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OPERATIONS IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS
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INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers operations in the Aleutian Islands during the period 3 June 1942 - 24 August 1943.

Although the monograph was assigned as a general subject, the author was stationed in the Aleutian Islands during the period covered and took part in the landing on Adak and the attack on Kiska.

For the reader to have a full understanding of the operations in the Aleutians, it is necessary to appreciate the strategic importance of the area, the climate, and the terrain.

At the time Secretary of State Seward purchased Alaska from Russia at a cost of about two cents an acre, it was considered a poor investment by the majority of the citizens of the United States and was popularly nicknamed "Seward's Folly". However, the strategic importance of the territory in World War II was to be sufficient justification for spending many times what Alaska cost. (1)

Alaska thrusts out of the northwestern corner of the North American continent like a giant thumb pointed toward Siberia. From the western tip of the Alaskan Peninsula the Aleutian Islands stretch some 800 miles farther to the west to form a series of giant stepping stones. Attu, the westernmost of the Aleutian Islands, is less than 800 miles from Japan's northern islands, the Kuriles. (2)

From the foregoing, the strategic importance of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands can readily be seen. Alaska's position could be vital in a war between Japan and the United States. It could be used as a base by either country to launch an attack against the other. Similarly, it could be used as a defensive base to ward off an attack. In addition, bases could be established for patrolling or raiding by surface vessels or by aircraft. (3)

(1,2,3) A-6

Contrary to common belief, the Aleutian Islands do not have an Arctic climate. The Japanese current flowing to the south of the island chain keeps the temperature higher than would be normal for that latitude. The temperature rarely drops to zero in the winter time. However, it also rarely rises above 60° in the summer time. In addition, the meeting of warm air masses from the Japanese current with cold air masses from the Bering Sea creates a turbulence in the area which causes it to be known as the weather factory for the North American continent. The climate of the Aleutians is characterized by wind, rain and fog with clear sunny days playing a decidedly minor role. A peculiar result of the constant turbulence is the "Williwaw" which gives the impression that the wind is blowing from all points of the compass at the same time.

(4)

The peculiarities of the climate and weather cause the area to be particularly unsuited for the operation of aircraft. Due to the unpredictableness of the weather, pilots taking off from an airfield in the Aleutians may find the field completely closed in upon returning a few minutes later.

Wind prevails most of the time and frequently attains hurricane velocity. For this reason warehouses, tents, quonset huts and similiar structure must be dug in for protection from the gales. A gauge installed by the Navy on the island of Adak was capable of measuring the velocity of the wind up to 110 miles per hour. It proved to be inadequate a number of times and eventually was destroyed by the wind.

The weather is not the only natural obstacle to military operations in the Aleutians. The terrain found in the islands is probably unlike that in any other combat theater. The Aleutians are devoid of natural concealment. There are no trees on the islands. (During the war, a sapling was flown from the mainland of Alaska to Adak by pilots of the

(4) A-6

11th Air Force and was appropriately labeled the "Adak National Forest".) Much of the territory of the islands consists of rugged mountains, rocky and covered with snow the year round. The terrain which is not mountainous is generally hilly or rolling. The valleys and lower slopes are covered by a layer of tundra, peculiar muskeg-like moss and coarse grass, which gives an elastic quality to the ground. Underneath the tundra layers of mud and muck extend downward from a few inches to much greater depths. Due to the heavy rainfall and lack of sunshine, this muck never dries out. Motor vehicles, even those with caterpillar treads, quickly break through and become hopelessly stuck.

The terrain is crisscrossed by numerous streams. There are many ponds and water-filled pot holes. Wheeled vehicles are, for the most part, restricted to travel upon roads constructed with great difficulty by placing gravel on top of the mud. Track laying vehicles have very limited cross country mobility unless designed or modified so as to possess extremely low ground pressure.

Before the war, the Aleutian Islands, with the exception of Unalaska, were virtually unpopulated. A small village of Aleut Indians was located on Attu. The Navy had a small detachment at a weather station on Kiska. The prewar Army post of Fort Mears was located at Dutch Harbor on Unalaska.

The combination of adverse weather conditions, terrain virtually un-negotiable by vehicles, and remoteness from civilization posed a difficult supply problem in the Aleutians. To support an amphibious operation in the area, whether opposed or not, everything necessary for a body of troops to merely exist must be transported with them. Port facilities for the handling of supplies unloaded from water transports must be built or improvised. Supplies brought ashore require special measures for protection in the extremely wet and windy climate to prevent deterioration or spoilage. (5)

(5) A-2

To summarize, any military operation attempted in the Aleutian Islands, whether against enemy opposition or not, requires careful and thorough planning to cope with the unusual characteristics of the terrain and climate.

THE JAPANESE ATTACK AT DUTCH HARBOR AND THE
OCCUPATION OF ATTU AND KISKA BY THE JAPANESE

When the Japanese first attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, we had only one small army post in the Aleutian Islands located at Dutch Harbor on Unalaska. In June 1942, the Japanese struck at Dutch Harbor but this time they did not catch us napping. Two secret airfields had been hastily installed just east and west of Dutch Harbor. One was at Cold Bay on the tip of the Alaskan Peninsula and the other was on Umnak Island. The Blair Packing Company and Saxton & Company, supposed to be canners of fish, were the disguises worn by these secret airfields.

(See Map A) (6)

The attack on Dutch Harbor was part of a two-pronged thrust at our westernmost possessions. The other attack was aimed at Midway and was the larger of the two. The force attacking the Aleutians consisted of approximately two small carriers, two seaplane tenders, several cruisers and destroyers and from four to six transports. (7)

On 2 June 1942, two Japanese aircraft carriers were reported less than 400 miles south of Kiska moving eastward. Air reconnaissance was almost impossible due to existing weather conditions. Patrol planes would find the Japanese ships only to lose them again in fog and storms before bombers could be summoned. In the meantime all available planes of the Alaska based 11th Air Force rushed to the two secret airfields to meet the Japanese threat. (8)

The first attack by the carrier based Jap planes on Dutch Harbor was made at about 0600 hours on 3 June 1942. Five waves of three planes each participated in the attack which lasted about twenty minutes.

(6,7) A-1; (8) A-3

On 4 June 1942, Army bombers and Navy patrol planes located and attacked the enemy carriers which had launched the attacking planes. Results could not be observed.

After several reconnaissance flights over the Dutch Harbor area, the enemy again attacked about 1700 on 4 June with eighteen carrier based bombers and sixteen fighters. This attack was made simultaneously with an attack on the newly established Fort Glenn on Umnak Island, seventy miles west of Dutch Harbor. The latter force consisted of nine enemy fighters. These attacks were the last to be made by the Japanese in the Dutch Harbor area. (9)

On 11 June 1942, a Navy patrol plane reported enemy forces in Kiska harbor. On 12 June, enemy ships were observed at both Attu and Kiska, and about twenty tents and temporary structures were observed on the shore at Kiska. (10)

Thus, war came to the Aleutians - to a chain of islands where modern armies had never fought before and to an area that was unlike any other where modern armies had ever fought before. No knowledge could be borrowed from the past. We would have to learn to live and fight as we went along in this remote area, the least known part of America.

THE OCCUPATION OF ADAK

The Navy had a weather station on Kiska. When this station failed to send it's usual reports after 7 June 1942, enemy interference was suspected but the weather denied reconnaissance by air for confirmation until 11 June, at which time the Japanese forces were seen at Kiska. The following day, Eleventh Air Force bombers made runs over Kiska, hitting and setting fire to two enemy cruisers and one destroyer. (11)

On 14 June 1942, the Japanese bombed a seaplane tender at Atka, just east of Adak, and a week after that began to reconnoiter Adak. The battle

(9,10) A-3

of the Aleutians was becoming a race for those islands in the chain which were suitable for land based aircraft. Adak, with a large protected harbor and areas suitable for the installation of airfields was considered one of the best. In addition, it was within easy striking distance of the enemy forces, roughly 200 air-miles from Kiska, and would enable bombers to have fighter protection. (12)

Meanwhile, Kiska and Attu were bombed and strafed whenever the weather permitted. Our surface ships and submarines attacked Japanese shipping in Aleutian waters. On 18 June, a transport was sunk in Kiska harbor. On 4 July, two of our submarines sank three, and possibly four, enemy destroyers. On 7 August, United States warships shelled Kiska harbor. On 31 August, the first Japanese prisoners were taken - five survivors of a destroyed Japanese submarine. (13)

On the night of 29-30 August 1942, one of the strangest convoys ever assembled approached the shores of Adak Island. Protected by warships, this force consisted of troop transports, lighters, tugs, barges of all sizes and descriptions and even a four-masted schooner equipped with electrically operated winches.

An amphibious landing was made on the shores of Adak beginning at 0700 on the morning of 30 August. The landing was unopposed. The troops had embarked prepared for any sort of trouble. Ships were combat-loaded. It was not known whether the Japanese might beat them to the punch. However, a group of Alaskan Scouts had preceded the convoy and was landed on the island by submarine. Twelve hours before the landing of the main force was scheduled to start, the Scouts reported there were no Japanese on the Island.

The forces which landed on Adak were under the command of Major General Eugene M. Landrum. The Infantry consisted of the 53rd Infantry (less the

(12,13) A-1

(7th D.L.)
1st and 2nd Battalions) and the 2nd Battalion of the 134th Infantry.

They were supported by Field Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Engineers and various other service troops.

Supplies were initially brought ashore by amphibious landing craft. However, a usable dock was quickly improvised by beaching a barge, sinking it on the sloping beach with the upper surface above the water, sinking a larger barge immediately in rear of it in like manner, and anchoring a still larger barge in rear of the latter. The floating barge had been previously loaded with a large, ancient, power-driven crane on its bow and the improvised dock was ready for operation within a few hours. Ships were unloaded into lighters at their deep water anchorages, the lighters were brought alongside the improvised dock where their cargoes were loaded directly onto trucks, and the trucks hauled the supplies along the beach to dumps. Movement by vehicles initially was restricted to along the beaches until roads leading to the interior could be built.

Work was started immediately on the airfield and ~~that airfield~~ ^{which} was built in twelve days. Perhaps twelve days doesn't sound like much of a record until the terrain which exists in the Aleutians is considered. The airfield was built in an unusual way. A dam was constructed to keep the sea out of a large tide-water flat with a hard, sandy bottom. The bottom was leveled where necessary and steel matting was laid. Everyone worked to hurry its completion - Engineers, Infantry, Artillery alike, and fourteen days after the landing on the beaches of Adak, a large flight of B-17's and B-24's landed on its airfield. For the airfield to have been constructed over the tundra with the equipment at hand would have required several weeks or perhaps months.

On 14 September 1942, Adak based bombers scored hits on three large cargo vessels at Kiska, sank two minesweepers, and strafed three midget submarines. Hundreds of miles had been subtracted from the roundtrip distance to Kiska and Attu.

The Japanese retaliated with token bombings of Adak on the 2nd and 3rd of October. Now that the airfield had been constructed, the job shifted to maintaining and protecting it. Docks and roads were built. Quonset and Pacific huts were brought in to shelter the men from the wind and rain and cold. Warehouses were built and supply reserves were built up. More thought was given to the comfort and recreation of the occupying troops, for the only source was that supplied by the Army or what the men themselves could devise.

We had outraced the Japanese to Adak, contained expansion by them from their toehold in the Aleutians, and had built up a base from which a counter-attack could be launched.

THE OCCUPATION OF AMCHITKA

Planes from Adak flew strikes against the Japanese every day that the weather permitted. However, there was another island only 70 miles from Kiska on which planes could be based. This was Amchitka, one of the flattest of the Aleutian Islands. In December 1942, a scouting party reported that the Japanese had dug test holes at Amchitka, searching for suitable airfield sites. Again we raced the Japanese for possession of an island.

On 12 January 1943, a force of 2,100 men under the command of Brigadier General Lloyd E. Jones landed at Amchitka. Bad weather hampered the landing but it also kept the Japanese float planes tied to their base at Kiska. A high wind blowing inshore from the ocean slowed up landing operations and piled up landing craft on the beaches. On the following day the wind increased to an 80 mile an hour gale and blew one of the supply ships onto a reef in the harbor. By the end of the following day all but one landing barge had been wrecked by the wind. The gale continued but so did the work because the Jap float planes could be expected as soon as the weather let up. (14)

(14) A-5, p. 22

The Japs finally learned of the occupation of Amchitka on 23 January 1943, when a single reconnaissance plane appeared over the island. Thereafter they made sporadic bombing and strafing attacks.

Work was begun on the airfield. The same technique was used as at Adak. However, the problem was more complex because the tidal flat that was used had to be filled with dirt to make the landing strip level. On 16 February, eight fighter planes landed on the strip and Amchitka, only fifteen minutes by air from Kiska was ready to strike back. The following day, two Jap float planes flew over to strafe and bomb. They were both shot down.

The occupation of Amchitka, like the occupation of Adak, had enabled us to bring ever increasing pressure against the Japs on Attu and Kiska and had prevented expansion on their part. Within two months after the airfield on Amchitka had been put into use, reconnaissance and bombing missions had prevented the enemy from supplying or reinforcing the Kiska and Attu garrisons by surface ships. Also, during this time, aerial photographs revealed the beginnings of enemy airstrips on Kiska and Attu. These strips were continually strafed and bombed throughout the spring. As a result of these attacks and the isolation of the two islands by air and surface vessels, the Japs were unable to finish either of the airstrips. They were attempting to do much of the work by hand and the lack of adequate machinery together with the damage inflicted by bombs brought the work to a standstill.

With the occupation of Amchitka, the stage was set for a new phase of warfare in the Aleutians. We were as close as we could get to the Japs without actually invading the islands they held. Either island would have to be taken by force. Kiska was the more important of the two. It was decided to by-pass Kiska and attack Attu first. There were two reasons for this:

- (1) The Japs probably expected us to attack Kiska.

(2) With Attu in our hands, Kiska would be pinched between Attu on one side and Amchitka on the other, and would be as completely isolated as the weather would permit. (15)

THE DEFEAT OF THE JAPANESE ON ATTU

After the attack on Dutch Harbor on 3 June 1942, the Japanese occupied Kiska and Attu. An Infantry battalion landed at Attu in the Chichagof Harbor area. At that time the population of the island consisted of forty-five Aleuts, an elderly American schoolteacher and his wife. The schoolteacher committed suicide rather than be captured and his wife attempted the same. She recovered, however, and together with the Aleuts, was transported to Japan for internment. (16)

During the latter part of September, the Attu garrison was moved to Kiska. Although this fact was known by the Alaska Defense Command, no attempt was made to reoccupy the island. The Alaskan defenses were being built up at this time and an adequate force to occupy and hold the remote island was not available. (17)

On 29 October 1942, a mixed Japanese force from Paramushio reoccupied Attu. They installed beach defenses and anti-aircraft guns. Apparently their principle mission was to build an airfield to supplement the one under construction at Kiska. Due to poor weather, lack of equipment and attacks by United States planes, the work progressed slowly. (18)

The Attu garrison was gradually reinforced until it had reached a strength of about 2,300 when the last transport arrived on 10 March 1943. Due to the efforts of the United States Navy and Air Corps, supplies could only be transported by submarines from that time on. (19)

After the decision had been reached to recapture Attu, a portion of the 7th Division was selected to do the job. The principal units selected were the 17th and 32nd Infantry Regiments, two battalions of Field Artillery (105mm), and the 50th Engineers. To these were added various supporting and

(15) A-1; (16) A-4, p. 2; (17,18,19) A-4, p. 3

service troops. In addition, the Alaska Defense Command organized a reserve on Adak, consisting of one battalion of the 4th Infantry and other additional troops. (20)

The selection of the troops of the 7th Division for the coming operation necessitated an abrupt change in training. Previous to this time the Division had been training as a motorized unit in the desert. They were then given about three months of training with emphasis on small unit tactics and amphibious landings. Officers from the Alaska Defense Command were temporarily assigned to the Division to advise the troops about the special conditions and problems which would confront them in the Aleutians. (21)

On 24 April 1943, the landing force sailed for Cold Bay, Alaska, and arrived there on 30 April. (22)

THE PLAN OF ATTACK
(See Map B)

The landing plan finally approved called for two main landings and two subsidiary landings. The Southern Force, consisting of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions, 17th Infantry; 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry; three batteries of Field Artillery and auxiliary troops, was to land on the beach in Massacre Bay. The mission of the Southern Force was to advance up Massacre Valley, seize Jarmin Pass and Clevesy Pass and move into Holtz Bay to join up with the Northern Force. (23)

The Northern Force, consisting of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry, one battery of Field Artillery and other supporting troops was to land some three miles northeast of the main Japanese camp at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay. Its mission was to clear the enemy from the west arm of the Bay and secure the high ground between the arms of the Bay. After the two forces met, the Northern Force was to complete the capture of the Holtz Bay area and the valley to the southwest. The two forces were then to hold and destroy the enemy in the Chichagof Harbor area. (24)

(20,21) A-4, p. 4; (22) A-4, p. 5; (23,24) A-4, p. 6

A provisional battalion consisting of the 7th Scout Company and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop (less one platoon) was to sail from Dutch Harbor aboard a destroyer and two submarines to make an independent landing. The mission of this force was to move into the west end of the valley opposite the west arm of Holtz Bay and compel the enemy in that area to fight facing to the west. They were also to assist the advance of the Northern Force by fire and join the latter as soon as Moore Ridge could be taken and held. (25)

A still smaller force consisting of one platoon of the 7th Reconnaissance Troop was to land at Alexei Point and establish an outpost to protect the rear of the Southern Force. After reconnoitering to the west and north between Lake Nicholas and Massacre Bay, the platoon was to reconnoiter the peninsula itself and destroy any enemy found. (26)

D-Day had originally been set for 7 May 1943. However, bad weather delayed departure of the convoy from Cold Bay and it was postponed until 8 May. When the convoy arrived off the coast of Attu, the high wind blowing at that time would have made the landing quite hazardous and D-Day was again set back to 10 May and the convoy steamed off into the Bering Sea to avoid detection. Fog caused another postponement to 11 May. This series of delays turned out to be quite fortunate. The defenders of Attu had been warned and had occupied their prepared combat positions from 3 to 9 May. Apparently they had then decided the attack was not coming off and had returned to their routine duties. (27)

By the time the landing was to take place, the Japanese had prepared strong defensive positions at strategic points throughout the area which they had occupied. These positions were stocked with weapons, ammunition and equipment against the time when they would need to occupy them. In addition, numerous caches of supplies and food were scattered at different

(25) A-4, p. 6; (26) A-4, p. 7; (27) A-4, p. 5

points on the island. This precluded the necessity of establishing a supply line from a central base and gave great mobility to small units operating independently of each other. The Japanese were well equipped, fully acclimated and determined to hold their strong defensive positions.

(28)

OPERATIONS OF THE SOUTHERN FORCE

The landing in Massacre Bay on 11 May 1943 was delayed by fog from the original H-Hour at 0740 until 1620 hours. To cover the left (south) flank of the landing, Company F, 32nd Infantry, was to land at Casco Cove, move inland and clear the high ground west of Jarmin Pass of enemy. In the dense fog, Company F missed its landing site. It landed with the main body and then proceeded on its mission. (29)

The main body landed in Massacre Bay and encountered no opposition. After a brief reorganization on the beach, the force moved inland toward its first objective, Jarmin Pass. A reinforced platoon from Company F, 17th Infantry, was sent out to protect the right (north) flank of the main body by blocking a pass through the mountains from Sarana Bay. The left (south) flank was protected by a platoon from Company I, 17th Infantry, advancing along Henderson Ridge. (30)

The main body, with the 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry on the right moving along the ridge known as the Hogback, and the 3rd Battalion of the 17th on the left moving along the valley floor, advanced up Massacre Valley encountering little resistance until it had proceeded some 2,500 yards inland. Shortly thereafter, at about 1900, they were forced to halt by increasing enemy resistance. The two battalions reorganized under cover of darkness and took up perimeter defenses. This was the situation on the night of 11 May and the positions established were to remain virtually unchanged until 17 May. (31)

(28) A-4, p. 3; (29,30) A-4, p. 8; (31) A-4, p. 9

From Sarana Nose, Point Able and Cold Mountain on the north, Black Mountain to the northwest, and Henderson Ridge to the south, the enemy had good observation and was able to deliver fire on the attacking force from three sides. The fog clinging to the tops and sides of the mountains concealed the Japs but left the floor of the valley clear. (32)

Between 11 and 16 May, five attempts were made to capture Jarmin Pass by frontal assault but the Japanese main line of resistance was not penetrated. The 3rd Battalion of the 17th Infantry had borne the brunt of the attack. On the night of 14-15 May, it was withdrawn to a support position and replaced by the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry which had seen relatively little action up to that time. (33)

In view of the lack of progress on the part of the Southern Force, the task force commander, General Brown, ordered the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry (less Companies A and B), which constituted part of the floating reserve, to land at Massacre Bay and reinforce the Southern Force. He also requested that the 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry, which had been in reserve at Adak, be moved to Attu. His request was granted and the battalion arrived at Massacre Bay on 18 May. (34)

In this fashion, the Southern Force was increased from three to five battalions. On 17 May, General Brown was relieved of command and replaced by Major General Eugene M. Landrum, the former commander of Adak. (35)

In the meantime, the Northern Force had seized and occupied the high ground dominating the west arm of Holtz Bay. Finding themselves in a difficult situation, the enemy withdrew from the west arm to the east arm of the Bay on 17 May. This left the enemy opposing the Southern Force in a precarious position with their rear exposed to the Northern Force. Consequently, they withdrew from their positions on Henderson Ridge and in Jarmin Pass to reinforce the positions around Clevesy Pass during the night of

(32) A-4, p. 9; (33) A-4, p. 10-11; (34,35) A-4, p. 11

16-17 May. After confirmation of the enemy withdrawal by patrol action, Jarmin Pass was occupied by the Southern Force. At 0230, 18 May 1943, contact was established between the two forces. (36)

The enemy was now contained in the area to the north and east of the two forces. It was to be assumed that the enemy had established a new defensive base in the Chichagof Harbor area. The rugged terrain leading to the harbor would be difficult to take and it was assumed that it would be stubbornly defended by the Japs. A new plan of attack called for the Southern Force to push out of Massacre Valley by way of Clevesy Pass and advance on Chichagof from the south. The Northern Force would advance on Chichagof along the northern slope of Prendergast Ridge from the west. (37)

The mission of attacking Clevesy Pass was assigned to the 1st Battalion of the 17th Infantry with the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry in support. After patrol action during the night of 18-19 May, the attack jumped off at 0952 on 19 May. By noon of that day the 17th Infantry had advanced 750 yards into the Pass. During the afternoon, the 32nd Infantry succeeded in clearing the enemy from the high ground northeast of the Pass. Fighting continued on the high ground northwest of the Pass during the night of 19-20 May. During the morning of 20 May, the 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry, which had taken over the attack from the 2nd Battalion of the 17th Infantry, pushed through the Pass and continued its advance to the eastern slopes of Prendergast Ridge. (38)

By the end of 21 May, the Americans had secured Clevesy Pass and its dominating heights, Cold Mountain, Engineer Hill and Point Able. The 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry had advanced against enemy resistance to a point halfway along Prendergast Ridge. (39)

(36,37) A-4, p. 11-12; (38,39) A-4, p. 12-13

OPERATIONS OF THE NORTHERN FORCE

On D-Day, 11 May 1943, the Northern Force landed some three miles northeast of the main Japanese camp at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay. The 1st Battalion of the 17th Infantry with one battery of Field Artillery started landing at 1530 and by 1800 was ready to move inland. (The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 32nd Infantry and two batteries of Field Artillery remained aboard their transports as a reserve.) The battalion advanced along the west arm of Holtz Bay in a column of companies with Hill X as the first objective. By 2200 it had proceeded about two miles but was still 800 yards short of its objective. Due to the lack of visibility and uncertainty as to its location, the battalion halted and dug in for the night. (40)

In the meantime, the Japanese in the Holtz Bay area had learned of the landing and during the night of 11-12 May occupied previously prepared positions on Hill X. On the morning of 12 May, the battalion was confronted by strong enemy positions on terrain which dominated its own position. Successive attacks on 12 and 13 May with artillery and air support gave the battalion possession of Hill X. Its position now dominated the enemy camp at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay. (41)

During the afternoon of 13 May, the 3rd Battalion of the 32nd Infantry was brought ashore to reinforce the 1st Battalion of the 17th. The attackers were thus doubled in strength. (42)

In the meantime, the Provisional Battalion, consisting of the 7th Reconnaissance Troop and the 7th Scout Company, had landed at Austin Cove on D-Day. After crossing the mountains they contacted the enemy on the high ground west of Holtz Bay on 12 May. Despite suffering from cold and exposure and a lack of food and supplies, the battalion accomplished its mission by diverting pressure from the approaching Northern (40) A-4, p. 13-14; (41,42) A-4, p. 15-16

Force and by forcing the enemy in the Holtz Bay area to fight facing west. (43)

At 1100, 15 May 1943, the Northern Force launched an attack from Hill X toward the Japanese camp at Holtz Bay. It was soon discovered that the Japs had evacuated the camp and withdrawn to Moore Ridge between the west and east arms of the Bay. During the following day a portion of the attacking force succeeded in occupying dominating terrain on the enemy's right (north) flank. A night attack was launched by the Northern Force at 0010, 17 May, against the enemy on Moore Ridge and succeeded without a single casualty. The Japs had again withdrawn, this time into O'Donnell Valley. During the morning of 17 May, patrols were sent into the valley and discovered that the enemy had withdrawn still further to the heights in the direction of Chichagof Harbor. On 18 May, patrols from the Northern and Southern Forces made contact. (44)

THE BATTLE FOR CHICHAGOF HARBOR

On 21 May 1943, the Southern Force prepared to move on Chichagof with the strong enemy positions on Sarana Nose as the first objective. After a very thorough preparation by fire from all available weapons, the attack jumped off at 0700 and by early afternoon the whole of Sarana Nose was secured. (45)

Meanwhile the Northern Force had slowly pushed its way up the northern slopes of Prendergast Ridge against stubborn enemy resistance until on 25 May it had reached the base of the rugged semicircle of mountains known as the Fish Hook. (46)

The Japanese had now been forced back to their inner perimeter of defense around the Chichagof Harbor base. Their defensive positions extended from Fish Hook Ridge southeastward to the plateau in Jim Fish Valley just short of Lake Cories. An attacking force moving down the

(43) A-4, p. 15-16; (44) A-4, p. 16; (45,46) A-4, p. 17

floor of Jim Fish Valley would receive flanking fire from the high ground to the north and west. General Landrum, adhering to his policy of taking the high ground before attempting to move along the valleys, decided to attack Fish Hook Ridge. (47)

On 23 May at 1700 hours, an attack was launched against Fish Hook Ridge by the 2nd Battalion of the 17th Infantry. They had advanced about 200 yards when they were forced to halt by machine gun fire from the ridge. (48)

On the Holtz Bay side of Prendergast Ridge, the Northern Force had reached a position from which it could join in the attack. At 1000 hours on 24 May a coordinated attack was launched by the 3rd Battalion of the 32nd Infantry (plus two companies from the 1st Battalion of the 17th) and the 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry. They made small gains but were then forced to withdraw to their starting points due to the heavy machine gun and rifle fire which denied the narrow approaches to the enemy positions. During the day the attacking force had been strengthened by the addition of Companies C and D of the 32nd Infantry. On the night of 24-25 May, the 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry was moved into support positions behind the 2nd Battalion of the 17th. After a series of engagements, chiefly by small units, Fish Hook Ridge was in friendly hands by 28 May. (49)

During this same period, the 1st Battalion (less Companies A and B) and the 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry, had reached a point about 200 yards short of Buffalo Ridge after a series of attacks. Another attack was launched at 1830 hours, 28 May, and by nightfall the two battalions had attained an important part of the Ridge. (50)

In the meantime, the 3rd Battalion of the 17th Infantry with Company B of the 32nd Infantry attached had advanced up the floor of Jim Fish

(47) A-4, p. 18-19; (48,49) A-4, p. 19-20

Valley to a point beyond the southern edge of Lake Cories where it halted for the night of 28-29 May. Patrol contact was established between the battalion and the friendly forces on Buffalo Ridge. (51)

The Japanese were now pinched into the Chichagof Harbor area with the sea at their backs and the American forces in possession of the dominating terrain around them. The end of the battle appeared to be in sight. General Landrum decided to attack with all of his forces on the following morning, 29 May. For the first time since the landing, during the night of 28-29 May, no Infantry was left in force reserve. (52)

THE COUNTER-ATTACK

By this time, the defending Japanese force had been reduced in strength from about 2,300 men to about 700. The only assistance that the defenders had received during the battle had been on the afternoon of 22 May. A flight of ten low-flying Japanese planes had suddenly launched twelve torpedoes against a cruiser and a destroyer lying off Massacre Bay. Neither of the ships was hit. The planes dropped some white packages in the Chichagof area and flew off to the west. A few minutes later a flight of heavy bombers was reported seventy-four miles south of Chichagof Harbor. Six American P-38's from Amchitka intercepted the enemy planes. Of the sixteen heavy bombers, which jettisoned their bombs when contact was made, nine were reported shot down. The loss of the base at Holtz Bay had cost the enemy most of his supplies and artillery. It was apparent that no further aid would be forthcoming and that the situation was hopeless. (53)

Thus the Japanese commander was faced with accepting one of four alternatives:

(1) To surrender - This was not in keeping with the Japanese military code.

(51,52) A-4, p. 20; (53) A-4, p. 18,21

(2) To fight to the end in the Chichagof area - This would be useless and unprofitable except for the damage inflicted on the attackers.

(3) To retreat further into the mountains of Klebnikoff Point - This would only prolong inevitable destruction of the defenders since no help was to be expected.

(4) To counter-attack, penetrate to the American rear areas and hope to seize the enemy artillery and destroy or cut off his supplies.

The latter plan was the only one which offered any chance of success. Failure would mean destruction of the Japanese force. However, since the first course of action could not be considered and the second and third alternatives meant ultimate destruction, the Japanese commander had everything to gain and nothing to lose by choosing the fourth alternative. (54)

On the night of 28-29 May, Company B of the 32nd Infantry was located in a position on the floor of Jim Fish Valley near the southern end of Lake Cories. The lake was on its right (east) flank and Company L of the 17th Infantry was occupying the rising ground on its left. At 0300, 29 May, Company B received an order to withdraw. The reason for this order is not known. At about 0330 hours, while the Company was in the act of withdrawing, the Japanese counter-attack struck its rear guard. Taken completely by surprise and greatly outnumbered, the company became disorganized and gave way before the Jap counter-attack. The Japanese main body moved quickly down the valley in the direction of Clevesy Pass. (55)

As the enemy main body moved along it detached small groups to either side, apparently to prevent flanking attacks. These groups succeeded in causing numerous casualties in the ensuing confusion but served to seriously reduce the strength of the main body of the counter-attacking force. (56)

In the Clevesy Pass area, the 7th Division Engineers, the 50th Engineer Battalion and various other service troops were bivouacked. They had no

(54,5b) A-4, p. 21

expectation of combat with the enemy. Disorganized American troops streaming down Sarana Valley before the oncoming enemy gave them the first intimation that anything was wrong. The Engineers hastily organized an improvised defensive line on Engineer Hill and within ten minutes of the first warning were in combat with the enemy. Service troops, cooks, and men from every type of unit grabbed whatever weapons they could find and joined in the battle. (57)

Although fighting in the Clevesy Pass area continued throughout the day of 29 May, the determined resistance of the Engineers fighting as Infantry had dissipated the force of the Jap counter-attack and prevented them from attaining their objective. (58)

In the late afternoon of 30 May, the situation was again well in hand. Small groups of Japanese had been destroyed throughout the area of the counter-attack and no effective enemy force remained. The Chichagof Harbor area was occupied virtually without resistance. Except for the mopping up of isolated small groups of the enemy, the Battle of Attu was over. (59)

THE OCCUPATION OF KISKA

With Attu again in the possession of the Americans, the remaining Japanese in the Aleutians were isolated on Kiska. The Navy and the Air Corps stepped up the tempo of the shellings and bombings of the island and tightened the blockade designed to prevent reinforcement of the Japanese garrison.

The only way that Kiska could be reoccupied was by a repeat performance of the job at Attu. In May 1943, Amphibious Task Force Nine was activated at Fort Ord, California, with the mission of recapturing Kiska. Major General Charles Corlett, an officer experienced in the ways of the Aleutians, was placed in command. Numerous lessons had been learned on (57,58,59) A-4, p. 20

Attu about the peculiarities of ground combat in the Aleutians and General Corlett was determined that his men should profit by them.

Amphibious Task Force Nine was organized into five similiar task groups. Each task group consisted of three reinforced battalion landing teams. Part of the troops employed were stationed in the Aleutians and others were fresh from the United States. The Infantry components of the force were as follows:

53rd Infantry (less 1st and 2nd Battalions)

2nd Battalion, 134th Infantry

1st Battalion, 153rd Infantry

87th Mountain Infantry

184th Infantry

17th Infantry

Elements of the 4th Infantry

1st Special Service Force

13th Canadian Brigade

The Infantry was supported by Field Artillery, Anti-Aircraft Artillery, Combat Engineers, Quartermaster, Ordnance and Signal units, field hospitals, a medical collecting company, a port battalion, bomb disposal units, photographic units, liaison parties, interpreter teams and interrogator teams.

At Fort Ord a short intensive period of training was conducted with the units of the Force stationed in the United States. Emphasis was placed on amphibious landings and cooperation between the various arms and services. Experience gained in the attack on Attu had indicated that troops must be acclimated to the weather and terrain of the Aleutians to fully appreciate the difficulties to be encountered. Consequently, in June 1943, the Force was moved to Adak for the necessary indoctrination and acclimatization. There it was joined by the troops of the Alaskan Department that were to take part in the operation.

A period of intensive training was culminated by a practice landing on the shores of Great Sitkin, an island a few miles to the east of Adak. This period was characterized, for the most part, by unusually good weather for the Aleutians with clear, sunny days abounding. The troops fresh from the United States were unimpressed and were difficult to convince that the weather could play a disproportionate role in the forthcoming operation.

In the meantime, the 11th Air Force was stepping up its attacks on Kiska. Missions were flown as often as the weather permitted. G-2's interpretation of the information brought back by the flyers and the information gained from aerial photographs indicated that something unusual was taking place. The anti-aircraft fire which had been intensive and accurate was slacking off. Buildings disappeared and tents sprang up where none had been before.

During the night of 26 July there was much activity on and around the island. American naval vessels fired through the fog at targets they couldn't see. The following day the anti-aircraft fire was extremely light. On the 29th of July the Kiska radio went off the air. Nineteen seagoing barges were missing and the flyers were unable to locate them. The airmen were no longer greeted by ack ack and flew as low as they wished. No activity was seen. (60)

It looked as though the Japs had withdrawn even though withdrawal was not characteristic of the Japanese. General Corlett thought it was a possibility. Since the Navy was in command of the operation until the troops were landed, General Corlett presented his views to the Naval commander. The Navy thought that their blockade around Kiska precluded escape by the Japanese. It was decided to forego ground reconnaissance in order to retain tactical surprise.

(60) A-5, p. 248-249

In view of the lack of activity on Kiska, D-Day was moved up from 1 September 1943 to 15 August, and on 13 August, Amphibious Task Force Nine began to board the transports and the various other craft to be used in the operation. The total strength of the Force approximated 35,000. Kuluk Bay at Adak, in spite of its large capacity, was jammed with ships. Among them were five battleships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and various other Navy craft.

THE PLAN OF ATTACK
(See Map C)

The island of Kiska is approximately 25 miles in length and from 2 to 8 miles in width. On the southern part of the island, the ground slopes upward from rock strewn beaches. On the northern part, cliffs, rising to a height of 100 feet in places, form a wall along the beaches. These cliffs are broken in places by a few small caves that permit access to the interior. The island is divided roughly into halves by a deep ravine known as Middle Pass, running from Kiska Harbor to the opposite shore. The main enemy camp was concentrated around Kiska Harbor with a secondary camp at Gertrude Cove.

Amphibious Task Force Nine consisted of a Southern Force and a Northern Force, each with its own staff. The plan of attack called for a feint, including landing craft and a Naval bombardment, to be made at Gertrude Cove on D-Day. At the same time, actual landings were to be made at Quisling Cove and Lilley Beach on the opposite shore of the island by the Southern Force. In the early morning hours of D-Day prior to the landing of the Southern Force, the 1st Special Service Force was to land on the beachhead and advance to the high ground overlooking the landing sites. It was hoped that this maneuver would insure an unopposed landing. The first objective of the Southern Force was to secure and hold the high ground. (It had cost many lives to learn this lesson on Attu.) They would then move toward Middle Pass to drive between the Japanese at

Gertrude Cove and those at Kiska Harbor. This was to be the main effort and would have Naval gun fire support. The Southern Force also was to have priority on use of the floating reserve.

The Northern Force was to land on Broad Beach on D plus 1, drive inland to secure the high ground, then push toward Middle Pass to effect a juncture with the Southern Force. The Northern Force would also have Naval gun fire support for their landing.

Both Forces were to have tactical air support whenever the weather permitted.

THE LANDING AT KISKA

The 1st Special Service Force landed at 0230 hours on D-Day as scheduled. Prior to the landing of the Southern Force, they reported that the high ground overlooking the landing beach was in their possession and that the enemy had not been contacted.

At approximately 0600 hours, the landings at Quishing Cove and Lilley Beach by Task Group 87 and Task Group 17 began. Numerous rocks and the falling tide made it a difficult task. Due to the difficulties encountered, a portion of the Force was diverted to a previously selected alternate beach at Kernel Cove. The troops moved inland toward the high ground which was their objective.

By afternoon of D-Day, rain was falling and the usual fog had closed in. Precautions were taken that night to prevent infiltration and active patrolling was conducted. During the night, occasional reports of rifle and machine gun fire could be heard.

The following morning several casualties were brought down from the hills to the beach. There were no Japs among them. Further, as yet there were no authentic reports of contact with the Japanese.

On D plus one, the Northern Force landed at Broad Beach and Task Group 184 and the Canadian Task Group moved inland on their missions of

seizing the high ground. They too suffered casualties during the ensuing night.

On D plus one, the Southern Force continued its expansion and search for the enemy. Patrols pushed as far as the Japanese camp at Gertrude Cove and to Middle Pass. No enemy was contacted.

On D plus two, the two Forces made contact at Middle Pass. By this time, patrols had reconnoitered all of the island and no Japanese had been found. It was now evident that the Navy's blockade had been penetrated. The Japanese had made good their escape.

The occupation of Kiska had cost millions of dollars, many tons of supplies, and numerous casualties without a shot being fired by the enemy.

The combined efforts of the Navy, Air Corps and Ground Forces had isolated the enemy on Kiska and made their position untenable. The last of the Japanese had been driven from the Aleutians and the threat which their presence imposed against Alaska and the western shores of the United States and Canada had been removed.

The 11th Air Force now had bases from which it could strike against Japan's northern defenses in the Kurile Islands or against the home islands of Japan proper. The first of many raids to follow were conducted on 10 July 1943, on 18 July and again on 11 August.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

When the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor it is not known whether they intended to launch an amphibious attack against the island and occupy it. If that was their intention, it would appear that the unexpected appearance of aircraft, indicating the presence of bases which they apparently did not know existed, caused them to alter their plans and land on Attu and Kiska instead. The landing of the Japanese on the westernmost islands of the Aleutians gave us the opportunity to contain a possible advance by them up the chain of islands toward the mainland of Alaska. The fact that

the Japs later reconnoitered Adak and Amchitka would seem to indicate that they had intended to expand their toehold in the Aleutians.

The American policy of "getting there fustest with the mostest" paid dividends in two respects. It enabled us to contain further expansion on the part of the Japs and gave us bases from which to launch a counter-attack. The proximity of Adak and Amchitka to the Jap-held islands permitted the 11th Air Force to bomb and strafe the enemy from fairly close range. This allowed larger payloads and permitted the flyers to take greater advantage of favorable weather conditions. These advanced bases also permitted extended reconnaissance flights over the wide expanse of the Pacific beyond Attu to aid in preventing the supplying or reinforcing of the enemy forces.

During the Battle of Attu, the attempt by the Southern Force to advance up Massacre Valley before clearing the enemy from the terrain dominating the valley was a costly maneuver. The Jap strategy of occupying the high ground was sound. It provided them with observation, fields of fire, cover and concealment. The importance of taking the high ground forming the sides of a corridor before attempting to advance through the corridor was illustrated during this phase of the operation.

The fighting on Attu proved that the Jap, although in most respects a clever fighter, was not a superman. There were many instances of individual or mass suicides by Japanese whose continued resistance could have inflicted much damage on the Americans.

The Japanese counter-attack, which nearly succeeded in accomplishing its mission, could have materially affected the outcome of the battle. The success the Japs did attain was due largely to the fact that they had hit Company B of the 32nd Infantry while it was in the act of withdrawing. Taken completely by surprise and greatly outnumbered, the company was thrown into confusion and gave way before the onslaught of the Japs. Why the company

was ordered to withdraw is not known. Further there is no indication that another unit was to take its place. This would indicate that the responsible commander who issued the order to withdraw had not considered all the capabilities of the enemy. Specifically, the capability of counter-attacking. The fact that the counter-attack was stopped before it could reach the artillery and supplies must be credited to the ability of the Engineers to quickly organize and hold a defensive line. It further demonstrated the ability of the Engineers to assume the role of Infantry when demanded by the tactical situation.

The high incidence of trench foot among the combat troops on Attu was caused by immersion. It was virtually impossible for the men to keep their feet dry with the footgear issued to them. For long periods they occupied foxholes which gradually filled with water from the rain and water soaked soil. The leather high top boot issued to the men was also in use by troops stationed at Adak and on other islands. This footgear was considered inadequate by the men who wore them under what might be termed "garrison conditions". It should have been obvious that this type of footgear would be wholly unsatisfactory during combat in a cold and wet climate.

In planning the Kiska Operation, the mistakes of Attu were studied and corrective measures applied. Whenever practicable, information was passed down to the troops. The field order was extremely well written and was complete and concise.

The reports brought back by Air Force personnel returning from flights over Kiska should have indicated a strong possibility that the enemy had withdrawn from the island. Every capability of the enemy, including withdrawal, should have been considered. In view of the doubt that existed as to whether or not the Japs were still on Kiska, reconnaissance measures should have been employed to determine whether or not the enemy had escaped.

Despite the fact that casualties were sustained on Attu as a result of fire fights between friendly units, the same mistake was repeated at Kiska. This showed a definite lack of coordination and training. In view of the uncertainty that existed with respect to the enemy situation, extraordinary precautions should have been taken to prevent such incidents.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. It is necessary to exercise extreme care in the choice of clothing and equipment for operations in an area where unusual climatic conditions and difficult terrain prevail.
2. Before attempting an advance up a corridor in terrain held by the enemy, the terrain features forming the sides of the corridor must be cleared of the enemy. *First*
3. Engineers can effectively assume the role of Infantry when demanded by the tactical situation.
4. Adequate precautions must be taken to prevent conflict between friendly units during fluid situations and conditions of poor visibility.
5. Under conditions of poor visibility, it is virtually impossible to prevent the escape of a determined enemy by blockading an island.
6. Whenever feasible, troops to be employed in an area possessing unusual and adverse climate and terrain should be acclimated to the unusual conditions prior to entry into combat.