

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

BUREAU OF FISHERIES
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
705 Federal Office Bldg., SEATTLE, WASH.

Funter Bay, Alaska
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Mr. E.C. Johnston
Superintendent
Fish & Wildlife Service
Seattle, Washington.

The following account is in response to your request for the story of our evacuation from St. George Island.

About 9:30 A.M. on the morning of June 14, 1942 - Sunday - I was called out by several natives who had sighted a small vessel which they thought "might be the PENGUIN". It came into the village landing from the east side, and I went out to it, meeting its Capt. Stack. I learned from him that the vessel was called the YP 86, and that he had come in to evacuate all the whites who wished to leave. We went ashore, informed the employees, and it was decided that all the whites leave with him except Father Theodosy, who elected to remain with me and the natives.

Capt. Stack was just going back aboard the ship when some natives advised me that a couple of ~~men~~ men were coming over the hill from Garden Cove. We went up to meet them and learned they were Executive Officer Olson and an enlisted man from another small patrol ship, the YP 155, which had anchored in Garden Cove with mail and provisions from Dutch Harbor. Capt. Stack then went aboard the "86" to send a message to the "155" to come around to the village, and then the "86" pulled out without further explanation.

Mr. Olson and his man waited ashore, and in about an hour the "155" came around and shortly after a cutter, later identified as the ONANDAGA, pulled in. A few provisions of really no consequence were given us from the "155". Capt. Blake, of the "155", and I were summoned aboard the cutter by its Capt. Melbun (I believe it was), where we learned that the entire population of the Pribilofs was to be evacuated immediately. In fact, he stated that an alarm might come at any moment, and all

of our arrangements were made along that line. According to messages he showed us, though, a ship called the ORIOLE was at St. Paul Island then; the UST DELAROF, accompanied by the CHARLESTON was to arrive Tuesday morning at the islands to take us all. In the event of alarm, the ORIOLE and the ~~CHARLESTON~~ ONANDAGA were to take us all off. I was instructed to prepare the village for destruction first that night by placing a pail of gasoline in each house and building, and a charge of dynamite for each other installation such as storage tanks, light plants, trucks, radio transmitters, receivers, antenna masts, etc. The packing of everybody was to be very simple - absolutely nothing but one suitcase per person and a roll of blankets. I asked specifically about Grovers, who were leaving for good and packed already, if they could take the couple of boxes they had; and I was told in no uncertain terms that absolutely nothing more than a suitcase would be allowed to go aboard the vessel taking us. I was also instructed to signal the ONANDAGA as quickly as all was set and ready for leaving the island.

It was 10 P.M. Sunday night when I finally got ashore again and I informed the whites of everything. At 10:30, I talked to the native gang and instructed them to have their women pack while they themselves worked on the destruction preparations. At 2:30 A.M. Monday, I gave the ONANDAGA the 4 blasts on the foghorn, signifying we were all ready to move out. In case of an alarm, our boys were to do the firing of the village, but in case we had to wait for the DELAROF, the cutter crew was to come ashore after we left to do the destroying.

I waited all Monday morning for someone to come ashore to find out about our preparations, as they had intended to do, but no one came. About 1 P.M. a large transport passed on the east side and headed for St. Paul Island. Shortly afterwards, the launch from the cutter came close to shore, calling to us to be ready to go aboard the DELAROF that night. We sat up and waited all night until about 5:30 Tuesday morning when the ship finally arrived.

We had hauled all the baggage and blankets, as allowed, down to the beach the night before, and immediately began loading passengers into the bidars when the boat came to the anchorage. When all but the last bidar load had been sent out, an officer, Mr. McClellan, came ashore from the cutter to make notes on the destruction preparations, with which I helped him. It was then, too, I learned that St. Paul had been allowed to take almost everything with them. Some of the bidar crew went back to the village and grabbed a few more things, including 3 dories and outboard motors, which have come in handy.

It was too late then, however, to do more, as the ship was getting impatient to leave and the tide was so low, anyhow, that the bidar was scraping bottom. It was about 10 A.M. when we finally were all aboard.

Then it was decided that they had to transfer oil from the DELAROF to the ONANDAGA, as the cutter had apparently just been instructed to convoy us down in the place of the CHARLESTON, which had not arrived on the scene yet. So the two ships went around to Garden Cove where it was smoother water to transfer oil. Our boys went ashore to take off the St. George mail which the "155" had put in the fox-house there the day before. About 4:30 P.M., Tuesday, June 16th, we finally departed from St. George Island, headed for Dutch Harbor by devious courses, we learned.

We arrived in Dutch Harbor Wednesday afternoon, where some cargo was discharged, more loaded, and finally the Atka population was taken aboard. The ship then departed from there early Thursday morning, convoyed still by the ONANDAGA, and headed for an unknown destination. There were many rumors and even the Captain apparently knew nothing of our new home to be. Seattle, Cook's Inlet, and Wrangell were reported at various times, until we came into Icy Straits. There, early in the morning, we were met by a patrol boat with orders to proceed to Funter Bay to leave the Pribilof Group, and thence to Killisnoo to drop the Atka people. We arrived in Funter Bay at about 9:30 A.M., June 24th, where we were discharged at the cannery site.

The two captains had orders to leave only the natives here and to take all the whites on to Seattle, but Mr. Hoverson and I decided to remain here also. Before we were completely unloaded, the USFWS BRANT came in with Service Agent Frank Hynes, Superintendent Hirst, and others of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who all concurred in our staying with the natives. It was then decided that the two priests and the Hellbaums remain also. The DELAROF departed about 8 P.M., June 24th, and the PENGUIN arrived the following afternoon, where you and Mr. McMillin took over.

Mr. Hoverson's story of the leaving of St. Paul will complete the account of the evacuation of the Pribilof Islands.

Sam Benson

Agent & Caretaker.