

LAST LETTERS *from* ATTU



The True Story of Etta Jones,
Alaska Pioneer and Japanese P.O.W.



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Bottom: Etta Jones and Attu Natives, 1942.

Frontispiece. Etta Eugenic Schureman, high-school
graduation photo, Vineland, New Jersey, 1898.



Invasion

The next morning, the commanding officer sent for my husband to come to headquarters. 𐄂

The main purpose of the Aleutians operations by Japanese task forces was threefold: (1) to defend the Japanese homeland from an attack by United States naval carrier task forces through the Northern Pacific Ocean, (2) to protect Japan from an attack by the United States land-based bombers using air bases in the Aleutian Islands, and (3) to create a diversion from the Battle at Midway. The Japanese knew Foster sent daily weather reports to the naval base at Dutch Harbor, and they accused him of including military secrets in the weather reports. Foster was the only male non-Native on the island, and he was the only one who knew how to operate the transmitter radio. Through an interpreter, his captors demanded to know what secrets he had passed on to the U.S. Navy. Foster responded to his captors time and time again that he did not have any knowledge of military maneuvers or secrets. The interrogation dragged on, hour after hour, the Japanese insisting that Foster was withholding information while Foster emphatically denied all accusations. The Japanese demanded that Foster repair his smashed radio and show his captors how to send and receive messages. When he responded that he did not know how to repair it, the Japanese shot him in the head, killing him instantly.

Kept in isolation, Etta was terrified for her sixty-three-year-old husband. Where was he? How long were the Japanese going to hold him? They had heard about Japanese atrocities in China and she was afraid he might be victimized the same way. She was frantic with worry and fear.

Foster was dead, but instead of telling Etta the tragic news, guards frequently came to her while she was alone and told her Foster was well, that he was warm, and he sent her his love. Etta wondered to herself about these assurances, but gratefully accepted them rather than let her hostile captors sense her doubt. In mental and emotional turmoil, the hours dragged on until, finally, some guards ordered her to come with them. She was taken to a room where, lying on the floor in a pool of his blood was the body of her

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husband. Even though she had known in her heart this was how it would probably end, seeing him lying there dead was too much to comprehend. The Japanese, however, were not yet finished. They forced her to watch as they beheaded him. Barely able to stand, she was roughly ushered back to her isolated quarters.

Gripped with fear, Etta languished in solitary confinement, struggling with the unspeakable horror she had just witnessed and the enormity of her situation. She fixated on the image of her husband's murder. She anticipated her own imminent death. Would she also be shot? Or worse? The brutality of the death of the only man she had ever loved overwhelmed her. They had spent nineteen magical years together. They had shared experiences that others could only dream of or read about. Now he was dead.

On November 28, 1945, Mike Lokanin, one of the Attu Natives, wrote to the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, telling what happened to Foster's body after Etta was led away by the guards. "[The Japanese guards] call us in, [Foster] was half sunk in his own blood. They wont let me see his face or body. He was wrapped in blanket. The tol me to bury him without coffin. So I dug a grave by our church. Measure destains from corner of church with my eyes and try to remember wind direction. It was burried in SW corner of church grave depth 7 ft. disent from church to grave 15 ft. After that I bury him that was end of them then and I never try to forget where I berried his body. And lamai [one of the Japanese guards] was by me all the tiem I work. We don't know what Japs might do to [Etta]. She is sick. . . . Mr. lamai received 3 stars. He got high after Foster got murdered."

I WAS PUT INTO A SMALLER CABIN, and the chief was told to appoint some of the villagers to stay with me, but they could not talk with me. A Jap guard stood right outside the door. I heard some of the news in whispers. Mike [Hodikoff] said he was allowed to go to the commander with requests and complaints, and he got results. For instance, the soldiers had stolen all their outboard motors. They were unable to go out for fish. When he complained of this, every motor was ordered back. Then, the soldiers stole the fish! After this complaint, the village was roped off, and the soldiers were forbidden to go inside the ropes.