In January 1979, the leaders of the two villages began work with the National Marine Fisheries Service to plan a ten year phaseout of the federal government's presence in the Pribilofs. Everyone was committed to the goal of total self-determination since no one wanted an outside entity, particularly politically influenced body, to decide if the villages are to survive in any given year. To be at the mercy and whim of bodies affected by single minded well-organized lobbyists was an unacceptable basis for economic security.

By the time the plan was complete in 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States and a conservative minded majority was seated in the Senate. The animal protectionists, quick to seize an opportunity, began an organized lobbying effort in the halls of Congress to cut the Pribilof budget entirely and terminate the International Fur Seal Treaty. Professional lobbyists were hired by the protectionists three months before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted on whether or not to support ratification of the Interim Convention for the Conservation of the Northern Fur Seals for another four years. One week before the vote was taken by the committee in March, 1981, the Alaska Congressional Delegation contacted the Pribilof leaders to inform them that there were only 8 Senators in support of the renewal, out of 17 on the committee. The Aleut leaders knew that if this vote was lost, the Pribilof villages would no longer be viable. The President of the Tanadgusix Corporation, Larry Merculieff and the corporation attorney and chief lobbyist, Tony Smith, traveled to Washington within two days of receiving word on the vote count to try to save the treaty. An "executive" position paper outlining arguments to
continue the treaty was drawn up with key support documents attached. The week prior to the vote was spent making numerous contacts, meeting Senate Staff Members and distributing the executive position paper. The Sierra Club and National Audubon Society was contacted to obtain their letters of support for distribution. Tony Smith was instrumental in obtaining a crucial support letter from Secretary of State Alexander Haig. When the vote was taken in the Foreign Relations Committee, there was unanimous approval for support of ratification. As a result, the full Senate voted to ratify the interim convention for another four years, through 1984.

The next battle came when the House Appropriations Committee was considering the budget for the Pribilofs. This occurred after the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee voted to cut the budget 100%. If this effort succeeded, the Pribilofs would have lost 73% of its wage base and funds for all critical services, such as bulk home heating fuel purchase, delivery and supply, power plant operations and marine transportation beginning October, 1981. Fortunately, the Alaska Congressional Delegation were able to identify 5 million dollars in the President's proposed budget which was to go towards changing the name of Mt. McKinley to Mt. Denali. Native leaders from the Alaska Federation of Natives, Ahtna, and Doyon Corporations fought long and hard for these funds, so the Alaska Delegation could not move these funds without their permission. Larry Merculieff contacted the native leaders for their permission to reallocate the 5 million dollars to the Pribilof Islands Program, which was granted. Thus, the 1982 funding was saved.

The Aleut leaders and their lobbyists have had to carry on such battles in Washington every year for over a decade. The fact that they have been successful in turning around every challenge to their only economic base in the last decade demonstrates that the Aleut leaders have developed a sophistication in dealing with the outside world unparalleled in the last 200 years. The new generation of leaders are perhaps more prepared to set the course of Pribilof Aleut destiny than they have ever been.

**The Village Corporation Leadership**

In 1971, Congress enacted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This complicated legislation gave legal recognition of land
ownership by Alaska Natives and provided monetary compensation for lands taken away. ANCSA created new entities called village corporations to receive the bulk of the Act's benefits. Methods were prescribed for allocation of rights to select land for ownership and to receive money based on the number of shareholders each village corporation had. Every village in Alaska has a village corporation, which is organized as a private for profit entity incorporated under the laws of Alaska. Each corporation functions in the same manner as any other corporation in the United States, with shareholder annual meetings, a board of directors and requirements for annual audits. The people of St. George incorporated the St. George Tanaq Corporation and St. Paul enacted the Tanadgusix (TDX) Corporation. The Tanaq Corporation received title to 103,000 acres of land which they selected from the Alaska Peninsula and the Aleutian Chain. Tanaq also owns 22,000 acres of land on St. George. TDX, with the largest number of shareholders of any village in the Aleutian Region, received the right to select 138,000 acres of land in the Aleutians, Alaska Peninsula, and St. Paul, and received three million dollars allocated over a 10 year period. For the first time since the encroachment of exploiters 200 years ago, Aleuts legally own and control the land they have used for thousands of years. Because of its financial resources, TDX took the primary leadership role in all lobbying efforts and planning for the Pribilofs future since 1975.

The TDX Corporation Board of Directors hired an Aleut business manager in late 1975 to begin an investment program. In 1976, TDX took over the hotel and restaurant operations and signed a contract with a large tour agency to bring in tourists. Presently, TDX employs 15 local people in the seasonal tourist operation which serves approximately 1200 visitors annually. In 1977, TDX negotiated an agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service to take over all responsibility for disposing of fur seal byproducts. TDX took over the byproducts processing plant and began marketing seal meat as mink and dog food and for use as crab bait. TDX also markets seal reproductive organs to the orient. These operations employ 24 local people seasonally. In 1978, TDX remodeled a building for use as a four-plex apartment building. In 1980, TDX lobbied for State appropriations to develop engineering and other data on a possible small boat harbor facility on St. Paul. As a result, the State of Alaska has determined administratively that they would

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support funding to construct the entire harbor facility. In 1981, TDX was successful in obtaining financing for acquisition of a large hotel in Anchorage. Also in 1981, TDX decided to purchase two small commercial halibut boats and initiated an aggressive training program for six selected local individuals. For the first time in the Pribilof history, Aleuts engaged in commercial fishing of resources in their backyard. The project received widespread attention through publication of feature articles in the National Fisherman's Magazine and the Alaska Fisherman's Journal. In addition to the boat investments, TDX remodeled and furnished a building for use as a processing facility, which employed four people on a part time basis. As a result of this project, TDX was successful in obtaining State funds to construct boat launching facilities on St. Paul, which is expected to be operational in 1982. TDX also obtained a sizable grant to develop markets for fresh halibut. As part of the halibut project, TDX sent representatives to the annual meeting of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, which is responsible for setting quotas and determining dates when commercial halibut fishing would be allowed. For the first time in Pribilof Aleut history, Aleuts actively participated in setting regulations for fish resources in their area.

TDX believes that the future of the Pribilofs will be intricately tied to the fish resources of the Bering Sea and therefore is now concentrating the bulk of its efforts and resources in this area. Because these efforts will significantly affect the village and its life-style the TDX leaders were the driving force behind creation of the Pribilof Interorganiza-tional Council (PIOC). This group composed of all major organizations of St. George and St. Paul, was organized in September 1981 to address issues of community wide concern and to give input and advice on critical issues. A Steering Committee, composed of two representatives from each participating organization was appointed by the PIOC to be its working arm. For the first time in Pribilof Aleut history, the people are formally coordinating organizational efforts.

The St. George Tanaq Corporation is equally a driving force for their village. In 1980, the Tanaq Corporation entered into a contract with a Taiwanese Fish Company to train St. George Aleuts on board a deep sea fishing vessel and to provide seed capital for investment in commercial fishing boats. In 1981, the Tanaq Corporation successfully lobbied for sizable State appropriations to construct small port facilities.
Construction is expected to begin in 1982. With funds obtained from the Taiwanese joint-venture, the Tanaq Corporation also has taken over the local grocery store, purchased a twin engine aircraft presently being leased by an aircraft charter company, and is now formulating plans to process crab which will be delivered to St. George when the port facility becomes operational. The Tanaq Corporation is also formulating plans to develop a specialized tour operation.

The two village corporations in the Pribilofs are now actively exploring possibilities for pooling their resources for investments on the islands. Should this occur, it will be the first time it is done since the creation of these entities.

The creation of these corporate entities has resulted in opening up new horizons for the Pribilofs. Its leadership has had to learn how to function in an alien corporate world in less than half a generation. Concepts of stocks, investment portfolios, proxies, return on investment, audit reports, financial analyses, parliamentary procedure, cash flow, depreciation, contracts and future planning have had to be learned to effectively manage these complex organizations. In dealing with today's world, perhaps the Pribilof Aleuts would not achieve economic self-sufficiency without knowledge and experience with corporations. It is much to the credit of Aleut abilities that they have come this far with leadership which never dealt with business or corporations in their history under the most trying of circumstances and against heavy odds.

**The Pribilof Interorganizational Council (PIOC)**

It has become the responsibility of the PIOC to plan for the future of the Pribilofs, at a point in time when decisions will affect the lives of Pribilof Aleuts for generations to come. The U.S. government plans a full withdrawal from the islands in less than five years. Given that this withdrawal could mean economic disaster and a rapid death of their villages unless plans are made now, the PIOC began its difficult task of assessing the impacts and determining how to replace six million dollars of government funds which now goes to operations critical to the villages.

The constant attacks by protectionist groups on the fur seal harvest and the International Treaty over the past ten years has taken its toll on the Aleut people. Economic insecurity has created community wide
depression and demoralization. Social stress has resulted in problems never before encountered by the villages in their history. The PIOC, as a result, sees that it must act quickly for the mental well-being of its constituents and to avoid an out-migration of young people who refuse to live under these conditions.

The PIOC Steering Committee decided in January, 1981 to pool organizational resources to support efforts to obtain State appropriations for construction of a boat harbor. This group is determined to seek out all methods to control the harbor to minimize social disruption, and to ease the transition from a fur seal economy to fisheries. Plans have been drawn up for training and retraining programs. The corporations are evaluating investment possibilities to ensure control over business enterprises that will be introduced once a harbor is built. The TDX Corporation is evaluating the possibilities of operating the fur seal harvest as a business.

The PIOC recognizes that their task is fought with tremendous obstacles and dangers. Because of past government practice, local people were not trained in management level jobs. Supervisory skills are limited. No one is trained or experienced in operating fishery enterprises. The entities do not have sufficient training funds nor do they have the capital to assume six million dollars of operations. The government buildings which serve important village maintenance functions are in a state of extreme disrepair because of yearly government funding cuts over the last decade. Heavy equipment and vehicles needed to maintain roads, deliver fuel, maintain the airstrip, deliver cargo are in need of major overhaul or replacement. Operating costs, fuel costs, and grocery costs are on an inflationary spiral upwards, resulting in growing community debt. There are no funds to build homes to meet a growing housing shortage. Most homes in the village are at least 50 years old and in need of major upgrading. The government contracted marine transportation which provides most village supplies annually will be terminated and there are presently no means to replace the service.

The PIOC must meet all these challenges with its limited resources. But, despite the great problems, the PIOC is not dwelling on how difficult the road towards economic freedom is. In the tradition of 10,000 years of Aleut survival, it is adapting to the circumstances with an unshakable commitment towards continued existence of the people.
Conclusion

The 1980s is a time of major transition for the Pribilof people. They have endured severe hardships first at the hands of the Russian fur traders, then the U.S. Government since 1911. Pribilof Aleuts have been loyal civil servants in the truest sense of the word, and despite their hardships, Aleuts always believed in working within the system to bring about change. They have won their struggle for political freedom by sacrifice and commitment of generations of leaders like Iliodor Merculieff. It was less than two decades ago that the political freedom was achieved. It took 27 years of litigation by Aleuts to obtain legal recognition of U.S. maltreatment of Pribilof Aleuts. It was one decade ago that Pribilof Aleuts received legal title to land they occupied for 200 years. For over a decade, Aleut leaders fought to protect the Fur Seal Treaty in public hearings, in Congressional Committees and in the media. Even when the seal harvest was stopped on St. George in 1973 and Aleuts were no longer allowed to take seal meat for food, a staple on the Aleut table for thousands of years, the leaders chose to voice their extreme indignation by participation in the International Fur Seal Commission.

It is the quality of Aleut culture that is demonstrated by what Aleuts chose to do. Many animal protectionist groups have maintained that the Pribilof Aleuts no longer have a culture. But, it is Aleut culture that taught patience, perseverance, justice and an indomitable will to survive through understanding of environment, be it political or natural.

Aleut destiny was intricately tied to the fur seal since the first Russian set foot on Aleut land and brought them to the Pribilofe as slaves. Now, within five years, the tie to the seals will be broken. This may be the last time that a major change is forced upon the people of these islands by outsiders. For the first time in two centuries, Pribilof Aleuts will be in charge of their future. They will succeed in bringing about a bright future if they are allowed the proper tools for use as they see fit.

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