Aleut communities were temporarily housed in tents at the Wrangell Institute; subsequently Unalaskans were moved into an old burned cannery at Burnett Inlet while people from the smaller villagers were housed at the former CCC camp at Ward Lake, near Ketchikan.

five decades before the war, was curtailed by decree of the federal government as an unnecessary wartime endeavor (Lesly 2002:26). The local citizenry was keenly aware of Alaska's wartime status and experienced the effort through many restrictions on daily life (especially in 1942 and 1943 when Aleutian combat was ongoing). Outgoing mail was censored, evening activities were hidden behind dark curtains as blackouts were enforced, possession of a camera near military installations was prohibited, fuel and other goods were rationed, fishing boats were requisitioned for Navy use, and men were encouraged to register for military service.

Against this backdrop, with the front pages of Juneau, Wrangell, Sitka, and Ketchikan newspapers reporting news of fighting in the Aleutians as well as the ongoing war in Europe, the arrival of Aleut refugees warranted short mention. The five-week Aleut encampment at Wrangell Institute was newsworthy in Wrangell at the time, and the villagers at the Ward Lake CCC camp near Ketchikan were written about regularly in the local newspaper after sanitation and other issues came to the attention of city officials. In contrast, the camps at Burnett Inlet, Killisnoo, and Funter Bay were more removed from the scrutiny of southeast Alaska's hometown journalists. While Aleuts struggled to survive in their new quarters

(some adjusting by moving and assimilating into the existing workforce), the men and women of southeast Alaska were already absorbed in their own wartime experience and saw the new arrivals as just one of many wartime changes. Though an entire indigenous Alaska culture was uprooted from its ancestral home and relocated for three years in a foreign environment, the event left little impression on most local residents, and it took 25 years for history to take note of the villagers' sacrifice (Kirtland and Coffin 1981). The places that Aleuts spent those three years had a long history before

**INDIANS HAVE BEEN EVACUATED  
FROM FAR NORTH**

*Five hundred and thirty-five Aleut Indians have arrived safely in southeast Alaska from the Pribilof Islands and Atka, it has been learned in Juneau from reliable sources. They were transported in eight days time from the western war area of the Territory and arrived in the Chatham Straits district without possessions excepting the clothing they wore.*

*The 450 natives evacuated from the Pribilofs are to be quartered at an unused cannery building at Funter Bay. There are empty houses and a dormitory for men at this locality. Eighty-five Atka people have taken living quarters at an abandoned saltery at Killisnoo.*

The Alaska Press (Juneau), Friday, June 26, 1942, p. 8

the war, and after the war their role in the evacuation was little recognized. According to Karey Cooperrider, a Funter Bay resident since the early 1970s, the local cannery's and mine's roles in the Aleut's WWII experience were not common knowledge in the community until Aleuts began visiting in the 1990s to care for the cemetery.

### Current Investigation

This volume is the product of a cooperative agreement (H9922030015) between the National Park Service (NPS) and Aleutian Pribilof Heritage Group (APHG). NPS provided technical guidance to APHG, who in turn contracted Charles M. Mobley & Associates to conduct the investigation. Jake Lestenkof was the APHG contact, while Bruce Greenwood, Janis Kozlowski, and Becky Saleeby administered the project for NPS. The research involved archival research, oral history, and field reconnaissance to assemble use histories for each of the six Aleut internment sites, and in particular to document their current integrity and potential significance collectively as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). The focus was on each site's entire history, though the Aleut internment is the theme that binds the six properties. Currently the people of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands refer to themselves using the traditional name "Unangan;" this volume uses the

*For myself, I did not take anything except I took apart my five horse Johnson and put every part I can into one suitcase, except for the bracket and shaft was tied out on the outside of a suitcase as I would make more use out of my motor than clothing.*

Father Michael Lestenkof, St. Paul priest, in 1981 testimony

term Aleut in keeping with the historical context.

The field reconnaissance involved brief visits to each of the six sites. Archaeologists Becky Saleeby and Charles M. Mobley spent a whirlwind six days traveling from Anchorage to southeast Alaska and on to five individual sites, logging six jet flights and six small plane flights in the process. The trip began on July 7, 2008, with a flight from Anchorage to Juneau, then another from Juneau to Angoon, with lodging in Angoon that night. The two were onsite at Killisnoo that evening and the next day, and conducted two taped interviews before returning to Juneau on the evening of July 8. On July 9 Mobley and Saleeby flew to Wrangell, visited the archives of the Wrangell Museum, photographed the site of the Wrangell Institute, and conducted one taped interview. The following day local historian Patricia Roppel accompanied the team on a flight to the west side of Etolin Island to investigate the cannery site at Burnett Inlet (Figure 5), then the two archaeologists returned to Juneau that night. On July 11 Mobley and Saleeby

**Figure 5.**

*Local historian Patricia Roppel joined NPS archaeologist Becky Saleeby and Charles M. Mobley to document the Burnett Inlet cannery.*



flew from Juneau to Funter Bay, where they stayed two days. While at Funter Bay they visited the cannery in the company of lodge-owners Joe Giefer and Karey Cooperrider (Figure 6), visited the mine in the company of long-time caretaker Sam Pekovich, and collected oral history information. That fieldwork was completed upon returning to Anchorage the evening of July 12. The Ward Lake CCC camp site was not documented until three years later, in 2011, by a team consisting of Charles M. Mobley and NPS anthropologist Rachel Mason. Mobley and Mason flew to Ketchikan on May 3, photographed the Ward Lake property and conducted one interview the following day, and Mobley returned to Anchorage on May 5.

Methods used in field observation were organic to the work at hand. Given the brief exposure to each property, photography was paramount in obtaining the most information about site integrity in a short amount of time. Saleeby and Mobley each kept notebooks and independently photographed site features. Measurements in the field and in this volume are in English units, since that system was used by the site inhabitants. Existing plans for some sites were annotated in the field, and several sketch maps were drawn. Extremely helpful were photocopies of archival photographs that were taken into the field. GPS coordinates were noted for selected features. At the Wrangell Institute time was so short that the taxi was kept waiting during the reconnaissance.

A comprehensive oral history of the WW II Aleut internment experience was beyond the scope of this effort. Notes were taken on conversations, and four interviews pertaining to specific site histories were audiotaped. Each contributor signed a release form so that the original audiotape could be filed for public use at the University of Alaska's oral history archives at Rasmuson Library in Fairbanks. At Angoon an interview was recorded with elder Frank Sharp discussing Killisnoo and Angoon history (H2008-17). Also recorded was an interview with Richard Powers (H2008-16), the host and owner of Whaler's Cove Lodge –



**Figure 6.** Long-time Funter Bay residents Joe Giefer and Karey Cooperrider (left) were interviewed by Charles M. Mobley (right) about recent Funter Bay cannery history.

the commercial facility that now occupies half of the Killisnoo site. In Wrangell an interview (H2008-18) was recorded with Richard and Wilma Stokes, who both witnessed the Aleut's Wrangell Institute experience during World War II. At Funter Bay residents Joe Giefer and Karey Cooper- rider were recorded discussing the recent history of Funter Bay (H2008-19). These taped interviews were augmented with notes made during conversations with others, such as Andrew Pekovich and his brother Sam Pekovich (Figure 7), who guided Mobley and Saleeby around the remains of the Funter Bay mine that has been in their family for over 75 years. Notes were also made on several conversations with Killisnoo owner Tom Aubertine. Other oral history material – some published and some collected by Charles M. Mobley in decades past – has been consulted to help

round-out the presentation for the six sites. Particularly useful are the transcripts of oral testimony made by camp survivors before the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians in 1981.

As with oral history, a comprehensive archival investigation into the WW II Aleut internment experience was beyond the scope of this investigation. Archival information was sought on the evolution of each site, from its origins as – for example – a cannery, to its current land use. Old photographs were selected from collections at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, Alaska State Library, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, University of Alaska-Anchorage, the Wrangell Museum, the Ketchikan Museum, the National Archives Alaska Pacific Region in Anchorage, and the Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association in Anchorage.

**Figure 7.**

*Funter Bay mine caretaker Sam Pekovich (right), here talking with Joe Giefer and Becky Saleeby, guided the 2008 investigation at the site and contributed oral history information.*



The goal of the project was to describe the six World War II Aleut relocation camps in southeast Alaska, review their historical significance as a group, and evaluate whether they have enough physical integrity to be nominated together as a National Historic Landmark (NHL). A related project involving NPS support focuses on village sites (Kashega, Makushin, Biorka) to which villagers were not allowed to return after the war (Mason 2011). A third related volume being prepared with NPS assistance is “Attu Boy” – a memoir by Attu-born Nick Golodoff.

### **Previous Investigations**

The six southeast Alaska properties figuring in the history of the Aleut World War II internment are the Funter Bay cannery, Funter Bay mine, Killisnoo

herring reduction plant, Wrangell Institute, Burnett Inlet cannery, and Ward Lake CCC camp. All but the Wrangell Institute have been subjected to prior cultural resource investigation. Most have had an Alaska Heritage Resource Survey (AHRS) number assigned to them in the statewide inventory maintained by the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology.

A group of Pribilof Islanders and other citizens in 2001 nominated the Funter Bay cannery and mine to the National Register of Historic Places as an historic district (Zacharof 2002). Early the following year the Alaska Historical Commission determined the two properties historically significant at the national level through their association with the themes of military and government, as well as intellectual

and social institutions, with a period of significance of 1942-1944. In a May 8, 2002, letter to the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places, the Alaska State Historic Preservation Officer or SHPO (Judith Bittner) summarized the Historical Commission's determination that "the Pribilof Aleut Internment Historic District is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under criterion A, with special criteria consideration D adequately addressed," meaning that the two sites are "associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history" (U.S. Department of the Interior 1991:37), and that the usual policy of excluding cemeteries from National Register designation was considered. Objections to the National Register listing were received from local property owners Sam Pekovich and Delbert Carnes, and the two properties have not yet been entered into the National Register of Historic Places. Pribilof community members visited Funter Bay in 1999 and 2000 to maintain the cemetery and help elders obtain closure on that part of their lives, and some fieldwork was done then to prepare the National Register nomination. Much of the research for the nomination consisted of oral history interviews, so the nomination form itself is a primary document (Zacharof 2002).

Killisnoo was the subject of archival and oral history investigation in an anthropological study of Angoon by Frederica de Laguna (1960:168-175). In 1972 U.S. Forest Service (USFS), prepared a National Register nomination form for Killisnoo, but no determination of eligibility was made. Sealaska Corporation (1975:604-605) briefly described the property as part of the cemetery and village site survey used to select land under Section 14(h)(1) of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971. Small USFS-sponsored cultural re-

*Nobody ever talked about it [Aleut relocation to Funter Bay]. We owned this property for several years [early 1970s] before we even knew there was a cemetery behind Harold and Mary's [Hargrave] house. So no, it was not talked about at all.*

Karey Cooperrider

source surveys have found prehistoric remains elsewhere along the shores of Killisnoo Harbor (Fields and Davidson 1979; Moss 1981). None of these studies resulted in a comprehensive cultural resource characterization or site plan for Killisnoo.

Despite the Wrangell Institute's history as one of Alaska's premier Native boarding schools for over 40 years, the site has never received any cultural resource attention.

USFS archaeologist David Plaskett briefly recorded the Burnett Inlet

cannery on Etolin Island in 1977. Between 1999 and 2003 USFS archaeologists visited the site three times and prepared a site map (Smith 2003).

The Ward Lake vicinity north of Ketchikan is on land managed by the USFS and has been subjected to over a dozen small cultural resource investigations by agency archaeologists John Autrey and Ralph Lively in the 1980s and 1990s. Projects involving the Ward Lake CCC camp area used for Aleut housing during World War II have been summarized by Stanford (2006).

### **Organization of this Volume**

Following this Introduction is a chapter for each of the six southeast Alaska sites occupied by Aleut communities during World War II. Each chapter is structured similarly and examines the history of the particular property from its known origins through 2008 (2011 in the case of Ward Lake).

Of particular interest are the sites' circumstances during the WW II Aleut internment, but each site is also characterized according to its pre-war and post-war history. Anecdotes relevant to the research are included along with text and illustrations to convey the setting as well as the experience. The intent was to use existing archival, oral history, and onsite information, add more of one or the other as needed, and arrive at balanced characterizations of each of the six Aleut relocation sites. The Funter Bay cannery is the first site described and has an expanded context for the World War II period that largely applies to the other site chapters as well. A final chapter summarizes the findings and evaluates the properties' significance and physical integrity with respect to National Historic Landmark eligibility. The volume concludes with an Afterword and Bibliography.