

Statement of William Ermaloff
President
Chaluka Corporation of Nikolski Village
Before the Subcommittee on Administrative Law
and Governmental Relations
Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C.
June 21, 1984

Statement in Support of H.R. 4322

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, my name is William Ermaloff. I am President of Chaluka Corporation, the village corporation of Nikolski, established under the authority of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971. I am very pleased to be here today with recollections from the World War II period.

Mr. Chairman, I was 28 years old when our village of Nikolski was evacuated on July 5, 1942. I was accompanied by my wife, who was then 22 years old, and our two young children, Sergie, aged 2 years, and Leonty, aged 4 years. We were first taken by army barge to Chernofksi harbor on Unalaska Island. Then we boarded the steamship COLUMBIA, which took us to Wrangell Institute.

There were 72 Aleuts from Nikolski on that voyage, along with 41 Aleuts from Akutan, 20 from Kashega, 18 from Biorka and 9 from Makushin. All of us arrived at Wrangell on July 13th. We lived in tents on the Wrangell Institute's grounds until we were taken to Ward Lake, an abandoned CCC camp near Ketchikan,

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some weeks later. We were taken to Ward Lake on a barge we built at Wrangell, along with some materials to build cottages at the Ward Lake facility.

Although we arrived at Ward Lake in good health, the conditions there were very bad for our people. Within one year 20 people out of 160 had died at the CCC camp. According to the official records, a higher death rate existed at Ward Lake than at any other camp for the Aleuts.

The newspaper at the time, The Alaska Fishing News, in an editorial of May 24, 1943, speaking about the Aleuts at Ward Lake, concluded:

It was their friendly spirit in greeting and welcoming all comers that betrayed them and turned their camp into mourning over the loss of loved ones.

Too late it is now to begin passing the buck as to the responsibility of their condition. What is needed is immediate emergency care. Moving the camp will not provide the cure.

End of Quote. Mr. Chairman, that emergency care did not come in time. There was simply a lot of neglect in the camps, and the people's health did not improve until they returned to Nikolski in 1945.

Mr. Chairman, my own family survived the camp, thank God. But the village has never recovered the losses. In 1942 Nikolski was a healthy village of more than 70 people. When we

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returned in 1945, we found that our village had been occupied by units of the Army's 42nd Engineers, the Army's 677th Aircraft Warning Company, civilian crews of the Army Transportation Service, and personnel of an Air Force Weather Detachment. Also, Navy personnel were stationed at Nikolski.

According to the official Board of Inquiry report on conditions at Nikolski, dated April 26, 1944:

- (a) Certain property and equipment chargeable to Alaska Indian Service and individuals was appropriated by the Armed Forces for use, and that an incomplete accounting was made of property and equipment so used.
- (b) Extensive pilfering and looting of private property occurred in the homes of Nikolski natives.
- (c) It has been impossible to fix responsibility for such pilfering and looting.
- (d) Certain efforts were made to prevent pilfering and looting, such as policing and boarding up homes to prevent breaking and entering, but these precautions were not established soon enough or were in general ineffective.

Mr. Chairman, these conditions were a shock to the Aleut people of Nikolski. Our homes had been used by the troops, but there was no respect for our property. And we had no opportunity to take anything with us to the Ward Lake Camp. It all had to be left behind.

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Today Nikolski is struggling to survive. We were 72 people in June of 1942. We are only 40 people today. The recommendations of the Commission, if they are approved by the Congress, will help us in saving Nikolski from the continuing effects of the destruction of our homes and property, and from the continuing effects of the reduction in our numbers at the camps.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.