

General Subjects Section  
ACADEMIC DEPARTMENT  
THE INFANTRY SCHOOL  
Fort Benning, Georgia

ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS COURSE  
1948 - 1949

OPERATIONS IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS  
3 JUNE 1942 - 24 AUGUST 1943

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index .....	1
Bibliography .....	2
Introduction .....	3
The Japanese Assault .....	4
Japanese Occupation in North America .....	5
American Strategy .....	6
Aleutian Weather and Terrain .....	7
General Plans for Recapturing the Aleutians .....	8
The Attu Plan of Attack .....	9
The Assault on Attu .....	12
The Southern Force .....	12
The Northern Force .....	15
The Provisional Battalion .....	17
The Capture of the Main Japanese Base .....	17
The Chichagof Battle .....	18
Kiska Evacuated .....	21
Analysis and Criticism .....	22
Lessons .....	24
Map A - Aleutian Islands	
Map B - Attu Island	
Map C - Eastern Section, Attu Island	

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OPERATIONS IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS  
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INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1942, the United States line of defense in the Pacific lay in a diagonal line from Australia to Pearl Harbor, through the Midway Islands and north to the Aleutians. Guam and Wake Islands, our outposts farther to the west, had already fallen to the Japanese. It was imperative that this line be held and strengthened with bases; first, for the defense of Continental United States, and later, for the offense. (1)

The bombing of the Japanese home islands by the Doolittle Raid caused that Empire to look to the east and northeast, with the view of extending its perimeter of defense. A dual operation was ordered to accomplish this end, with attacks against Midway in the Central Pacific, and the Aleutian Islands in the north.

The operation against Midway failed miserably, with the Japanese Navy suffering<sup>ed</sup> its worst defeat in over three centuries. However, one day prior to the Midway attack, the secondary attack of the Japanese came off on schedule with an attack against the Aleutian Islands, the nearest American territory to the Japanese homeland at that time. (2)

The mission of the <sup>Japanese</sup> Aleutian Force was threefold: "1) To break up any offensive action the Americans might contemplate against Japan by way of the Aleutians; 2) To set up a barrier between the United States and Russia in the event that Russia determined to join the United States in its war against Japan; and 3) To make preparations, through the construction of advance air bases, for future offensive action." (3)

(1) A-1, p. 125, 126; (2) A-2, p. 78, 79; (3) A-3, p. 2

### THE JAPANESE ASSAULT

The Japanese Naval Force attacking the Aleutians was made up of two aircraft carriers, two seaplane tenders, several cruisers and destroyers and from four to six transports. On 3 June 1942 the Japanese launched fighters and bombers from carriers positioned south of Dutch Harbor. These planes flew over the naval base at Dutch Harbor and the nearby army camp of Fort Mears<sup>at</sup> about 0600. (See Map A)

This raid<sup>was</sup> was accomplished by fifteen planes flying in waves of three. The attack was over in about twenty minutes and little damage had been done. One navy patrol plane<sup>US</sup> was strafed and several fires were set to barracks and warehouse buildings. Shore and ship anti-aircraft batteries had been forewarned and were firing at the Jap raiders before the bombing began. The few ships in the harbor got under way and not one was hit.

The next day the enemy carriers were located by army bombers and navy patrol aircraft. Several torpedo and bombing runs were made but the results of the attack were not known. The Japanese made several reconnaissance flights over Dutch Harbor and later in the day the base was attacked for the second time. This attack consisted of 32 planes and caused considerable damage. An old station supply ship that had been beached and used to quarter civilian workmen was bombed and destroyed by fire. Several fuel oil tanks, a warehouse, and an aircraft hangar were razed by fire. Total casualties of these two raids amounted to approximately forty-four military personnel killed, forty-nine wounded, and one civilian killed. (4)

Another attack was made at Fort Glenn on Umanak Island, about seventy miles west of Dutch Harbor. (See Map A) It is not believed that this was

(4) A-4

a planned attack since the Japs did not have any intelligence as to the existence of the army base there. It so happened the Jap planes had chosen a rendezvous point almost directly over the army installation there. They then became engaged by American fighters and suffered the loss of four planes in the ensuing fight. (5)

#### JAPANESE OCCUPATION IN NORTH AMERICA

Upon return of the aircraft to their carriers from their second day's attack, the naval force sailed south and hovered off the end of the Aleutian Chain. Two more aircraft carriers from the beaten Midway force joined the Japanese ships to offer additional protection from expected American attacks. Since the American Army and Navy planes did not locate the Japanese force, the ships divided in two forces and headed toward the islands to be occupied. (6)

One force landed a naval battalion at Kiska on 6 June. (See Map A) A small American naval detachment consisting of one officer and ten men represented a United States weather detachment and the only persons on the island. These men were taken prisoner by the Japanese and the island was completely in enemy hands.

The second invasion force comprised a battalion of army troops. They had initially planned to occupy both Adak and Attu. <sup>Howland</sup> (See Map A) The unexpected occupation of Umnak by American forces and the nearness of United States land based aircraft to Adak caused the Japanese to concentrate all this force on Attu. This force occupied Attu on 7 June, the day after Kiska was taken. The populace of Attu comprised an American school teacher, his wife, and about forty-five Aluets (a branch of the Eskimo). The Japs took these people prisoner and secured the island. Initially the Japanese occupied the small village of Chichagof. (See

(5) A-2, p. 79; (6) A-2, p. 80

Map B) Chichagof Harbor was not suitable for the landing of supplies in quantity so the enemy moved to Holtz Bay where the main camp was set up. Chichagof was maintained by a small number of men as a subsidiary base. (7)

#### AMERICAN STRATEGY

The Japanese occupation of Kiska and Attu was not discovered by American air reconnaissance until several days after it had taken place. Although daily attempts were made to reconnoiter the islands and ocean areas for hostile forces, bad weather prevented successful intelligence. As soon as the Japanese occupation was <sup>discovered</sup> learned, the Navy and Army Air Forces began reconnaissance, bombing and strafing missions. They were flown as often as the weather permitted. (8)

Plans were made to establish new air bases on other outlying islands in the Aleutian Chain to increase the effectiveness of our air intelligence and to better support our air missions. This was accomplished by occupying Adak and Atka Islands on 30 August 1942, and Amchitka Island on 12 January 1943. (See Map A) Securing such bases assured American air and sea control of the Aleutians. <sup>(How)</sup> Thus a blockade began which caused the Japs no end of difficulties and hardships.

A Japanese transport ship enroute to Attu bearing reinforcements and supplies was sunk on 19 February by a small United States naval patrol. The next mission to resupply the garrisons on Attu and Kiska was accomplished by a large convoy in which the entire strength of the Japanese Fifth Fleet was employed. This was the last successful resupply run made by Japanese surface vessels. The next run resulted in an important naval battle on 27 March 1943, off the Komandorski Islands between the Japanese Fifth Fleet and a small American Fleet. (See Map A) A bombard-

(7) A-2, p. 80; A-3, p. 2; (8) A-2, p. 80

ment dual between the big guns of both fleets assessed heavy damages against the outnumbered American Fleet, with the Japanese suffering the lesser damage. There were no aircraft employed by either force, but fearing an air attack by American land based planes the enemy withdrew. After this action the submarine became the vessel <sup>which was</sup> used in supplying the enemy held islands. (9)

#### ALEUTIAN WEATHER AND TERRAIN

In no other part of the world did the weather become such a vital factor in influencing the conduct of war as in the Aleutians. (10) The significance of this weather requires further explanation and the author feels it is of consequence to expound a little on the subject.

The weather in the Aleutians is the primary factor for <sup>?</sup>its retarded growth. The weather is general throughout the year, rather than seasonal. Clear days with sunshine are a rarity and may come in December as well as in May or June. The temperature on the Aleutian Chain rarely ever equals arctic severity. Icy rain or snow falls practically every day of the year. Winds blow across the narrow islands from the Pacific Ocean to the Bering Sea and back again at very high velocity, frequently exceeding one hundred miles per hour. Thick fogs envelope the islands in such depth that even these winds fail to dispel it. The rugged peaked mountains average about three thousand feet and the greater part of them are always covered with snow. Due to the constant severity of the weather the seas storm against the rugged islands for days at a time making landing and loading or unloading operations impossible. There are many days when no outside work can be done at all.

The dampness and soil on these islands restrict the growth of any trees other than a scrub tree. Streaks and areas of sand are spotted

(9) A-2, p. 81, 85; (10) A-5, p. 28



over the islands with the greater part wildly covered with tundra. The tundra is a wild wet grass which grows on uneven, soaked, furrowed ground. It is so soft that in places a man can fall through it to his knees. The tundra will not support jeeps or tracked vehicles very easily, except in sandy areas. Many areas are just a black, thick mire, practically impossible to traverse. (11)

#### GENERAL PLANS FOR RECAPTURING THE ALEUTIANS

The Japanese had gradually built up the strength of their troops on Kiska and Attu. By May 1943 there were approximately 5,400 troops on Kiska and 2,500 troops on Attu. (12)

Units of the 7th Infantry Division were selected to comprise the main forces to make the assault on Kiska and Attu Islands. The principle elements of the force were:

17th Infantry Regiment

32nd Infantry Regiment

48th Field Artillery Battalion

49th Field Artillery Battalion

78th Coast Artillery (AA) Regiment (less 1 battalion)

50th Engineer Battalion

Attached Medical and other Service Troops, and,

1st Battalion, 4th Infantry Regiment (to constitute the reserve, stationed at Adak). (13)

The 7th Infantry Division had been training as a motorized unit on the Mohave Desert in California expecting to participate in desert warfare in North Africa. This change in plans caused the division to be transferred to Fort Ord, California. A three month training phase began here, emphasizing amphibious operations and basic infantry tactics. The

(11) A-3, p. 1; (12) A-2, p. 80; (13) A-2, p. 103, A-3, p. 4

training schedule included several cruises and amphibious landings, including one major landing at San Clements Island off the coast of California. These landings were planned and executed in great detail, except that the unloading of supplies was simulated. And too, the terrain could not be compared with that of the Aleutians.

Originally the American High Command in Washington intended to assault and secure Kiska, and then invade Attu. However, it was later decided to take Attu first and perhaps make it easier to capture Kiska later. This change did not greatly effect the training of the units or hamper the overall efforts and plans of the joint naval-army staff. This staff had been selected from army officers of the Alaska Defense Command and navy officers of the North Pacific Fleet who were ~~all~~ familiar with conditions as found in Alaska and the Aleutians. (14)

Commanders of the force were:

Supreme Commander -- Rear Admiral T. C. Kinkaid

Naval Assault Force Commander -- Rear Admiral F. W. Rockwell

Landing Force Commander -- Major General Albert E. Brown

(7th Division Commander). (15)

All clothing and equipment was issued to the troops prior to sailing from the United States. The troops were tactically loaded on the ships from which they would later launch their landing, and on 30 April the invasion forces arrived at Cold Bay, Alaska. (16) (See Map A)

#### THE ATTU PLAN OF ATTACK

Eight plans were developed for the attack on Attu Island prior to sailing for Alaska. All but one were variations of the same plan known as Plan "A". This plan called for the main attack to take place at Massacre Bay in the south with a secondary effort to be made from the

(14) A-3, p. 4; (15) A-2, p. 103; (16) A-3, p. 5

north at either Red or Scarlett Beaches which are north and west of Holtz Bay. The exception to these plans was to make a frontal attack on Black Beach on the West Arm of Holtz Bay. (See Map B) (17)

After arriving at Alaska the troops spent over a month aboard ship in Cold Bay. During this time frequent conferences were held by the joint commanders and staff with the result that a new plan was devised. In general the plan was about the same as Plan "A" except that a provisional battalion was made up of units formerly scheduled to be small, separate advance elements attacking from several different locations.

The plan approved and now to be acted upon set the date for the attack on Attu as 7 May 1943. This plan called for two main landings and two subsidiary landings with each to be made independently of the other. (18)

The Southern Force commanded by Colonel Edward P. Earle, the 17th Infantry Commander, consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 17th Infantry; the 2nd Battalion of the 32nd Infantry; three batteries of field artillery (105-how) and supporting troops. The Southern Force was to land on Massacre Beach with the mission of advancing up Massacre Valley to seize Jarmin Pass and Clevesy Pass, and then move toward the Holtz Bay area and join up with the Northern Force. (See Map C) The combined forces were to first hold and then destroy the enemy in the Chichagof Harbor area. (19)

The Northern Force commanded by Lt Colonel Albert V. Hartl consisted of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry; one battery of field artillery (105 how) and supporting troops. This force was to land at Red Beach with the mission of attacking and clearing the west arm of Holtz Bay and

(17) A-6, p. 3; (18) A-6, p. 4; (19) A-3, p. 6

secure the high ground (Moore Ridge) between the west and east arms of the bay. (See Map C) After joining the Southern Force, the Northern Force was to complete the capture of the Holtz Bay area and the valley to the southwest. The 1st and 3rd Battalions, 32nd Infantry and two battalions of field artillery were to remain aboard ship in reserve under command of Colonel Frank L. Culin, the 32nd Infantry Commander.

(20)

A Provisional Battalion commanded by the commanding officer of the 7th Scout Company would take his company and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop (less one platoon) and land from a destroyer and two submarines at Austin Cove. (See Map C) The mission of this small force was to move to the west end of the valley opposite the west arm of Holtz Bay, attacking the main enemy force and thereby withdrawing his attention from the larger American Force which would attack him from his rear. The Provisional Battalion would assist the Northern Force by fire action and join it after Moore Ridge was taken. (21)

The other landing was to be made at Alexei Point, east of Massacre Bay, by one platoon of the 7th Reconnaissance Troop. (See Map C) Its mission was to protect the rear of the Southern Force by reconnoitering and exploiting the area between Lake Nicholas and Massacre Bay. They were to destroy enemy detachments and installations and join the Southern Force at Clevesy Pass. (22)

Only the general outline of this plan was made known to all commanders and troops. The finer details had not been worked out when the convoy sailed from Cold Bay to assault Attu. Due to restriction of communications it was most difficult to transmit directions, orders, and <sup>orient</sup> question leaders while enroute to the combat area. (23)

(20, 21, 22) A-3, p. 6; (23) A-6, p. 4

While the task force was at Cold Bay, neither the Commanding General of the landing forces nor the Commander of the amphibian forces came ashore to inspect the terrain which was similar to that of Attu. A few army officers were all that were permitted to set foot on Cold Bay. While waiting at this station the clothing and particularly the boots that had been issued to the ground troops were found to be inadequate against the wet, cold and icy weather. An attempt was made to exchange some of these items but due to the shortage of time, the desired results were not obtained. (24)

#### THE ASSAULT ON ATTU

The original date for the Attu Invasion was set as 7 May 1943. (25) Weather delayed the sailing of the convoy from Cold Bay at the very beginning. After cruising off the island of Attu, the weather postponed the operation four different times and changed H-hour just as often. Fog had so besieged the island and sea that several of our destroyers collided with one another and were forced to return to a nearby base. (26)

#### THE SOUTHERN FORCE

The Southern Force landed its first troops at 1620 on 11 May 1943 without any enemy resistance. The force moved out toward Jarmin Pass with the 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry moving forward along Hogback Ridge on the right while the 3rd Battalion advanced up the floor of the valley. (27)

The tractor-towed field artillery attempted to follow the infantry and immediately became trapped in the Aleutian black mud as the tundra gave way under the weight of the vehicles and guns. With movement of the guns restricted and ~~temporarily curtailed~~ the artillery was readied for

(24) A-6, p. 4; (25) A-6, p. 2; (26) A-6, p. 5; (27) A-3, p. 7.

action on the beaches. A target was soon located by the leading elements of the main body and the artillery fired the first shot to begin the action on this island. Later the artillery moved inland on temporary roads made by the engineers with tractors.

Companies and platoons were paralleling the advance of the main body by guarding the flanks and exploiting the high ground on each side of the valley. Each unit ran into small outposts of Japanese who guarded the valley approaches from surrounding commanding ground. None of the enemy first encountered did more than fire a few shots and hurriedly withdraw. Later in the day all units had progressed to along a line approximately six hundred yards from Jarmin Pass when they met a stiff Japanese defensive line. The Japanese had certainly taken advantage of the terrain. Their exact positions could not be located and after several attempts to move forward with artillery support, all units found themselves hopelessly pinned down. The Southern Force dug in and prepared to spend their first night in defensive perimeters far short of their objectives. (28)

*This action not shown on map*

The Japanese dominated the valley from high positions on Henderson Ridge, Black and Cold Mountains, Sarana Nose and Point Able. (See Map C) Fog hid the well concealed positions from observation by the Americans, but the valley was clear and allowed the Japs to lay down deadly enfilading crossfires. Desperate and vigorous frontal attacks were made for the next five days to capture Jarmin Pass. Although the 3rd Battalion on the left made slight gains, it bore heavy casualties and did not succeed sufficiently to make any appreciable change in the tactical situation. The 3rd Battalion was replaced by the reenforced 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry. Attacks were renewed with this fresh battalion in conjunction with the 2nd Battalion on the right. All these attacks failed.

(28) A-3, p. 8 and 9.

By this time the American troops were suffering casualties from exposure and lack of supplies as well as from the enemy. All supplies had to be hand carried because the vehicles could not travel over the Tundra or up the rugged mountains. It was difficult for a man to walk at all and carrying supplies by hand was not contemplated to this degree. The clothing worn by the troops proved inadequate against the freezing wind, rain and snow. The leather boots the men wore were little protection from the icy water filled foxholes.

The situation was becoming desperate. General Brown ordered the 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, on board ship in reserve, to land at Massacre Bay as reinforcements. He also requested that the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry in reserve at Adak Island be brought to support the Southern Force. These battalions joined the force, increasing the strength to five battalions. On 17 May, Major General Eugene M. Landrum, formerly commanding general of Adak, arrived and relieved General Brown as commander of all ground forces on Attu.

There had been no contact or communication between the Southern and Northern Forces. By 16 May the Northern Force had seized the high ground overlooking the site of the main Japanese base at Holtz Bay. To prevent being attacked from their rear, the Jap defenders who had been holding off the Southern Forces withdrew on 17 May to positions in the direction of Chichagof. These positions protected Clevesy Pass. This move was executed during the night, unobserved by the American Forces.

Later that day when the Jap withdrawal was discovered, the Southern Force moved into Jarmin Pass. In the valley beyond the pass the Southern Force linked up with the Northern Force. The Northern Force had occupied the main Japanese base in Holtz Bay. (29)

(29) A-3, pp. 9-13

### THE NORTHERN FORCE

On 11 May 1943, the same day the Southern Force landed at Massacre Bay, the Northern Force landed at Red Beach. This beach was only about one hundred yards long and due to the jagged rocks thereabout, only two landing crafts could land side by side at a time. The beach extended seventy five yards inland and then steep, two hundred and fifty foot hills towered above. A party of Alaskan Scouts and Navy personnel reconnoitered Red Beach prior to the landing of the main body to assure the feasibility of unloading there. Fog that limited visibility to one hundred yards protected this landing which was only three miles west of the Japanese main camp in Holtz Bay. (See Map C) Lt Col Hartl's 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry came ashore, climbed the steep hills and advanced along the high ground toward Holtz Bay. The left flank was secured by a patrol following the beach. It was this detachment that had the first Japanese contact. After killing part of a Jap beach patrol their presence was acknowledged by the fire from Japanese dual purpose 77mm AA guns. Evidently the enemy did not discover the main body moving forward on the high ground. <sup>Just</sup> It advanced until dark. The battalion had no contact with the enemy and the commander was not certain of his location, so he ordered the battalion into defensive positions for the night.

(30)

The fog cleared in the middle of the morning of the next day, 12 May. The battalion commander discovered that the battalion was just eight hundred yards from Hill X, the first objective. (See Map C) (31) Patrols discovered the hill was defended by enemy. The battalion commander then ordered an attack against the hill with one company enveloping the right flank. Enemy snipers covered this flank and soon after the attack began the battalion was pinned down. This was the battalion's first

(30) A-6, p. 5-7; (31) A-6, p. 8



action and they were fighting an unseen enemy. The Jap positions were so well concealed that no targets could be given the mortars or artillery. American patrols were dispatched to locate the snipers. Upon return to the battalion these patrols received more fire from their own troops than they did from the enemy. After several hours some of the enemy positions were located. The 105 howitzer field artillery battery was in position on Red Beach and the 75 howitzers from the Cannon Company were in positions immediately in rear of the battalion. Naval Air and Gunfire Officers were with the battalion commander at his observation post. Through these officers the fires of the howitzers were coordinated with those from the navy warships off-shore. A very effective rolling barrage was placed on Hill X in conjunction with an attack by navy fighter planes. The reserve company made a frontal attack on the hill with the barrage rolling 50 yards ahead of them all the way up the hill. The American troops stormed the hill, captured it, and drove off a counterattack with close in fighting continuing until dark. All of Hill X but the high knob on the north crest was taken by nightfall without a single casualty to the American troops. The Japanese did inflict some casualties later with air bursts from their AA guns on the west arm of Holtz Bay.

The next morning the capture of Hill X was completed by more close fighting atop the knob of the hill. By this time the Northern Force troops were beginning to suffer from exposure as did the men in the Southern Force. (32)

One of the two reserve battalions on board ship came ashore on 13 May. This was the 3rd Battalion, 32nd Infantry. This unit joined the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry on Hill X the next day. Colonel Culin, the 32nd Infantry Commander landed with the battalion and assumed command of the Northern Force. A combined attack by both battalions was planned

(32) A-6, p. 8,9.

against the Japanese camp in Holtz Bay. This attack took place on the morning of the 15th. (33)

#### THE PROVISIONAL BATTALION

The 7th Scout Company and the 7th Reconnaissance Troop landed at Austin Cove on 11 May from two submarines and a destroyer. This force climbed the snowy mountains and proceeded toward their objective, the west end of the valley opposite the west arm of Holtz Bay. The next morning the battalion came under fire from enemy positions on the high ground west of Holtz Bay. This unit was fighting under the most difficult conditions. The terrain in this sector was particularly rugged and the small force had lost many men due to fatigue and exposure. This provisional unit did not advance for the next three days. It did force the enemy to fight facing west, thereby relieving much of the pressure that would have been added to the opposition already against the Northern Force. Therefore it did accomplish its mission. (34)

#### THE CAPTURE OF THE MAIN JAPANESE BASE

On 15 May the Northern Force began the attack on the main Japanese camp in Holtz Bay. Soon after the attack jumped off it was discovered that the enemy had vacated the western sector of Holtz Bay and now defended positions on Moore Ridge. This enemy withdrawal permitted the Provisional Battalion to advance and effect a union with the Northern Force. The force overran the western sector of the now evacuated Japanese camp. They discovered large quantities of supplies to include weapons, ammunition and food that the Japs had left intact. (35)

In an effort to press the attack and reduce casualties, the Northern Force commander ordered a night attack on the 16th against Moore Ridge. After the attack jumped off it was discovered the enemy

(33) A-6, p. 10; (34) A-3, p. 15; (35) A-6, p. 12

had now withdrawn to the east arm valley. (See Map C) On the 17th the force captured the valley and the entire Holtz Bay area was then in American hands. The next day the Northern Force met the troops of the Southern Force. (36)

#### THE CHICHAGOF BATTLE

With the two forces now united and Massacre Valley partially secured, the Southern Force turned toward Clevesy Pass to destroy the enemy that had escaped them previously at Jarmin Pass. The Northern Force pressed the attack across the northern slope of Prendergast Ridge and the Southern Force attacked the heights dominating Clevesy Pass. (See Map C) After three days of bitter fighting against more Japs and Aleutian weather the enemy was cleared from Clevesy Pass and dispossessed from his positions on Cold Mountain, Engineer Hill, and Point Able. On 21 May Massacre Valley was completely secured and the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry had advanced halfway across Prendergast Ridge from the south toward Chichagof.

The enemy was now fighting desperately to delay the American troops advancing from the west and the south. Each ridge, hill and valley was strongly defended and taken only after heavy fighting. Particularly was this true in the northern sector. By the 25th the Northern Force had reached the base of the snow covered Fish Hook Mountains. (See Map C) (37)

Meanwhile, the Southern Force directed its attack toward Chichagof in two directions. The 3rd Battalion, 17th Infantry attacked the strong enemy positions on Sarana Nose and the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry was advancing north across Prendergast Ridge. (See Map C) Both of these units made use of all available infantry heavy weapons and coordinated

(36) A-3, p. 16; (37) A-3, p. 17

these fires with artillery. As a result of this employment of supporting fires Sarana Nose and Prendergast Ridge were taken with less casualties than in previous battles.

The American Forces had now reached the Japanese perimeter that protected Chichagof. The perimeter was atop the Fish Hook Mountains overlooking American positions from well concealed sniper and machine gun positions and a deep snow-trench system. These mountains called the Fish Hook consisted of narrow gorges and steep, treacherous cliffs. It would have been suicide to attempt the attack through Jim Fish Valley while the enemy held the high ground, so General Landrum followed his policy of taking high ground first and ordered the attack against the Fish Hook. (See Map C) The fighting here consisted of attacks by squads and individuals. The terrain and weather made this the most difficult objective that had been fought for. It took six days to subdue the enemy here and claim the Fish Hook.

Only Buffalo Ridge remained to be taken to give the American Forces complete and unobstructed observation of the entire plateau that stretched toward Chichagof. (See Map C) The ridge was attacked but only part of it was occupied by our troops at nightfall on the 28th. While the fighting for Buffalo Ridge was taking place the reenforced 3rd Battalion of the 17th moved up Jim Fish Valley. General Landrum now had all his forces positioned to move in on Chichagof for the kill. He did not leave any infantry in reserve and ordered the entire force to attack on 29 May. (38).

The Japanese commander, Colonel Jasuyo Jamasaki had expected reinforcements or at least some aid from the home islands or Kiska. Two air missions were dispatched from the home islands in Japan but neither flight accomplished its mission in hitting any targets at Attu. Other

(38) A-3, p. 18.

than these two attempts, the Japanese commander never received any outside assistance. (39)

This same evening that General Landrum made his plans and issued the order for the final attack that would wind up the fighting on Attu and secure the island, the Japanese commander found it necessary to take some decisive action. With approximately seven hundred men left, thirty per cent of his original force, Colonel Yamasaki realized the desperation of his present situation. His back was to the sea and the bulk of his supplies and artillery had been captured. There was no hope of relief. Only one thing was left to do -- counterattack! The Jap commander very logically deducted that the main American forces were on the high ground of the Fish Hook. He selected to attack that night, the 29th, through the valley, with his objective the American Artillery Battery in rear of Engineer Hill. (See Map C) He determined that by striking with his entire force in the night he might reach the howitzers and turn them against the American troops on the beaches of Massacre Bay, cut off the supply lines and perhaps turn the tide of the present situation. (40)

Colonel Yamasaki and his troops did attack and the surprise gained permitted his troops to overrun the unprepared American forces in the valley and send them running. The Japs had small detachments protecting the flanks of this spearheading main body which caught all the troops in the rear areas unaware. This action engaged close fighting and the Japanese bayoneted wounded and unarmed soldiers and medical personnel in a clearing station as they wildly ran through the rear. This action caused heavy casualties against United States forces but the effectiveness of the enemy was withering with his own casualties as he advanced toward Clevesy Pass. In only ten minutes warning the divisional and

(39) A-3, p. 18; (40) A-3, p. 21

50th Engineers and other service troops in the area gathered the weapons at hand and hastily formed a defense line along the slopes of Engineer Hill toward Point Able. (See Map C) Some of the enemy almost reached the artillery positions they had fought for, and very probably would have but for the quick action of the gallant engineers and service troops. The fighting continued on through the next day with the American Forces organized and mopping up these scattered bands of Japanese wherever encountered. (41)

Chichagof was taken with virtually no resistance as there were not any forces left there by the Jap commander. On 30 May the Battle of Attu had been won. (42)

KISKA EVACUATED -

*more should be given on this action - preparation, etc.*

With Attu in possession of American troops the Japanese were in a precarious position. Kiska could no longer be supplied and it could very well be expected that the Americans would strike there next. The Imperial Headquarters cancelled Japanese Fleet operations in the north and issued a directive for the evacuation of Kiska. Under cover of fog several fleet sorties evacuated over 5,000 troops from Kiska by 29 July 1943.

American Air and Sea power in the Aleutians were a definite threat to Japan through the Kuriles. The defense of these islands was weak and a matter of great concern to the Japanese Empire. The Kiska troops plus other Army and Navy troops and Air units were distributed to reinforce the Central and Northern Kuriles. The Japanese had almost tripled their strength in the Kuriles expecting a possible amphibious attack from the Aleutians. (43)

On Adak over 34,000 United States and Canadian troops were trained

(41, 42) A-3, p. 22; (43) A-2, p. 82

and acclimated for Aleutian fighting. This force landed at Kiska on 15 August 1943 after army and navy air and naval fleet units had bombarded the island for over a month. The Japanese evacuation was a surprise to this task force who secured the island without a shot fired or any enemy encountered. (44)

#### ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

The strengthening of the Aleutian Islands and the occupation of Attu and Kiska made possible a short route to the heart of Japan. Airfields were constructed on the islands in a few weeks. Aircraft departing from these fields flew many missions over the industrial centers and military bases of Paramushiro and the Kuriles. Sailing from Aleutian bases, the navy sank enemy shipping along the Kuriles and bombarded the islands. Recapturing Attu and Kiska gave the United States superiority in the air and on the sea in the north. The Japanese were on the defense at home and the Aleutian Campaign was a success. (45)

The decision of the American High Command to take Attu prior to Kiska proved to be an excellent choice. Attu was not defended as strongly as was Kiska and by capturing the island nearest the Japanese home islands, the enemy's supply route was definitely cut off, resulting in the evacuation of Kiska and the successful occupation of the island without loss of lives to American troops.

The American stronghold in the Aleutians was of sufficient threat to the Japanese homeland's security that thousands of troops were necessarily kept in defense of the Kuriles thereby preventing the employment of these troops on other fronts.

Commanders participating in the Attu Campaign stated that they could have accomplished their mission with more efficiency and in a

(44) A-2, p. 84, A-7, p. 380 & p. 405; (45) A-2, p. 83, A-5, p. 35

shorter time if they had understood the details of the attack plans better. They had not been given ample opportunity to receive, evaluate and question the task force commander and staff as to the situation and orders. The communication system was so restricted between ships that complete orientations and conferences could not and were not held between commanders and staffs.

If the task force commander and subordinate commanders explored the terrain at Cold Bay they would have had a better appreciation of what they were soon to be up against at Attu.

After repeated attempts by the Southern Force to capture Clevesy Pass failed the commander should have employed his troops to maneuver over the high ground around him and attack the enemy dominating the objective. This was done when General Landrum relieved General Brown.

The Japanese appreciation for terrain and the importance it gains for you when properly utilized is to be recognized. They organized key terrain with all around mutual support. Positions were prepared in depth on every terrain feature protecting their base installations.

Connecting trenches joined these positions which were occupied after delaying the attacker as long as possible.

Air power was continually playing its part in the Aleutian Campaign. Although restricted by weather the army and naval air units never relented in their missions over enemy targets. Results of bombings on Attu and Kiska were considered negligible when observed by air and ground officers after the islands had been secured. Conclusion is that air superiority is necessary but not final, in the ultimate success of capturing the objective.



## LESSONS

Following are a few of the many lessons learned during the Aleutian Campaign:

1. Adequate clothing ~~was not~~ <sup>must be</sup> issued the troops participating in the Attu Campaign, resulting in more casualties than should have been necessary. -
2. Orders must be disseminated for efficient accomplishment of the mission. Not well stated
3. Supply personnel must be augmented and trained if hand-carrying supplies is anticipated. Supplies must reach the front line troops.
4. Troops should be trained on terrain and in weather comparable to that expected in combat.
5. Definite procedures must be established within a unit for permitting the safe return of patrols into the friendly lines without being fired upon. Many casualties resulted in patrols being fired on by their own troops when returning from patrol missions.
6. Units expecting to operate in conjunction with air forces should carry identification panels or have a definite means of signaling or communicating with the aircraft to prevent being strafed or bombed by friendly planes. not thought out in advance
7. Communications should have been provided the separated forces to enable them to know the situation and position of one another. These forces knew nothing of one another until they finally joined.
8. Surprise can almost always be gained if an attack can be made over rugged terrain at <sup>unexpected</sup> undesirable points, such as was made by the Northern Force at Red Beach. This force landed only three miles from the Japanese main camp and found no defenses. It was never expected that an attacker would launch an assault in such a place.

9. Diverting missions by small forces can often be successful,  
even when things go wrong, and should be considered when possible to  
employ them. Example: The Provisional Battalion caused the Japs to  
fight facing West while the main Northern Force attacked the enemy  
rear and flanks.

10. Coordinating supporting fires and rolling barrages contribute  
to successful attacks. ✓