



COAST GUARDSMEN REMEMBER THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE ON ATTU ISLAND

By Petty Officer Sara Francis

ANCHORAGE, Alaska -- World War II is well known. The Aleutian campaign is not. On Attu Island a group of dedicated Coast Guardsmen is keeping the memory of what happened and the people involved alive. Members of Loran Station Attu repaired the Chichigof Village plaque and rededicated it to the memory of the previous inhabitants.

While most of the WWII conflict took place in the Pacific and European theaters, there were significant campaigns in Alaska. That activity included the stationing of men, planes, ships and armament on the Alaska mainland and throughout the Aleutian Islands. The Aleutian Islands are the only place in America that the Japanese were able to gain a foothold.

Attu Island, Alaska -- MK3 Matthew Burnard and MK1 Joshua Hickman stand with the new plaque commemorating the village of Chichigof on Attu Island, Nov. 3, 2007. The crew re-dedicated the site to the memory of the villagers on Nov. 3, 2007. USCG photo.

On June 6, 1942, the Japanese 301st Independent Infantry Battalion landed on Attu in Chichagof Harbor. At the time, Attu's population consisted of several Blue Fox, 45 native Aleuts, and two Americans: Foster Jones, 60, a schoolteacher, and his wife Etta. The village consisted of several houses around Chichagof Harbor.

The villagers survived by fishing, trapping fox, and weaving baskets. Missionaries, as well as government patrol boats and small fishing craft, provided the inhabitants with their only direct link to the outside world... except for a small radio operated by Jones.



Jones subsequently committed suicide after the Japanese invasion with his wife attempting to do the same. Etta recovered under Japanese care. For a short time, the Japanese occupational forces commandeered the services of the Aleut fishermen to supply them with food.

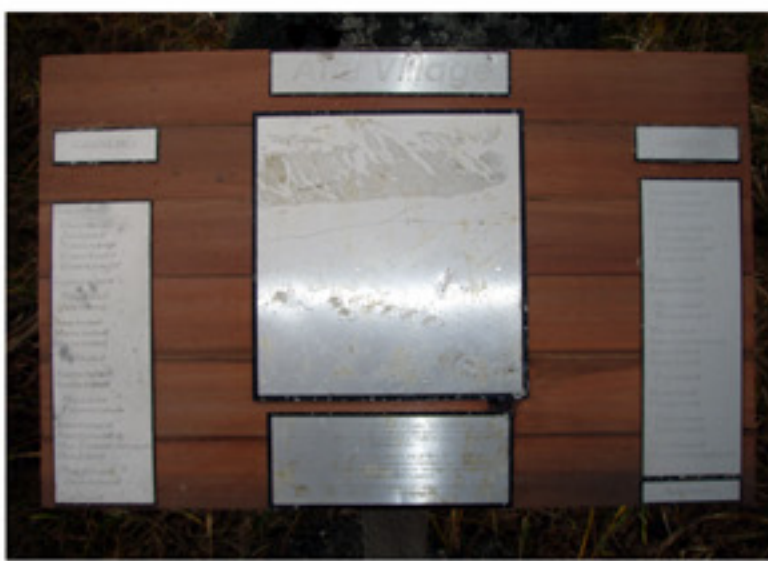
As the Japanese forces became more entrenched on Attu, Etta and the entire Aleut population of the little village of Chichagof were transported to Hokkaido, Japan in the hold of a freighter for internment. After WWII, the Aleuts were resettled on Atka Island, another island in the Aleutians.

Attu Island, Alaska - Coast Guard Loran Station Attu as seen from the top of the antenna. USCG photo.

Today the inhabitants of Attu Island are the 20 Coast Guardsmen who maintain the Loran Station at Massacre Bay. The tour of duty is one year. It is

unaccompanied meaning that for a year their families are left behind. Their only lifeline is the Coast Guard C-130 aircraft that arrive every two weeks with supplies and mail. Occasionally they host film crews and wildlife biologists. Remnants of the village and the occupation are still evident. Weapons, unexploded ordinance, ink bottles, china and other artifacts have been found over time.

After enduring 14 years of extreme Aleutian weather, the plaque that commemorates the Attu Aleut village finally succumbed to the elements. It was found by the station personnel on the ground this spring. The plaque was in several pieces and in need of repair. The crew brought it back to the station and worked on the plaque during their free time.



Damage Control Technician First Class Timothy Florezadams, of Victorville, Calif., rebuilt the plaque base and remounted the aluminum placards on it. Chief Machinery Technician Richard Boxleitner, of Curlew, Wash., Machinery Technician First Class Joshua Hickman, of Redlands, Calif., and Machinery Technician Third Class Matthew Burnard, of Monroe, Mich., drove out to Chichagof harbor on Saturday, November 3 to perform a re-dedication ceremony. They bowed their heads and said a brief prayer to remember those that lived and died in the small village. The rebuilt plaque was placed in the same location that it was found.

Attu Island, Alaska -- Coast Guardsmen at Loran Station Attu spent free time rebuilding a plaque commemorating the Aleut village of Chichigof on Attu Island this fall. USCG photo.

Attu was retaken by American Forces in May 1943. The battle lasted 18 days. Approximately

2351 Japanese and 549 Americans were killed. It was the only land battle in North America during the war. There are two cemeteries on the island. More than 600 American servicemen rest there. This past summer station personnel, Dept. of Defense POW/ Missing Personnel Office members and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service members assisted the Japanese in identifying mass graves on Attu.

This plaque, the WWII memorial and the remnants of the village are a tribute to those who lived and died on the desolate island. The Coast Guardsmen who stand duty there are steadfast and remind us of the sacrifices our service men and women make for our country.