

Timofei Osipovich Tarakanov - A Russian- He was working for the company by 1802. Joseph O'Cain, the American Sea Captain, of the brig O'Cain suggested in 1803 to take a group of Aleut hunters to the California Coast with him. **Tarakanov** led the hunting group with 20 baidarkas. In the San Francisco Bay area they took 1,100 pelts and bought 700 pelts from the Spanish missions. They returned in 1804. In October of 1806, they left Kodiak with 12 baidarkas and a crew of Aleuts to hunt the California Coast, returning in 1807. On September 1808 he sent **Tarakanov** with a party of hunters back to the California Coast but this time to start looking for a hunting base to establish. The ship he sailed on was shipwrecked near the Washington Coast and several passengers were captured by the local Indians. Several died in the months that followed, however, **Tarakanov** was able to talk to the Indians and encourage them to be freed with several others. They arrived back in Sitka on the brig Lydia, rescued by American Ship Captain Brown. A year later **Tarakanov** was again sent to California with a hunting party. They hunted the Farallones and Drake's Bay and stopped at the new Ross Colony. His life is unknown for the next several years. He sailed several times to the Sandwich Islands and continued leading hunting parties.

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Russian ship /Saint Nicolas/ wrecks near mouth of Quillayute River on November 1, 1808.

On November 1, 1808, the Russian brig /Saint Nicholas/ wrecks just south of the mouth of the Quillayute River at latitude 47 degrees 56 minutes. Although the crew of 20 men and women makes it to shore safely, the party will battle with the Quileute tribe and will endure captivity by the Indians for the next two and a half years. Seven people will die in captivity or disappear before the survivors are ransomed by the crew of an American trading ship.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, expeditions by the Spanish, British, and Americans put pressure on the Russian American Fur Company to establish a presence on the west coast of North America. On September 28, 1808, the U.S.-built brig, /Saint Nicolas/, sailed from New Archangel (Sitka) in Russian Alaska on an expedition of exploration and trade. Russian naval officer Nikolai Bulagin commanded the vessel. He was accompanied by his 18-year-old wife, Anna Petrovna Bulagina, 12 Russian men, four Aleut men, and two Aleut women for a total of 20. Bulagin's plan was to rendezvous with another ship, the /Kodiak/, at Grays Harbor, and probe south towards California.

Near Destruction Island the /Saint Nicolas/ became becalmed and the tide drove the ship toward the shore. Bulagin set anchors, but the hawsers failed and the /Saint Nicolas /crashed into the beach at high water just south of the mouth of the Quillayute River. All 20 members of the crew made it ashore with arms, ammunition, tents, sails, provisions, and other supplies. Quileute Indians pilfered some items and the situation degraded as they attacked with stones and spears. The Russians retaliated with firearms, killing two.

Bulagin elected to trek southward and find the /Kodiak/ in Grays Harbor. For three days the survivors struggled through the heavy undergrowth to the Hoh River. Unable to ford the stream, they got some Indians to ferry them in two canoes. During the crossing, the Indians turned on the Russians. One man was killed and Anna Petrovna, a Russian man, and an Aleut man were captured. Bulagin was so upset by the loss of his young wife that he resigned leadership to supercargo Timofei **Tarakanov**, who had survived a massacre and capture by Tlingits at New Archangel six years before.

Under **Tarakanov** the Russians marched inland and sustained two more wounded. Anna Petrovna's captors followed the fugitives and proposed a ransom for her return. In the negotiations, Bulagin was able to speak to his wife, but the deal fell apart when the Russians would not relinquish their firearms. The Russians fought their way upriver and built a fortified camp. They also constructed a boat.

On February 8, 1809, they took the boat down river to the mouth of the Hoh and landed opposite a village. When the Indians gathered around the strangers, the Russians took three hostages of their own, two women and a young man. By the time that the Indians produced Anna Petrovna, she refused repatriation because she had been well treated and did not care for hardship in the wilderness. Bulagin at first threatened to shoot his wife, then withdrew in grief.

Anna Petrovna's account of her experience gave **Tarakanov** an idea. He and four other men surrendered to the Indians counting on eventual rescue by other Europeans. The balance of the expedition attempted to take their boat to Destruction Island, but lost it on the rocks along with all their supplies. They became prisoners as well.

The captives were traded up and down the coast among the tribes. Bulagin's first owner traded him to the man who held Anna Petrovna. But Anna Petrovna died in August 1809, and consumption took Bulagin in February 1810.

Tarakanov ended up north at Cape Flattery the property of Utramaka. and he received good treatment due to his skill with tools and his entertainment value (he built a kite). On May 6, 1811, **Tarakanov** was ransomed by Captain Brown of the American brig /Lydia/ along with an Englishman, John Williams, and the other Russians. The Americans and the Indians could not make a deal for two of the Russians until Brown seized the Indian chief. The two men were released.

Of the 20 members of the expedition, 13 were recovered by Brown and repatriated to Sitka. One Aleut man was eventually found along the Columbia River and ransomed. One Russian was traded so far away he was never heard from again.

Sources:

/The River Pioneers: Early Days on Grays Harbor/, ed. by Edwin Van Syckle and David James (Aberdeen, WA: Pacific Search Press, 1982), 19-24. By David Wilma, May 03, 2006

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