

Statement of Agafon Krukoff, Jr.  
President  
The Aleut Corporation  
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 Agafon Krukoff. I am President and Chief Executive Officer of The Aleut Corporation, the Aleut regional business corporation established under the terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971.

One of my responsibilities is the management of lands conveyed to the corporation by that landmark legislation. Another is to make investments and secure earnings for the Aleut shareholders of our corporation. The success of our enterprise will mean greater economic security for the Aleut people.

I am here, Mr. Chairman, to discuss one specific recommendation of the Commission which is implemented by H.R. 4322. That recommendation is for Congress to declare Attu Island to be Native land, and to direct that the island be conveyed to the Aleut people through The Aleut Corporation.

The basis of this recommendation may be stated in one sentence: Traditionally, Attu has been Aleut land, and were it

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not for the events of World War II and its aftermath, Attu Island would be Aleut land today. The circumstances which kept Attu Island in the public domain are both profoundly tragic and little-known to the general public. I will summarize those circumstances.

On June 8, 1942, units of the Imperial Japanese Army made an unopposed landing at Holtz Bay on Attu Island. The main force attacked the undefended Aleut village at 7:30 a.m. Forty-two Aleut citizens of the United States and two Alaska Indian Service employees were taken prisoner. One of the Aleut elders died in July and was buried on Attu. The remaining Aleuts were taken from Attu in September, and transported to Hokkaido Island in Japan, there to remain prisoners of war until they were discovered by American occupation forces in 1945.

The AIS employees were Mr. and Mrs. Foster Jones, a non-Native couple in their mid-60's. Mr. Jones died at the hands of the Japanese on the first night of his capture. His wife was transported to Yokohama, and remained there under detention until after V-J Day.

When the Attuan people were repatriated from detention in Japan, they were not rehabilitated to their home island. Instead they were involuntarily merged for the convenience of



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the Interior Department into the village of Atka. This failure resulted in their loss-of-right when land selections were made following enactment of the land claims settlement act.

As a matter of fundamental fairness and equity, the Island of Attu should be conveyed back to the Aleut people under the terms and conditions set forth in H.R. 4322. That legislation provides, as the Commission recommends, that The Aleut Corporation shall enter into an agreement with the Department of Transportation which will allow the U.S. Coast Guard to continue essential functions on Attu Island.

Mr. Chairman, the bill provides more. It requires the Corporation to enter into a cooperative management agreement with the Secretary of the Interior to protect environmental values on Attu Island. This agreement must be approved by both The Aleut Corporation and the Secretary before the conveyance can occur. The procedures for such an agreement are set forth in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, and it will be consistent with those in force on other privately held lands within Alaskan wildlife refuges.

Attu Island is about 1,100 miles from the tip of the Alaska peninsula. It is about 45-miles long, from east to west, and about 18-miles wide, from north to south at its widest point. It is now part of the Aleutian Islands Unit of the Alaska

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Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. At the present time the U.S. Coast Guard maintains a 24-person LORAN station on Attu. The Coast Guard leases 1,800 acres for its station from the Fish and Wildlife Service, and maintains an airstrip served by Coast Guard C-130's and Reeve Aleutian Airways Lockheed Electras. Reeve Aleutian serves Attu from Shemya Air Force Base under a charter arrangement. On Attu Island a portion of the World War II battlefield has been proposed for addition to the Register of Historic Sites.

Of special concern from an environmental standpoint, Attu Island has a large seabird population nested on the island, and many Asiatic species of migratory birds pause there during migration. At least one Asiatic species, the white-tailed eagle, nests nowhere else in North America. Of course, one of the principal purposes for the cooperative management agreement will be to assure that these wildlife values are not destroyed by any development that may occur.

Mr. Chairman, Attu Island is an important part of the Aleut heritage. The lands were occupied by Aleuts for thousands of years -- until 1942. Attu would be Aleut land today. But the Interior Department failed to rehabilitate Attu following the war. The Aleut people should not be denied the benefits of Attu ownership because of the tragic circumstances of the war



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years. The Commission made a sensitive and proper judgment when it concluded that these lands, so long in Aleut hands, should be returned to the people under procedures which protect the government's continuing interest in the Coast Guard station and the environmental values that are there.

Mr. Chairman, I submit for the committee's files a recent map of Attu Island, prepared by the U.S. Department of Interior's Geological Survey.

On a personal note, Mr. Chairman, I am from St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs, and my parents were at Funter Bay's abandoned fish cannery, on Admiralty Island, during World War II. I was born shortly after their return to St. Paul. I urge that the full measure of relief recommended by the Commission be granted, principally for the benefit of the villages themselves, and for the people who continue to maintain the Aleut culture and traditions there.

I should now like to introduce Father Paul Mercurief, who serves as village priest in Nikolski, and who also serves as Chairman of the Aleutian Housing Authority.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.