

Gun — Nutek

TAATILLKA NUTENGQ'RTAALLIA. – MY LATE FATHER ALWAYS HAD A GUN.



Photo: Lead shot, gun part, and a gunflint from an Alutiiq sod house ca. 1820s, ikt'sqaaq Angayuk site. Leisnoi, Inc. collection.

The Alutiiq word for gun, *nutek*, comes from the verb *nutegluku*, “to shoot it.” The first firearms Alutiiq people encountered were flintlock muskets imported by Russian traders. Stephen Glotov, who wintered in Alitak Bay in 1763, used musket fire to scare Alutiiq warriors attacking his ship. The warriors fled but returned later with shields impenetrable to Russian musket balls. In 1784, Alutiiq people suffered the destructive power of cannons when entrepreneur Gregorii Shelikhov attacked the settlement at Refuge Rock off Sitkalidak Island. When musket fire failed to subdue the community, Shelikhov fired two half-pound cannons at their sod houses, killing many and crushing further resistance.

Some historic sources suggest that guns were not initially traded to Native people, that firearms were a limited, valuable commodity Russian traders kept for themselves. However, archaeological data suggests that guns were part of Alutiiq households in the early decades of the nineteenth century. At *Mikt'sqaaq Angayuk*, “Little Partner,” an archaeological site, archaeologists found

lead shot, gun parts, and a gunflint in an Alutiiq sod house dating to the 1820s.

Although Alutiiq people apparently had guns in the Russian era, their arrows and lances were better hunting weapons. The loud report of muskets frightened game, and their iron parts corroded quickly in the rain and salt spray. Most muskets survived in Russian America for only a few years.

More widespread use of guns began in the 1860s when muzzle-loaded percussion cap lock guns replaced flintlock muskets. Explosive caps, a valuable trade good, ignited the powder charge in these weapons. Like arrows and lances, Alutiiq hunters often fired percussion guns from double-holed kayaks. The person in the front seat operated the gun, while his partner used a paddle to steady the boat from the rear.

In the early years of the American era, traders imported surplus civil war .44 caliber rifles that fired small rimfire cartridges, as well as some .50 caliber rifles. Rifles that fired large centerfire cartridges replaced these older-style guns.