# *LIFE AS A JAPANESE P.O.W.*

Many of the Attu people were sick. Many of the Attu people were dying. About half of them died. I am not sure exactly what happened but they were dying one by one.

—Nick Golodoff

*I guessed that the Japanese were planning to stay a while because they brought in extra supplies like onions and potatoes. Once the Japanese finished unloading supplies, I guess plans changed because they were leaving and they took us with them. At that time, I did not understand why they did not leave us in Attu. While we were heading down to the beach, the Japanese were burning the onions and potatoes. My mom gave me some cooked potatoes off the beach so I had some. The Japanese took us out to the boat and put us in the cargo hold, where we stayed all the way to Tokyo. They dropped off some Japanese troops there. From Tokyo we went to the island of Hokkaido, which is where we were held until the war was over. We were taken to Sapporo, the largest city on Hokkaido.*[7]

*The next thing I knew we were in a house and we weren't allowed to leave. In Japan, they put us all in one building for over three years with one Japanese police officer guarding us. The building we were kept in was made out of wood; there were two levels, and I stayed on the second floor. There were two planks under a building for a bathroom. Coal was piled under the house. There wasn't a sink. I remember my mom used to wipe my hands with a wet cloth. The house must have had a stove to provide heat, but I don't remember it.*

[7]The Attuans may have stopped in Sapporo, but they were taken to Otaru, another city on Hokkaido, for the duration of the war.

Photo 35. The first house the Attuans lived in on Hokkaido. (Source: Aleutian-Pribilof Island Association)

*When we first got there we used to eat only rice, oats and fish, but later as the war was still going on there was hardly any food. Even the Japanese did not have much food.*

*I did not know what the men did for work, but I know that my mom worked digging the clay and I would go with her to work. There were two or three Japanese women working with mom. I do not know how long they worked during the day but we used to walk there and walk back home. I used to walk with my mom to and from the clay pits. Other than that, I never left that building.*

*At the first house I had to stay inside most of the time. It felt like time was going slow since there was not much to do. I spent most of my time looking out the window.*

*Sometime during the war, I was taken to another building. During the last year of the war, I was able to go out. The Attuans were able to go out and find food for themselves. The second building was bigger and had a fence around it. There was a sour green apple tree and peach or apricot tree nearby. The policeman wouldn't let us climb the trees. During the summer, the fruit started dropping. Early in the morning, I used to get up, pick them off the ground, and eat some. Going out and doing things kept me going. I also spent a lot of time sitting inside by the window and watching the Japanese go by. In the morning I could hear Japanese women with wooden shoes walking down the street and it would wake me up. I didn't talk to the Japanese. A little boy would come to the fence to play with me but I was too afraid to go outside the fence.*

*At the second building, there was a hospital above us where our people were taken when they were sick. I am unsure what kind of sickness they had but most of them were in the hospital. Hardly anyone was in the building. My dad was in the hospital as well and sometimes in the morning, my mom and I would walk upstairs to visit him and return in the evening. My dad died soon after we moved to the second house. I was seven or eight when he died. When I was in Japan in 1992 [actually 1995] I asked for my dad's medical record but they would not give it to me. I had an older sister too, Helen. I don't know what happened to her – maybe she died in Japan. I didn't know about any of my siblings. I thought I was alone.*

*Many of the Attu people were sick. Many of the Attu people were dying. About half of them died. I am not sure exactly what happened but they were dying one by one. When we were in the second building, I think during the last year we were there, just Steve Hodikoff and I were in the building and everyone else was in the hospital. I was kind of surprised when Steve said to be quiet and a ghost came through the door.*

*It walked in when we were both on the bed. The ghost walked in and turned around then went back out. We could see right through the ghost, but it was all white. The next day somebody else passed away.*

*The people who died were cremated and their ashes were put in pans. My dad got cremated too. After the war ended their remains were shipped to Atka and buried.*

*I remember this one woman had a hole on top of her feet. This woman must have been related to me somehow because my mom would take me to her. Every time I went to visit, the hole on the top of her feet got bigger and bigger, and then she passed away. I myself had the same problem. The hole on top of my feet was getting bigger. I do not know what they did to it but it started drying up and healed completely. I do not know what the cause of it was. Today I still have a scar from it.*

*I was told that when I was in Japan, I was in the hospital too. I do not remember what happened exactly. I was taken there in a covered wagon with Japanese pulling me. It had two wheels and was all covered.[8] A Japanese man was pulling me to another building. When I got there, they put me in a room with a window and told to stay in my room, and so I did. I didn't know why I was separated from my mom. I cannot remember how long I stayed. I used to get a quarter of a bowl of watery rice a day and sometimes oats and water. I could see through the window, but all I could see was ground. I was rooming with a Japanese boy younger than I was, and his mom would come and visit him once in awhile. I noticed that his mother did not like me very much. When the Japanese boy and his mother were talking, I could not understand what they were saying. After a while, I picked up a few things because I started to learn the Japanese language.*

*When I got back to my mom, I was told I was skin and bones. When I was in the hospital, I used to daydream about a big house by the beach and pies and cakes. Back when I was in Attu, I did not have many*

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[8]Perhaps this human-powered wheeled transportation was a rickshaw.

*pies or cakes. In fact, I do not remember having a birthday party in my life. Even when I came back to the United States, I do not remember having a birthday party.*

*I remember being hungry. The Attuan boys would steal food at night. They stole carrots, potatoes, and turnips. The boys shared the food with everyone so no one would tell on them. There was no meat but there was a little bit of fish. I ate some seaweed.*

*I did not have shoes while I was in Japan. I do not know how or when I got them, but I had wooden slippers. Every morning on the pavement, you could hear wooden slippers clapping every morning and that is what used to wake me up. Since there was a fence around our building, we were able to step out. Every time I got up, I went out the back door to get some fresh air.*

*I could see the train station from where I stayed, and I watched some military men training the station workers to be in the military. There was a one skinny tall Japanese military man trainee and this trainer kept slapping him very often, so I guessed he did not like this tall person.*

*We spoke Aleut among ourselves. While we were in Japan a police officer and his wife lived with us for over three years. They communicated with us by writing in English. Most of the Japanese could write English, but they couldn't speak it. My mom knew how to read and write English. My parents spoke some Russian and the languages got mixed.*

*We were told that America was losing the war. I do not know why they were telling us that, but that is what they wanted us to believe, I guess. We didn't have any TV or radio, but the policeman had a radio, so I could hear some Japanese music and someone talking over the radio. The police officer had his own room and I never was in that room so I do not really know what it was but from that music, I started to learn to sing. I remembered all the songs and I started learning the language like*

*1,2,3,4,5 in Japanese. Just as I was learning, I left and started to forget. While in Japan I hardly talked much since there was not many people to talk to, I just listened and learned from that.*

*I think it was during the last year of the war, at night I could hear projectiles exploding and see search lights. American planes were flying high and I could hear the Japanese shooting at them. I never got hurt while I was in Japan.*

*Close to the end of the war, my mom and the police officer's wife took me to a place that was like a small pool and I enjoyed it very much. It was supposed to be for a bath. I wanted to play there but I was told to hurry up so I did. I do not remember getting back to the place where I was staying.*

*One day toward the end of the three years in Japan the policeman took us down to the beach and we saw Japanese women diving for sea urchins. None of us knew how to dive or wanted to dive, and it was too cold so we just watched. Later we started moving some big boulders around and found some small crabs and picked some. When we got home, we cooked some and ate them. They were really good. There was not much to eat but it helped. I don't remember how often we ate. Near the end we started getting some better food. I think maybe it was because the Japanese were losing and they didn't want the Attuans telling everyone we didn't get fed well. Late in the third year we started to get kite fish. One time a police officer took a couple of younger men and me to go shopping. There were a few kite fish, oats, and a little bit of rice for sale. The police officer tried to get some oats but the store would not give us any since there was not enough. Once we got home, the Japanese cooked some food for us. Even when I was hungry, I did not eat much since I did not like the kite fish very much. The kite fish meat was like glue; it was sticky and I did not want eat any more even though I was hungry.*

*Most Japanese were kind. One time there were a few Japanese police officers who came and visited us, and one officer was somewhat mean.*

Photo 36. Policeman Takeshiro Shikanai. (Source: Masami Sugiyama) [p. 259, M. Sugiyama 1987]

## Other First-hand Accounts:

**Olean Prokopeuff (Golodoff), 1981**

After three days we were taken aboard a ship and we were on our way. My house was opened and burned. We were taken out to the ship when it was getting dark. After spending the night on board the ship with much whistling and running about going on, and because of our ignorance of exactly what was happening, we were very anxious. Later on we were told that an American submarine was detected and that was the cause for all the commotion. A short-cut was said to be taken to where they were going. (I was not aware of what short cut they meant.) After traveling for some time, we were told that we were passing by a navy yard. All during the voyage, we were kept in a hold which was very unpleasant smelling, and it was also dark. We never once saw daylight until we reached Japan.

**Innokenty Golodoff, 1966**

When the Japs were ready to leave in September, they carried all our stuff onto their ships for us. We took our blankets, beds, chairs—everything except our houses. The Japs treated us pretty good. Two of them spoke English. None of us were scared when they took us on the ship—no women cried. Then we went to Kiska and went to another ship—a bigger one. We stayed at Kiska for one day.

**Mike Lokanin, 1947, (1988)**

From 7th June to 1st of Sept, 1942 we had been tol to be ready to go to Japan. So we got evrything ready. Imai tell us we better take as much food to Japan as we can. It is hard to get food in Japan maybe. So each family takes flour sugar barrels of salt fish. We dont know how we are going to live in Japan so we take tents stoves fish nets windows and doors also. Good thing we did. One day, 14 Sept, 1942 a coal carrier came and they tol us to get ready we gone to Japan. We take our stuff to vessel. We got aboard at late pass midnight. They put us down in hole where the coal had been. Evrything all black and dirty. Some of the little kids didnt want to leve Attu they cry

but Japs soliders pick them up trow them down in hole too. There are 42 of us Attu people and Mrs. Jones.[9] Some old peoples very bad scared. The vessel start off for Kiska and one of our peoples died on the boat it was Alfred Prokopioffs mother and Capt tol us to throw her overboard. So we let her go overboard in between Kiska and Attu Pass. Next morning when we got to Kiska ther were plenty Japs there as in Attu. Some houses are bombed 3 submarines were there 3 sunkin boats were there too and about 12 destroyers were there. Other vessel Big Army transport that was the one to take us to Japan. Everybody was kind of afraid because if American sub or plane come it will be our end.

That evening we take off for Japan. On the way to Japan we were keeped in hatch and not allowed to come out doors.

**Olean Prokopeuff (Golodoff), 1981**

When we reached Japan, the Captain collided with the dock, and when this happened, we were thrown from our seated position right on to the deck. Then we thought to ourselves, "Ayayaa! Did our ship get shot?" This was a scary experience.

Finally, we were gathered on top of the dock. Then we were sprayed. Later on we were picked up by a vehicle and taken to a black house. Since we fed ourselves with our own food from home during the trip, the only different food that was given to us was some warm rice. It was the only warm food we ate.

When asked if we were hungry, we told them yes. A meal was cooked for us that day. They brought our food on a tray. Chop sticks, which we did not know how to use, were given to us to use. There was a policeman present there with his partner. So as soon as they started talking with each other and not paying attention to us, we would quickly eat with our hands. When the policeman turned towards us, we would pretend like nothing had happened at all. We were also served an unusual looking cooked bird with its feathers still on it. We felt suspicious of the cooked bird and so we did not eat it.

After we were fed, we were put to bed.

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[9]According to Etta Jones, she was separated from the Attuans and taken to Yokohama before the Attuans went in a different boat to Hokkaido (Breu 2009:180).

**Alex Prossoff, 1947 (1988)**

Then one day in September a coal carrier came and they told us to get ready, we are going to Japan. One Japanese man who was kind to us tell us we better take as much food with us as we can for it is hard to get food in Japan, maybe. So we do. Each family takes flour, sugar, and barrels of salt fish.

We are all put down in hold of coal carrier where coal had been. Everything all black and dirty. Some of the little children do not want to leave Attu. They cry but Japs soldiers pick them up and throw them down in holds, too. There are forty-two of us, old men and women, young people and the children. Most all the women and older girls going to have babies.

First we go to Kiska. A white man, Mr. House, is with us here. He was Navy man on Kiska when Japs take it. There were ten American Navy men there. The Japs take all of them prisoners but Mr. House runs away and hides from Japs. He eats things he finds, plants and *pootchky* and along the beach. But finally, he can't find anything more because he doesn't know. So he goes to the Japs and gives up. We never see him after we get to Japan.

My wife's mother gets sick on the coal carrier and died. They make us just through her into the sea. We could go on deck once a day for fresh air but if we were going by any cities we had to stay in the hold.

After thirteen or fourteen days one night about 11:00 P.M. we landed at the city of Otaru on the island of Hokkaido in Japan. We stayed on board the ship until daylight. When morning came some Japs soldiers, some policemen and some Japs doctors came on board. They examined all of us but did not find any disease. They took us ashore then. We do not see Mrs. Jones again.

I was just wondering where they will take us when they brought us to a house that looked like nobody had lived in it for very long time, fifteen or ten years. It was very dirty but even then Japs make us take off our shoes before we can go in.

They ask us all kinds of questions about American. They asked me if Americans are good people; if we have any military outposts on our island; if we know where there were outposts in the Aleutians Islands; how often the Coast Guard and American warships came into Attu harbor. One of our head men told us not to tell the truth to them so we did not tell them the right things. They asked us how many white people lived with us and we told them just two, the teacher and the radio man. I told them the Japs killed the man. They asked us which army we liked best, Japs or Americans. Mike and I are only ones who talk to them. I tell them I can understand American language and that they are very kind to us. As long as Americans are fight for my country I'll be on their side. I told them Japs destroy our homes, make us prisoners and put us on a land where we cannot talk his language. So I cannot say Japs are good people.

All of us are kept in one house. There are forty-two of us in one five-room house. We put our mattresses and blankets on the floor to sleep on. It was getting winter and we did not have enough blankets to keep warm. We had only one stove we brought with us from Attu. The women cooked for all of us on it. The Japs did give us little heaters but we did not have enough coal to keep us warm. They give us only one bucket of coal for all day.

**Olean Prokopeuff (Golodoff), 1981**

Our mattresses were laid on the floor. Pillows were also given to us, and they were very hard, but we did not complain. The blankets that were given to us were almost as thick as the mattresses, but we used them anyway. Every morning the floor was mopped. The house that we were staying at had a kitchen down stairs. We had a stove that we had taken from Attu which we used there.

We had soup that looked like grass and some dried rice. When we ran out of grass soup, we started making rice soup. Prior to this, we ate the food that we brought along from Attu, like the dried fish, the salted fish, and so on, but when we ran out of food, we were given vegetables like carrots, potatoes, and so on. After eating the

boiled potatoes, we would have very bad stomach aches, and they were very painful.

It so happened one day that we were told that some officials were coming there to our place for a visit. A Japanese cook was brought there for us. They told us not to go away and the Japanese cook put wood into the oven. He lit it, and as a result of that, the smoke filled the room. I can't remember whether or not cooking took place that day.

We were once again grouped and questions were asked of us. They asked if we were eating good food. We did not give them any reply. They once again asked us if we wanted to talk. We refused to talk. Then after that, we were given food once more.

**Innokenty Golodoff, 1966**

When we got to Japan we landed at Otaru on the west side of Hokkaido. We went to the town—or city I guess—it was kind of big. They put us in one house—a big wooden house. Two policemen lived there with us. They gave us rice and bread and some fish once in awhile and a little bit of pickled radishes. A girl friend, Kasha San,

Photo 37. Mrs. Kusaka "Kasha San," a nurse and friend of Innokenty Golodoff. (Source: Masami Sugiyama) [p. 107, M. Sugiyama 1987]

saved my life. She was a nurse, and she was good to me. She gave me extra rice and she brought me eggs. She talked a little bit of English. She was there for about a year then she went away. Then I didn't get any extra food.

**Alex Prossoff, 1947 (1988)**

We were hungry, too. At first we did all right because we ate the flour and sugar and fish we brought from Attu. The Japs gave us only two cups of rice for about ten people a day. When our food was gone we could not buy any more from Japs. Then we began to get very hungry.

**Innokenty Golodoff, (1966)**

While we were at Otaru for about three years we worked digging clay. We worked about eight hours a day. We didn't work very hard. We dug it off the top of the ground and took it to the factory in a wheelbarrow. The clay was white. I guess they made dishes out of it. Our policeman took us up in the morning—we walked—and then he came for us in the afternoon. For lunch we ate the rice we brought with us in a little tin box. We had our own spoon—I never learned to use chopsticks. We never heard any news about the war. We had electric lights. At night we talked or patched up our clothes. We didn't have anything to read.

**Olean Prokopeuff, (Golodoff)**

That land where we were was very hot. We worked with picks and shovels shoveling away at the clay. Then the clay was dried and crushed. The clay was also being worked on in the factories during winter. While working on this clay, a particle of it went in my right eye. I was afraid that I was going to lose my eyesight, but I have managed to arrive here (on Atka) without having to wear glasses.

**Alex Prossoff, 1947 (1988)**

A month after we get to Japan we had to go to work for Japs. I dug clay for a week and then I went to work in the clay factory. It was hard work. We worked from seven in the morning to five at night and got one day of rest in two weeks. The women, most of them were put to work, too.

**Olean Prokopeuff (Golodoff), 1981**

As things were, our men were put to work. Shortly after that, they started admitting our people to the hospital. The people were getting sick one after the other until I was almost the only one left at home to cook. While I was doing that, they took my husband to the hospital. After they took my husband, my children were starving. So when I went to fetch some water, I would pick orange peelings off the ground. Then I would cook them on the top of the heater. Then I fed them to my children, and only then would they stop crying for a while.

Shortly thereafter, they admitted my children to the hospital. They asked me to come to the hospital. So I went there and "Ayayaa!" The people that were admitted to the hospital were very sick. That day a few went home. Being unable to hear what was happening, I begged to be returned to work. So they started me working on clay....

Later on, those who were sent home from the hospital took ill again. They were taken once more to the hospital. We were allowed to visit the hospital for check-ups. Whenever they did that, I would ask my people what they were doing to them. They replied, "We are being inoculated." Ayayaa! We did not know what was being done to them.

But then the people were dying. Lots of people died there. My daughter and son were among those who were in the hospital. They would say, "Mother, come here and scratch me." So I would go over to him/her and not knowing exactly where they wanted me to scratch, I would scratch then moved away from them. The reason why they were unable to specify where they wanted to be scratched was because they could not move.

When my husband was close to death, he sent for me. I went to the hospital, and he gave me some cigarettes which he had stashed away. Then I stayed awake with him most of the night. Then he told

me if I were sleepy to go to sleep. So I went to sleep, and during my slumber, he died.

When I was awakened, I got up, and I noticed that in our religious custom when a person dies, he is not dressed, but I watched them dress him. After he was dressed, he was taken out. I did not know what they did to him. It was not until my Leonty died that I went to where they must have taken him. Leonty was put in an oven, and I was told to light some flowers, so I did. Then I went to the other room. After that they pulled him out and I did not like what I saw. I approached a Japanese priest and asked him if it was a sin to do that. He told me that the reason why they did that was because they did not have any burying space. They said that they hardly had any space for burying people.

**Alex Prossoff, 1947, (1988)**

We lost twenty-one people in Japan. My step-mother gets sick first. She got TB and Japs take her to kind of hospital. But there is no heat and very little food so she died. Some died of beri-beri. Our chief, Mike Hodikoff and his son, George, eat from garbage can and get poison food. Lots of children and babies die because they hungry and nothing but rice.

**Innokenty Golodoff, 1966**

When the Japs came to Attu we were 42 people and after the school teacher died 41 left Attu. But many Attu people died in Japan. They died of starving I guess. Only 25 people came back from Japan. The ones who didn't come back ate the rice for about two years, then they couldn't eat it anymore. They were sick and they couldn't and the Japs didn't have anything else to give them. We never had any fruit or vegetables. I don't know if our policemen had any other food—all I ever saw them eat was rice. We had both white and brown rice.

My two brothers and one sister died in Japan. They never buried them—they burned them. They gave the bones and ashes back to us and now they are buried at Atka. They sent them back after we got to Atka.

**Alex Prossoff, 1947 (1988)**

One of the hardest things was we could not bury our dead. There are no burials in Japan. All are burned. When our people died they were burned, too, and the Japs gave us little boxes to put the bones in. This was hard to have to pick up the bones of our loved ones. We kept all our boxes carefully because we wanted to take them home to be buried some day.

I noticed that when a Jap body was burned the bones did not fill the box, but when an Aleut was burned the box was not big enough to hold what was left. I told a Jap guard that his people have small frames, much smaller than Attu people. Must be because his people eat too much rice.

When we first get to Japan Japanese seem to have enough food but later lots of Japs hungry, too. We never saw any Red Cross packages of food or clothing while we were in prison. No medicine ever came either. By 1944 we got so hungry we would dig in the hog boxes when the guards were not looking. Whatever we found we would wash it and cook it and try to eat it. When spring came we would work after five o'clock in some of the Jap gardens nearby for a little extra food. In summer we sometimes helped the herring fishermen. One time. I went fishing in the bay to show the Jap fishermen how we fish in Attu. All I caught was old boot. We could not eat that.

Once we killed two dogs and ate them. The men only. We gave our rice to the girls. Next day my stomach is full, I can work. After we dig garden in the fall they let us pick up anything they don't want. So we keep alive, some of us. Some of us died and sometimes I think I, too, would die like the others and never see my home again.

When we were there I used to think Japan must be one of the poorest countries in whole world. In that town of Otaru of about twenty-five thousand people[10] not one painted house did I see. One house only had a coat of tar. Everyone worked, and worked every day. Young boys and girls worked in the factories near the house where we lived.

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[10]Otaru's population in 1920 was 102,462 (Irish 2009:227) and in 1940 was 164,282 (Demographics of Imperial Japan 2011).

**Alex Prossoff, 1947, (1988)**

One day I went up to the old Jap who was kind to us and asked him which side was winning and he said the Japs were getting weak. They had plenty men but no guns and things to fight with. I saw some big Jap cruisers, two destroyers while there, but one battleship. The officers had good clothing but the soldiers poor, except their shoes. The officers slapped their men sometimes hard in the face for a little thing, maybe a gun not clean or something. I notice Jap soldier does not have much freedom. On Attu most were young, twenty-five or nineteen years old. In Japan they were maybe fifty or older.

We did not have much clothing. All I had was one pair of pants, two shirts, one pair of socks and one towel in two years. One old Jap who talked some Russian and English was kind to us. Sometimes we would give him a piece of clothing to sell and he would get us a little food.

....We had to learn to talk Japanese, even the little children. Japs said they would kill us if we didn't. Sometimes we were beaten and our women whipped. Julia Golodoff once went three days without food to eat or water to drink. This was her punishment for talking back to the Japs and blaming them when her little girl died. She said it was Japs fault. They made her shovel snow when she was barefoot, too. She did not die.

**Alex Prossoff, 1947 (1988)**

I had arguments with the guards over their gods. One of them wanted me to pray to their gods but I told him I would pray to my own God. I asked them where were their gods but they could not tell me. I saw many statues of the gods they pray to. Most were of Buddha, though. They had a funny custom of taking a dragon-like piece of wood into their houses and talking while they open and shut its big fiery mouth. What they say I don't know. Another custom was to send men with big umbrella-like hats and dressed in white to our camp. They held out small cup and begged for money. Finally guards told them it's no use; we did not have any money.

Photo 38. The Attuans near the end of their time in Otaru. (Source: Masami Sugiyama) [Sugiyama 1987, p. 191]

# Commentary

The Attuans boarded a merchant ship, the *Yoko Maru*, in mid-September of 1942. The Japanese soldiers allowed them to bring food, blankets, and even furniture with them, perhaps with the idea that their move to Japan might be permanent. The village was standing when they left, but U.S. forces destroyed it in subsequent air and sea raids as well as in the Battle of Attu.[11]

The trip to Japan began September 14 and took about two weeks. Alfred Prokopeuff's and Elizabeth Prossoff's mother Anecia Prokopeuff died on board ship between Attu and Kiska, and she was buried at sea (Carter 1994:46). At Kiska the Attuans were transferred to another ship, the *Nagata Maru*.[12] Their quarters were in a cargo hold that had been used to carry coal. They had to stay in the hold except for daily periods on deck (Kohlhoff 1995:85-86).

The ship finally arrived at the Japanese city of Otaru, on the west side of Hokkaido Island, at the end of September. The passengers were very dirty from the coal dust and had not bathed since they left Attu (Carter 1994:46). Their first house was a vacant railroad employee dormitory on Wakatake-cho. They stayed on the second floor in four rooms, each about 142 square feet. The furniture and belongings they had brought were stored at the rear of the dormitory (Stewart 2008:302-303).

It must have been a big culture shock for the Attuans to come to live in an industrial city. Otaru's population in 1940 was about 164,000, somewhat larger than its 2008 population of about 138,000. The city is in Ainu territory, but the Ainu had been decimated by disease several centuries earlier. Today Otaru is a tourist destination for Japanese and Russians.

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[11]After the boat carrying the Attuans left the island in September 1942, some Japanese troops stayed on Attu, in Massacre Bay. The next year, in May 1943, the Americans re-took the island of Attu in a bloody battle that resulted in some 550 American and 2,350 Japanese deaths. In the final battle, about 700 Japanese died in a desperate last-ditch charge. The Japanese survivors committed suicide, except for a few who were taken prisoner (John Cloe, personal communication).

[12]The boat was identified by Gengoro S. Toda of Japan, a user of the Tully's Port website (http://propnturret.com/tully), a listserve devoted to Japanese military vessels. Another Tully's Port user, "Bob," [Bob Hackett] found information indicating that the gunboat Nagata Maru brought construction materials and food from Yokosuka, Japan, to Attu, arriving August 27, 1942. After transporting troops between Kiska and Attu, she departed Kiska on September 17, 1942 and arrived in Otaru, Hokkaido on September 27, 1942.

SONIA
SONIA II

*When we were there I used to think Japan must be one of the poorest countries in whole world. In that town of Otaru…not one painted house did I see. One house only had a coat of tar. Everyone worked, and worked every day. Young boys and girls worked in the factories near the house where we lived.*

**–Alex Prossoff**

Photo 39. Otaru Canal February 7, 2009. (Source: 欅, photograph by 欅. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Otaru_yukiakari_no_michi.jpg

Mr. Kawashima, one of the Japanese soldiers who had occupied the village, visited the Attuans in Otaru in late 1942 or early 1943. He said that two of the boys, "Ivan" (probably John Golodoff) and his younger brother Nick, hugged him in greeting, and that Ivan told him their sister Helen had already died (Stewart 1978:28).

There are differing reports of the Attuans' diet in Otaru. In August 1942 a Japanese soldier who visited them saw that they had bread, rice, meat, and vegetables. He thought they were eating better than most Japanese (Stewart 2008:303). At that point the Unangan probably still had food they had brought with them from Attu. Innokenty Golodoff remembered that at first the food was only slightly meager – rice, bread, and a little fish and pickled radishes (Golodoff 1966:8-9).

In addition to not having enough to eat, many of the Attuans were weakened by other medical circumstances, particularly tuberculosis. Several of them died of that disease in Japan. Dr. Satoru Nogushi examined the Attuans soon after they arrived in Otaru, and found that about half of them were suffering from acute tuberculosis. He thought their conditions were exacerbated by their meager diet on Otaru, which lacked protein and calories (Stewart 2008:303). Several died from beriberi, a disease of malnutrition. This may have been caused by a diet almost entirely made up of white rice. Mike Hodikoff and his son both died of food poisoning in 1945 from eating rotten garbage (Kohlhoff 1995:132).

The Attu residents worked digging dolomite, a kind of clay, from an open pit while they were there. Nick remembers going with his mother to the clay mine and waiting for her while she worked. According to Innokenty Golodoff, the Attuans didn't work very hard. Although they were supposed to be paid 1-1/2 yen per day, they were not paid at the time. When they were released, those who had worked were given about $700 in yen to take back to the United States. Unfortunately, this money was collected by U.S. officials and the equivalent in American money never given to the workers. The Unangan worked only during the first part of their internment, and even then, on most days only a few of them worked. The voluntary Unangan labor contrasted sharply with the treatment of Chinese and Korean prisoners, who were marched to work every day (Stewart 2008:303).

In 1944 the 29 (of the original 40) Attuans still living were moved from the Wakatake-cho dormitory to a larger house at Shimizu-cho, which had previously served as clergy quarters for a Shinto shrine. Partitions divided the families (Stewart 2008:302-303). The Attuans' new home was farther from the clay pits, and they didn't work after that. Their declining health may have also prevented them from working.

After the Japanese surrendered, the Attuans were able to walk more freely around the city of Otaru. Alex Prossoff even remembered that they met a Russian couple named "Soffieff"[13] and attended Russian Orthodox church services (Prossoff 1988). In 1942, a count of foreign nationals in Japan found 48 Old Russian residents living in Hokkaido (Foreign Resident Population 2011). Contrary to most reports, Stewart found that the Attuans were allowed much freedom of movement in Otaru throughout their stay in the city. According to him, the children frequented the candy store and the adults bought food at the butcher and fish shops (Stewart 2008:302-303). It is unlikely, however, that they had money to make such purchases, which also contradict the malnutrition and starvation of the Attuans.

Communication between the Attuans and the Japanese was in English, while the Attuans spoke Unangam Tunuu (Aleut) among themselves. Nick Golodoff remembered that the Japanese often wrote notes in English to convey their orders or questions. On Attu, Angelina Hodikoff served for a time as an interpreter, translating the Japanese soldiers' English into Unangam Tunuu (Jolis 1994:16). In Japan, the Unangan were expected to learn Japanese (Stewart 2008:303). A Japanese linguist, Ken Hattori, visited them in 1943 and recorded and made notes on their language.

Innokenty Golodoff said that at first the Japanese were pretty rough, but later they got friendlier. The Unangan internees remembered beatings and other mistreatment by guards. Julia Golodoff went for three days without food and water, and had to shovel snow in her bare feet, as punishment for shouting at one of the guards about her daughter's death. Japanese sources, too, acknowledge that the Attuans were sometimes victims of violence at the hands of their guards (Stewart 2008:303).

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[13]Perhaps "Sofiev," a common Russian name.

At least one of their captors became their friend, however: Mr. Shikanai, the policeman who lived with them in both of their houses in Otaru. On Christmas Eve in 1944, Shikanai obtained goat meat and turkey for a party, and the Unangan played the accordion and danced into the night (Kohlhoff 1995:133). After the war was over, when an American Army plane came to take the Attuans back to the U.S., they had a sake drinking party with Shikanai (Golodoff 1966:9).

The main hardship of internment in Japan was the lack of healthful food. After their own food was gone, the Attuans began to starve and suffer from malnutrition. They rarely got any fruits or vegetables, only a small ration of rice. They could see that their Japanese guards were hungry too (Golodoff 1966:9).

Forty people came to Otaru, but only 24 left. Twenty-one people died, including four of the five babies born while they were in Japan.