

Anguyagcillrit – WARFARE

In Alutiiq/Sugpiaq society, success at warfare could enhance a man's social and economic standing. Men led raids to seek vengeance and acquire wealth. Alutiiq stories suggest that when visitors ridiculed or embarrassed a community member—particularly a chief or a child—the community would seek revenge. The goal of conflict was not simply to punish offenders, but also to take their possessions. Raiders collected loot and slaves—people who were ransomed for goods or taken home as laborers.

Alutiiq warriors were legendary, athletic fighters. In preparation for warfare, they received gifts from their leader, readied their gear, took a cleansing steam bath, and probably painted their faces. They departed by boat early in the morning and carried wooden clubs, spears, bows, and specially fashioned arrows. Their arrows were tipped with bone points that had thin, splintery barbs. Craftsmen designed these barbs to cause extensive internal damage by breaking off inside their victims. In addition to weaponry, warriors held shields made from thick planks of hardwood, and wore protective vests of wooden armor. Fashioned from small pieces of wood and tied together with sinew, sturdy yet flexible shirts of armor protected a warrior's chest from enemy arrows.

War parties attacked neighboring Alutiiq communities, as well as the more distant villages of neighboring cultures. Secretive nighttime raids and open battles took place, often in the summer when travel was easiest.

Sentries, signal fires, and runners helped warn communities of approaching raiders. To protect their families, Alutiiq people built temporary settlements at the top of precipitous cliffs and small, rocky islands. Here, families had shelters and stockpiles of supplies. When communities feared assault, they retreated to these sites for protection. From these strategically located refuges residents could repel attackers by dropping logs, boulders, or piles of burning grass.



LEARN MORE:

Warriors of Kodiak: Military Traditions of Kodiak Islanders, 2004, by Lydia T. Black. *Arctic Anthropology* 41(2):140-152.

Frank Peterson, Jr., with a wooden war club and war shield, carved by artist Andrew Abyo. Purchased by the Alutiiq Museum with support from the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund.