On October 23, 1941, the Japanese withdrew from the North Pacific Seal Convention of 1911. This was a warning that Japan was quietly severing its international ties in preparation for war. However, the warning went unnoticed and two months later Japan launched a devastating attack on Pearl Harbor. On the third of June in the following year, the Japanese opened a new military offensive in the Aleutian Islands, using the intelligence its fishing fleets in the Aleutians Islands had been gathering for years. A surprise attack was launched against Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island, thrusting the Aleutian Islands violently into World War II and the Pribilof Islands into the war zone.

The Japanese planes that had delivered the bombs to Dutch Harbor had come from the decks of aircraft carriers that were hidden in the summer fog of the North Pacific. Rumors spread quickly throughout Alaska that the Japanese fleet had entered the Bering Sea and was preparing to launch a new surprise attack on the Alaskan mainland. Anxiously the Fisheries Office in Seattle radioed the Pribilof people to repair the barges on the Islands that were used for loading and unloading ships, and then there was silence.

June 16th that year was a beautiful, sunny day, despite the shadows of the war. The young men on St. Paul had gathered to play baseball on the village ball field while other people were visiting among themselves outdoors. In the midst of this summer day, two dark ships appeared, without warning, on the horizon, speeding ominously towards St. Paul. No one knew their identity or their purpose; all radio traffic had been silenced in the Bering Sea. It was with considerable relief that the people finally recognized a U.S. military transport ship, the *U.S.S. Delaroff*,

1
and an escort ship that had come to the Islands unannounced to evacuate the Pribilof people as quickly as possible from the war zone. The people had a single evening to pack whatever they wanted to take with them, not knowing what they would need or where they were going. The food supplies in the canteen were also packed and loaded on the ship to insure that wherever the people went they would have some food. Few people slept that night; children chose their favorite toys to take with them while their parents discussed their uncertain future. The next morning everything was loaded onto the transport with women and children going aboard first. Gabe Stepetin, George Bourdukofsky, and Paul Tetoff, who had been working all night in the canteen, were the last Aleuts on the Island. When they left, the only people remaining on St. Paul were nine Army enlisted men, assigned to defend the Islands in case of a Japanese attack, and Roy Huid, a radio man.

After the Delaroff left St. Paul it stopped at St. George where people were given a single hour to pack what they would take with them. Each person was allowed one suitcase and most people packed as many clothes as they could in the largest satchel they could find. Some, like Michael Lestenkof, decided that his most valuable possession was his outboard motor, which he disassembled and packed in place of his clothes. St. Paul had been able to load their village bidar on the transport, but St. George had no time to take such luxuries.

The position of the Japanese fleet was still unknown and therefore the Delaroff, with the entire Pribilof population aboard, zig-zagged its way down to Unalaska, in case enemy submarines were following them. Life aboard the ship was filled with lifeboat drills, rumors of unknown foreign ships and speculations about their destination. People thought they were headed south to Seattle or Oregon, until they pulled in at Unalaska. There, the Aleuts from Atka quickly boarded the ship and then the Delaroff continued its journey, this time traveling eastward. Several days later, on June 24th, the ship reached the Admiralty Islands in Southeast Alaska, where the Pribilof people were landed at a deserted salmon cannery on a beach at Funter Bay.

The people debarked on another beautiful summer day with temperatures higher than most of the people had ever felt. The island was lovely, but it could not disguise the decrepit appearance of the cannery. It had been deserted for years and was filthy from neglect. The two story dormitories at the old cannery, which were to become the

128 Slaves of the Harvest
home of the Pribilof people, had been used for the Chinese and Filip-pino laborers who used to work there. In 1942 only a caretaker and watchman remained. The dormitories had little or no furniture in them; many people had to make their own beds from scrap lumber and chickenwire. There were no partitions in many of the long rooms and people improvised with blankets to give themselves a semblance of privacy. There was also no clothesline so their first washing was hung out on the branches of trees.

There was a mess hall on the first floor of the bunkhouse, next to a large kitchen. However, that first day there was no time to prepare a decent meal so people ate K-rations that had been unloaded from the *Delaroff*. Once everything was unpacked, canned goods and corned beef became the staples of the diet until more food began to arrive from Juneau and Seattle on a ship named the *Penguin*. The canned goods were supplemented by the salmon the men caught and by mushrooms the women gathered in the woods. However, the supply of food was never adequate and fresh food was almost nonexistent.

The bunkhouses were too crowded for all of the Pribilof people; some had to sleep in the hallways those first few nights. A deserted gold mine with a bunkhouse was located ten minutes across the bay and the St. George people moved there within a week. The two camps were soon renamed St. Paul and St. George and the hour walk between the cannery and the mine, through the woods, was made often during the next two years.

Mail for the two camps arrived from Juneau once a month by ship. Although Juneau was only four hours away, the Pribilof people were forbidden by the U.S. Government to leave the Funter Bay area. They were paid $20 a month to do work around the cannery and mine, but the attraction of real wages in Juneau was too strong to keep some of the men isolated on the island for long. Irish Stepetin was the first to illegally take a boat down to Juneau and find a job. Soon others followed him and the Fisheries realized that their quarantine of the Pribilof people from the outside world was crumbling. Some of them, like Aggey Galaktionoff, also managed to bring their families to Juneau:

> I only had about $15 in my pocket and I went to Juneau. I leave her (his wife) at Funter Bay and went to Juneau and looking for a job. Well, I couldn't make it. I was just about to give up—I had only left

*World War II at Funter Bay*  
129
about $2.50 in my pocket. Finally I happened to meet my partner, Irish Stepetin, in Juneau. I just told him what I do here. Never mind paying for hotels, he said. Come on to my house. I'll get you a job. I didn't believe him but I went to his house and I slept there. Next morning he wake me up and have breakfast with him and took me down to U.S.E.D. (Engineering Department). We were building government dock. Biggest warehouse I ever seen—100 feet by 300 feet long.

Irish was mechanic helper and Alex Stepetin and I was in the bull gang. We were the only ones to put in overtime and there I was making pretty good in just two weeks time. First I was supposed to be a truck driver but I refused. I don't know Juneau. They told me I was missing a good chance. It's all right, I said, I'm able to come up to it someday. So they let me off and put me in labor—98c an hour. I take it. I didn't care. I said I'll make it. First paycheck wasn't very much but then I try to get my wife over and found a house for about $15 a month. I stayed there and I received a letter, she's gonna come right away. I write back and said stay there till I call.

Then I had overtime in Auk Bay—out fourteen minutes or so from Juneau. I told my foreman I was worried about my wife because Penguin was coming. She might have a hard time if she arrived and I was out of town. She did too, but lucky, people at Juneau saw her where I stayed and I get home about 10:00 one evening and she was making cakes. I stand right in front of window and Nectary was a little boy then, and Nedesa, both by window playing and I tap at window and they look up and say "Daddy!" I didn't have nothing—no supplies but man who ran supply store—I went over to his house and knocked door and told him. He got a box and went to the store and fill up box full. "You're working, you'll pay for it. Take it home to mama." Tracy was our neighbor and we put up meat and started to drink and old Nekifer—Tracy's father—come and we have all the fun we can have in that small place.

The Fisheries staff who supervised the evacuation camps on the Admiralty Islands were Mr. McMillin, the agent, and Mr. Benson, the storekeeper. A small school was built for the children and several teachers gave them instruction. A clinic was also set up in the back of the doctor's house and a retired doctor and his wife were recruited to administer what medicine was available. The Russian Orthodox priests from both Pribilof communities had also come with their people to
Funter Bay. However, soon after their arrival Father Baranov moved to Juneau where they needed a priest and Father Archimandrite Theodosy Kulchitsky from St. George administered to both camps. That first Christmas was celebrated in the mess hall of the bunkhouse. Maxim Buterin dressed up in red pajamas and convinced the children that Santa Claus had found them even that far away from home.

After the people were resettled in the Admiralty Islands some of the young men were drafted into the Army. The Fisheries resisted the drafting of their sealing labor force on the grounds that the Pribilof people were not really citizens of the United States. However, a court in Washington D.C. declared that they were citizens, and therefore eligible

for military service.2

Three Pribilof men participated in the Battle of Attu in May, 1943: Victor Bourdukovsky, Arthur Hapoff, and Martin Galanin. For their service they all received a bronze star. Others were drafted and served in posts throughout Alaska until the end of the war.

In the early part of 1943, the Fisheries called a meeting of all the Pribilof men who were left in Funter Bay and Juneau to persuade them to return to their islands to harvest the fur seals that summer. After much discussion, the men agreed to return if they would be paid $1.00 per skin instead of the 60c they had received in the past. Ironically, they did not realize that they were also eligible for war zone pay which was considerably higher than what they had asked for. The sealers arrived back on the Islands on May 22,1943; some of the men were dropped off at St. George and the rest went on to St. Paul. They found all their houses occupied by the Army troops who had replaced the nine soldiers who had lived on the Island after the Aleuts were evacuated.

Those original soldiers who had been left on St. Paul had endured a lonely winter in what had become the ghost town of St. Paul. They had been under the command of SGT Lyman Ellsworth,3 who had made the hotel his headquarters. These nine men spent the year manning the lookout posts they had built at Zapadnie, North Hill, Hutchinson Hill, and at the village. They put drums of kerosene in each house on the Island and wired the drums so that they could be exploded if necessary by a detonator hidden on Telegraph Hill. If the Japanese did land on the Island, they would at least not have the benefit of the Pribilof homes for their barracks. In the course of that year, these men also bulldozed the runway near Polovina so that planes could land in case of a military

131
emergency; the planes then could also bring them their piled-up mail. One of the nine men froze to death that year, walking back from Hutchinson Hill; the remaining eight men were relieved the following year by a much larger company of soldiers.

In the summer of 1943, the Pribilof sealers, who returned to the islands, were greeted by this second group of American soldiers. AggeyGalaktionoff remembered:

We come up in '43 to do sealing. Army was here. We pretty near get stuck here.

Mr. Johnston—he gets off from here on a plane to arrange our transportation. We stayed here till September last part. We came up on boat.

When we were coming up here they was being invaded at Attu. Invasion starts and we sat off from dock—anchored right in Unalaska Bay there—three or four transports. We didn't know what was going on. About three days there. Fourth day we finish oiling up and head this way. Just next day we arrive over at East landing and we hear the machine gun going off. I thought they might make a mistake on us and shoot us out.

We got here about one o'clock but they didn't allow us to come ashore until evening. The Army was here and didn't allow us—over 100 men was here. But they all scattered all over the island. At North Hill, Rush Hill, all around, holes, fox holes.

We were anchored but wait till around five o'clock evening before we went ashore. This was a mistake too. They want us to be aboard there yet but operator made mistake. They wanted only leaders to come ashore But operator made mistake and said everybody ashore and some recruits with us coming ashore. All the men in line—march them back. Here we are all on the dock wandering around. Keep us like kids.

All right to the Aleutian bunkhouse. And we got here everything was disconnect. No running water, no beddings, nothing. And here you are—no grub. We're getting hungry, waiting and finally the mess sargeant coming in and ask for a cook. My brother and little David Fratis they cook for us. He said to put up what we have to support ourselves with. And we have these old cans of pink salmon. Army put them all inside and that been thrown away from us and Army eats that themselves.

Everybody starts busy cook themselves. David was a plumber before then and start connecting everything together—the stove and
everything. Then he started to cook and the mess sargeant came in and help him out. He comes in with a big box and boy, everything already cooked. At nine o'clock evening we finally started to eat.

Then we went to bed and didn't know what we're going to do next morning.

Next morning they don't allow us to move. It was rough. We just caged up in bunkhouse. Until they fixed work up we were going to do. Then they authorize us to go just that much from bunkhouse to garage. Just that area that's all. Not to houses or anywhere. We do the sealing and make the salt meat and after sealing they all get acquainted with us and we got nothing to do, we all stay in bunkhouse. They said we could come and visit troops if we wanted in our homes. Colonel was living in Government House and men in all our houses. It was crowded. There were eight bunks in each room in a house. Like my house now—even in kitchen, eight bunks. And men at Rush Hill and Big Lake—scattered around. And all the phone lines were on the ground—all reports come in here. Airfield built here and planes came in to bring supplies.

That summer 117,164 seals were harvested, the largest number since 1889. And in September the St. Paul men were picked up and returned to the Admiralty Islands on October 5th. Aggey remembered:

We stayed in bunkhouse that summer until September and then left for Dutch. And at Dutch they told us to go around to Captains Bay Dock and as we entered the Captains Bay we see the white boat, the Coast Guard, coming in at full blast. We just made it. The gates were gonna be closed. They saw a submarine outside of us and we just made it in as they shut gates. We stayed there three days.

The ship that had picked up the St. Paul sealers had sailed past St. George that fall. The men on St. George were told by the Fisheries that they had to stay there to fox trap. No date had been set for their return and as the days became shorter the men became more anxious to return to their families. It wasn't until November 11th that they were finally picked up and began their journey back to the old mine on Funter Bay.

The St. George men arrived back in the Admiralty Islands at the height of a measles epidemic that had swept through the dormitories on both sides of the Bay. The doctor and the few healthy people in the camps tried to care for the sick, but the living conditions were so
crowded that there was no way to prevent the spread of an infectious disease once it was introduced into the community. During the measles epidemic Alexandra Melovidov, Dimitri Tetoff, and Xena Stepetin worked long hours bringing soup from the huge stockpot in the mess hall up to the sick on the second floor, and then in the evening going into each room to empty the chamber pots. The measles finally ran its course in the camps, but over the two year period there were many other diseases that claimed at least 19 lives. The dead were buried in a shallow home-made cemetery by the side of a creek near the sandy beach looking out on to the Bay.

The Battle of Midway in 1942 was the turning point in the war against the Japanese in the Pacific. The Japanese navy retreated slowly back across the Pacific after this American victory. By May of 1944 it was safe for the Pribilof people to return to their homes again.

The two years the people had spent in Funter Bay had been filled with great deprivation. The summary of the experience in a Department of Interior report five years later emphasized the hardships the people had to endure during those years:

There is still evidently some resentment and bitterness of the abrupt and disastrous removal by the Army of the people of the Pribilofs ... to prevent their capture by the Japanese. They were all boarded on an Army transport and were many miles from the islands when the Director of Fish and Wildlife Service was notified and asked to designate their destination. Relocating two communities of more than 500 men, women, and children was no simple task. They were finally disembarked at Funter Bay. . . . The sufferings, deprivations and uncertainties that resulted from this war-time tragedy have not been forgotten. 5

However, the two years had not been all suffering, and peoples' memories reflected some of the most pleasant aspects of their evacuation camp experience as well. For the first time many young couples who had had to live with their in-laws on the Pribilofs because of the severe housing shortage, found themselves with their own private corner of the bunkhouse. It was the first time that they had had a "home" of their own to arrange the way they wanted. Others remembered the trees that surrounded the camps, the warmer weather, the mushrooms that could be picked in the forests and the bears that
would come down to the creek to drink in the evenings. Many of the people had also experienced the freedom of living in Juneau beyond the rules and regulations of the Fisheries, earning real salaries and being treated like workers rather than wards. When they returned to the Pribilofs it would be the experiences of freedom that would ultimately be the most important. The independence people had experienced in Juneau and in the Army made it impossible for them ever to accept again the roles they had left in 1942.