

STATEMENT OF TESTIMONY

BY

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BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE LAW AND GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
U. S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Rayburn House Office Building
Room 2141
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Mr. Chairman:

I appreciate the opportunity of appearing before this Committee in behalf of the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians. I was a member of the Commission. It is my privilege to provide the Subcommittee with a statement of the Commission's findings and recommendations with respect to the Aleuts relocated during World War II.

During the Second World War the Aleutian Islands were strategically valuable to both the United States and Japan. In June, 1942 the Japanese attacked and held the two westernmost Aleutians, Kiska and Attu; only giving the islands up in the summer of 1943.

The military had anticipated a possible Japanese attack for some time before June, 1942. The question of what should be done to provide security for the Aleuts lay primarily with the civilians who reported to the Secretary of the Interior. They were unable to agree upon a course of action -- evacuation and relocation to avoid the risks of war, or leaving the Aleuts on their islands on the ground that subsistence on the islands would disrupt Aleut life less than relocation. The civilian authorities were engaged in consulting with the military and the Aleuts when the Japanese attacked.

At this point the military hurriedly stepped in and commenced evacuation. On June 3, 1942, the Japanese bombed the strategic American base at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians; as part of the response a U.S. ship evacuated most of the island of Atka, burning the Aleut village to prevent its use by Japanese troops, and Navy planes picked up the rest of the islanders a few days later.

In anticipation of a possible attack, the Pribilof Islands were also evacuated by the Navy in early June. In early July, a number of Aleut villages from Atka eastward to Akutan were evacuated. All of the approximately 900 Aleuts were relocated to southeastern Alaska except 50 persons who were either evacuated to the Seattle area or hospitalized in the Indian Hospital at Tacoma, Washington.

The Commission found that the evacuation of the Aleuts had a rational basis as a precaution to ensure their safety. The Aleuts were evacuated from an active theatre of war; indeed, 42 were taken prisoner on Attu by the Japanese. It was clearly the military's belief that evacuation of non-military personnel was advisable. The families of military personnel were evacuated first, and when Aleut communities were evacuated the white teachers and government employees on the islands were evacuated with them.

But the military basis for the evacuation does not justify the later treatment of the Aleuts. The Aleuts were subjected to deplorable conditions following the

evacuation. Typical housing was an abandoned gold mine or fish cannery buildings which were inadequate in both accommodation and sanitation. Lack of medical care contributed to extensive disease and death.

Conditions at the Funter Bay cannery in southeastern Alaska, where 300 Aleuts were placed, provide a graphic impression of one of the worst camps. Many buildings had not been occupied for a dozen years and were used only for storage. They were inadequate, particularly for winter use. The majority of evacuees were forced to live in two dormitory-style buildings in groups of six to thirteen people in areas nine to ten feet square. Until fall, many Aleuts were forced to sleep in relays because of lack of space. The quarters were as run-down as they were cramped.

In the fall of 1942, the only fulltime medical care at Funter Bay was provided by two nurses who served both the cannery camp and a camp at a mine across Funter Bay. Doctors were only temporarily assigned to the camp, often remaining for only a few days or weeks. Medical supplies were scarce.

Epidemics raged throughout the Aleuts' stay in southeastern Alaska; they suffered from influenza, measles, and pneumonia along with tuberculosis. Twenty-five died at Funter Bay in 1943 alone, and it is estimated that probably ten percent of the evacuated Aleuts died during their two or three year stay in southeastern Alaska.

To these inadequate conditions was added the isolation of the camp sites, where climatic and geographic conditions were very unlike the Aleutians. No employment meant debilitating idleness.

The standard of care which the government owes to those within its care was clearly violated by this treatment, which brought great suffering and loss of life to the Aleuts.

The Aleuts were only slowly returned to their islands. The Pribilovians were able to get back to the Pribilofs by the late spring of 1944, nine months after the Japanese had been driven out of the Aleutian chain. The return to the Aleutians themselves did not take place for another year. Some of this delay may be fairly attributed to transport shortage and problems of supplying the islands with housing and food so that normal life could resume. But the government's record, especially in the Aleutians, reflects an indifference and lack of urgency that lengthened the long delay in taking the Aleuts home. Some Aleuts were not permitted to return to their homes; to this day, Attuans continue to be excluded from their ancestral lands.

When they first returned to the islands, many Aleuts were forced to camp because their former homes (those that still stood) had not yet been repaired and many were now uninhabitable. The Aleuts rebuilt their homes themselves. They were "paid" with free groceries until their homes were repaired; food, building and repair supplies were procured locally, mostly from military surplus.

The Aleuts suffered material losses from the government's occupation of the islands for which they were never fully re-compensated, in cash or in kind. Devout followers of the Russian Orthodox faith, Aleuts treasured the religious icons from czarist Russia and other family heirlooms that were their most significant spiritual as well as material losses. They cannot be replaced. In addition, possessions such as houses, furniture, boats, and fishing gear were either never replaced or replaced by markedly inferior goods.

The Commission faced practical difficulties in deciding on appropriate remedies. No effective system of records exists by which to estimate Aleut property losses exactly; certainly there is no readily available means of putting a dollar value upon the suffering and death brought to Aleuts in the Camps. The Commissioners agree that a claims procedure would not be an effective method of compensation. Therefore, the sums included in the Commission's recommendations were chosen to recognize fundamental justice as the Commissioners perceive it on the basis of the testimony and evidence before them. The recommended amounts do not reflect a precise balancing of actual losses; this is now, after many years, a practical impossibility.

1. The Commissioners, with Congressman Lungren dissenting, recommend that Congress establish a fund for the beneficial use of the Aleuts in the amount of \$5 million. The principal and interest of the fund should be spent for community and individual

purposes that would be compensatory for the losses and injuries Aleuts suffered as a result of the evacuation. These injuries, as Personal Justice Denied describes, include lasting disruption of traditional Aleut means of subsistence and, with it, the weakening of their cultural tradition. The Commissioners therefore foresee entirely appropriate expenditures from the proposed fund for community educational, cultural or historical rebuilding in addition to medical or social services.

2. The Commissioners, with Congressman Lungren dissenting, recommend that Congress appropriate funds and direct a payment of \$5,000 per capita to each of the few hundred surviving Aleuts who were evacuated from the Aleutian or Pribilof Islands by the federal government during World War II.

3. The Commission recommends that Congress appropriate funds and direct the relevant government agency to rebuild and restore the churches damaged or destroyed in the Aleutian Islands in the course of World War II; preference in employment should be given to Aleuts in performing the work of rebuilding and restoring these buildings, which were community centers as well as houses of worship.

4. The Commission recommends that Congress appropriate adequate funds through the public works budget for the Army Corps of Engineers to clear away the debris that remains from World War II in and around populated areas of the Aleutian Islands.

5. The Commission recommends that Congress declare Attu to be native land and that Attu be conveyed to the Aleuts through their native corporation upon condition that the native corporation is able to negotiate an agreement with the Coast Guard which will allow that service to continue essential functions on the island.