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ALEUTIAN CAMPAIGN, WORLD WAR II:
HISTORICAL STUDY AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY OF ART AND SCIENCE

by

ROBERT L. JOHNSON, JR., MAJ, USA
B.S., McNeese State University, Lake Charles, Louisiana, 1977

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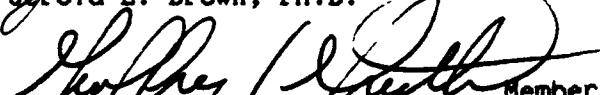
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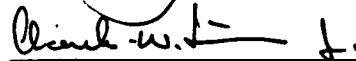
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ABSTRACT

THE ALEUTIANS CAMPAIGN, WORLD WAR II: HISTORICAL STUDY AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVE by MAJ Robert L. Johnson, Jr., USA, 206 pages.

This work is a detailed historical study of the Aleutians Campaign conducted by U.S. Armed Forces from 3 June 1942 through 18 August 1943 to gain control of the North Pacific and eject the Japanese from Attu and Kiska Islands. The campaign, characterized by combined and joint operations, involved an extended air battle, a brutal fight for control of the waters of the western Aleutians, and two major combat amphibious operations.

The Aleutians Campaign, of major significance at the time, quickly became over-shadowed by later naval, air, and amphibious operations conducted in the Pacific. Though studied extensively after August 1943 to apply lessons learned to other operations, the Aleutians Campaign attracted little attention by military scholars in the years after World War II. This study details the conduct of the campaign and applies tactical, operational, and strategic aspects to the current U.S. Army model for campaign planning.

There is significant parallel with current U.S. doctrine for conducting a regional campaign, especially in an austere theater, with that used to conduct the Aleutians Campaign in the North Pacific theater of operations.

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INTRODUCTION

On the 3rd of June 1942 aircraft of Japan's Northern Naval Force attacked the United States' naval station on Unalaska Island in the Aleutians. This aerial attack on Dutch Harbor Naval Base and Fort Mears, the companion army base, and the follow-up attack conducted the next day, were the opening shots of a battle for control of the North Pacific and the Aleutian Islands that would continue until the early fall of 1943 (Refer to Figure 1, Map of the North Pacific, page 6).

Action in the North Pacific and on the Aleutian Islands during World War II were small operations in relation to the combat in Europe, and it pales in comparison with the major amphibious operations yet to come in the Pacific. However, a very important consideration made the struggle in the North Pacific unique. This was the potential for one side or the other to achieve a huge strategic payoff in the Aleutians, and this caused both Japanese and American planners significant worry.

This strategic potential was never realized for either side. By the end of the Aleutians Campaign in August 1943, American planners judged the weather and sea conditions of the North Pacific too inhospitable from which to launch a major offensive through the northern approaches to the Japanese homeland. Though planning for such an operation, and for the basing of strategic bombers, continued throughout 1944, successes in both the Southwest and Central Pacific made such an offensive unnecessary.

Japanese operations in the North Pacific, after the Japanese forces on Attu were destroyed by U.S. combat troops in May 1943 and those on

Kiska evacuated the island shortly thereafter, were limited to defensive activity in and around their own Kuril Islands. U.S. plans for use of the Aleutians as a base from which to launch a strategic offensive against the Japanese homeland, though considered feasible by the United States until the end of the war, were never to be a reality.

Like the eventual failure of the Allied concept plan to attack Nazi Germany from the south through Italy, the American plan to attack Japan from the north by way of the Aleutians never fully materialized. In fact, after the last Japanese withdrew from the Aleutians in August 1943, U.S. forces in the region became an occupational force involved in the completion of base and facility construction.

Although the active campaign in the Aleutians lasted for fourteen months, included over 325,000 U.S. personnel (245,745 troops to Alaska and Northwest Service Command), required the commitment of a large volume of scarce resources, and created much interest (and alarm) in the U.S. at the time, there are few secondary sources on the North Pacific/Aleutians Campaign. Additionally, most published works on the Aleutians and Alaska during World War II are of the "You were there" variety and take a micro-view of a particular operation.¹ These published accounts contribute to our understanding in that they add

¹One notable exception is the work by Brian Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969). Garfield's work is the only complete published work on the Aleutians Campaign. Written with the full cooperation of the U.S. Air Force, using available declassified documents and based on extensive interviews with U.S. participants, Garfield's account remains the definitive published work on the World War II Aleutians Campaign. Personnel figures from Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, Global Logistics and Strategy 1943-1945, United States Army in World War II, The War Department (Washington, D.C: Center of Military History, 1986), 834.

interesting and informative substance to battles that are difficult for one to gain an appreciation for by the reading of only official documents. Though cited frequently in historical works, the Aleutian Campaign is usually afforded only a side note during analysis of the Battle of Midway.

An examination of available unpublished literature reveals a wealth of information from U.S. and Japanese sources. The Commander in Chief of the North Pacific, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, with headquarters at Pearl Harbor, exercised command through a representative, Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, headquartered at Kodiak Naval Station, Alaska. The Army chain of command stretched from the Alaska Defense Command, Major General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., with headquarters at Ft. Richardson, Alaska to the Western Defense Command, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, with headquarters at the Presidio of San Francisco. This widely dispersed command and control system required that a surprisingly detailed amount of operational matters be coordinated between these headquarters by message traffic. This "paper trail" of operational decisions, synopsis of conferences and campaign plan development actions, situation reports, and chronology of events during the campaign's sea, air, and land operations provide a wealth of information and insights (Refer to Figure 2, Chain of Command, Joint Chiefs to North Pacific, page 7).

On the Japanese side, most of original documents and orders concerning their Aleutian operations were lost due to the systematic destruction of records that occurred at the end of the war. However, sufficient documents survived the war to provide military historians the

opportunity to recreate operational details. Additionally, the U.S. Army sponsored a series of monographs written immediately after the war by Japanese officers, most of whom were participants in the various campaigns.

Though many U.S. units and key personnel were quickly transferred to other theaters of war at the end of the campaign in August 1943, the continuation of "occupational" forces in the region ensured the preparation of After Action Reports (AAR), operations and intelligence estimates, and administrative and logistical reports. Senior leaders involved in the offensive phase of the campaign did not write about it after the war. The leader most likely to have written about Alaska and the Aleutians was the original major commander in the region, Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Jr. However, General Buckner did not survive the war.²

Why did the Japanese armed forces seize bases in the Aleutian Islands? Why did it take the United States fourteen months to respond in sufficient strength to force the Japanese out of the North Pacific and reclaim the Aleutians? What were the strategic and operational considerations that influenced the development of the campaign plan for that theater of operations? The central question is are there lessons to be derived from the Aleutians Campaign that can be used by today's campaign planners? This study will focus on the U.S. and Japanese campaigns in the North Pacific, conducted from June 1942 through August

²LTG Buckner was killed 18 June 1945 on Okinawa while commanding the U.S. Tenth Army. It is likely that Buckner would have written extensively of his experiences in Alaska as commander of the Alaska Defense Command, and of the offensive operations in the Aleutians, had he not been killed by Japanese artillery.

1943, and assess the strategic impact of the theater of operations on the war in the Pacific. This information will be framed in terms of the current U.S. Army Command and General Staff College methodology for regional force planning.² From this, comparisons can be drawn with current U.S. Army doctrine for campaign planning.

²"Joint and Combined Environments," U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, C500, 1 August 1991, 102-103.

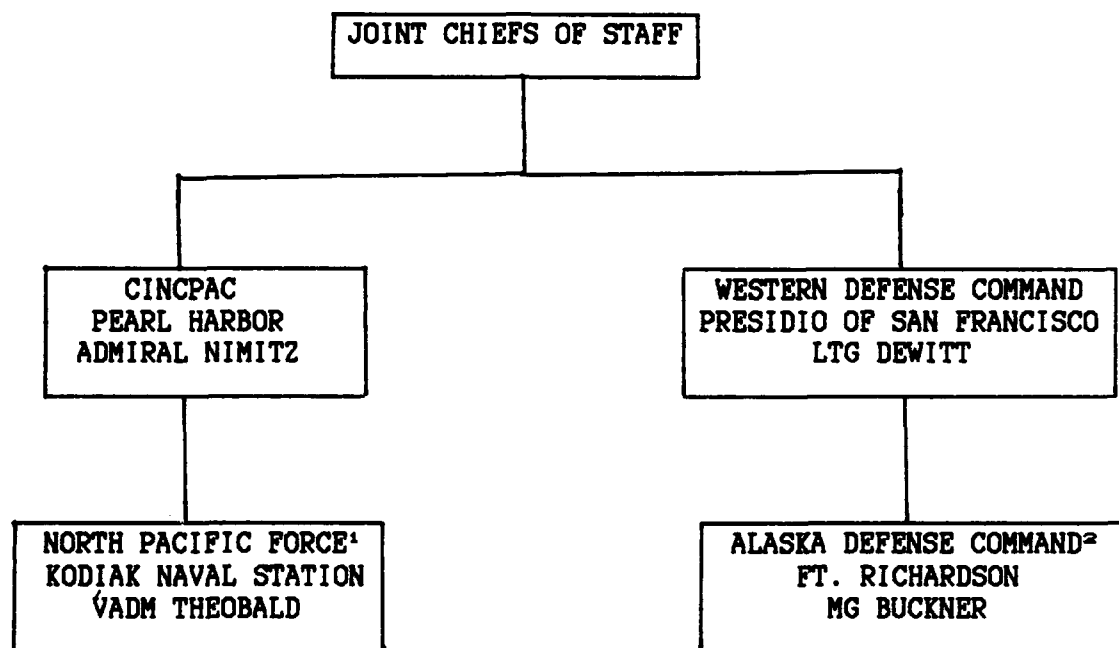


Fig. 2. Chain of Command, Joint Chiefs to North Pacific Theater of Operations.

¹Commander, North Pacific Force also Commander, Task Force 8 (naval task force allocated to the North Pacific).

²Commander, Alaska Defense Command exercised command and control over all U.S. Army forces in Alaska and the Aleutians (including Eleventh Air Force). Immediately prior to the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor, Commander, North Pacific Force (Theobald) was given operational control of Eleventh Air Force. The Eleventh Air Force Commander (BG William O. Butler) then had to report to both Theobald and Buckner.

CHAPTER ONE

Japanese Offensive in the North Pacific

When you have undertaken the offensive, it should be maintained to the last extremity.

Napoleon, Military Maxims

In the early morning hours of 3 June 1942 Rear Admiral Kakuji Katuka, commanding the Japanese Second Mobile Force built around the aircraft carriers Ryujo and Junyo, launched the initial attack on the U.S. Navy base at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. His mission was to strike Dutch Harbor to neutralize the eastern most U.S. base in the Aleutians, then screen the operation of the fleet's main body (Japanese Fifth Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya) to seize the islands of Attu, Kiska, and Adak.¹

Ultimately, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet, decided that seizing Adak represented too great a risk and deleted it from the target list. Adak, which is 275 nautical miles further east than Kiska, would undoubtedly be much harder to defend and supply. Yamamoto made this decision at the end of the Battle of Midway, and indications from Japanese army records are that the outcome of that engagement influenced Yamamoto to cancel the Adak portion of the operation.

Plans did account for the possibility that the Aleutians operation

¹U.S. Army, "History of Imperial General Headquarters, Army Section, Japanese Monograph Number 45" (United States Army Headquarters, USA Japan, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Foreign Histories Division, 1945), 84-87. U.S. Army, "Aleutian Naval Operation, March 1942-February 1943, Japanese Monograph No. 88" (United States Army, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, Office of Military History), 17-19.

would have to be modified. There were five different options built into the plan (Northern Naval Force Operational Order Number 24) and Yamamoto ultimately selected the one that did not include Adak (Plan Number 5). The Japanese Fifth Fleet, commanded by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogayo, accomplished this modified mission on 7 and 8 June 1942.²

The Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor initiated a campaign for control of the Northern Pacific Ocean that continued through late summer of 1943. The air, sea, and land battles of the campaign were fought in some of the most difficult environmental conditions of World War II. The personal deprivations and isolation, coupled with the feeling among participants of both sides that they never received sufficient materiel and equipment, made the Aleutian Campaign one of the least documented and generally unpopular theaters of World War II. However, the importance of this campaign for control of the waters and islands of the North Pacific should not be understated simply because it lacked glamour.

The apparent importance of the Aleutians to any combat operation into eastern Soviet Union or the northern half of the Pacific Rim quickly becomes obvious in even the most superficial strategic study. Attu, the western most island of the chain, is only 630 miles from the Soviet Union's Kamchatka Peninsula. From Attu, it is only 650 nautical

²U.S. Army, "The Aleutian Islands Campaign, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph Number 46" (United States Army, Headquarters, FEC (Far East Command), 16-17, 25. U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph Number 45," 86. U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph Number 88, 33-34, 42.

miles to the Japanese Kuril Islands.² This distance is to the nearest military target, the naval base at Paramushiro, an important Japanese base in the Kurils. The Kurils are key to the northern approaches into the Japanese home islands. (Refer to Figure 1, Map of the North Pacific, page 6.)

As a starting point for an examination of the Aleutian Campaign, it is important to understand the intent of Japanese strategic planners for the North Pacific, and what event or operation triggered their move into the area. Japanese intent in this regard is a complex question and will be discussed later, but the trigger operation for their move into the North Pacific, the Battle of Midway, is one of the most widely studied and publicized battles of the war. The Japanese main effort in the Central Pacific during the Midway fight, commonly viewed as a turning point for the U.S. in the Pacific, overshadows the Japanese' successful supporting attack in the North Pacific. The feeling in Admiral Chester W. Nimitz' (Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet) headquarters was summed up by the log entry of 3 June 1942: "The whole course of the war in the Pacific may hinge on the developments of the next two or three days."⁴

²Merriam-Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1988), 1473.

First spelling of Kuril Islands is "Kuril," however "Kurile" is alternate spelling. Except where quoting a work that uses the second spelling, this work will use the first spelling. Many early works of the post-World War II period use the alternate spelling, but most modern U.S. published atlas, maps, and encyclopedias use the first spelling exclusively.

⁴U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary/Running Estimate and Summary" 3 June 1942 (Headquarters, Pacific Fleet, Department of the Navy, 1945), Frame 570.

These documents, a compendium of dispatches to, from and through

Admiral Hosogaya's Fifth Fleet (operating as the Northern Area Force and task organized with a carrier task group, screening group, and main body) was several of sixteen task forces operating under Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander of the Combined Imperial Fleet. The objective of Admiral Yamamoto's complex plan was to seize and garrison Midway Island, which was planned to be the Japanese eastern most strong point in the Central Pacific, then destroy the United States Pacific Fleet when it counterattacked. This decisive battle once won, Admiral Yamamoto believed, might make a negotiated peace possible.⁵

At the conclusion of the Midway operation, the Japanese planned to have a secure eastern perimeter that would stretch from the Aleutians in the North Pacific, through Midway in the Central Pacific, down to the Solomons in the Southwest Pacific. Ultimately, the only part of the Midway plan that succeeded was the attack on Dutch Harbor and the seizing of bases in the Aleutians. The eastern most stronghold in the Japanese security perimeter ended up being Wake Island, instead of Midway Island, but the anchor of their northern perimeter was moved from the Kuril Islands out to the Aleutians. (Refer to Figure 3, Japanese Eastern Defensive Perimeter, page 12.)

This allowed the Japanese perimeter to be extended another 900 nautical miles to the east without antagonizing the Soviets or

the office of Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (Admiral Nimitz), contained in three reels microfilm, Combined Arms Research Library, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

⁵R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, Military Heritage of America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956; reprint, Fairfax, Virginia: Hero Books, 1984), 588.

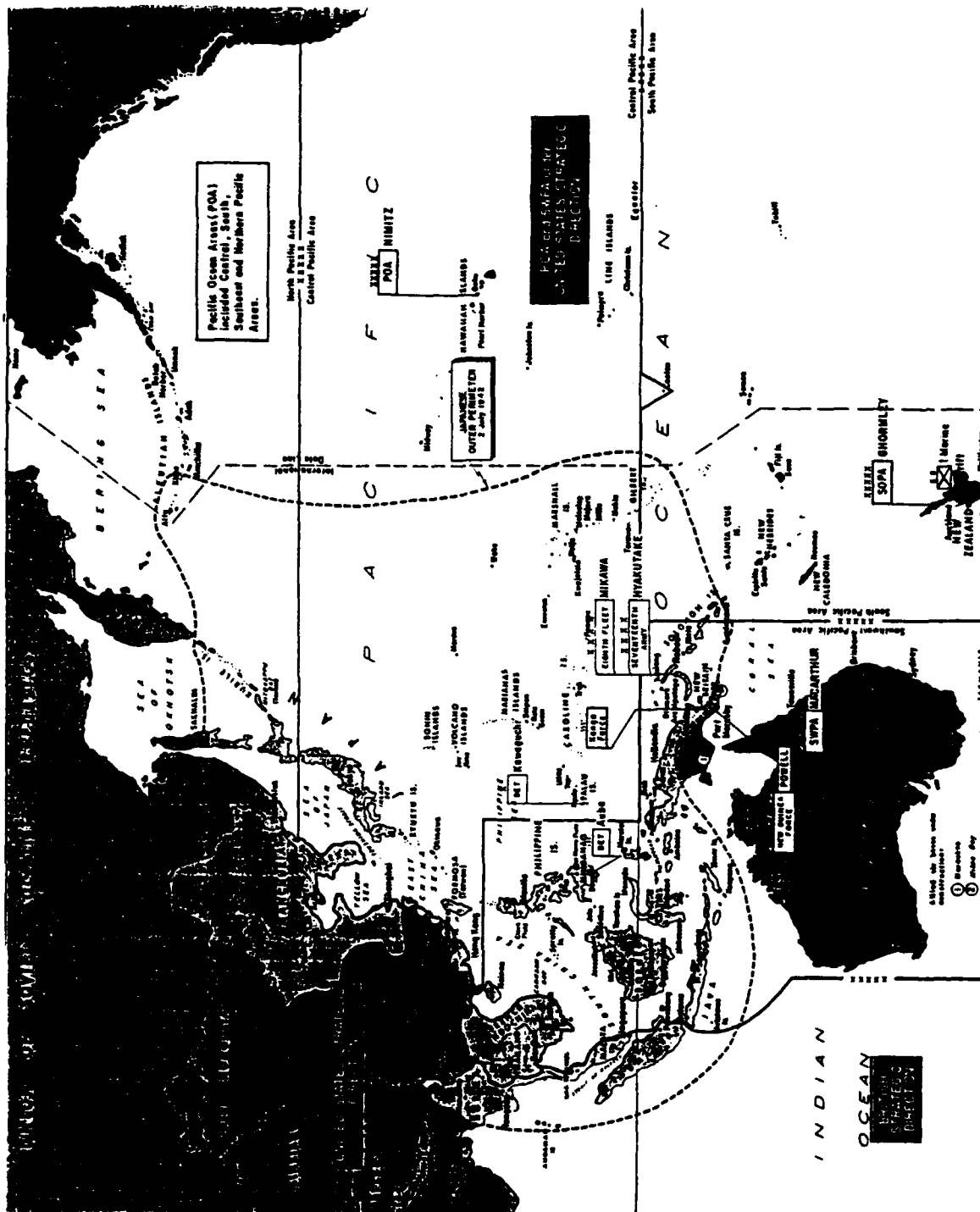


Fig. 3. Depiction of Japanese eastern defensive (outer) perimeter as of 2 July 1942. Reprinted, with permission, from Thomas E. Griess, ed., Atlas of the World War: Asia and the Pacific (Wayne, N.J: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1985), Map 16.

violating their neutrality. The Japanese had a very real concern that the Soviets may agree to lease bases on the Kamchatka Peninsula or in Primorskaya (located north of Vladivostock) to the Americans. From these bases the U.S. would have been only 600-750 miles from major targets in the Japanese home islands.⁴ Amazingly, the Japanese were studiously ignoring the Lend-Lease materiel pouring from U.S. west coast ports into Vladivostock--a route over which more than 50% of all Lend-Lease materiel to the Soviet Union flowed.

The Aleutian operation, scheduled to start one day prior to the Midway attack, was actually a reconnaissance in force designed to draw the attention of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief U.S. Pacific Fleet. The Aleutian operation was designed to fool the Americans into thinking the Japanese were making a major move into the North Pacific. If this effort succeeded, Nimitz would be obliged to shift naval forces out of the North Pacific to meet the threat. This would give Yamamoto time to attack and seize Midway Island.⁷

Fortunately for the Americans, their code breakers had deciphered enough of Yamamoto's plan to feel assured that they knew the true Japanese objective. Therefore, Nimitz was able to assume an acceptable risk in the North Pacific, relying on land based aviation in lieu of carrier based aviation, and concentrate the majority of his combat

⁴Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, The Second World War 1939-1945. A Strategical and Tactical History (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1954), 208-209.

⁷T. Dodson Stamps, Vincent J. Esposito, eds., A Military History of World War II. With Atlas. Volume II. Operations in the Mediterranean and Pacific Theaters (West Point, New York: United States Military Academy, 1953), 303, 306.

power against Yamamoto at Midway.⁹

This risk involved the commitment of the U.S. aircraft carriers. Nimitz, fairly certain of the Japanese objective in the North Pacific, was not about to split up his few carrier task forces. However, not willing to leave the Aleutians completely unopposed to the Japanese incursion, Nimitz deployed a task force organized around cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and land-based aviation.¹⁰

While Yamamoto planned to use his powerful battleships as the defeat mechanism to destroy the U.S. fleet during the Midway battle, Admiral Nimitz was relying on his carriers. Ironically, Admiral Yamamoto had eight carriers for the operation, while Admiral Nimitz had only three. Yamamoto was relying on surprise to ensure the quick reduction of the U.S. garrison on Midway. After seizing Midway, his plan called for quickly moving Japanese aircraft onto the island which would give him an overwhelming advantage with which to meet the anticipated U.S. counterattack.¹⁰

Admiral Nimitz, aware of significant portions of this plan, reinforced the Midway garrison and moved the Central Pacific fleet into position to ambush the Japanese. Since the Japanese plan did not hinge on their carriers, Yamamoto dispersed his carriers throughout the Imperial Fleet (two of them were in Hosogaya's Northern Area Force in

⁹Ronald H. Spector, Eagle Against the Sun. The American War With Japan (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 168.

¹⁰Louis Morton, United States Army in World War II. The War in the Pacific. Strategy and Command: The First Two Years (Washington: Department of the Army, 1962), 280-282.

¹⁰Spector, Eagle Against the Sun, 166-168.

the Aleutians) while Nimitz concentrated his three carriers at Midway.¹¹ (Refer to Figure 4, Map Depicting Battle of Midway, page 16.)

The U.S. Naval Task Force dispatched to the North Pacific (Task Force Eight), commanded by Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, departed Pearl Harbor on 21 May 1942 fully aware that the Japanese fleet would contain at least two carriers. With all three of the U.S. carriers committed to the Midway operation, Theobald's Task Force would have only cruisers and destroyers as major combatants with which to face Hosogaya.¹²

Admiral Nimitz did place all U.S. Air Forces in Alaska under control of Theobald. The Operations Plan (No. 29-42) of May 1942 for the defense of "Hawaiian and Alaskan Bases" in preparation for the Japanese attack on Midway allocated forces to the North Pacific Task Force (Task Force Eight) as follows:

This force is being formed at the direction of the Commander-in-Chief [sic], U.S. Fleet. It comprises all of the forces which can reach Alaskan waters during the first week in June. As Task Force EIGHT, this will eventually comprise: 2 CA, 3 CL, 12 DD...and all Army aircraft that can be made available. Being opposed to a force containing carriers, it must depend very heavily on land based air.¹²

Although Admiral Nimitz knew that Yamamoto's main effort was at

¹¹Ibid., 167-169.

¹²U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message traffic from CINCPAC (Nimitz) to COMINCH (King), 160325 May 1942, frame 471. CINCPAC's fourth carrier, the Saratoga, was undergoing repairs following the Battle of the Coral Sea and would be available until several days after the Battle of Midway was over.

¹²U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Estimate of the Situation, Attack on Hawaiian and Alaskan Bases, Part I-Mission, II-5, II-6. "CA" is the U.S. Navy designation for heavy cruiser, "CL" is a light cruiser, and "DD" is destroyer.

Midway, all other available resources that could be assembled were committed to meet the Japanese threat in the North Pacific.

Significantly, the Pacific Fleet's seven surviving battleships had been withdrawn to the West Coast of the U.S. "because of entire lack of air support and inadequacy of screening vessels...."¹⁴ It is clear that Admiral Nimitz was committing everything available to the defense of Midway and Alaska, while maintaining what could be considered a hemispheric strategic reserve.

Fortunately, the U.S. Commander had benefitted immeasurably from the efforts of the Navy code breakers in Hawaii (Station Hypo) and Australia regarding Yamamoto's Midway-Aleutian plan. By the last week of May 1942, the U.S. had "recovered almost 90 percent of this long and complex message" and was aware of the "date, place, and time of the operation, as well as the composition of the Japanese forces involved."¹⁵

Vice Admiral Hosogaya's air strikes of 3 and 4 June on Dutch Harbor and Ft. Mears (the U.S. Army post located immediately adjacent to Dutch Harbor) were successful. However, they inflicted relatively minor damage to the bases. Turning away from Dutch Harbor, Hosogaya's carriers steamed toward the western Aleutians to support Phase II of the Aleutian operation, the seizure of Kiska and Attu Islands. Early on 7 June 1942, the Japanese landed about 1,250 troops on Kiska and about the same number on Attu early on 8 June. These garrisons were

¹⁴Ibid., "Estimate of the Situation: Own [sic] Forces," I-1, I-2, Frame 506-507.

¹⁵Spector, Eagle Against the Sun, 157, 168.

routinely reinforced by the Japanese throughout the occupation period.¹⁴

Except for a ten man crew of weather observers on Kiska, led by Navy Aerographer's Mate William C. House, there were no U.S. Forces on either of the two islands. The Americans, with Task Force Eight desperately searching the North Pacific and Bering Sea for Hosogaya's carrier, battleship, or assault task forces that comprised his Fifth Fleet, began to suspect the Japanese had landed in the Aleutians when radio transmissions from House's team on Kiska and an American civilian amateur radio set on Attu ceased transmitting on 7 June. However, it was not until 10 June that the weather improved enough for an American reconnaissance airplane to discover Japanese warships in Kiska Harbor. Admiral Theobald (Task Force Eight) had failed to make contact with the Japanese fleet and, operating under radio silence, could not react to the Dutch Harbor attack or interfere with the Japanese landings further West.¹⁵

The Battle for Midway ended with Admiral Yamamoto retiring with staggering losses and without achieving either of his two objectives in the Central Pacific. The supporting operation of securing a foothold in the Aleutians was a tactical success but an operational failure. This latter failure was due to Admiral Nimitz knowledge of Yamamoto's intent and the true objective his operation. The attack in the North

¹⁴U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph Number 45," 86-87, 365. The Japanese theater commander struggled, just as the U.S. commander did, to obtain sufficient men and materiel for his Aleutian forces.

¹⁵Brian Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 23, 82-83.

Pacific was designed as a feint to confuse the Americans and draw significant forces out of the Central Pacific. Of course, Nimitz did not react in accordance with Yamamoto's assumptions and, in this regard, the Aleutian operation was also a failure.

However, the fact is that the Japanese ended up with significant forces in the Aleutians. This afforded them a huge advantage in that their northern approaches were secure and provided them with a success to exploit for propaganda purposes at home. The matter of homeland security had heated up in Japan ever since the 18 April 1942 attack on the Japanese homeland by Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle's B-25 bombers.¹⁰

The bombing of Tokyo, especially before the Japanese became certain of the base from which the B-25's were launched, had made the Japanese more aware of the potential danger of enemy operations from both China and Siberia. These concerns of the Japanese, of which the U.S. planners were aware, taken with the estimate of an upcoming offensive against the Russians from Germany and the movement of significant air forces to Paramushiru, indicated to the U.S. that the Japanese may be planning to attack St. Lawrence Island and Nome in order to cut communications from Alaska across the Bering Sea. This move would be taken preliminary to an attack on Siberia.¹¹

One of the provisions of the Japanese basic war plan formulated by the Imperial General Headquarters was the "seizure of strategic areas

¹⁰T. Dodson Stamps, Vincent J. Esposito, eds., A Military History of World War II. Volume II, 302-303.

¹¹Grace Person Hayes, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II. The War Against Japan (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 133.

and islands essential to the establishment of a perimeter for the defense of the southern resource area and the Japanese homeland."²⁰ This perimeter, triangular in shape, began with its east arm stretching from the Kuril Islands in the north, through Wake, to the Marshalls. The southern base of the triangle was to be a line connecting the Marshalls, the Bismarck Archipelago, Java, and Sumatra. The western arm was to extend from Malaya and southern Burma, through Indochina, and then along the China coast.²¹ (Refer to Figure 3, Japanese Eastern Defensive Perimeter, page 12.)

Whether out of a desire to avoid antagonizing the Russians or in recognition of the difficulty in establishing and sustaining bases further out into the North Pacific, the Japanese initially had no plans to establish a defensive stronghold beyond their own Kuril Islands. Neither Yamamoto's staff planners nor those at the Imperial General Headquarters had planned on maintaining a garrison in the Aleutians later than the fall of 1942. However, the success of the Aleutian operation proved to be useful for homeland propaganda.

The Japanese people did not learn of the defeat at Midway until after the war, and stringent security measures were taken to keep even Japanese Navy personnel from learning the magnitude of the losses. The survivors of sunken warships were literally isolated to prevent word of the disaster from spreading. Beyond the Navy high command, the truth

²⁰R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, Military Heritage of America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1956; reprint, Fairfax, Virginia: Hero Books, 1984), 569-570.

²¹Louis Morton, "Japan's Decision for War," in Command Decisions, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1987), 110.

of the debacle extended only to Imperial General Headquarters Army Section Chiefs at bureau level or higher.²²

In any event, the decision was made to exploit the success in the Aleutians and suppress information regarding the defeat at Midway. A secondary reason for maintaining a presence in the North Pacific was one of homeland security. Many on the Japanese staff feared a repeat of the Doolittle Raid, never fully accepting the estimate that "land based" Army bombers had been launched from an aircraft carrier. Hotly debated throughout the Japanese staff, senior Japanese leaders soon became aware of the details of the Doolittle Raid. This information was obtained from those U.S. survivors of the mission that were captured, and later executed, in Japanese occupied China.²³

Another reason the Imperial General Staff agreed to a plan to develop the situation beyond the original provisions of the Midway-Aleutians operation was the familiarity of the Japanese with the waters of the North Pacific and their view of the region's resources. The Japanese had historically maintained and deployed a sizable North Pacific fishing fleet and continued operating this fleet throughout the months following the start of World War II. This fishing activity reached its peak each June. Its importance to Japan's food supply was not lost on the planners at Headquarters, U.S. Fleet.²⁴

²²U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No.45," 87.

²³Thaddeus V. Tuleja, Climax at Midway (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), 36.

²⁴U.S. Navy, Message from Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, serial 00210 March 1942, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 539.

By the end of April 1942 CINCPAC had developed a plan to send a light cruiser (USS Nashville) to the North Pacific fishing grounds off Siberia (east of the Kamchatka peninsula). This plan called for the Nashville to conduct unrestricted operations against the fishing fleet to sink as many of the fishing vessels as possible. Though the Nashville departed in late May to execute the mission, she was diverted on 27 May to Join Task Force Eight.²⁵

In his history of the war in the Pacific, Walter B. Clausen argues that the "main reason" for the Japanese seizing bases in the Aleutians was to protect their fishing grounds in the North Pacific. Clausen further maintained that any significant loss or disruption of the Japanese fishing fleet could seriously affect their war effort.²⁶ Clausen's work, written even before the end of the war, did not take into account many classified operational developments. Given access to this information, Clausen would most probably redefine the "main reason" for the Aleutian operation as a supporting operation of the Battle of Midway. However, he did identify a reason that in all probability did weigh in as a factor that contributed to the Japanese decision to capitalize on their initial success in the Aleutians.

The Japanese entrenchment in the Aleutians caused great concern among the U.S. commands. From Admiral Nimitz' Headquarters in Pearl, through the Western Defense Command in San Francisco, to the War Department, senior commanders and staff officers considered possible

²⁵Ibid., Frame 539, 825.

²⁶Walter B. Clausen, Blood for the Emperor. A Narrative History of the Human Side of the War in the Pacific (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Incorporated, 1943), 323-324.

U.S. response to the situation in the North Pacific. The Joint Chiefs of Staff felt that the Japanese effort may be part of a plan to attack into Siberia. Other planners at the War Department were, at the same time, exploring the feasibility of an eventual U.S. invasion of Japan via Nome, Siberia, and Kamchatka.²⁷

In a memorandum to the service chiefs (Admiral Harold R. Stark and General George C. Marshall) entitled "United Nations Action in Case of War between [sic] Russia and Japan," March 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt encouraged the chiefs to consider all possible actions to be taken by the U.S. in the event of Russian involvement in the war with Japan. The President proposed that this scenario be studied "from all angles, such as...opening up the Aleutian Islands route to Kamchatka and Siberia."²⁸

This plan required Russian cooperation but, despite Japanese concerns to the contrary, the Russians were studiously avoiding any conflict on their eastern front. Continued denial of the use of Russian territory forced U.S. planners to switch their attention to the Aleutians as a base from which to eventually attack the Japanese homeland.

On 5 May 1942, the War Department stated the reasons for making the defense of the Aleutians an objective. Manifested in Naval Order 18,

²⁷Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1964), 263-264.

²⁸Memo, President to Stark and Marshall, "United Nations Action in Case of War between (sic) Russia and Japan," 4 Mar 42, enclosure to JCS 16, 6 Mar 42, CCS 381 (3-5-42) (1), excerpts quoted in Grace Person Hayes, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II. The War Against Japan (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 131.

the Joint Chiefs of Staff published the following: (1) Dutch Harbor is the key to the Bering Sea, and (2) Russian Lend-Lease route must be preserved (Unimak Pass outside Dutch Harbor commanded approach to the Bering Sea).²⁹ Enemy in control of the eastern Aleutians could also interdict the air lanes used by the U.S. Lend-Lease aircraft moving through Fairbanks and Nome (Alaska) for Russia.

There was no way that the Joint Chiefs of Staff or Admiral Nimitz could ignore the situation in the North Pacific. The Aleutians, as stated previously, appear to be a natural route for invasion of Japan from the United States or, as many feared, a route for Japan to use to invade North America. Each fearing the other would use the Aleutians to this end, both countries began to shift resources to the theater.³⁰

The Americans, uncertain of the strength and exact dispositions of the Japanese forces in the Aleutians after the initial discovery on 10 June that the Japanese had established themselves on Kiska Island, decided that a "direct attack on the enemy-held islands was...impractical."³¹ Accordingly, the Americans prudently decided to establish a series of bases from the Alaskan mainland out to positions in the Aleutians within striking distance of the Japanese in the western Aleutians. In these bases, sufficient war materiel could be stockpiled that would eventually enable the U.S. to mount an offensive operation that would be reasonably certain of success.

²⁹U.S. Navy, excerpts from "Naval Order 18, Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet," listed in "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," 5 May 1942.

³⁰Hayes, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II, 272.

³¹Ibid., 272-273.

The Aleutians, west of the Umnak airfield, was totally void of any existing infrastructure. Both sides would have to develop austere support bases on islands that offered nothing as a starting point. Fortunately for the U.S., the frantic efforts in 1941 by the Alaska Defense Command (with the by now Major General Buckner still commanding) had created a sizable infrastructure in Alaska and in the eastern Aleutians from which to carry out this strategy. Growing recognition of the strategic value of Alaska and the Aleutians had continued since 1939 with the approval of the Protective Mobilization Plan, 1939. The plan for defense of the west coast of the U.S. and its hemispheric interests centered on Japan (referred to as ORANGE in the family of war plans that pre-dated the Rainbow series) as the aggressor.

Between 1904 and 1939, U.S. war plans had been based on the assumption of the U.S. facing only one other opponent nation. Each country or situation was given a code-color, for instance Japan was ORANGE, Great Britain was RED, Mexico was GREEN, and Germany was BLACK in these plans. Under Plan ORANGE, the Army would have to hold Manila in the Philippines until the Pacific Fleet arrived. Then the fleet would be able to sortle against the Japanese Fleet. This plan, revised in 1938, assumed there would be no other nation combatants, and the decisive action would take place in the waters off the Asiatic coast.²²

This plan was obviously limited and somewhat simplistic in light

²²Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in Command Decisions, ed. Kent Roberts Greenfield (Washington: United States Army, 1987), 13-15, 19-20; Specter, Eagle Against the Sun, 55.

of the history of coalition warfare that has dominated European warfare. More and more, planners on the Joint Planning Committee began to look at other possibilities. Foremost was the possibility of coordinated action by Germany in the Atlantic and Japan in the Pacific.²³

Throughout 1938, U.S. planners studied the problems posed by such a scenario. Finally, in June 1939 the Joint Planning Committee submitted tentative plans to the Joint Board for the development of a new series of war plans to meet the combined threat of Germany, Italy, and Japan. The new name for this family of plans was RAINBOW. A new name was chosen to show distinct movement away from the old color plans and accommodate the updated assumptions brought about by the ongoing aggressive activities of the European Axis partners.²⁴

The Joint Plans Committee quickly came up with five RAINBOW plans, all designed to defend the United States and the Western Hemisphere from Axis aggression.

RAINBOW 1 assumed the U.S. to be at war without major allies facing a violation of the Monroe Doctrine that required first priority, relegating U.S. Pacific interests to a strategic defense initially.

RAINBOW 2 assumed the U.S. to be allied with Great Britain,

²³Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy," in Command Decisions, 13-14, 20.

The Joint Board, created in 1903 and reorganized in 1919, consisted of the Army Chief of Staff, the Chief of Naval Operations, their deputies, and the chief of the War Plans Division from both services. The Board reported to both of the Service Secretaries, and took up matters that were joint in nature. The responsibility for the detailed development of joint war plans rested with the eight man Joint Planning Committee. These eight officers worked for and reported to the Joint Board.

²⁴Ibid., 23.

and France requiring minimum participation by the U.S. in the Atlantic. This would allow the U.S. to undertake immediate major offenses against the Japanese in the Pacific.

RAINBOW 3, like Rainbow 1, assumed the United States to be at war without major allies, but made the assumption that sufficient combat power would be available ensure hemispheric defense and allow for the immediate undertaking of offensive operations into the western Pacific.

RAINBOW 4, similar to the Rainbow 1 plan, assumed the U.S. would have no major allies. The focus on this plan was for the defense of the western hemisphere, but in a more aggressive manner. The Army would have to deploy forces to the southern part of South America and in eastern Atlantic areas as part of joint operations. This plan would obviously require a strategic defense in the Pacific due to lack of forces.

RAINBOW 5 assumed the United States would be allied with Great Britain and France. The U.S. would conduct actions to ensure defense of the western hemisphere but with early projection of U.S. forces to the eastern Atlantic, and to either or both the African and European Continents. A strategic defense was to be maintained in the Pacific until success against the Axis permitted transfer of major forces to the Pacific.²⁵

Planning continued on the Rainbow series through 1939 and 1940.

By 1940, with the fall of France and Great Britain, it became apparent that Rainbow 2 and 3, with their early focus on the western Pacific, had lost their applicability. Therefore, by mid-1940, Rainbow 4 was judged to be the most feasible of the Rainbow family and it received the preponderance of the planners' attention. The trigger for implementation of Rainbow 4 was to be the end of both French and British resistance in Europe.²⁶

By winter 1940, with the bleak situation in western Europe, Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, briefed the President on a new basic U.S. policy developed by Brigadier General George V. Strong. Strong, as the Chief of the Joint Planning

²⁵Ibid., 24.

²⁶Ibid., 29.

Committee, and his staff of planners had realized that the U.S. must develop a purely defensive policy in the Pacific and should cease aid to the Allies in favor of mobilizing U.S. forces for hemispheric defense.²⁷

Except for halting the shipment of lend-lease materiel to the fighting Allies, this recommendation became the policy of the U.S. and it was from this position that American and British planners met 29 January 1941 through 29 March. This meeting, commonly referred to as ABC-1 (American British Conference 1), resulted in a joint position calling for defeat of Germany early, with the U.S. effort being in the Atlantic and European area. Action against Japan would be constrained to that of a strategic defense with a corresponding commitment of resources.²⁸

The Rainbow Plan that most closely accommodated the ABC-1 position was RAINBOW 5. Actually, the strategic principles of the ABC-1 matched those of Rainbow 5 almost exactly. On 14 May 1940 the Joint Board approved both RAINBOW 5 and ABC-1, which it had tentatively approved on 28 May (Navy) and 2 June (Army).²⁹

The President withheld approval of both the ABC-1 principles, because the British government had not approved them, and RAINBOW 5, because the plan was partially based on the ABC-1. However, the Service Chiefs and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson agreed that detailed operational planning by the services could be undertaken since the

²⁷Ibid., 29-30.

²⁸Ibid., 44.

²⁹Ibid., 46.

President had not disapproved Rainbow 5, but had merely decided to table the plan while waiting for the British government to voice approval of the ABC-1 directives .⁴⁰

It was under RAINBOW 5 that defensive measures for Alaska began to pick up steam, increasing from a sustainment level necessary for a single outpost to that of major expenditures for airfields, naval bases, and support facilities. RAINBOW 5 called for a strategic triangle, formed by lines connecting points in Alaska, Hawaii, and Panama, to ensure the defense of the U.S. mainland. Defense of other American interests in the Pacific, such as in the Southwest Pacific, were not included in the Rainbow 5 Plan.

The specific plan for defense of Alaska and the North Pacific was codified in the "Joint Pacific Coastal Frontier Defense Plan, RAINBOW NO. 5 (Reinforcements for Alaska, 16 October 1941 update). In accordance with this joint plan the services (including Army Air Corps) had the following major missions:

Army: (Alaskan Defense Command)

- (1) Supported by the Alaskan Sector (Navy), defend the Alaskan Sector...against attacks by sea, land, and air.
- (2) Defend United States military and Naval bases in Alaska, including Unalaska, against external attacks and sabotage.
- (3) Support the Alaskan Sector (Navy) in protecting the sea lines of communications....provide for local protection....to include Navy Bases (Sitka, Kodiak and Dutch Harbor).⁴¹

Navy: (Alaskan Sector (Navy), Thirteenth Naval District:

- (1) Patrol the coastal zone of the Alaskan Sectors control and protect shipping therein.
- (2) Destroy Axis sea communications.
- (3) Support the Army in repelling land, sea, and air

⁴⁰Ibid., 47.

⁴¹U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Frontier Defense Plan, RAINBOW No. 5," Pacific Coastal Frontier: Department of War, 1941, Part XI, Annex No. 3.

attacks.⁴²

Air Corps: (Eleventh Air Force (Alaska))

(1) Defense of Army and Naval bases and other vital installations against land, air and sea attack.

(2) Denial of use by enemy of air, land, and sea bases in Alaska and the Aleutians.⁴³

In 1939, Congress had approved only \$4,000,000 for construction of military facilities in Alaska. This, an insufficient sum even for the day considering the expensive nature of any operation in Alaska, was earmarked for construction of a cold weather aviation test facility at Fairbanks. Adding to this was the fact that the only Army post anywhere in Alaska garrisoned only a battalion size force. This post, Chilkoot Barracks, was located in Southeastern Alaska near the Canadian Border. Though afforded "Military District" status under the Western Defense Command and a very professional organization, the unit had no relevant mission and was functioning only as an "outpost" confined to the local area of operations.⁴⁴

In July 1940 the Army sent over 750 troops of the 4th Infantry Regiment to Anchorage, Alaska. By 16 October 1941 the number of U.S. Army personnel had increased to 19,887. Of these, 7,431 were infantry (4th Infantry Regiment, 37th Infantry Regiment (less the band), 153rd

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴U.S. Army, "Protective Mobilization Plan, 1939," (HQ, Ninth Corps Area, Office of the Commanding General, Presidio of San Francisco, April 1, 1939). U.S. Army, "Official History of the Alaskan Department," (U.S. Army, Headquarters, Western Defense Command, Presidio at San Francisco, 1945), 276.

The Ninth Corps Area was divided into seven Military Districts, together the seven encompassed the western U.S. The Commanding Officer, Chilkoot Barracks, AK was empowered to perform, for Alaska, the duties assigned to District Commanders.

Infantry Regiment, 201st Infantry Regiment, and one battalion from the 297th Infantry) and 122 were armor troops (Company B, 194th Tank Battalion). The remainder of the troops were Signal, Field Artillery, Coast Artillery, Engineers, and Headquarters and Service Troops.⁴³

Also, the Army established the Alaska Defense Force, subordinate to the Western Defense Command (WDC), at Anchorage. Lieutenant General (LTG) John L. DeWitt, commanding the Western Defense Command from San Francisco, ordered Colonel Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. to command the Alaska Defense Force. Colonel Buckner assumed command on 22 July 1940.⁴⁴

Those attempting to prepare Alaskan defenses faced monumental and seemingly impossible tasks. The territory was void of any significant infrastructure and was linked to the U.S. only by sea lines of communication. There were no military airfields in Alaska, no depots or significant military posts. The Navy had no base at all in the Aleutians, and only a few small bases in southeastern Alaska. Adding to this dismal situation, that part of the civilian infrastructure that could be utilized for military application was small.

As late as 1934 Alaska had only five airfields more than 2,000 feet long and all five were civilian controlled sites. This despite a very vocal and persuasive lobbying effort by General William "Billy" Mitchell, Assistant Chief of the Air Service, and Anthony J. Dimond,

⁴³U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Coastal Frontier Defense Plan RAINBOW No. 5," 1941 (Revised 16 October 1941), Part XI Annex No. 3: Alaskan Garrison (as of October 16, 1941).

⁴⁴Ibid., 267, 271.

Congressional Delegate from Alaska.⁴⁷

These two enthusiastic supporters of Alaska's strategic and economic importance finally succeeded to a degree in 1935 when Congressman John F. Dockweiler of California introduced legislation to establish a military air base in Alaska. The War Department appointed a board of officers to select a site in the vicinity of Fairbanks, and the board submitted its report in September 1936. However, when the Air Corps included a request for funding to purchase the land for the site the Bureau of Budget struck down the request.⁴⁸

In 1938 the Air Corps became interested in establishing a cold weather experiment station, initially considered for construction in Michigan. A new site selection board was established in mid-1939 to consider sites for defensive air bases and the cold weather training station. The board visited sites in Anchorage, Nome, and the previously considered site in Fairbanks. As a result of this visit, the board recommended establishing an air base adjacent to Anchorage (what would become Elmendorf Air Force Base) and the cold weather station at Fairbanks. Finally, these recommendations were funded after a considerable amount of argumentative debate in Washington.⁴⁹

In this setting, in the summer of 1940 Colonel Buckner set about to establish a credible defense using all resources available, and some that weren't. Buckner, convinced early on that war with Japan was

⁴⁷Jerold E. Brown, Where Eagles Land. Planning and Development of U.S. Army Airfields, 1910-1941 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1990), 118.

⁴⁸Ibid., 119.

⁴⁹Ibid., 119-120.

imminent, shifted resources within Alaska as he saw fit to prepare defenses.⁵⁰ In hindsight, we can see it was fortunate for Buckner that war did come and it is fortunate for the U.S. effort in the North Pacific that Colonel Buckner executed his mandate so aggressively.

Though the plan for the defense of Alaska was a "Joint" plan, initially there was no theater commander in the North Pacific. Buckner's Alaska Defense Force, redesignated Alaska Defense Command on 4 February 1941, was subordinate to the Western Defense Command (WDC), an all army command.⁵¹ The U.S. Navy in Alaska, commanded by Captain Ralph C. Parker,⁵² was directly subordinate to the 13th Naval District, Seattle, Washington, which was part of the Pacific Northwest Sea Frontier, also headquartered at Seattle.⁵³

Integration of service efforts was to be by a spirit of cooperation. With no joint commander to ensure integration and unity of effort, establish objectives, and promote cooperation, one would expect problems between the army and navy (the Eleventh Air Force (Alaska) was subordinate to Buckner).

It was not until the Presidential Directive of 30 March 1942 that the geographic responsibilities of the Pacific were established. This directive appointed General Douglas MacArthur Commander in Chief of the Southwest Pacific Area and Admiral Nimitz, Commander in Chief,

⁵⁰Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 59-61.

⁵¹U.S. Army, "Official History of the Alaskan Department," 267, 272.

⁵²Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 17.

⁵³U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Coastal Frontier Defense Plan, RAINBOW No. 5, (Reinforcements for Alaska), 1941 (Revised 16 October 1941)."

Pacific Ocean Areas. Nimitz' area of responsibility was sub-divided into the Central and North Pacific, both under Nimitz' direct control, and the South Pacific, under a naval officer subordinate to Nimitz (Vice Admiral Robert L. Ghormley). The boundary between Central and North Pacific was 42 degrees north.³⁴

Buckner first established an Army base at Anchorage (Ft. Richardson, activated 27 June 1940 and located next to the air base site selected by the 1939 Air Corps Airfield Selection Panel) and an Army airfield at Fairbanks (Ladd Airfield, located in a large bend in the Chena River three miles east of downtown Fairbanks and activated 1 July 1940).³⁵

Ladd Army Airfield, was constructed around a 9285 foot concrete runway with a second shorter parallel runway of asphalt and concrete. This construction, still solid after fifty years of use, was somewhat of an engineering marvel given the undesirable properties of permafrost for a construction foundation. Eventually, the airfield and its support facilities proved crucial to the successful Russian Lend-Lease Program of providing aircraft to the Soviets. These aircraft were

³⁴Dupuy and Dupuy, Military Heritage of America, 585.

³⁵Fort Richardson was named for Wilds P. Richardson, Brigadier General, U.S. Army. Elmendorf Army Airfield was named for Captain Hugh M. Elmendorf, an army air corps aviator who was killed in a plane crash at Wright Airfield in 1933. Ladd Field, renamed Fort Wainwright after General Jonathan Mayhew Wainwright when the U.S. Army took over the base in 1961, was named for Major Arther K. Ladd, army air corps aviator killed in an air crash in South Carolina in 1935. This information from author's notes during visits to these locations September 1984-August 1988. Information on activation dates of installations confirmed in U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of USA Ground Forces in World War II-Pacific Theater of Operations," United States Army, 1959, 278.

ferried from the U.S. to Ladd Airfield where Russian pilots accepted them and flew through Nome into Siberia, then on to the Russo-German front.

While busily working to construct a defensive infrastructure for Alaska, Buckner pressed the Navy to expand into the Aleutians. He conducted a personal sea-borne reconnaissance throughout the length of the Aleutians, noting those suitable for use as military bases. This incursion by Buckner into the domain of the Navy created significant consternation, not with the Naval Commander in Alaska, Captain Ralph C. Parker, but with the Navy Department in Washington. The positive side of this episode was that the Navy then accelerated planning to expand their presence in Alaska and establishment of bases throughout the North Pacific, principally Kodiak (also referred to during these early days as Chiniak), Sitka, and Dutch Harbor.⁵⁴

Buckner's first construction west of Anchorage was at Cold Bay, which is on the Alaska Peninsula, followed shortly thereafter by the construction of an air base on Umnak Island. This air base was designed to provide air defense for the Navy base at Dutch Harbor.

It was in establishing these two air bases, Cold Bay on the Alaska Peninsula and Umnak in the eastern Aleutian Islands, that Buckner really stuck his neck out by his shifting of resources from one project to another. Landing construction workers at Cold Bay in the fall of 1941, under a deception plan that was designed to convince observers that a fish processing station was being built, Buckner began building the

⁵⁴Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 56-58.

western most military airfield in Alaska.⁵⁷

Even before this work was completed, he began organizing another construction operation, again under the cover name of a fictional fish packing company, to make his move into the Aleutians (landing troops on Umnak Island on 17 January 1942 and starting airfield construction on 12 March). Fortunately for Buckner, on 26 November 1941 authorization had been granted and funding provided for these two air bases.⁵⁸ (See Figure 5, Map of Alaska and Aleutians, Page 37).

Buckner knew that to project power into the Aleutians, he had to establish bases; bases to stockpile materiel and bases to build up combat power. These two air bases would later contribute much to the success of combat operations throughout the Aleutians, and would vindicate Buckner from the issues raised by those that questioned the intensity of his pre-war construction efforts. By December 1941 Buckner, recently promoted to Brigadier General, had substantially increased the infrastructure of mainland Alaska (a road between Anchorage and Fairbanks, improvised railway between the ice-free port of Whittier and the railhead south of Anchorage at Portage, about thirteen military airfields and forward operating bases completed, the

⁵⁷Ibid., 59. U.S. Army, "Army Air Force Study #34, Army Air Forces in the War Against Japan, 1941-1942," United States Army, Headquarters, Army Air Forces, 122-123.

During the war the airfield on Umnak (located about 775 miles from Anchorage) was called Umnak AAF, later renamed Cape Air Force Base after First Lieutenant John Cape. Cape shot down one Japanese dive bomber during the attack on Dutch Harbor, but was killed when his P-40 was shot down by a Japanese Zero during the same fight. The companion installation on Umnak for ground and anti-aircraft troops was called Fort Glenn.

⁵⁸Ibid., 60.

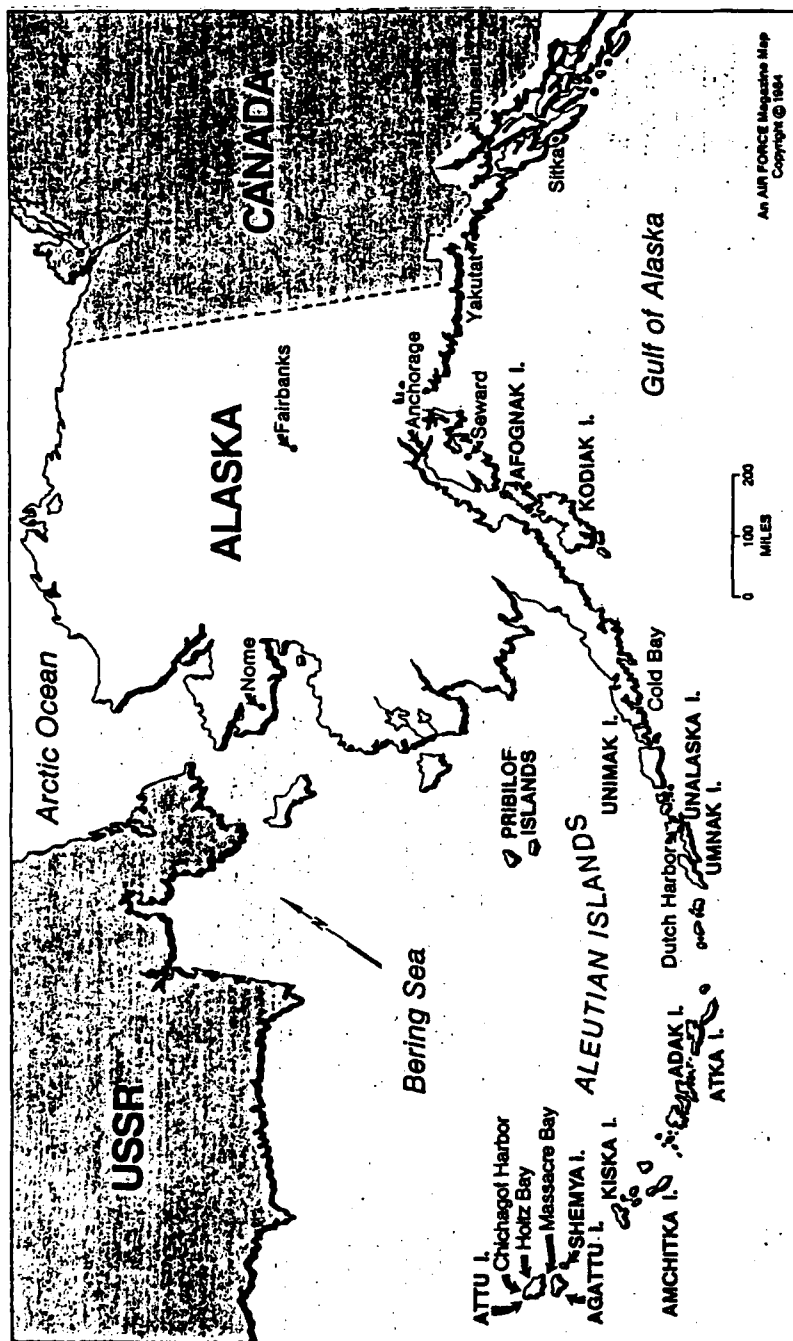


Fig. 5. Map of Alaska and Aleutian Islands with key islands identified. Reprinted, with permission, from John L. Frisbee, "The Forgotten Front," *Air Force Magazine*, vol. 67:2, February 1984, 97.

large posts at Anchorage and Fairbanks and the establishment of communication and navigation systems).³⁹

With his construction projects completed or underway in the Aleutians, Buckner's effort to prepare for war had greatly enhanced the region's defense capability. Buckner had over 24,000 soldiers and airmen under his command at the outbreak of the war on 7 December 1941.⁴⁰

While he was busily constructing airfields throughout Alaska, General Buckner was also fighting to get an air force. It is somewhat disconcerting to realize that while the immense--and expensive--effort to construct airfields was in full swing there was no air force waiting in the wings to occupy them. However, this was exactly the situation prior to fall of 1940.

Nothing if not an optimist, Buckner's efforts to get military aircraft to Alaska eventually paid off, albeit initially very modestly. On 12 August 1940 an obsolete B-10 bomber landed at Merrill Field on the outskirts of Anchorage.⁴¹ On board was the advance element of the

³⁹U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Coastal Frontier Defense Plan, RAINBOW No. 5, 1941 (Revised 16 October 1941), Appendix 5 to Annex 5 (Air), Supporting Plan-11th (sic) Air Force (Alaska).

The use of the term airfield here should not give the reader the impression that these bases had all the support facilities found at air force bases in the U.S. and at other more developed locations overseas. The terms used by the Air Force in 1941 in referring to their bases were "Air Base," "Operating Airdrome," and "Staging Field." Facilities were best at the former.

⁴⁰U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of USA Ground Forces in World War II," 145.

⁴¹This airport is still active and, today located in the heart of Anchorage, is one of the busiest airports in the world for general aviation. Commercial airlines today use the large Anchorage International Airport, not in existence in 1940.

U.S. Eleventh Air Force, Major Everett Sanford Davis and two enlisted soldiers.⁴²

Major Davis may not have realized it, but he was facing a herculean task in getting the Eleventh Air Force flying in Alaska.⁴³ There was no system of navigation aids, of course limited number of landing fields, and the arctic temperatures did things to mechanical components that a flier and aircraft mechanic from the continental U.S. could not imagine, much less remedy.

However, Major Davis, emulating General Buckner's enthusiasm and determination, had within weeks of his arrival in Alaska, surveyed six air field locations and activated the Cold Weather Aviation Laboratory at Fairbanks. Major Davis compiled a textbook of data and information on flight operations in Alaska that was used throughout the war years and eased the way for the pilots and mechanics that would be operating against the Japanese by June 1942.⁴⁴

However well Buckner and Davis worked to construct airfields and support facilities after August 1940, they still had only two combat squadrons in Alaska on 7 December 1941. The fact that there were not more was not due to lack of trying on Buckner's part. Though he had continually asked for aircraft through the Western Defense Command (LTG DeWitt heartily endorsed Buckner's requests) the attitude of the Army

⁴²Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 49-50.

⁴³Major Everett S. Davis was killed in an air crash east of Naknek, Alaska in November 1942. At the time of his death, Davis, previously promoted to Colonel, was the Chief of Staff, Eleventh Air Force. The Army Airfield on Adak in the Aleutians was named Davis Air Force Base in 1942 after Colonel Davis.

⁴⁴Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 50.

Air Corps in Washington was that if the situation required it, aircraft could be rushed to Alaska from the United States. Buckner was well aware that this was unrealistic, if not out and out impossible, and he was again proved correct in the hectic months to come.⁴³

In 1936, General Henry H. Arnold, then assistant chief of the Air Corps, sent Captain Edward Whitehead to survey a route from Seattle to Alaska. Whitehead surveyed five sites, all west of the Canadian Rockies, that would allow aircraft to deploy to Juneau without entering Canadian airspace. Though the air corps personnel involved in the mission did everything they could to obtain approval and funding for the project, including Whitehead's emphasis on the commercial benefits of the route, congressional approval was not forthcoming.⁴⁴

As a consequence, in January 1941 when the first two squadrons (one squadron of B-26's and one of P-40's) departed the Air Corps depot at Sacramento for Alaska, they had to use a route through Canada that went east of the Canadian Rockies. At this time, there were only five staging bases on this route, and none of them were complete. For the fighters, some of the flight legs terminated at the very end of their fuel endurance, some of the stage fields had no navigation beacons, and, being January, the arctic cold increased the severity of every problem. As a result, only seventeen of the twenty-five P-40's made it to Ladd Field in Fairbanks, and it took six weeks. The medium bombers made out somewhat better, taking only four weeks and losing five of thirteen

⁴³Ibid., 66-67.

⁴⁴Brown, Where Eagles Land, 118-119.

deploying aircraft.⁴⁷ Although the air corps got significantly better at ferrying aircraft to Alaska, it is commonplace even today to see the skeletons of crashed World War II aircraft throughout the state, especially around Fairbanks.

As late as March 1942, the Air Corps was still struggling to move squadrons to Alaska. The troop list for the Eleventh Air Force on 1 March 1942 included, besides the Headquarters located at Elmendorf Field: Three Medium Bombardment Squadrons (73rd and 77th at Elmendorf, 36th at Naval Air Station, Kodiak)⁴⁸, three Interceptor Pursuit Squadrons (18th (less one flight), and the 11th at Elmendorf, and one flight of the 18th at Annette Island Landing Field), and a large number of air corps service units at these bases plus Ladd Field, Yakutat Field, Otter Point, Nome, Northway, Cold Bay, and Naknek.⁴⁹

The Army Ferrying Command, established in May 1941 at Long Beach, California, instituted a system of flying Lend-Lease aircraft through Alaska that was ultimately a huge success. Aircraft bound for Russia departed East Base Airfield outside Great Falls, Montana and flew a

⁴⁷Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 68.

The commander of the P-40 squadron (11th Pursuit Squadron) was Lieutenant John S. Chennault from Waterproof, Louisiana, son of General Claire Lee Chennault, commander of the American Volunteer Group that was fighting the Japanese in China.

⁴⁸Army elements at Kodiak, the air corps units, air defense, service troops, etc., were consolidated at one area near the naval air station, called Fort Greely. This should not be confused with the present day Fort Greely located at Delta Junction, Alaska (Delta Junction is about 90 miles east of Fairbanks).

⁴⁹U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Frontier Defense Plan, Supporting Plan-11th (sic) Air Force (Alaska)," Appendix No. 5 to Annex No. 5-Air, Table A, 1-2. U.S. Army, "Army Air Forces in the War Against Japan 1941-1942," (Washington: Headquarters, Army Air Forces, August 1945), 2, 111-112.

route established by the 7th Ferrying Group of the Air Transport Command. After being winterized at East Base, aircraft were flown along the Northwest Staging Route airfields of Edmonton, Grand Prairie, Fort St. John, Fort Nelson, Watson Lake, and then into Ladd Field. During the twenty-one months the 7th Ferrying Group operated this route, almost 8,000 (7,983) aircraft passed through East Base bound of Fairbanks for transfer to the Russians.⁷⁰

Without the dedicated effort of U.S. soldiers, sailors, and airmen in the North Pacific protecting the Lend-Lease route from Fairbanks to Nome, then across the Bering Sea into Siberia the Japanese could have easily disrupted or shut down this strategically vital operation.

The United States Navy in Alaska was in no better shape than the Army. In fact, during the months when General Buckner was feverishly building an army in Alaska, the Navy was taking a far more cautious approach in allocating resources to the North Pacific.

The Thirteenth Naval District (Alaska Sector) had only sufficient naval strength for harbor control and patrolling. Its mission was defending "...the coastal zone of the Alaskan Sector; control and protect shipping therein."⁷¹ The Navy received authorization to begin improving its sites at Kodiak, Sitka, and Dutch Harbor in July 1940.

These sites, and others in the Aleutians and in Southeastern Alaska, were the subject of studies, panels, and survey parties

⁷⁰Stan Cohen, The Forgotten War. A Pictorial History of World War II in Alaska and Northwestern Canada (Missoula, Montana: Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, 1981), 44-45.

⁷¹U.S. Army, "Joint Pacific Coastal Frontier Defense Plan, Rainbow #5," Annex No. 4, pp 7-8.

throughout the 1930's. These efforts were about as fruitful as those taken by the Army and Air Corps during the same period.

The Navy had established a wireless station at Dutch Harbor on Unalaska Island in the Aleutians in 1912 to transmit weather reports. Kiska in the western Aleutians was set aside as a naval reserve in 1904, and construction on a base was started in 1916 but the site was soon abandoned. In 1938, a Navy board headed by Admiral Arthur Hepburn proposed construction of fifteen naval bases and air stations throughout the continental United States plus air stations at Kodiak and Sitka. On 25 April 1939, funding was appropriated for building bases at Sitka and Kodiak.⁷²

Kodiak, with construction well underway but far from complete at the start of the war, played a key role in the Aleutians Campaign. An island just south of the base of the Alaska Peninsula and about 125 nautical miles southwest of the Kenai Peninsula, Kodiak has a natural harbor (Old Woman's Bay) and is strategically located to provide command and control of the North Pacific Fleet. It is here that Admiral Theobald, as commander of Task Force Eight would make his headquarters in late May 1942.

Until Task Force Eight sailed into the North Pacific, the only naval force present was that of the Thirteenth Naval District (Alaska Sector) commanded, as noted above, by Captain Ralph C. Parker. Commanding the Alaska Sector since October 1940, Parker had only the USS Charleston until the Navy leased private boats (called Yard Patrol, thus the designation "YB") with which to fulfill his mission of harbor

⁷²Cohen, The Forgotten War, 154.

and coastal defense. In the fall of 1941 the District Commander in Seattle had begun committing patrol aircraft to Alaska. Operating out of Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor the PBY-5 squadrons of Patrol Wing 4 (especially VP-42) would play a key role in Theobald's defense of the Aleutians. This illustrious service would continue throughout the campaign.⁷²

The Japanese fleet certainly had no compunction to operating in the inhospitable and harsh North Pacific, even as far east as the Aleutians. They had always viewed it as an area possessing invaluable natural resources with great strategic potential.

There is little doubt that even with the Soviets totally preoccupied with Nazi Germany in the west the Japanese felt threatened on the northern end of its defensive perimeter. There were no indicators from which they could draw the conclusion that the Soviets were planning to invite U.S. forces into Siberia or Kamchatka, yet they continued to fear such an inevitability. So much so that the Japanese never seriously attempted to interdict the flow of Lend-Lease supplies moving along the "Pacific Route" from the U.S. west coast, through the Japanese Kurils, to the port of Vladavostok. The Axis' failure to insist on an interdiction effort of this longest of the five surface

⁷²Ibid., 154-155. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," message traffic from Commander, Northwest Sea Frontier to CINCPAC, Frame 523.

The American Consolidated PBY-5 patrol flying boat was used extensively throughout the Pacific for maritime reconnaissance. Particularly effective in the North Pacific because of its slow flying speed and extended range, it would be pressed into service as a bomber during the aerial phase of the operation to oust the Japanese from Kiska and Attu.

Lend-Lease Routes (the Alaska-Siberian Air Ferry Route was an all air effort) would have great impact on the Soviet offenses during the last two years of the war. Over 47% (9.24 million tons) of the total Lend-Lease materiel that went to Soviet Russia (19.6 million tons) was transported over the Pacific Route.⁷⁴

Certainly, with the manpower and seapower requirements demanded by their effort in the Southwest Pacific, the Japanese simply did not have the resources to establish bases in the North Pacific (beyond their own Kuril Islands, garrisoned by their Northern Area Force). Why then did the Japanese attack the U.S. Naval Base at Dutch Harbor and occupy the Aleutians?

The shock of the 18 April 1942 Doolittle Raid was very real. The Japanese military had sworn no enemy would be able to strike the homeland, and they were deeply embarrassed and angered by that aerial attack, however superficial the actual damage. Speculation was rampant throughout the Imperial General Staff about future threats to the homeland. Preventing this insult from reoccurring was certainly a priority and any opportunity to expand their eastern defensive perimeter would be a strong argument for action. The Tokyo Raid served as the final straw for Admiral Yamamoto to insist on executing the Midway operation, and opposition to this plan quickly folded.⁷⁵

When the planners on the Combined Fleet staff developed the

⁷⁴U.S. Army, "International Aid Statistics, World War II, A Summary of War Department Lend Lease Activities," Headquarters, Army Service Forces, War Department, 31 December 1945, 46, 47-54.

⁷⁵U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88, Aleutian Naval Operation," 6-8.

complex Midway plan, they wanted to ensure that the main effort of the Combined Fleet (seizing Midway Island) would be completed before the U.S. Pacific Fleet could interfere. To gain this assurance, they planned an operation in the North Pacific against the U.S. Aleutians, phased to be conducted one day before the assault on Midway. Part one of this operation to be a carrier strike against Dutch Harbor Naval Base, and part two to be the occupation of certain islands in the Aleutians. Tactically, the Aleutian operation was an unqualified success. At the operational level, it was a terrible failure.⁷⁴

If the Americans reacted in accordance with the plan's assumptions, Admiral Nimitz would rush a number of his few remaining carriers north to meet the threat in the Aleutians. This would give Yamamoto, with the main body of the Combined Fleet, a free hand with which to reduce the U.S. garrison on Midway. Once Midway was taken and his own land based naval aircraft operating from the atoll, Yamamoto would be ready to ambush and destroy the U.S. fleet when they counterattacked. Of course, the Americans were aware of the plan in significant detail, thanks to intercepted radio transmissions, and the Japanese were the ones ambushed. The Midway operation was a disaster for the Japanese Navy.

Given the opportunity to disguise a major failure with a minor success, the chance to extend at least a segment of the homeland's defensive perimeter, and the Japanese' natural inclination and willingness to operate in the North Pacific, it is understandable why the Japanese elected to remain in the Aleutians beyond the period

⁷⁴Ibid., 32-33.

provided for in the Midway plan. The original plan only allowed for occupation of the Aleutians until the winter following the operation.⁷⁷

How well they could capitalize on their gains in the Aleutians and use those gains to support the achievement of their strategy throughout the Pacific remained to be seen.

⁷⁷U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 45," 84-85S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88," 12.

Among many on the Imperial General Staff, especially in the Navy Section, the operation in the Aleutians was viewed with greater import than Yamamoto attached to it. An example of this view can be demonstrated in the following excerpt from Japanese Monograph No. 45: "...there were to be two operational areas-Aleutians and Midway-but these two areas were to be closely coordinated. ...the occupation of the strategic islands was an important objective...."

CHAPTER TWO

STAND-OFF IN THE ALEUTIANS

There must be one man in command of an entire theater--air, ground, and ships. We cannot manage by cooperation.

General George C. Marshall, George C. Marshall, Ordeal and Hope, 1939-1942

In spite of a rather immense effort by Nimitz to thwart, or at least disrupt, the Japanese thrust into the North Pacific, the Japanese had managed to complete their operation almost flawlessly. Nimitz had dispatched Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald as Commander, North Pacific Force in late May to present the best defense possible for the Aleutians. Operating as Task Force Eight and armed with the information on Japanese objectives for the Midway and Aleutians operation, Theobald was not successful in preventing the Japanese from occupying islands in the western Aleutians.¹

Task Force Eight did not form at Pearl Harbor, but in fact was drawn from areas throughout the Pacific. The various naval units then rendezvoused south of Kodiak. Theobald departed Pearl Harbor on 22 May 1942 aboard the destroyer Reid and arrived Kodiak on 27 May. He then hoisted his flag aboard the light cruiser Nashville, which had also arrived on the 27th from a mission northwest of Midway.²

¹Thaddeus V. Tuleja, Climax at Midway (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1960), 60.

²U.S. Navy, "The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942. Strategical and Tactical Analysis," (U.S. Navy, Naval War College, 1948), 64.

The Nashville had been ordered to an area about 400 miles northwest of Midway to participate in a CINCPAC deception plan. The

By 2 June, all elements of Task Force 8 had arrived in the North Pacific and was organized into four surface and subsurface groups (refer to Figure 6, Organization of Task Force Eight, page 50). The main group, TG 8.6 was composed of three light cruisers, Nashville, St. Louis, and Honolulu, two heavy cruisers, Indianapolis and Louisville, four destroyers, Gridley, McCall, Gilmer, and Humphreys. TG 8.4 was composed of the nine aged destroyers, Case, Reid, Brooks, Sands, Kane, Dent, Talbot, King, and Waters, attached to Theobald from the Thirteenth Naval District (Alaska) of the Northwestern Sea Frontier. TG 8.2 was composed of one gunboat, Charleston, one minesweeper, Oriole, five Coast Guard cutters, and fourteen patrol vessels. The last task group, TG 8.5, was composed of seven submarines (SS 18, 23, 24, 27, 28, 34, and 35).³

Air strength of the task force totalled ninety-four Army fighters, seven heavy bombers, forty-two medium bombers, twenty-three Navy patrol aircraft (Catalina PBY's), and three scout aircraft.⁴ The War Department had been frantically attempting to introduce additional aircraft to Alaska, however logistical requirements had greatly slowed

Nashville broadcast radio signals designed to deceive the Japanese about movements of the Pacific Fleet during preparations for the Battle of Midway.

³Ibid., 66, 70.

Six of TG 8.5 submarines (S-18, 23, 27, 28, 34, and 35) were detached from the Midway force (TF 7) on 21 May and ordered to report to CTF 8 in the Aleutians. The remainder of TG 8.5 submarines arrived in the Aleutians from the Navy's Sound School at San Diego. The pressing into service even these aged submarines illustrates the thoroughness of the Pacific Fleet in scouring combatants from any region with which to meet the Japanese offensive.

⁴U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," (United States Navy, Office of Naval Intelligence, 1945), 5.

TASK FORCE 8

ORGANIZATION

2 JUNE 1942

TASK FORCE 8

REAR ADMIRAL ROBERT A. THEOBALD

TASK FORCE 8.1 (Submarines)

S18 S28
S23 S34
S24 S35
S27

TASK FORCE 8.2 (Patrol Group)

CHARLESTON (PG)
ORIOLE (SM)
5 USCG CUTTERS
14 PATROL BOATS (YP)

TASK FORCE 8.3 (Air Units)

ELEVENTH AIR FORCE
94 FIGHTERS (P-38, P-40)
7 B-17s
42 B-25s
PATROL WING 4
23 PBys
3 LAND BASED SCOUTS

TASK FORCE 8.4 (Destroyers)

CASE (DD) TALBOT (DD)
DENT (DD) WATERS (DD)
KING (DD) SANDS (DD)
REID (DD) BROOKS (DD)
KANE (DD)

TASK FORCE 8.6 (Main Body)

NASHVILLE (CL)
ST. LOUIS (CL)
HONOLULU (CL)
INDIANAPOLIS (CL)
LOUISVILLE (CL)
GRIDLEY (DD)
McCALL (DD)
GILMER (DD)
HUMPHREYS (DD)

NOTES:

CA HEAVY CRUISER
CL LIGHT CRUISER
DD DESTROYER
PG GUNBOAT
SM MINESWEEPER
SS SUBMARINE
YP PATROL BOAT

Fig. 6, Organization of U.S. North Pacific Force (Task Force Eight).

these deployments.

Upon arrival at Kodiak, and after conferring with General Buckner, Theobald began planning a defense for the Aleutians. Facing a Japanese fleet that consisted of two aircraft carriers, six cruisers, twelve destroyers, and accompanying auxiliary ships, Theobald was fully aware of the overwhelming advantage enjoyed by the Japanese Fifth Fleet.³

U.S. Intelligence reports, developed from Japanese signal intercepts, indicated that the most likely target for the Japanese in the Aleutians would be Dutch Harbor. Dutch Harbor is located in the eastern Aleutians on the northern side of Unalaska Island, which is just off the Alaska Peninsula. Intense construction had been underway at Dutch Harbor to improve naval facilities and expand its capability as a base from which the U.S. could push westward into the Aleutian Chain.⁴

The one over-riding assumption that ultimately shaped Theobald's plan for defense of the Aleutians was that the Japanese Fifth Fleet had two aircraft carriers. This assumption, like the information identifying Dutch Harbor as the Japanese' most likely target, was developed from intercepts by the U.S. signal intelligence units. On 16 May, CINCPAC (Nimitz) sent the following dispatch to the Commander in Chief (COMINCH), U.S. Fleet (Admiral Ernest J. King):

...indications that there may well be three separate and

³Brian Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War. World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 14-15.

⁴Basil Collier, The Second World War: A Military History. From Munich to Hiroshima-In One Volume (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1967), 476-477.

possibly simultaneous enemy offensives. One involving cruisers and carriers against the Aleutians probably Dutch Harbor.⁷

On 17 May, King responded with the following dispatch:

...I believe enemy attempt to capture MIDWAY and UNALASKA will occur about May 30th...or shortly thereafter.... UNALASKA attack force Crudiv 7, Cardiv 3 (RYUOJO and HOSHO), at least 2 desdivs [sic] plus troops. Consider it possible that "AOB" is BEAVER INLET and that landing is planned there.*

Theobald and the planners of his naval staff, despite having the intelligence reports identifying Dutch Harbor as the Japanese primary objective, developed a course of action that did not focus solely on Dutch Harbor. Theobald elected to position a screening force of submarines, patrol vessels, and Catalina flying boats well into the western part of the North Pacific to provide early warning of the approach of the Japanese fleet.*

Once contact with the Japanese was made, Theobald planned to attack the Japanese carrier task force with all available land based Navy and Army Air Force aircraft. With the Japanese carriers taken out

⁷U.S. Navy, "Dispatch CINCPAC to COMINCH, 160325 May 1942," excerpted in "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary/Running Estimate and Summary," Headquarters, Pacific Fleet, Department of the Navy, 3 June 1942, Frame 471.

*U.S. Navy, "Dispatch from COMINCH to CINCPAC, 172220 May 42," excerpted in "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Frames 489-490.

"Crudiv 7" is Cruiser Division Seven, "Cardiv 3" is Carrier Division Three, and "2 desdivs" are two destroyer divisions. BEAVER INLET referenced in this dispatch refers to a very deep natural harbor (inlet) on the east side of Unalaska Island, near Dutch Harbor Naval Base. There was real concern among U.S. planners that the Japanese were indeed planning on invading Dutch Harbor. I was unable to determine the exact meaning of the abbreviation "AOB" used in this dispatch. Most probable meaning is "Area of Bombardment," although it could have meant "Advanced Operating Base."

⁸U.S. Navy, "The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase," 73-74.

of the fight, Theobald felt the odds would be sufficiently evened to allow Task Force Eight's war ships to engage the remainder of the Japanese fleet. While the screening force was searching for the Japanese fleet, Theobald planned on withdrawing the main body of Task Force Eight (TG 8.6, with Theobald embarked) into the Gulf of Alaska south of Kodiak.¹⁰

To cover Dutch Harbor, Theobald committed TG 8.4 (Destroyer Division 82, previously assigned to the Northwestern Sea Frontier). Its mission was to defend Dutch Harbor only against any attempt by the Japanese to land troops. It was not expected that these destroyers could provide any meaningful defense against the Japanese carrier aviation units. They were to remain in the vicinity of Dutch Harbor (Makushin Bay) and become committed only if the Japanese main body--surface combatants and troop transports--made an attempt to land an invasion force at Dutch Harbor (Unalaska Island).¹¹

Theobald's plan was not endorsed by the Commanding General of the Alaskan Defense Command. General Buckner was sure that Theobald's surface and aerial screen would not be able to detect the Japanese fleet because of adverse weather. Buckner would have much preferred a plan that more fully embraced an active and vigorous defense using all available U.S. assets concentrated at and around Dutch Harbor.¹²

Since the weather systems in the North Pacific move from west

¹⁰Ibid., 68.

¹¹Ibid., 68, 73.

¹²Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 16-17. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," 4-5.

to east, the Japanese could and did use these systems to effectively mask their movements. Buckner realized this and used it as the basis for his argument with Theobald on how best to defend the Aleutian key sites. This disagreement was but the first of many that would plague the U.S. command and control system during the campaign against the Japanese in the North Pacific.

The Presidential Directive of 30 March 1942 gave Nimitz responsibility for the North Pacific (north of 42° longitude), as one of the three theaters of operation comprising the Pacific Ocean Areas. Up to this point, and continuing until 17 May, the U.S. Navy in the North Pacific was under the command of the Northwest Sea Frontier.¹³ This command had the mission of and was equipped for carrying out defense of coastal waters and harbors in Alaska and, until 17 May, was directly subordinate to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Fleet (King).

On 4 February 1941 the Alaska Defense Command (ADC) was activated from the units of the Alaska Defense Force which had been in existence since 22 July 1940. Though activated on 4 February, it was not until 1 March that Headquarters, Alaska Defense Command was constituted with permanent station at Fort Richardson, Alaska.

Initially, Alaska Defense Command was assigned to the Fourth Army with the mission of preparing a peacetime defense project to include the defense of U.S. military and naval installations in Alaska, including Unalaska Island (Unalaska, on which Dutch Harbor is located,

¹³Dispatch from Commander, Northwestern Sea Frontier to Nimitz on 182235 May 1942 acknowledging the new command and control directive from Admiral King (Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet), dated 172221 May 1942, excerpted in U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 493.

is the eastern-most major island of the Aleutians). On 10 June 1941 the Western Defense Command (WDC) was activated and combined with the Fourth Army to form Headquarters, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army (General John L. DeWitt commanding at the Presidio, San Francisco, California). The Alaska Defense Command (Buckner) was subordinate to the Western Defense Command and Fourth Army (DeWitt). DeWitt's Western Defense Command and Fourth Army reported directly to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Army. The U.S. Army Air Corps in Alaska (Eleventh Air Force), commanded by then Brigadier General William O. Butler, was subordinate to the Alaska Defense Command (Buckner).¹⁴

By mid-May 1942, with information in hand concerning Japanese intentions for their Midway-Aleutians operation, Nimitz and King adjusted the organization of the Pacific Fleet to meet that threat from the Imperial Combined Fleet. Nimitz, who considered the Aleutians the "gateway" to Alaska, believed a Japanese success in the area would have a very negative effect on American morale and seriously threaten Alaska's security. With only three carriers available, the U.S. planners had no choice but to use all of them to meet the Japanese main effort at Midway. However, Nimitz did decide to commit a sizable surface force (Task Force Eight) to meet the threat in the North Pacific.¹⁵

In his dispatch of 211700 May 42, Admiral King informed Nimitz that the War Department:

¹⁴U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of USA Ground Forces in World War II-Pacific Theater of Operations," (Washington: United States Army, Chief of Military History, 1959), 267-272.

¹⁵U.S. Navy, "The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase," 64.

...prospectively gives Alaska state of fleet opposed invasion until and if invasion in force of Kodiak or continental Alaska becomes imminent. Army and Navy air to be under General Butler (and he under Task Force 8). Command relationship between remainder Army Alaska force and Task Force 8 [sic] to be by mutual cooperation. Op-Plan 28-42 will be changed accordingly."¹⁴

This arrangement effectively made the initial fight for the Aleutians--like much of the rest of the Pacific--largely a Navy show. The key phrase in King's dispatch was "fleet opposed invasion," instead of "ground opposed invasion." In the vernacular of the day, this declaration by the Joint Chiefs would be the determining factor in identifying which service would provide the senior commander for the campaign.

The major offensive operations in the Aleutians--against the Japanese on Attu and Kiska--were conducted under the command and control of Commander, North Pacific Force. Although the Commanding Generals of Western Defense Command and Fourth Army (DeWitt) and Alaska Defense Command (Buckner) assisted in the preparation and execution of the assaults on Attu and Kiska and were responsible for the administration and supply of the Army forces, over-all command was vested in the Navy. Once the amphibious assault phase was completed, command of the land forces was assumed by an army commander. The chain of command then ran from the army commander on the ground to the Alaska Defense Command, then to Western Defense Command.¹⁵

In establishing the command relationships in the North Pacific and

¹⁴U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 538.

¹⁵U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of USA Ground Forces in World War II," 267.

Alaska, Nimitz, King, and Marshall felt that the principle of "mutual cooperation" between Theobald and Buckner would be the most effective command and control system. Unfortunately, a clash of personalities and disagreements over most major operational decisions caused continuous problems between the two commanders. As mentioned previously, Buckner strongly and vocally disagreed with Theobald's initial plan for defending the Aleutians. The poor relationship between these senior officers continued until 4 January 1943 when Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid replaced Theobald in command of the North Pacific Force.¹⁰

Generally, however, disagreements between Theobald and Buckner were limited to matters of operational planning, and did not actually manifest themselves during actual combat situations. General DeWitt, in his comments of July 1959, wrote:

Too much emphasis is being placed on an incident that had no appreciable effect on operations as far as local commanders were concerned. It seems to have appeared more serious on paper than it actually was. There was a personality clash between Admiral Theobald and General Buckner, but it was superficial and had no lasting effect on the mutual cooperation that followed. It was forgotten after Admiral Theobald was relieved and General Buckner promoted.¹¹

In any event, neither Marshall nor King felt that any change in command or command relationship was necessary although such a move was considered. In August 1942 poor relations between Theobald and Buckner led the Army to propose a separate Alaskan Department independent of

¹⁰Louis Morton, United States Army in World War II. The War in the Pacific. Strategy and Command: The First Two Years (Washington: Department of the Army, 1962), 423.

¹¹Ibid., 424.

General DeWitt and headed by an Army Air Corps officer. Although taken under consideration, Marshall and King decided to make no changes in either personnel or command relationships. (Alaska was eventually made a separate department on 1 November 1943, assigned to and subordinate to the War Department.)²⁰

In July 1943 King wrote regarding the command structure and relationships in the North Pacific (by this date Theobald had been relieved by Kinkaid, the successful U.S. operation to retake Attu had recently been completed, and preparations were underway for the assault on Kiska):

In the North Pacific Area no complete unified command has been established. Naval Forces, amphibious operations, and a portion of the Army Air Forces have been placed under the Commander North Pacific, to operate under the principle of mutual cooperation with the ground forces and other Air Forces. The Commander North Pacific has carried out operations under joint directives not directly from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but from the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Areas, and the Commanding General, Western Defense Command. This arrangement, made last year, has, for the ADAK, AMCHITKA, ATTU, and the prospective KISKA operations, worked extremely well in practice, largely due to excellent cooperation between the responsible commanders concerned. I have not seen fit to press for a change in this setup, nor do I wish to do so now. In fact, it is working so well that I believe a change would be a mistake.²¹

Though initial U.S. command relationships in the North Pacific were plagued with problems that have since been the subject of significant comment, they were largely overstated. The problems between Theobald and Buckner were precipitated by clashes of two strong and opinionated personalities. Many staff officers of the Alaska

²⁰U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of USA Ground Forces in World War II," 272.

²¹Morton, Strategy and Command, 424.

Defense Command viewed the staff of Task Force Eight as newcomers to the region that did not, at least initially, have an appreciation for the realities of the environmental conditions and then, after the navy staff gained an appreciation, underestimated the capabilities of man and machine to operate in those conditions. The ADC staffers, like their Commanding General, felt that Task Force Eight did not operate aggressively enough in the early stages of the North Pacific campaign, being overly concerned with the admittedly terrible weather and sea states.

In a letter to DeWitt, Buckner wrote about his impatience with the Navy's timidity in the waters of the Aleutians:

The Naval officers had an instinctive dread of Aleutian waters, feeling that they were inhabited by a ferocious monster that was always breathing fogs and coughing up williwaws that would blow the unfortunate mariner onto uncharted rocks and forever destroy his chances of becoming an admiral.²²

Setting aside these minor disagreements, the command arrangement did, as Admiral King stated, work well. Nimitz was the theater commander. He exercised operational command in the North Pacific, as he did in the South Pacific, through a subordinate. The stage was set for friction between the two services when U.S. Army units in the theater (minus the U.S. Army's Eleventh Air Force) were not made subordinate to the theater commander. This is a classic example of

²²Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 57. The initial operational cautiousness of the Navy, whether actual or perceived, was overshadowed by its outstanding performance as the campaign progressed. General Buckner's criticisms seem limited to plans and not to actual combat operations. General Buckner wrote much more in praise of the Navy effort than he did criticizing it. This, in the author's judgement, is a key difference and should be noted during any discussions of the campaign.

failure to achieve unity of command.

The command relationship of "mutual cooperation" between the Army in the theater (Alaska Defense Command) and its parent headquarters (Western Defense Command and Fourth Army) and the Commander, North Pacific Force and CINCPAC required much coordination and "political maneuvering" in the development of the supporting campaign plan. Today's military professionals would undoubtedly unanimously condemn this command relationship because of lack of unity of command. However, we should remember the attitudes prevalent in the services at the time, service organization, and the organization of the War Department when analyzing the command relationships in the World War II North Pacific.

This example of joint forces command and control highlights the many points of friction and duplicity of effort that will occur when a commander is not given command of all forces in the theater. Before criticizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the shortcomings in the command relationship between the Army-Navy forces in the North Pacific in 1942, we should remember that many military and civilian leaders feel it was not until 1986 that real progress was made in this regard. Even then, it required congressional action in the form of the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 to mandate a comprehensive system for the command and control of joint forces.

One of the major reasons for the command relationship established in the 1942 North Pacific was the continuing concern among U.S. planners (and the U.S. public) that the Japanese may attempt to

establish forward operating bases in southern Alaska. From such bases, it was feared, the great industrial facilities in the U.S. Pacific Northwest could come under Japanese aerial bombardment, or Japan could even mount an invasion of the United States.²²

In the tense months of 1942, concern for the strategic defense of the U.S. Pacific Northwest was significant. The War Department accordingly attached a significant priority toward this end, and this mission belonged to the U.S. Army, not the U.S. Navy. The Army's Major Subordinate Command charged with the strategic defense of the western U.S. was the Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, and the Alaska Defense Command was an integral part of that command. Considering this, it is not surprising that General Buckner's Alaskan Command was not subordinated to Admiral Nimitz' North Pacific Command.

Politics and intrigue were not unique to the U.S. Army-Navy relationship. Actually, the Japanese system suffered from even greater and more distracting rivalries and differences in war-fighting philosophies between their Army and Navy (like the United States, the Japanese had no separate air force). The major difference, and ultimately the major weakness, of the Japanese command structure was that it was completely a non-joint effort. At every level, from the Japanese garrisons on Attu and Kiska in the North Pacific to the Imperial General Staff, the two services maintained their separate identities. In fact, the Army Section and the Navy Section of the Imperial General Staff worked in offices of their own parent services. During their twice weekly meetings, they met on the grounds of the

²²Morton, Strategy and Command, 420.

Imperial Palace. The Army enjoyed greater prestige, even though Japan was a maritime nation, due to General Hideki Tojo's positions of Premier and War Minister.²⁴

The Japanese did not normally organize their forces in the field under a single joint commander. Measured against the current U.S. command structure whereby specific commanders are assigned geographical areas of responsibility, the Japanese command relationships were certainly more complicated. The closest the Japanese system approached the U.S. system was that of the Japanese Navy, which placed all its forces under a single command, the Combined Fleet--commanded until 18 April 1943 by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.²⁵

This did little, of course, to promote joint operations. The Chief of the Navy General Staff ruled the Navy's efforts and the Chief of the Army General Staff held total sway over Army operations. In the event of opposing view points regarding strategy, as often happened, the entire system could stalemate itself and the operation or plan would have to be changed or postponed. One example was the debate in

²⁴Louis Morton, The War in the Pacific, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years (Washington: U.S. Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1962), 234-235.

²⁵Admiral Yamamoto was killed when his aircraft was shot down on 18 April 1943 while enroute to visit the Buin area in southern Bougainville. U.S. cryptanalysts had determined his travel arrangements enabling a force of eighteen P-38's from the 339th Fighter Squadron to intercept the Japanese flight of two bombers (used to transport Yamamoto and his Chief of Staff) and six fighter escorts over Bougainville's Kahili Airfield. Both bombers were shot down, but the Chief of Staff (Vice Admiral Ugaki), flying on the number two bomber, survived the attack. Rear Admiral Augustus Read, "Condition Red on Guadalcanal, and the Shooting Down of Admiral Yamamoto," in The Pacific War Remembered. An Oral History Collection, ed. John T. Mason, Jr. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 159.

the Japanese camp concerning the decision to conduct the "Midway-Aleutians" occupation or the "Fiji-Samoa-New Caledonia" occupation.

Put forth and championed by Yamamoto, the plan to occupy Midway instead of the previously agreed on plan to occupy Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia was debated in the Navy Section before being approved by the Chief of the Navy General Staff. The Navy then had to ask the Army to cooperate in the Midway-Aleutian operation by committing one infantry regiment. Initially, the Japanese Army refused but, after "negotiating" the issue with the Navy, finally acceded to the plan (first the occupation of the Aleutians and Midway (Navy's preference), and then the occupation of Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia (Army's preference)).²⁶

In the Japanese system, orders to the field commanders were issued as Army or Navy Section Orders from within the Imperial General Headquarters and were signed by either the Army or Navy Chief of Staff. Again, a good example is the Midway-Aleutians operation.²⁷

On 5 May 1942 the Imperial General Headquarters, Navy General Staff issued Navy Order #18 directing the Commander in Chief, Imperial Combined Fleet to invade and occupy Midway Island and key points in the western Aleutians in cooperation with the Army. On the same date, the Imperial General Headquarters, Army General Staff issued two orders that supported the Navy's plan. Army Order Number 626 stated:

²⁶U.S. Army, "History of Imperial General Headquarters Army Section, Japanese Monograph No. 45," Headquarters, U.S. Army Japan, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Foreign Histories Division, 82-84.

²⁷Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, 234-239.

Imperial General Headquarters plans to occupy Midway Island. The Ichiki Detachment commander is assigned the mission of occupying Midway Island and will cooperate with the Navy forces for that purpose. After assembling at the point of rendezvous, the Ichiki Detachment will be placed under the operational command of the 2d Fleet Commander. Detailed directives will be issued by the Chief of the General Staff.²⁸

Army Order Number 628 stated (referencing the same operation):

Imperial General Headquarters plans to occupy the western Aleutian Islands. The North Seas Detachment commander will cooperate with the Navy forces in carrying out the occupation of Adak, Kiska and Attu Islands. After assembling at the point of rendezvous, the North Seas Detachment commander will be placed under the operational command of the 5th Fleet commander.

Detailed directives will be issued by the Chief of the General Staff.²⁹

This not only illustrates how orders flowed from the Imperial General Staff--that is with orders for a single operation originating separately from the navy and army sections--it reveals the use of the word "cooperate" in both of the army orders. This was the key word used by the U.S. to describe the method of interfacing between the theater commander's representative (Theobald) and the army commander (Buckner). Just as was the case with the Americans, the Japanese operation in the North Pacific would be primarily a navy show.

After establishing itself ashore on Attu, the Japanese Army Detachment (Hokkaido Detachment), was detached from control of the Fifth Fleet and placed under direct control of the Imperial General Staff. Since the General Staff was composed of two sections (Army and Navy), this action was tantamount to the Army in Tokyo assuming direct control of an operation over 1600 miles away. If problems should

²⁸U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph Number 45," 85.

²⁹Ibid., 85.

develop from such an arrangement it could only be due to the forces of human nature, especially if the players possess aggressive, outgoing personalities common on both sides of the North Pacific conflict.²⁰

By the end of the day 7 June 1942 the Japanese had successfully seized the islands of Kiska and Attu. The daily situation report from the Commander, Fifth Fleet (Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya) to the Imperial General Staff in Tokyo may have included the following:

Enemy naval base at Dutch Harbor hit by carrier aviation 3 and 4 June with minimal losses in aircraft and no damage to ships of the 5th Fleet. Unopposed landing on Kiska (by the Navy's Maizuru 3rd Special Landing Force and a 750 man construction unit) and Attu (by the Army's North Sea (Hokkaido) Detachment) completed without incident, on 7 and 8 June.²¹

The North Seas Detachment on Attu (referred to by the Japanese Army as "Hokkaido Detachment") and the 3rd Special Naval Landing Force quickly established a hasty defense, certain of quick action from the Americans. Imperial General Headquarters also expected an American response and, now that they had established themselves in the Aleutians

²⁰U.S. Army, "The Aleutians Campaign, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph No. 46," United States Army, GHQ, FEC, Historical Section, G-2), 31.

²¹U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88, Aleutian Naval Operation," 51-52, 58. One loss in the strikes on Dutch Harbor resulted in consequences for the Japanese not immediately apparent. One of the Japanese Mitsubishi Type "O" (Zero, Mark 2) fighters was hit by a single round while shooting down a U.S. PBV. The round severed an oil return line resulting in a loss of actual and indicated oil pressure. The pilot crash landed on Akutan Island, flipping the fighter onto its back. The Zero, despite flipping, was very much intact but the pilot died from a broken neck. One month later, a U.S. plane noticed the fighter, providing the U.S. with the opportunity to study the deadly Zero. The aircraft was recovered, moved to San Diego, and returned to flying condition for study of flying characteristics and capabilities. Admiral James S. Russell, "A Zero is Found Bottom Up In a Bog," in The Pacific War Remembered. An Oral History Collection, ed. John T. Mason, Jr. (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 109-111.

the Japanese determined that they would fight to remain.

Originally, the Japanese had planned on evacuating the Aleutians before winter, then return in the spring of 1943 to reoccupy the islands. When the Americans launched strong attacks during the second and third weeks of June, the Japanese realized that the U.S. had established itself in the eastern Aleutians and would probably continue to push westward. In view of this development, Imperial General Headquarters issued Directive Number 106 on 23 June which called for the establishment of permanent defenses on Kiska and Attu.²²

Rear Admiral Hosogaya had already moved a squadron of Kawanishi "Mavis" flying boats (similar to but larger than the U.S. PBY's) to Kiska harbor on 9 June. Additionally, he moved the seaplane carrier Kimikawa Maru to Kiska. This specialized vessel, with its unique float-equipped Zero fighters, was a Fifth Fleet asset and was ideally suited for use in the North Pacific. In the Aleutians Operation Order (AF), the navy (Fifth Fleet with its Malzuru 3rd Special Landing Party) would be primarily responsible for defending Kiska, and the army (Hokkaido Detachment) would be primarily responsible for the defense of Attu.²³

Phase Three of the Japanese plan, long term defense of the Aleutian gains, required a reorganization of the Fifth Fleet (Northern Naval Force). The Combined Fleet reinforced the 2nd Mobile Force (the

²²Ibid., 53.

²³U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 45," 13. This division of responsibility was an initial plan only. Both garrisons were reinforced throughout the next fourteen months, and the command relationships and responsibilities changed numerous times.

carrier striking group, 1st Raiding Group, built around the carriers Ryujo and Junyo) that had been operating as part of Hosogaya's Fifth Fleet with two more aircraft carriers. The Zuiho, arriving 8 June, and Zulkaku, arriving 13 June, entered the North Pacific and was organized into the 2nd Raiding Group. With this reinforcement of the Fifth Fleet, which also included six battleships, two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, ten destroyers, and one seaplane tender, the Japanese had overwhelming combat power with which to meet any American naval challenge.²⁴ (Refer to Figures 7, 8, and 9, Organization of Japanese Fifth Fleet (by phase/date), pages 68, 69, and 70).

Of course, neither Attu nor Kiska had an airfield. Japanese aviation operating from the islands would have to be sea based--either carrier borne or float equipped aircraft. Since the Japanese had not planned on remaining in the Aleutians beyond the first winter, they had included only one engineer company in the occupation troop list (301st Independent Engineer Company). That the Japanese were never successful in completing construction of an airfield was their major failure in the Aleutians, and their slow start in even attempting such a venture presaged their haphazard strategy in the region.²⁵

Aware of the two day aerial attack on Dutch Harbor, the light damage to facilities there, and with the main Japanese fleet withdrawing

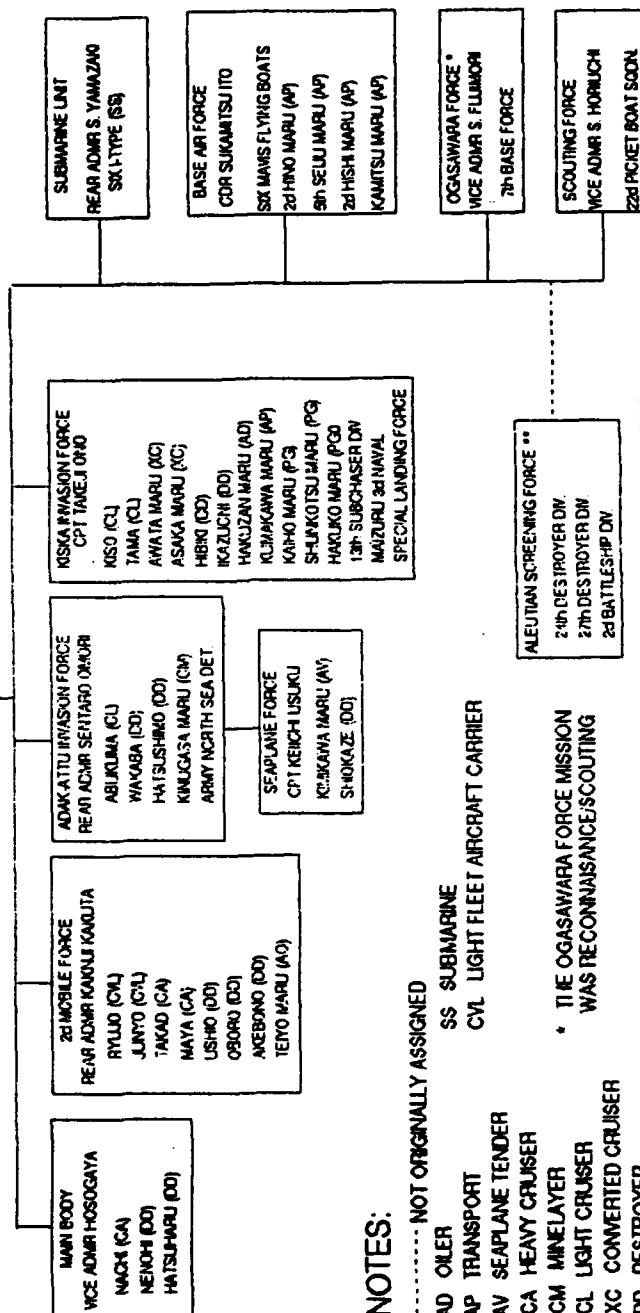
²⁴U.S. Army, Message from CINCPAC to CTF 8, 112209 June 1942, "Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 575. Richard W. Bates, "The Battle of Midway Including the Aleutian Phase, June 3 to June 14, 1942. Strategical and Tactical Analysis," (United States Navy, Naval War College, 1948), 192. U.S. Navy, "Aleutian Naval Operation, March 1942-February 1943, Japanese Monograph No. 88," 24-25, 28-29, 41.

²⁵U.S. Army, "Aleutian Naval Operation, Japanese Monograph No. 88," 79.

JAPANESE NORTHERN FORCES

PHASE ONE
20 MAY-9 JUNE 1942

JAPANESE NAVAL FORCE VICE-ADMIRAL BOSHIO HOSOGAYA



NOTES:

..... NOT ORIGINALLY ASSIGNED

AD OILER
AP TRANSPORT
AV SEAPLANE TENDER
CA HEAVY CRUISER
CM MINELAYER
CL LIGHT CRUISER
XC CONVERTED CRUISER
DD DESTROYER
PG GUNBOAT
PC SUB CHASER

* THE OGASAWARA FORCE MISSION
WAS RECONNAISSANCE/SCOUTING

** THESE DIVISIONS WHILE ASSIGNED TO THE MIDWAY INVASION FORCE
WERE ALLOCATED TO THE NORTHERN NAVAL TASK FORCE FOR USE
IF NEEDED. (2d BATTLESHIP DIV HAD 4 BATTLESHIPS)

Fig. 7, Organization of Japanese Fifth Fleet, 20 May-9 June 1942.

JAPANESE NORTHERN FORCES

PHASE TWO
9-13 JUNE 1942

NORTHERN NAVAL FORCE
VICE-ADMIRAL BOSHIO HOSOGAYA

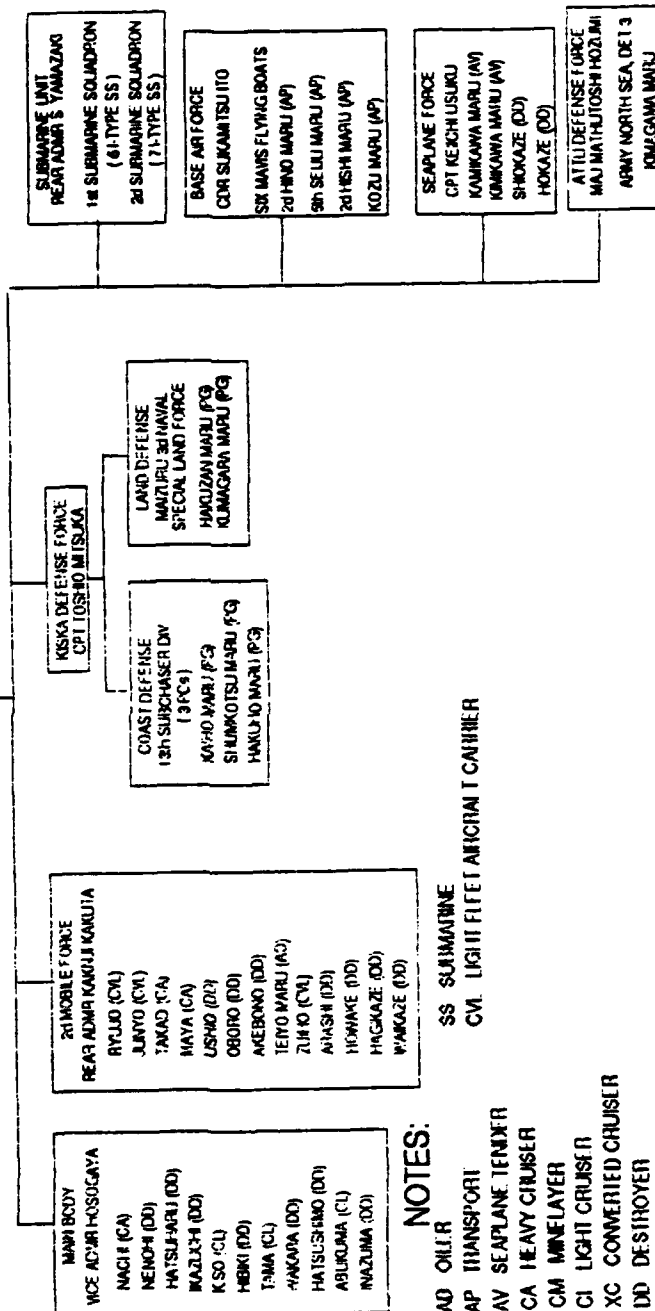
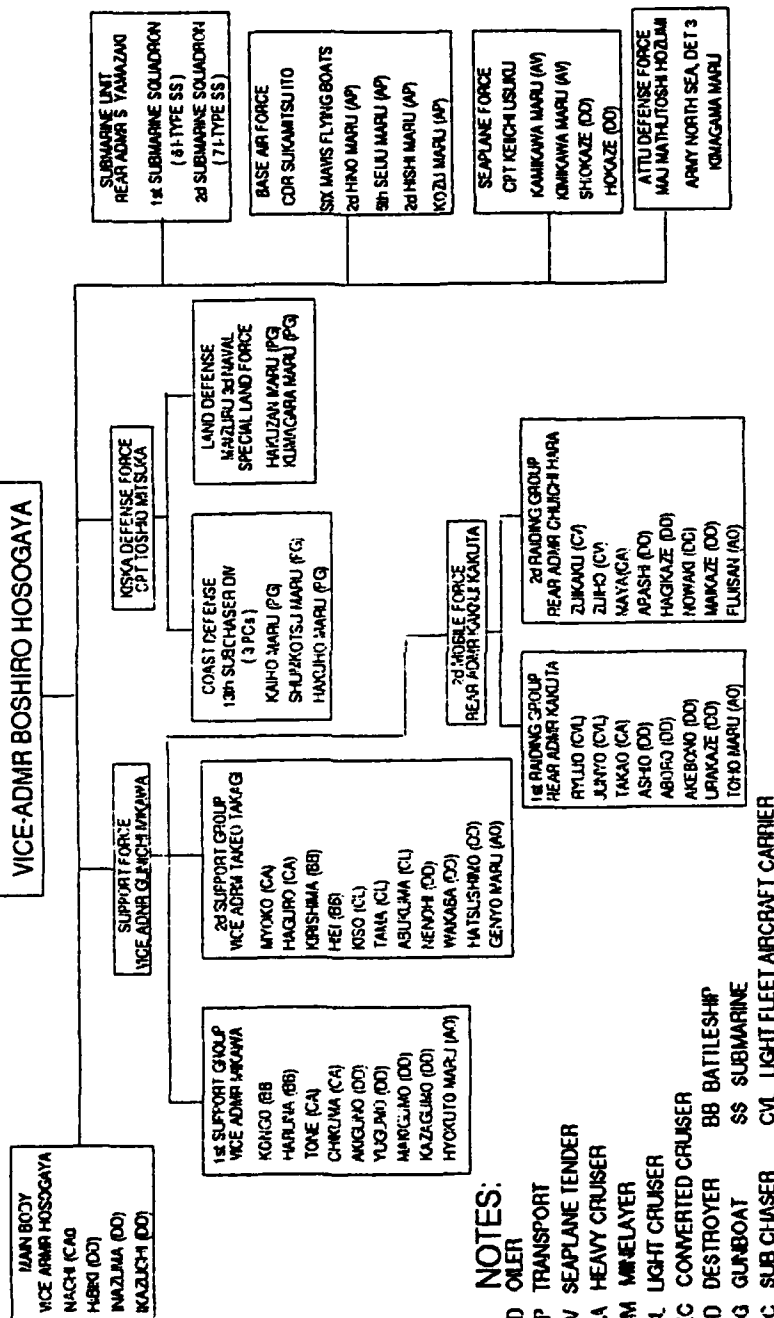


Fig. 8. Organization of Japanese Fifth Fleet, 9-13 June 1942.

JAPANESE NORTHERN FORCES

PHASE THREE
13 JUNE-MID AUGUST 1942

NORTHERN NAVAL FORCE
VICE-ADMIRAL BOSHIO HOSOGAYA



NOTES:

- AD OILER
- AP TRANSPORT
- AV SEAPLANE TENDER
- CA HEAVY CRUISER
- CM MINELAYER
- CL LIGHT CRUISER
- XC CONVERTED CRUISER
- DD DESTROYER
- PG GUNBOAT
- PC SUBCHASER
- BB BATTLESHIP
- SS SUBMARINE
- CVL LIGHT FLEET AIRCRAFT CARRIER

Fig. 9, Organization of Japanese Fifth Fleet, 13 June-15 August 1942.

after the Battle of Midway, Nimitz wasted no time in assembling reinforcements for the North Pacific Force. On 8 June, in dispatches to Task Forces 8, 16, 17, and "others concerned", Nimitz directed that Task Force 16 (Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance commanding) proceed to the North Pacific to come under command of the North Pacific Commander (Theobald).²⁶

Task Force 16, built around the carriers Enterprise and Hornet, rendezvoused with the Saratoga to cross-level aircraft, bombs, and personnel to bring those two carriers to the "best practical strength." Spruance would operate under command of Theobald, and both had the mission to "destroy or drive out enemy forces in the Aleutian-Alaskan Area." Already aware of the Japanese reinforcement of the Fifth Fleet with two additional carriers on 10 June, and with Spruance en route to the Aleutians, Nimitz learned of the Japanese landing on Kiska and Attu. Assuming the Japanese had quickly constructed an airfield on Kiska, Nimitz decided to recall Spruance.²⁷

With this development, Theobald would again be left to develop the situation in the North Pacific with an out-gunned force. The Japanese Commander (Hosogaya) was able to keep his two carrier task forces in the North Pacific for almost an additional month without contacting any elements of the Pacific Fleet. Finally, pressing needs elsewhere forced the Combined Staff to withdraw the Japanese carriers from the North Pacific. They would not return.

²⁶U.S. Army, Message from CINCPAC to CTF 8, 16, 17, 080429 June 1942, excerpted in "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 556-557.

²⁷Ibid.

With Spruance's recall on 11 June, Theobald kept his fleet in the vicinity of Kodiak. Considering the strength of the Japanese Fifth Fleet, this was obviously a prudent move on Theobald's part.

During the Japanese operation, the Eleventh Air Force had kept up a break-neck pace in searching for the Japanese Fifth Fleet. Although a Navy PBY found the Japanese fleet on 4 June, scrambling Eleventh Air Force bombers were never able to follow up the contacts with a coordinated attack.²⁸ The primary reason for this failure was, of course, the terrible weather common in the North Pacific. Dense fog, high winds, and heavy seas are the norm in the region, and the few U.S. airborne radar sets available were early versions of this new technology.

Lacking even rudimentary radar, the Japanese were forced to employ more time-worn tactics. During the movement of the Japanese Fifth Fleet into the Aleutians region in the first week of June, the fog was so thick that each ship towed a buoy to guide the ship behind.²⁹

It is difficult for the uninitiated to appreciate the adverse impact meteorological conditions can have on operations in the Aleutians. Even modern ships and aircraft experience difficulty with

²⁸Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 33-34. One Eleventh Air Force pilot, becoming separated from his flight, found the Japanese fleet. Captain George W. Thornbrough of the 73rd Bomber Squadron, flying a B-26 Marauder armed with a single torpedo, found the enemy and launched a single-handed attack against the carrier Ryujo. Narrowly missing the carrier, Thornbrough returned to Cold Bay, reported the sighting, rearmed, and took off again to press the attack. Failing to relocate the enemy on this second effort, Thornbrough crashed attempting to return to Cold Bay.

²⁹U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph Number 46, The Aleutian Islands Campaign," 25.

the conditions prevalent throughout the region. During the January 1987 biennial U.S. joint exercise "Brim Frost," which included defense of key sites off the Alaska coast, this point was reinforced quite well. U.S. Air Force A-10's of the 18th Tactical Fighter Squadron, Elmson Air Force Base, operating out of Kodiak and supporting a battalion task force of the U.S. 6th Infantry Division (Light), had the mission of intercepting "aggressor" vessels in the Alaskan Gulf attempting to deploy special operations personnel. Despite the advantage of positive control measures, inherent in any training mission, the A-10's found it nearly impossible to locate the target ship using visual search only. This anecdote illustrates how effective naval vessels can be in using adverse weather to mask location and movement ⁴⁰

The Japanese Navy, with many of its officers experienced in the nuances of the North Pacific, were very adept in using the North Pacific weather to their advantage. Given that North Pacific weather patterns move from west to east, the Japanese generally were aware of the storms sweeping out of Siberia and off the Bering Sea before the Americans and put this intelligence to very good use.

Sightings of unidentified warships by U.S. search aircraft in Kiska Harbor on 10 June (confirmed as Japanese the next day), led to the assumption that the Japanese had landed major forces. This information caused the Americans, already operating at a frantic pace in their efforts to locate and engage the Japanese fleet, to shift into

⁴⁰Information from author notes taken in conversation with pilots of the 18th Tactical Fighter Squadron during Exercise BRIM FROST 87 on Kodiak Island in January 1987.

a wide-open aerial operation that has been called the "Kiska Blitz."⁴¹

On 12 June the U.S. flew its first coordinated major bombing mission against the Japanese force on Kiska. Using B-24 Liberators, the Eleventh Air Force performed a horizontal bombing attack that achieved relatively insignificant results. The Japanese threw up an amazingly heavy amount of antiaircraft fire, most of which came from ships anchored in Kiska Harbor. In this raid the U.S. lost one Liberator, and gained an appreciation of the hardships they would be facing from the combination of Japanese ground fire and Aleutian weather.⁴²

In addition to the Eleventh Air Force bombing and strafing missions, the U.S. Navy's fleet of PBV-5 and PBV-5A aircraft (mostly from Patrol Wing 4) contributed significantly to the light but continuous bombing of the Japanese on Kiska. Japanese shipping and warships in the surrounding Aleutian waters began to suffer an increasing amount of damage and losses from the American aerial assault.⁴³

From 12 June through 7 August the air forces of Task Force 8 had

⁴¹U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," 10. Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 79-83.

⁴²U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 11.

⁴³Ibid., 11-12. U.S. Army, Army Air Forces In the War Against Japan 1941-1942, Washington: Headquarters, Army Air Forces, 1945, 151, 154-155. Though the American airmen attacked the Japanese relentlessly, the extended distance and bad weather cut deeply into bombing weight. For example, in October 1942 the monthly bomb total for the Eleventh Air Force was only 200 tons. Flying from Unak, B-17's and B-24's had to lighten their bomb loads and even carry auxiliary fuel tanks in order to make the 1,200 mile round trip. Airfields established later in the campaign would alleviate these problems significantly.

constantly hammered the Japanese and had achieved a fair amount of success. However, reconnaissance efforts to determine battle damage had continually been hampered by the weather. Additionally, the U.S. Navy had conducted aggressive offensive patrolling in the waters of the western Aleutians with its submarines.

On 4 July the Growler (Lieutenant Commander Howard W. Gilmore commanding) sank two Japanese destroyers and attacked a third off Kiska. Also on that day, the Triton (Lieutenant Commander Charles C. Kirkpatrick commanding) sank a Japanese destroyer near the Aleutian Island of Agattu.⁴⁴

This effort was designed for one purpose--to prevent Japanese development of Kiska as a major base from which to push eastward through the Aleutian Chain. Concern by Theobald over the distance between his task force in the North Pacific and the main Pacific Fleet, by now operating in the South Pacific or preparing for operations in the Solomons, led to his decision to increase the weight of the aerial assault on Kiska. Theobald wanted to prevent any further Japanese activity before winter by increasing pressure on Kiska and deceiving the Japanese concerning his true strength.⁴⁵

To achieve this, Theobald planned on adding the fires from his surface combatants to those aerial fires of his air forces. He wanted to take his four destroyers (Case, Gridley, McCall, and Reid), three light cruisers (Honolulu, St. Louis, and Nashville), and two heavy cruisers (Indianapolis and Louisville) into Kiska waters, engage any

⁴⁴Ibid., 12.

⁴⁵Ibid.

Japanese naval forces present and bombard the Japanese Kiska garrison.⁴⁴

Rear Admiral William W. Smith, a Theobald deputy, conducted this mission on 7 August in weather that caused the surface group significant navigational and fire control problems. The group fired 631 8-inch, 3,534 6-inch, and 2,620 5-inch rounds in the 30 minute bombardment, without any interference from the Japanese fleet. Unfortunately, this incredible volume of fire was unobserved fire and the majority of the rounds impacted well inland of the Japanese positions. Smith's spotting planes were forced away from Kiska by Japanese fighters. This took away the naval gunners' eyes, which prevented accurate fires.⁴⁷

Though well planned and executed with almost no losses--one of the 10 spotting planes, launched from the cruisers, was lost--the fierce bombardment had minimal effect on the Japanese. The U.S. Air Force reportedly named the operation "The Navy's Spring Plowing" because the majority of the rounds impacted so far inland. CINCPAC credited the operation with serving as a diversion from the operation on-going in the Solomons.⁴⁸

In his After Action Report, Admiral Smith drew the conclusion that the Japanese could not be driven out of Kiska by surface bombardment alone and that bombardment by surface forces would be of questionable value unless followed by the landing of troops. Neither of these conclusions came as a surprise to General Buckner, commanding the Alaska Defense Command. He had continued his fight to establish

⁴⁴Ibid., 14-15.

⁴⁷Ibid., 16-17.

⁴⁸Ibid., 17-18. Garfield, The Thousand Mile War, 121.

bases out into the western Aleutians, aware that in the end army troops would be required to throw the Japanese off Kiska and Attu.⁴⁹

With competing priorities, there was much debate and many opinions regarding the best response to the Japanese action in the Aleutians. Buckner in the Alaska Defense Command and DeWitt of the Western Defense Command were of one mind. This mind-set was the invasion of both Kiska and Attu by U.S. ground troops, followed by continuation of offensive operations from the Aleutians into the Japanese home islands.⁵⁰

In July 1942 DeWitt submitted a plan to General Marshall for the assault on both of the islands. Because of other priorities and resource shortages, principally a shortage of landing craft, Marshall disapproved DeWitt's plan. DeWitt responded with a plan to seize unoccupied Tanaga island, located about 160 statute miles east of Kiska. An air base on Tanaga would shorten flight times and allow the basing of significant combat power much closer to the enemy. General Marshall approved this concept plan, mainly because DeWitt demonstrated he could accomplish it with troops already under his command.⁵¹

Though Marshall's approval was a victory for Buckner's and DeWitt's plan for expansion into the western Aleutians, the Navy remained to be sold on Tanaga as an objective. The Navy (Theobald) preferred Adak (330 statute miles from Kiska) over Tanaga because of navigational problems around Tanaga. After a debate over the relative merits of the two islands and a threat from the Navy to drop the entire idea, DeWitt

⁴⁹U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 18.

⁵⁰Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, 421.

⁵¹Ibid., 421-422.

asked General Marshall to concede to the Navy's demand. Accordingly, on 30 August Army troops from the Alaska Defense Command, commanded by Brigadier General Eugene M. Landrum, a Buckner deputy, landed on Adak and began work on an airstrip.⁵²

Adak had a very suitable harbor for naval vessels, however it did not have suitable terrain on which an airfield could be constructed. This was the reason the Army wanted to bypass Adak and next land on Tanaga. However, the strength of the U.S. in the Aleutians, later acknowledged by the Japanese, was their ability to quickly build an airstrip on inhospitable terrain. Once on Adak, the Army engineers were again faced with a huge problem in constructing an airfield. The answer for Adak's problem came from an unusual source, but is in keeping with the American way of waging war.

The U.S. Army's Alaskan Combat Intelligence Platoon, commonly referred to as "The Alaskan Scouts," conducted reconnaissance of Adak in advance of the main landing. Coming ashore at Kuluk Bay from submarines on 28 August, the Scouts were to determine whether any Japanese, known to have also conducted a recon of Adak, were on the island. Led by their able commander, Colonel Lawrence V. Castner, the Scouts determined that the island was not defended and passed that word, via PBY, back to Alaska Defense Command headquarters. After the main force landing, the engineers were surveying the most suitable site for the airfield. Observing the difficulty of the engineers, one of the Scouts recommended that a marsh, located next to the harbor, be drained for the runway. Whether the Scout was serious or not, the

⁵²Ibid., 423. Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 132.

engineering officer seized on the idea and made the airfield site selection decision on the spot.³³

In only two weeks, aircraft from this new airfield attacked the Japanese garrison on Kiska. The Americans kept pressure on the Japanese to disrupt their construction efforts, particularly airfield construction, and to interdict their lines of communications from the home islands. Despite a shortage of critical assets and differences in opinion on strategy, commanders and politicians at every level remained of one mind regarding the Japanese in the Aleutians--they wanted the Japanese out. President Roosevelt even suggested a tactic that Marshall and King immediately dismissed. This suggestion was to blast the Japanese out of the Aleutians using the old battleships of Task Force 1, still guarding the west coast of the U.S.³⁴

After the Adak occupation in late August 1942, U.S. strategy in the North Pacific was to concentrate on improvement of all bases from Alaska out into the Aleutians and attrition of the Japanese using air power. With the operation in the Solomons heating up, Nimitz was forced to withdraw many of Theobald's warships to the South Pacific starting on 12 October with the detachment from TF 8 of the Louisville, followed later that month by the St. Louis, and the seaplane tender Thornton. In November, the Nashville and the Indianapolis were detached (the Indianapolis only temporarily). Also, 12 F4F fighters

³³Jim Rearden, "Castner's Cutthroats," Alaska, 57, December 1991, 36, 74. U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of the United States Army Ground Forces in World War II, Pacific Theater of Operations," (Washington: Department of the Army, Chief of the Military History, 1959), 273. Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 133.

³⁴Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, 425-426.

were transferred to the South Pacific, which illustrates the detailed level of weapon system management required throughout the austere Pacific Theater. TF Eight did receive the older cruisers Raleigh and Detroit later in the fall.³³

With aircraft of Task Force Eight maintaining pressure on Kiska and Attu, the planners at the Western Defense Command and the War Department debated the question of how best to carry out the dislodgement of the Japanese-held islands. Nimitz felt, as did Buckner, that the Japanese could only be forced out of the Aleutians by ground troops and recommended that the Army start training a force to accomplish this task. However, the service chiefs estimated that such an operation could not be undertaken before the spring of 1943. As an intermediate step, War Department planners recommended the occupation of Amchitka Island. Amchitka was located only 40 miles from Kiska. Steadily, despite distractions and higher priorities, the Americans closed on the Japanese garrisons.³⁴

On 17 December Buckner ordered the Alaska Scouts to conduct a reconnaissance of Amchitka Island. The Scouts found the island deserted, but they also found evidence of Japanese interest in the islands. The Japanese had dug test holes in terrain suitable for construction of an airfield. Based on this report, Nimitz (acting on orders from the War Department) on 23 December ordered Theobald to land forces on Amchitka and construct an airfield. On 12 January 1943, Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, who had relieved Theobald of command of Task

³³U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 20-21.

³⁴Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, 425-426.

Force Eight on 4 January, ordered the Amchitka landing force ashore.⁵⁷

The Japanese quickly discovered the American presence on Amchitka, and launched several attacks against the construction crews working to build the airfield. However, Japanese naval air had been seriously attrited by the Eleventh Air Force and the Japanese failure to construct an airfield on Kiska, from which land based aircraft could operate, doomed any chance of gaining control of the skies of the western Aleutians.

By 17 February, the U.S. had completed the Amchitka air field and had moved both P-40 and P-38 squadrons onto the island. By mid-April, the U.S. air forces had completed efforts to sever the Japanese lines of communication.⁵⁸ Poised on the doorstep of the Japanese garrison on Kiska, the U.S. faced a determined, dug-in force of over 5,000 Japanese with an additional 2,500 secure on Attu. Just as DeWitt, Buckner, and Nimitz had predicted it appeared certain that the Japanese Aleutian defenders would have to be routed by U.S. ground troops.

⁵⁷U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 22-23.

⁵⁸Ibid., 23.

CHAPTER THREE

PRELUDE TO AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION

Air power is a thunderbolt launched from an egg-shell
invisibly tethered to a base.

Hoffman Nickerson, Arms and Policy

With the establishment of operating airfields on Umnak, Adak, Atka, and Amchitka Islands by the end of 1942, the Americans had systematically projected combat power into the western Aleutians. Though hobbled by the lack of large numbers of ships and aircraft, the U.S. Task Force commander successfully disrupted and then completely smothered Japanese efforts to expand their footholds. By Japanese count, the U.S. Eleventh Air Force conducted aerial attack or reconnaissance missions (B-24, B-17, P-38, and PBY) against Kiska on thirty-nine different days during the period 15 September through 10 November 1942. Considering the area's consistently unfavorable flying weather, the Americans' ability to fly against the Japanese 68% of the days during this representative period illustrates not only the amount of pressure that was placed on the Kiska garrison but also the dedication and skill of the U.S. pilots.¹

By 15 February 1943, the new airfield on Amchitka Island (located only eighty miles east of Kiska and code named CROWBAR) had become fully operational with both P-40 and P-38 fighters for defense. By mid-June a second runway of suitable length to support heavy bombers enabled the

¹U.S. Army, "The Aleutian Islands Campaign, Japanese Monograph No. 46," (United States Army, Far East Command, General Headquarters), 40-41.

11th Bomber Command (consisting of the 73rd Bombardment (M) Squadron and the 404th Bombardment (H) Squadron) to start relocating from Adak. The advance elements of the 11th Bomber Command Headquarters arrived at Amchitka in mid-July 1943. Other elements based at Amchitka by this date were the 343rd Fighter Group and a Navy Patrol Squadron.²

When the U.S. established the airfield on Adak, they reduced by one-half the distance to Kiska with a corresponding increase in aircraft sortie rates. The airfield on Amchitka, practically under the very noses of the Japanese, meant American air power achieved an even greater degree of flexibility in attacking the Japanese. During windows of unforecasted improvements in the weather, fighters or bombers could quickly launch for spontaneous attacks against the Japanese on Kiska or Attu. Though the approximately 5,000 Kiska defenders were well dug in, the near continuous aerial attacks seriously disrupted their construction work, especially on the Kiska airfields.³

The aerial attacks were but one method that the commander of the U.S. North Pacific Task Force (Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid assumed

²U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary/Running Estimate and Summary," (Department of the Navy, Headquarters, Pacific Fleet, 1945), Frames 1421, 1449. U.S. Army, Army Air Forces in the War Against Japan 1941-1942 (Washington: Headquarters, Army Air Forces, AAF Historical Narratives, 1945), 149-150.

Brigadier General Earl H. DeFord assumed command of the Eleventh Bomber Command in January 1943 from Colonel William O. Eareckson. Activated on 1 July 1942 as the XIth Bomber Command (Provisional). Initially composed of the 28th Composite Group and its assigned squadrons. One week later the 404th Bombardment Squadron arrived in theater equipped with B-24 Liberators.

³U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," Washington: Navy Department, Office of Naval Intelligence, Publications Branch, 1945, 23.

command of Task Force Eight from Theobald on 4 January 1943) used to execute the U.S. strategy of isolating then hammering the Japanese garrison on Kiska. The other two methods were surface and subsurface warfare.

Nimitz' withdrawal of several capital ships from the North Pacific to meet operational requirements in the Central and South Pacific took place in November and December 1942. This reduction in the combat power of Task Force Eight prevented, in Theobald's judgement, his ability to interdict Japanese shipping to the western Aleutians or to blockade Kiska. When Kinkaid assumed command of Task Force Eight in January, he assessed the capability of Task Force 8 surface forces differently and quickly set plans in motion to bring direct naval surface power to bear against the Japanese in the North Pacific.

By mid-February 1943 Kinkaid had approved a plan to deploy a surface force into western Aleutian waters and establish a blockade of Attu and Kiska. On 13 February this force, commanded by Kinkaid's deputy, Rear Admiral Charles H. McMorris and composed of the light cruiser Indianapolis, the heavy cruiser Richmond and the destroyers Bancroft, Caldwell, Coghlan, and Gillespie sailed with orders to patrol west of Attu to interdict Japanese Navy supply vessels believed to be logistically supporting the garrisons. By 18 February, McMorris had not contacted any shipping however his task group had been detected by Japanese Kuril-based patrol aircraft.⁴

Having failed to detect any Japanese vessels, McMorris decided to execute a bombardment of the Attu garrison. On the 18th, McMorris'

⁴Ibid., 24-25.

cruisers conducted an intense ten minute bombardment of the Chichagof Harbor. In addition to this heavy bombardment, two of the Indianapolis' spotting planes each dropped a bomb on buildings in the harbor. There were no prominent targets visible, either on Attu or in the immediate waters, and McMorris withdrew from Attu but sailed westward instead of eastward toward the U.S. bases. He estimated that the Japanese would recommence supply operations thinking the Americans had withdrawn to eastern Aleutian waters. U.S. submarines had reported Japanese cargo transports in the area and McMorris was determined to interdict this supply line during this deployment.⁵

McMorris' assumption was valid, because on 19 February his task group detected and sank the Japanese Navy transport Akagane Maru, which was carrying an infantry unit and heavy equipment for the airfield construction efforts on Kiska and Attu. This sinking and loss of heavy horizontal construction equipment was one of numerous setbacks to the Japanese' airfield construction effort. The late realization of how far behind they were in building airfields and their failure to get construction equipment and materiel through the U.S. blockade would ultimately tip the balance of power in the Aleutians overwhelmingly in the Americans favor.

Kinkaid maintained the blockade of the western Aleutians with his meager surface forces and his over-worked but aggressive submarine task force throughout the remainder of February and well into March without any serious challenge by the Japanese. This naval blockade, made more effective by the capabilities of Army Air Forces aircraft flying from

⁵Ibid., 27.

Amchitka and Adak, would eventually force the Japanese to completely abandon the use of surface transports by the first week of March 1943.⁴

Initially, the Japanese had free reign in the North Pacific--from their primary operating base at Ominato on Hokkaido, their advance operating base of Paramushiro in the northern Kurils, to their easternmost Aleutian garrison on Kiska their navy dominated both the open ocean and the waters of the western Aleutians. For the first six weeks of the Aleutian Operation, their numerically superior fleet enabled the Japanese to move all scheduled supplies to Attu and Kiska without interference from the Americans. Starting July 1942 and continuing until the first of March 1943, the American Navy would contest the movement of Japanese warships and supply vessels throughout the western Aleutians while the Eleventh U.S. Air Force continued the aerial pounding of Kiska that began on 11 June.

In those early days of the Aleutians Operation, the commander of Task Force 8 estimated that he had insufficient naval power with which to directly challenge the Japanese Fifth Fleet. Therefore, the burden of interdicting the Japanese lines of communication into the western Aleutians from mid-April 42 until Kinkaid's arrival fell to the U.S. Submarine Force operating in the Aleutians (Task Group 8.1). These submarines were all of the older short-range types and carried an "S" designation instead of names. These vessels were constructed in the decade following the end of World War I and suffered from restricted cruising range and submergence duration. S-23, one of the more

⁴U.S. Army, "Aleutian Naval Operation, Japanese Monograph No. 88," United States Army, Headquarters, Army Forces, Far East Command, 69, 79-80. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 24-25.

venerable submarines of TG 8.1, had been in service for twenty years at the time of the attack on Dutch Harbor. It is not surprising that these old boats, though aggressively and skillfully deployed in the defense of the Aleutians in the early days, were not able to significantly disrupt operations of the Japanese Fifth Fleet in the open ocean.⁷

The crews of these submarines suffered great hardship when on patrol--extended surface running time in rough seas to charge short duration batteries, enduring cold from lack of adequate heating, and the omnipresent condensation that formed on the inside of the hulls. An example of the type of hardships the crews of these submarines faced in the North Pacific, extracted from the operations log of the S-23, dated 13 February 1942, follows:

...Shipped heavy sea over bridge. All hands on bridge bruised and battered. Officer of the Deck suffered broken nose. Solid stream of water down hatch for 65 seconds. Put high pressure pump on control room bilges; dry after two hours...Barometer 29.60; thirty-knot wind from northwest....⁸

Battery and engine problems, and a host of other S-boat systems that routinely malfunctioned, coupled with the tumultuous North Pacific and the vastness of the patrol areas, reduced the effectiveness of the submarine fleet. The S-boats needed reinforcements before they could begin to effectively interdict Japanese activity in the western Aleutians.

⁷Theodore Roscoe, United States Submarine Operations in World War II (Annapolis, Maryland: United States Naval Institute, 1949), 13-14, 135.

⁸Roscoe, Submarine Operations, 135. The North Pacific S-Boat fleet operated with the Northwest Sea Frontier out of Dutch Harbor prior to the Japanese attack in the Aleutians.

By the third week of June 1942, CINCPAC had begun reinforcing Task Force 8 with modern fleet submarines from Pearl. On 28 June, the Growler reported to Dutch Harbor, followed on 3 July by the Triton and Finback. Within nine days, the Trigger, Grunnion, and Gato reported to Theobald, followed by the Tuna and Halibut before mid-August. These submarines had vastly improved batteries, engines, and operating systems along with extended range and better weapons. These new subs and the introduction of four additional S-boats into the North Pacific gave Theobald the ability to strike the Japanese in the waters of their Aleutian garrisons. It would not be long before this force would indeed make its presence known to the Japanese.⁹

On 5 July, Growler, lying in ambush just outside Kiska Harbor, attacked and sank the Japanese destroyer Arare, and damaged the destroyers Shiranuhi and Kasumi. The latter two were sufficiently damaged to require tow back to Japan. Later that day, the Finback attacked and sank the destroyer Nenohi in waters southeast of Agattu. These attacks, coupled with the persistent U.S. aerial attacks, forced the Japanese to take action to preserve their relatively meager number of transport vessels.¹⁰

The pressure placed on the Japanese during this period forced a change in their operating procedures. During their first six weeks in the Aleutians, the Japanese had operated like they had complete sea and air supremacy, which wasn't too far from the truth. Accordingly, they

⁹Ibid., 138.

¹⁰Japanese Monograph No. 88, 73-74. Roscoe, Submarine Operations, 139.

kept vessels in the vicinity of the islands, often riding at anchor in Kiska and Chichagof Harbors. By 11 October, the Americans had forced an end to this type of ship deployment and management. The Japanese were forced to use evasion techniques, and resort to the use naval combatants for escort duty to get supply vessels to the Aleutians. To reduce exposure to U.S. air attack, they ceased the earlier practice of anchoring vessels in the harbors and concentrated on rapid discharge of cargo.

The Japanese did start using their fleet submarines to resupply and reinforce their Aleutian garrisons. Unfortunately, this method would only amount to subsistence resupply and could never deliver the tonnages required to effectively develop the islands into the defense bastions envisioned by the planners on the Imperial General Staff.

The Japanese planned on establishing an air base in the Semichi Island group (largest of which is Shemya Island), located just east of Attu and west of Kiska. The original plan called for the establishment of this base by mid-December 1942. The nearest American air base during this period was on Adak (U.S. troops landed on Adak 30 August and completed the first part of a fighter/bomber runway on 10 September). Japanese planners wanted an air base that could defend Kiska, and they believed that planes operating from Semichi could accomplish that mission.

On 1 November 1942, the Japanese Army and Navy published a comprehensive strategy that would, they hoped, strengthen their Aleutian defensive capability and solve the problem of protecting their lines of communication. The plan, referred to by the Japanese as the "Central

Agreement Between the Army and the Navy" included the following provisions concerning the Aleutians:

The objective of the operations is to strengthen defenses in the area through supplying the required land forces, and to reinforce and make secure the key points in the western Aleutian Islands throughout the winter...

...Special emphasis will be given to the strengthening of defense in the key areas surrounding Kiska and Attu with Semichi as the center. Every effort will be made to complete defenses by February 1943....

Urgent transportation of troops for Attu and the North Sea Garrison will be carried out by Navy ships in the most part. Munitions and supplies will be carried by Army transports, escorted by Navy vessels. They might, however, be transported by naval vessels depending on the enemy's situation....¹¹

To accomplish this defensive plan, the Japanese Army and Navy commanders of the North Sea Garrison, headquartered in the Kurils, decided that to meet the February 43 target date, shipment of necessary construction equipment and materiel would have to arrive in the Aleutians no later than early December. Unfortunately for the Japanese, continued attrition by U.S. submarines and aircraft of their transports seriously disrupted the supply flow throughout Winter 1942.

Finally, on 27 November when U.S. aircraft operating from Adak sent the transport Cherrybourne Maru to the bottom of the North Pacific, the Imperial General Staff suspended all further shipping until the base on Shemya could be established. The Japanese plan for Shemya--referred to by the Japanese as Simichi, the name of the island group--called for the landing of Army troops followed closely by the basing of float-equipped fighters. On 12 December, the Army elements departed Paramushiro for Shemya. Experiencing difficulties caused by

¹¹U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88," 62, 63, 74.

the lack of a natural harbor and the exposure of Shemya to the worst of the Bering Sea weather, the Northern Area Force Commander (Hosogaya) cancelled the mission on 20 December.¹²

The Japanese now found themselves in a "Catch-22" situation. They could not complete the Kiska-Attu airfields without construction equipment and materiel resupply, and they could not resupply without fielding an air force of some kind to counter American air superiority. Winter weather, shortages of seaplane fighters, transports, and the momentum garnered by the Americans since early fall combined to doom the Japanese plan to significantly strengthen their defenses in the North Pacific. By November 1942 rationing went into effect on Attu, with Kiska following suit in January 1943. Though initially well supplied with individual equipment, weapons, and ammunition, the Japanese garrisons were desperate for resupply of consumable and major equipment.

Unable to establish the base on Shemya, the Japanese adopted other measures in their attempt to resupply their garrisons. On 7 January 1943, one day after the sinking of the two transports Montreel Maru near the Komandorski Islands and the Kotohira Maru just off Attu, the Japanese suspended use of all transports that could not maintain at least twelve knots. The Montreel Maru was carrying elements of the 302nd and 303rd Independent Engineer Battalions and critical airfield materiel. Because of this, the Japanese decided to limit transport of personnel, weapons, and certain critical materiel to warships.

During the key period between 17 December 1942 and 30 January

¹²Ibid., 75.

1943, the Japanese supply vessels completed only eleven missions and partially completed one other. Of these eleven, eight were resupply for Kiska leaving Attu with only three complete and one partial vessel load of supplies.¹² By the first of February, the Japanese commanders at Paramushiro had reverted to a strategy they called "watchful waiting." Though they were stymied in their supply efforts for the time, it would only be a matter of time before naval resources would eventually become available. Within one month Vice Admiral Hosogaya, the Fifth Fleet Commander, would gather sufficient strength to make a breakthrough attempt.

U.S. naval planners at Kodiak and Pearl realized that soon the Japanese Imperial Staff would have to take positive action to resupply their beleaguered garrisons. Admiral Nimitz' Intelligence log shows the following entry for 17 March:

There are some indications that the enemy is planning some sort of a move in the ALEUTIANS [sic] within the next six or seven days.¹⁴

The origin of this intelligence is unclear; however it would soon prove to be quite accurate.

The blockade installed by the commander of the U.S. North Pacific Force (Kinkaid) was having a telling affect on the Japanese. The original Japanese mistake in not including enough engineer and airfield service units on the Aleutians occupation force troop list had not been corrected by the end of February 1943. The inability to transport additional units during the closing months of 1942 and the first two

¹²Ibid., Chart Number 11, 77-78.

¹⁴U.S. Navy, "Nimitz Command Summary," Frame 1449.

months of 1943 marked the turning point in the battle for the North Pacific. With the rapid construction of the U.S. airfield on Amchitka, the Japanese finally realized the scope and intensity of the American effort to establish bases further and further out into the Aleutians.

What was difficult in November and December now appeared impossible. Nevertheless, the Japanese were able to keep a trickle of supplies flowing into the islands during this time. In early March 1943, the first convoy of the year, escorted by warships, put into Chichagof Harbor at Attu. Meanwhile, Hosogaya had planned the force that he planned to use to force the U.S. blockade and hopefully deal a setback to the U.S. North Pacific Force.

Hosogaya's Main Body consisted of the heavy cruisers Nachi and Maya, the light cruiser Tama, and the destroyers Wakaba and Hatsushimo. The Escort Force, commanded by Rear Admiral Mori Tomochi and composed of the light cruiser Abukuma and the destroyers Inazuma and Ikazuchi, had the mission of escorting two supply vessels--the converted cruiser Asaka Maru and the Sakito. The Second Escort Force, consisting of the destroyer Usugumo, provided one-on-one escort of the Sanko Maru.¹⁵

Hosogaya had the stated mission of punching through the U.S. naval blockade to resupply the Aleutian garrison. Never before had the Japanese committed this much combat power to a North Pacific resupply effort. The logical assumption can be made that Hosogaya had another

¹⁵U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88," 80.

The Japanese identified their transport/cargo vessels with a Japanese word that translates to "Maru" in English. Even when one of their merchant vessels underwent conversion, like the cruiser Asaka, the vessel name picked up this suffix.

purpose in mind--that of dealing the under strength but tenacious American North Pacific Force a tactical defeat.

Meanwhile in the U.S. camp, Kinkaid had pulled McMorris' task group off the western Aleutians blockade line in early March for refit and minor overhaul at Dutch Harbor. On 22 March these actions had been completed and all units of McMorris' task group rendezvoused in the waters southwest of Kiska. McMorris' force (Task Group 16.6) consisted of:

One heavy cruiser: Salt Lake City, Captain Bertram J. Rodgers

One light cruiser: Richmond, Captain Theodore M. Waldschmidt

Four destroyers: Bailey, Lieutenant Commander John C. Atkeson
Coghlan, Commander Benjamin F. Tompkins
Dale, Commander Anthony L. Rorschach
Monaghan, Lieutenant Commander Peter H. Horn

The destroyers comprised Destroyer Squadron 14, under command of Captain Ralph Riggs. Sailing westward, McMorris intended to establish a patrol area that would stretch to 168° East Longitude. Early on 26 March 1943, McMorris' task group ran smack into Hosogaya's forces.¹⁴

Initially, the Americans had only radar contact with the Japanese and were uncertain of its composition. Actually the destroyers in the van of TG 16.6 had detected Hosogaya's trailing units of the Second Escort Force. This initial disposition placed the Japanese in a disadvantage, however Admiral McMorris had not fully concentrated his units by this time and could not engage what he assumed was a group of

¹⁴U.S. Navy, The Aleutians Campaign, 28. The Salt Lake City had only recently arrived in the North Pacific by way of repair and overhaul at Pearl Harbor. She had been heavily damaged in the Battle of Cape Esperance. Furthermore, for fully one-half of her crew (seventy percent of her fire control personnel), this mission would be their first trip to sea.

unescorted cargo vessels.¹⁷

Sea state and visibility had been unusually good and remained so on this day with both naval groups maneuvering to ascertain the opponents exact identity and strength. First indications led McMorris to believe he had caught the Japanese trying to move unescorted or lightly escorted transports into the Aleutians. By 0825 hours however, Hosogaya's Main Body had begun appearing on the horizon and McMorris' officers, sorting the look-out reports, estimated that the Japanese force included two heavy and two light cruisers, with six to eight destroyers.

Again the Americans were seriously outgunned by the Japanese and it appeared that they would have to yield to the faster, newer, and more powerful Japanese warships. McMorris, like Theobald before him, had to operate under orders that encompassed the principal of "calculated risk." That is, he must not engage a superior force. If McMorris followed these instructions to the letter it would mean, of course, that the transports would be able to deliver their cargo, bolstering the morale and confidence of the island garrisons and the Japanese Navy. However, in this case McMorris elected to fight the Japanese instead of retiring, and maneuvered in a manner designed to threaten the transports, by now attempting to clear the area. By this tactic he felt he could force a part of the Japanese force to break off to cover the fleeing transports. In any event, by the time the tactical situation became clearer, the Japanese had gained a very favorable position, and it is doubtful whether McMorris would have been able to

¹⁷Task Group 16.6 had been operating on its scouting line with a distance of six miles between ships. Thus McMorris had to concentrate his units while maintaining radar contact with the Japanese.

withdraw cleanly.

By 0840 the Japanese Main Body had closed sufficiently to open fire on the Richmond at a range of about 20,000 yards. For the next hour, a long range, fully developed surface battle raged with the Japanese engaging both American cruisers, then concentrating their accurate fire solely on the Salt Lake City. During the opening salvos, the Japanese cruiser Nachi, engaged by both U.S. cruisers and one destroyer, sustained hits on the starboard side of the bridge and on her mainmast.

At 0910 the Salt Lake City suffered a hit on the port side that penetrated the hull below the water line and ruptured oil tanks. This and other damage threatened operations in the after engine room. After this, the Japanese began pouring it on the Salt Lake City even more furiously and scored another hit at 0920. However, prior to 0930 hours, much of the immediate damage to the Salt Lake City had been controlled.¹⁰

During a lull in the heretofore furious battle, McMorris received

¹⁰A significant debate exists over many of the details of the Battle of the Komandorski. The official combat narrative, The Aleutians Campaign 1942-1943, published by the United States Navy in 1945, credits the Salt Lake City with scoring the hits on the Nachi. Commander (Retired) Ralph H. Millsap, in his article "Skill or Luck?," Naval Institute Proceedings, September 1985 maintained the Richmond damaged the Nachi. Millsap participated in the Battle of the Komandorski aboard the Richmond.

Other discrepancies exist in the exact number of hits sustained by the Salt Lake City. Millsap maintains there were six, while the official combat narrative accounts for only four, with many near-misses so violent and damaging due to concussion that the crew had a hard time distinguishing hits from near-misses. Samuel Elliot Morrison in History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume VII, Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls reported the U.S. cruiser took four hits.

a response from Kinkaid to his initial call for air support. Kinkaid informed McMorris that air force bombers would arrive about 1430, but that Catalina flying boats, all of which flew with bombs in the Aleutians, may arrive before that time. Kinkaid also recommended that McMorris consider retiring in light of the superior Japanese force. By the time of this message, a retiring action was quite impossible. The Americans had a tiger by the tail and had no choice but to fight it out in the frigid North Pacific waters.¹²

Fierce action continued with the Japanese focusing their fire on the Salt Lake City. At 1002 hours, under the shock of many near misses, she suffered a steering casualty and veered dangerously off course. Within minutes, partial rudder control was regained--just in time for a high angle shell from one of the Japanese cruisers to penetrate the old heavy cruiser's main deck. The armor-piercing shell fortunately passed out through the hull, minimizing damage. McMorris ordered the destroyers to make smoke, a tactic they continued throughout the battle, in an attempt to help the stricken, but still fighting Salt Lake City.

McMorris realized that the raging gun fight was taking the task

¹²When the Eleventh Air Force received the call for help from McMorris, the bombers on Adak were configured for a mission against Kiska. Figuring it would take about one hour to switch the light antipersonnel bombs for heavy armor piercing bombs, General Butler decided the delay was worth the delay. Unfortunately, the ground operation took considerably longer with an untimely snow squall delaying take-off even longer. By the time the bombers were airborne the Battle of the Komandorski's were history. Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, United States Army in World War II, The Western Hemisphere (Washington, D.C: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1964), 278-279.

group further and further away from the Aleutians and he began maneuvering south with the intention of turning east soon after. Just prior to and immediately after 1100 the Salt Lake City sustained two more hits from the eight inch guns of the Japanese heavy cruisers. The shock of these hits, coupled with the previous damage, caused water and oil to flood the cruisers main engine compartments. This forced her to reduce speed by one-third, to 20 knots, so repairs could be undertaken. Listing and limping but still fighting hard, the cruiser's crew corrected the flooding problem and began increasing the ship's speed.

The next problem that developed aboard the Salt Lake City, low ammunition in the aft magazines, caused the crew to undertake the highly unorthodox and dangerous action of transferring ammunition from forward magazines over the open deck. During this ammunition crisis, the Number Three turret fired high explosive (HE) bombardment shells when it ran completely out of armor-piercing. The effect of the HE shells bursting above the Japanese ships caused the crews to believe they were under aerial attack. The Japanese loosed a high volume of antiaircraft fire into the overcast, detracting them from the surface battle.

Immediately after the Salt Lake City's crew completed the redistribution of ammunition, the cruiser suffered a main engine casualty that came close to causing the Americans a disaster. Sea water had entered the aft fuel tanks when the multiple hits and near-hits opened seams. The sea water extinguished the burners and, at 1155 hours, the Salt Lake City went dead in the water. With the

two Japanese heavy cruisers bearing down on her from only 19,000 yards off the port quarter and a light cruiser at the same range to starboard, the Salt Lake City faced a dangerous and determined enemy fully capable of sending her to the bottom of the North Pacific. Immediately prior to the cruiser's speed falling to zero, Captain Rodgers turned her to face the Japanese. This move brought all her guns to bear on the advancing threat while members of the crew prepared to go over the side and the Richmond came about to assist.

Facing the loss of his heavy cruiser, McMorris, embarked on the Richmond, ordered his four destroyers to execute a torpedo attack on the three advancing cruisers. One of these destroyers, the Dale, circled Salt Lake City frantically making smoke. The other three destroyers launched a headlong charge toward the Japanese from 17,000 yards. The Balley led the column of destroyers with all guns firing and torpedoes flying. Inexplicably, in the face of this attack and with his units still capable of fighting, Hosogaya broke off the engagement.

During the destroyer charge, the Salt Lake City's engineers were able to refire her boilers, and she got underway at 1158. At 1204 hours her guns fell silent. The Dale, still making smoke and firing, ceased fire at 1207 hours. The other ships of McMorris' task group ceased firing at 1212 hours. These were the last shots in a surface battle that would become known as the Battle of the Komandorski Islands.

In the three and one-half hour Battle of the Komandorski's, the U.S. certainly came close to losing the Salt Lake City and could have

lost the Richmond and the destroyers assisting the stricken cruiser. The destroyers Bailey and Coghlan each received hits from eight-inch shells during their charge into the face of the Japanese that caused serious damage. All of these vessels, though crippled to varying degree, successfully returned to port. Incredibly, Task Group 16.6 lost only seven men killed in action--five on the Bailey and two on the Salt Lake City. The Japanese sustained five hits on the Nachi with only fourteen killed and twenty-seven seriously injured. The equipment and personnel casualties only slightly degraded the cruisers' war-fighting ability. The American force expended 3,465 rounds of ammunition (three-inch through eight-inch caliber), with the Salt Lake City firing an incredible 927 of that total.²⁰

Hosogaya's retreat from the North Pacific marked the last opportunity for the Japanese to deal a loss to the Americans and reestablish their lines of communication to the Aleutians. During the early days of the Aleutian operation, June through August 1942, the Japanese could not entice the North Pacific Force into an engagement at sea. In March 1943, the Japanese, again possessing superior naval forces, had the opportunity but failed to capitalize on it. This failure was a turning point for the North Pacific campaign. Colonel (USAF Retired) John L. Frisbee wrote in a 1984 Air Force magazine article that Hosogaya managed, despite his many advantages to "...snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, and end up on the beach for

²⁰U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," Combat Narratives, Office of Naval Intelligence, 1945, 27-64. Commander Ralph H. Millsap, "Skill or Luck?," Proceedings, March 1985, 79-87. The above account of the Battle of the Komandorski Islands was taken extensively from these two sources.

it." On 1 April 1943 Vice Admiral Shiro Kawase relieved Hosogaya of command of the Fifth Fleet and the Northern Naval Forces.²¹

The Battle of the Komandorski's sealed the fate of the Japanese expedition forces still entrenched on Attu and Kiska. Lacking air power to counter the American aerial onslaught and now totally cut off from their supply base in the Northern Kurils, the defenders had no means with which to expand their defenses. Initially, the Imperial General Staff wanted to send the Fifth Fleet back into the North Pacific, however required maintenance on many of the fleet's vessels made this impossible. The Japanese were faced with choosing two options--to return in force to the North Pacific and properly reinforce the Aleutian garrisons or, evacuate the garrisons and withdraw those forces back to the Kurils and Honshu. Instead, the Japanese deferred making this decision and chose instead their fall-back tactic of "watchful waiting." Unfortunately for them, the Americans had no such tactic and, though struggling with their own logistical problems, were busy making plans to retake Kiska and Attu and run the Japanese completely out of the North Pacific.

Since December 1942 planning had been underway for an offensive amphibious operation against the Japanese garrison on Kiska. Nimitz had directed the Commander, Amphibious Force Pacific Fleet, Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell, to prepare an estimate or concept plan for the opposed invasion. Before the month ended, Rockwell, in collaboration with Major General Holland M. Smith, USMC, then commanding the Second Joint Training Force at Camp Elliott, California,

²¹Frisbee, "The Forgotten Front," 100.

submitted his estimate of the requirements to assault and secure Kiska. This estimate, in line with those of staff planners at Pearl and at General DeWitt's Western Defense Command, called for the use of 27,000 men.²²

In early January 1943, Nimitz forwarded the detailed plan, developed by LTG DeWitt's staff, for an amphibious assault on Kiska. The plan called for training a force from the continental United States since the Army's Alaskan Defense Command did not have sufficient combat units in theater to conduct the assault. There were several choices of combat units that were undergoing training and conducting defensive operations on the west coast of the United States. Of these, DeWitt recommended using the 35th Infantry Division for the Kiska operation. The War Department nonconcurred with this recommendation and allocated the 7th Infantry Division instead.

The 7th Infantry Division, activated at Fort Ord, California on 1 July 1940 as the 7th Motorized Division, had occupied defensive positions and been engaged in outpost and patrol activities along the west coast and training from 8 December 1941 through 30 April 1942. Training for overseas movement began on 1 May 1942 when the division moved from Fort Ord to Camp San Luis Obispo, California. Except for a nine week divisional size training exercise at the U.S. Desert Training Center, the division remained at Camp Luis Obispo until January 1943. On 10 January, the division was redesignated the 7th Infantry Division and moved back to Ft. Ord on 15 January. On this date the division was

²²Holland M. Smith, General U.S. Marine Corps (Ret.) and Percy Finch, Coral and Brass (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 102.

reassigned from Army Ground Forces to the Western Defense Command. The division then engaged solely in amphibious warfare training until 22 April, when the division moved to the port of embarkation for the Aleutian operation. The commanding general of the 7th Infantry Division, Major General Albert E. Brown, had commanded since Spring 1942.²³

For the planned Kiska operation, Nimitz appointed recently promoted Vice Admiral Francis W. Rockwell the Task Force Commander (Task Force Fifty-one). Rockwell, after establishing a headquarters in late January at the San Diego Navy Base, assembled an experienced senior staff to oversee the difficult amphibious training mission. These planners came from the staffs of Task Force 8, Alaskan Defense Command, U.S. Pacific Fleet, and Western Defense Command. Additionally, CINCPAC directed then Major General Smith, USMC, join the staff as senior amphibious trainer.²⁴

During the initial training phase, Rockwell lost all of his Attack Cargo (AKA) ships and all but two of his Attack Transport (APA) ships. These amphibious support vessels were needed for actual combat requirements in the Central and South Pacific and could not be spared for training. This loss had an adverse impact on Rockwell's training schedule in that full scale amphibious operations could not be

²³U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of the United States Army Ground Forces in World War II, Pacific Theater of Operations," Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, Washington, D.C., 1959, 418-419, 429.

²⁴U.S. Army, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing," Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, Presidio of San Francisco, California, 30 May 1943. 1.

conducted. Limited amphibious landings were conducted between 21 February and 9 March. In early March 1943, Rockwell received two additional APA's plus the troop transport President Fillmore.²³

With these reinforcements, Rockwell's staff planned and executed a larger scale amphibious training operation on San Clemente Island. This exercise was supported by Task Force One with three battleships and four destroyers. This exercise, building on the earlier training exercise's emphasis on the amphibious fundamentals of combat loading, embarkation, debarkation, and ship-to-shore movements, stressed naval gunfire support to the landing force and naval aviation close air support. Unfortunately, amphibious shipping and other key equipment shortages continued to prevent division sized amphibious training exercises. Additionally, the Task Force Fifty-one round-out troops of the Alaskan Defense Command and the aircraft that would actually support the Kiska operation were in Alaska and could not participate in any amphibious training. During the San Clemente amphibious training exercises, Rear Admiral Kinkaid reported to LTG DeWitt to discuss the problem of insufficient naval vessels available to properly support the Kiska operation.²⁴

Requirements for amphibious, cargo, and transport shipping elsewhere in the Pacific throughout the winter of 1942 preempted the commitment of enough of these vessels to Task Force Fifty-one. It wasn't that other areas of the Pacific enjoyed a higher priority than the Aleutians, only that the Navy's amphibious shipping had been

²³U.S. Navy, The Aleutians Campaign, 69.

²⁴Ibid., 68-69.

utilized extensively in the Solomons and the production of these vessels had not reached the level necessary to support multiple Pacific Theaters of Operations.

In fact, a Joint War Plans Committee (JWPC) study on the utilization of amphibious vessels, conducted prior to the Trident Conference, point out the indiscriminate manner in which this problem affected all of the Pacific theaters of operations. In that study, the conclusions were that if the New Guinea-Solomons operations were completed by January 1944, enough assault shipping for two divisions could be moved from the South Pacific to Pearl Harbor for the Marshalls campaign by about 1 April 1944. This meant that no ship-to-shore operations could be conducted in the South and Southwest Pacific theaters of operations until the Marshall Islands operation could be completed.²⁷

Clearly the lack of amphibious shipping was a problem that plagued the entire Pacific theater and was not in any way limited to being a problem only for the North Pacific planners nor did it reflect a lower priority for operations in that region. It must be remembered that during the U.S. North Pacific offenses, the Allies in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) were demanding the preponderance of amphibious craft production for on-going operations in the Mediterranean and, in keeping with the "Germany First" strategy, the ETO had first priority on resources.

²⁷Joint Chief of Staff Report 311, Report by JWPC, "Mobility and Utilization of Amphibious Assault Craft," 15 May 43, CCS 560 (5-15-43), referenced in Grace Person Hayes, The History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in World War II. The War Against Japan (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 418, 839.

In light of this problem, Kinkaid's recommendation to DeWitt was to modify the mission by changing the target--assaulting the relatively lightly defended western-most Japanese garrison of Attu instead of Kiska. Control of the North Pacific by the U.S. Navy made this idea of bypassing the Japanese garrison on Kiska a workable reality. Also, since Attu had fewer defenders, the assault force necessary to achieve attacker to defender ratio to ensure success (about 11,000 troops in the initial fight for Attu versus the 27,000 deemed necessary for Kiska). Based on Kinkaid's recommendation and DeWitt's endorsement, CINCPAC approved this change and directed that detailed staff planning be commenced at once. Full approval by the Joint Chiefs of Staff followed on 22 March and operational planning began in earnest.²⁰

On 1 April 1943, Nimitz and DeWitt issued a joint directive that defined the end state of the Attu operation:

The objective is the reduction and occupation of Attu and the occupation of the most suitable airfield site in the Near Islands.... The purpose is to sever enemy lines of communication to the Western [sic] Aleutians, to deny the Near Islands to the enemy, and to construct an airfield thereon for air operations; to render Kiska untenable and to create a base of operations for possible future reduction and occupation of Kiska... target date is May 7th, 1943....²¹

This directive made clear the purpose of the operation and allowed Rockwell, the Task Force Commander, to develop and execute the plan

²⁰U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message from Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet to Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet, 222335 March 1943, Frame 717. By the end of the Attu fight, the Americans had put over 16,000 soldiers over the beach.

²¹U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 70-71.

that best accomplished the objectives.²⁰

Kinkaid's assumptions regarding the strength of the Japanese on Attu were faulty in one regard. He endorsed his staff's estimate the Attu garrison was defended by only 500 Japanese when there were actually over 2600. Fortunately for the Americans, Kinkaid also assumed that the much larger Kiska garrison could land reinforcements on Attu within twenty-four hours and organized his assault forces accordingly. Late in the planning process, Kinkaid's intelligence staff upgraded their estimates of the number of Japanese on Attu to 1600. This information and the expectation that the Japanese would be well dug-in prompted Kinkaid to commit the majority of the 7th Infantry Division, with reserve forces provided by the Alaskan Defense Command, to the operation.²¹

Initial relations between the Joint Task Force planners, the operations flag officers, and the Commander, 7th Infantry Division were strained at best. Problems in this regard started when the War Department forced DeWitt to accept the 7th Division instead of the 35th Division. Adding to this strained relationship was the distance between Rockwell's staff, headquartered in San Diego, and Major General Brown's headquarters at Ft. Ord. Many of the Joint Task Force planners, experienced in the North Pacific and the environmental conditions and

²⁰This same message directed that Kinkaid would be the "supreme commander" in his capacity of Nimitz deputy in the North Pacific and that Commander, Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet (Rockwell) would operate under Kinkaid as Task Force 51.

²¹U.S. Navy, The Aleutians Campaign, 70. Brian Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1969), 196, 198.

terrain of the Aleutians, resented the indifference with which the division staff greeted many of its recommendations.

Falling in his attempt to obtain the 35th Infantry Division, DeWitt mounted a campaign to get Brown replaced with Brigadier General Eugene M. Landrum. Landrum was an Alaskan veteran having served as a Buckner deputy and had led the Adak occupation force in August 1942. When General Marshall refused to relieve Brown, DeWitt pressured Brown to accept Landrum as Assistant Division Commander. Brown refused this, selecting instead Brigadier General Archibald V. Arnold, a 7th Infantry Division officer. The dispute served to ruin any chance for the formation of a solid command relationship between Brown, Rockwell, and Buckner. This set the stage for an unsavory and awkward showdown that would manifest itself in the middle of the Attu combat operation.²²

The 7th Infantry Division continued planning and training until 21 April. Over the two day period of 22-23 April the division moved from Ft. Ord to its port of embarkation at San Francisco under very tight security. The division Command Post commenced operations aboard the Zellin on 24 April.²²

On 28 April 1943, the revised operation plan for Operation "LANDCRAB," (Operation Plan 3-43, Revision "A") was complete. The loading of cargo and troops, an always difficult but critical undertaking in any amphibious operation, was made harder by the lack of sufficient Attack Transport (APA's) vessels. This also resulted in severe over-loading of these vessels with both cargo and personnel,

²²Garfield, "The Thousand-Mile War," 196-197.

²²U.S. Army, "Order of Battle, United States Army Ground Forces," 419.

adding a great degree of hardship to the officers and men of the division.²⁴

A significant deception plan was employed to mask the destination of the Task Force. A complete training order was issued that called for an amphibious exercise in the San Diego area. The troops were given instruction on tropical diseases and hot weather survival. Perhaps the trickiest operational security measure undertaken was the loading and storage of cold weather gear for task force personnel. When aviation personnel aboard the escort carrier Nassau discovered the cold weather equipment, the carrier's commander intentionally allowed himself to be seen studying charts of Argentina and of the North Atlantic. Not until all units were at sea did all levels of command in the task force become informed about the true objective.²⁵

After ten months of fighting to gain control of the western Aleutians airspace and waters, a combat force was finally en route to take American soil away from the Japanese. This force, operating as Task Force Fifty-one, was organized into five Task Groups (refer to Figure 10, Organization of Task Force Fifty-one, page 111).²⁶

While Rockwell and his staff hustled to organize Task Force Fifty-one and put to sea, Kinkaid's North Pacific Force continued to hold the line in the Aleutians. Of course the focus of Task Force 16's

²⁴United States Pacific Fleet, Amphibious Force, "Revision 'A' to Commander Task Force Fifty-One Operation Plan No. 3-43," Serial JS-0031, April 28, 1943, 1-2.

²⁵U.S. Navy, The Aleutians Campaign, 72.

²⁶United States Pacific Fleet, Amphibious Force, "Operation Plan No. 3-43," 1.

effort now became Operation LANDCRAB, and it was organized into nine different groups (refer to Figure 11, Organization of Task Force 16, page 112-113).²⁷

In addition to these units, a number of vessels from Kinkaid's North Pacific Force (Task Force 16)--the DD's Abner Read, Commander Thomas Burrowes, and Amnen, Lieutenant Commander Henry Williams, Jr., the AVP Casco, Commander Willis E. Cleaves, the DMS Elliot, Lieutenant Commander Henry Mullins, Jr., and the ATF Ute, Lieutenant William F. Lewis (USN)--were detached and placed under the command and control of Task Force 51.²⁸

Together, these two large task forces contained sufficient combat power to, in the judgement of Kinkaid and DeWitt, to ensure the quick establishment of a beachhead on Attu followed by the rapid destruction of the Japanese defenders. The one weakness in the force, lack of carrier aviation, was off-set by the strength of Butler's 11th Air Force (Air Striking Group). Any analysis of the Attu operation should have an understanding of the assumptions made by the planners in the development of Operations Plan 3-43. Rockwell had approved eight

²⁷On 15 March 1943 the North Pacific Force, operating as Task Force 8, underwent a slight reorganization and redesignated Task Force 16. This numbered task force should not be confused with the Task Force 16 commanded by Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spruance that operated during the Battle of Midway and the months following. Wesley Frank Craven, James Lea Cate, Air Force Historical Division, et. al., eds., The Army Air Forces in World War II, Vol. 4, The Pacific: Guadalcanal to Saipan, August 1942 to July 1944 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), 378.

²⁸U.S. Pacific Fleet, Amphibious Force, "Task Force Fifty-One Operation Plan No. 3-43," Task Organization, page 1. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 73, 75.

Task Group 51.1, Support Group Rear Admiral Howard F. Kingman

BB42 Idaho
BB36 Nevada
BB38 Pennsylvania
ACV 16 Nassau
DD360 Phelps
DD350 Hull
DD351 MacDonough
DD354 Monaghan
DD355 Avlwin
DD602 Meade
DD619 Edwards

Task Group 51.2, Transport Group Captain Pat Buchanan

APA3 Zellin
APA2 Harris
APA6 Heywood
APA16 J. Franklin Bell
XAP Perida
DD349 Dewey
DD348 Farragut
DD353 Dale
DM22 Pruitt
APD18 Kane
AVD2 Williamson

Task Group 51.3, Mine Sweeping Group LTCDR Paul F. Heerbrandt

DMS12 Long
DMS9 Chandler

Task Group 51.4, Landing Force Major General Brown

17th Infantry Reinforced
1st Battalion, 32 Infantry (Reinforced)
78th Coast Artillery A.A., less 1 Battalion
1st Battalion, 50th Engineers, less Detachments.
Scout Company, 7th Division
Reconnaissance Troop, 7th Division
Landing Force Headquarters

Task Group 51.5, Landing Force Reinforcement Major General Brown
32d Infantry (Reinforced, less 1 Battalion, Reinforced)

Fig. 10. Organization of Task Force Fifty-one, Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell commanding, for Operation LANDCRAB.

Shore-Based Air Group: Major General William O. Butler (T.G. 16.1)
 -Air Striking Unit: (Task Unit (T.U.) 16.1.1)
 24 heavy bombers, 30 medium bombers, 128 fighters.
 -Air Search Unit: Captain (USN) Leslie E. Gehres (T.U. 16.1.2)
 24 PV-1's, 30 PBV-5A's, 5 seaplane tenders.

Alaska Sector Escort & Supply Group: Rear Admiral John W. Reeves
 (T.G. 16.2)
 -1 DD, 1 DMS, 1 DMS, 1 DM, 2 DE (Canadian), 1 PG, 3 AM, 1 ATF,
 4 LST, 8 LCT(5), miscellaneous small craft.

Motor Torpedo Boat Group: Lieutenant Commander James B. Denny
 (T.G. 16.3)
 -11 MTB's

Submarine Group: Commander Gray (T.G. 16.5)

Southern Covering Group: Rear Admiral Charles H. McMorris
 (T.G. 16.6)
 -3 CL's:
 Detroit, Captain Ellis H. Geiselman
 Richmond, Captain Theodore M. Waldschmidt
 Santa Fe, Captain Russel S. Berkley
 -5 DD's:
 Bancroft, Commander John L. Melgaard
 Caldwell, Lieutenant Commander Horatio A. Lincoln
 Cochran, Commander Benjamin F. Thompkins
 Frazier, Lieutenant Commander Frank Virden
 Gansevoort, LTCDR Montgomery L. McCullough, Jr.

Northern Covering Group: Rear Admiral Robert C. Giffen
 (T.G. 16.7)
 -3 CA's:
 Louisville, Captain Charles T. Joy
 San Francisco, Captain Albert F. France
 Witchita, Captain John J. Mahoney
 -4 DD's:
 Balch, Commander Harold H. Tiemroth
 Hughes, Lieutenant Commander Herbert H. Marble
 Morris, Lieutenant Commander Edward S. Burns
 Mustin, Lieutenant Commander Earl T. Schreiber

Attu Reinforcement Group: Captain Charles L. Hutton (USN)
 (T.G. 16.8)
 -32nd Infantry Regiment, less one battalion, embarked in 1 AP,
 4 XAP's, and 3 XAK's.

Fig. 11. Organization of Task Force 16 (North Pacific Force), Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid commanding, during Operation LANDCRAB.

Tanker & Service Group: (T.G. 16.9)

-6 AO's:

Brazos, Commander Richard P. Glass
Cuyama, Captain Paul R. Coloney
Guadalupe, Commander Herbert A. Anderson
Neches, Commander Campbell D. Emory
Platte, Commander Harry Keeler, Jr.
Tippecanoe, Commander Ralph O. Myers

-2 AD's:

Black Hawk, Commander Edward H. McMenemy
Markab, Captain Allen D. Brown

Shemva Occupation Group: Brigadier General John E. Copeland
(T.G. 16.10)

-4th Infantry Regiment

-18th Engineer Regiment

Transported in 1 AP, 1 XAP, 3 XAP(C)'s, 1 XAK

Fig. 11 (cont'd). Organization of Task Force 16 (North Pacific Force), Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid commanding, during Operation LANDCRAB.

assumptions that guided the planners through the planning process:³⁹

- (1) That the main landing assault will take place during daylight.
- (2) That air and submarine attacks are to be expected.
- (3) That surface attacks may be expected.
- (4) That mines may be encountered.
- (5) That weather conditions, although unfavorable, will permit landings through the surf on designated beaches.
- (6) That enemy garrison of ATTU [sic] may be reinforced prior D-Day [sic].
- (7) That Japanese defense will be vigorous.
- (8) That immediately our intentions are disclosed strong enemy reaction will occur and countermeasures will be taken by the enemy.

Assumption 8 referred to the anticipated response of the Japanese Fifth Fleet from its northern Kurils base at Paramushiro. The Americans felt they had sufficient strength in their battleships and cruisers, covered by land based fighter aircraft, and the aircraft from the escort carrier Nassau, to turn back any reinforcements from Japan. Also, the Eleventh U.S. Air Force would ensure air superiority over Attu and assist in stopping any Japanese Naval Forces that may appear.⁴⁰

The plan for command and control of Operation LANDCRAB was fairly

³⁹U.S. Pacific Fleet, Amphibious Force, "Operations Plan No. 3-43," 2.

⁴⁰The main strength of the 11th Air Forces horizontal bombers lay in their deterrent value. The Japanese had a profound respect for the land-based Army Air Forces. This concern for the deadly effects of Army Air Forces may have been greatly over-rated when one considers the number of Japanese warships actually sunk during the war by non-naval aircraft. Samuel Elliot Morison, in his historical series on naval operations during World War II, makes this point several times. Pointing to the poor performance of horizontal bombing by B-17's and B-24's during the battles of Coral Sea, Midway, and the Aleutians, Morison would relegate land-based air to reconnaissance missions only. Samuel Elliot Morison, History of United States Naval Operations in World War II, Volume IV, Coral Sea, Midway and Submarine Actions, May 1942-August 1942 (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1949), 32, 38, 41n, 111, 150-151, 158-159. It should be pointed out that the 11th U.S. Air Force sunk many Japanese Maru's and damaged many warships in Aleutian waters during the ten months preceeding Operation LANDCRAB.

typical of an American amphibious operation during World War Two. Supreme command of the theater of operations and thus for LANDCRAB remained with Commander, Task Force 16 (North Pacific Force). The Commander, Task Force Fifty-one (Rockwell) operated under Commander, North Pacific Force and had command of all amphibious operations until completion of the landing phase on Attu. From that point, the Landing Force (Task Group 51.4, commanded by Major General Brown) became Attu Occupational Group (Task Group 16.4) operating directly under Commander Task Force 16. Once control of the island was obtained, Task Group 16.11 would revert to complete Army command (through Commander, Alaska Defense Command to Commander, Western Defense Command).⁴¹

The Operation LANDCRAB planners had developed eight courses of action to accomplish the reduction of Attu--five basic plans and three variants. This would allow the commander to choose the best plan based on the latest aerial reconnaissance. On 1 May, with Task Force Fifty-one in Alaskan waters at Cold Bay, General Brown had to decide on a course of action for the tactical fight. With one exception, all the plans provided for the main effort to be made from the south side of Attu, either at Massacre Bay or Sarana Bay. The exception required a frontal assault on Black Beach in the west arm of Holtz Bay.⁴²

The plan Brown selected called for two main landings--one in Holtz Bay (Scarlet Beach) on the north side of Attu by Battalion Combat Team 17.1 and one at Massacre Bay (Yellow and Blue Beaches) on the eastern end of the island by Regimental Landing Group 17 (less

⁴¹U.S. Pacific Fleet, Amphibious Force, "Operation Plan 3-43," 362.

⁴²U.S. Army, "Report on Attu Landing," 3.

Battalion Combat Team 17.1) with Battalion Combat Team 32-2. Additionally, Brown developed a "Composite Scout Battalion" comprised of the 7th Scout Company and 7th Reconnaissance Troop (less one platoon) that had the mission of conducting a landing from submarines over the exposed north side of Attu (actually through a small cove Scarlet Beach) and driving south to secure key mountain passes. The fourth landing was to be on the south side of the island (just north of Alexai Point) by a divisional reconnaissance platoon over Rainbow Beach. (Refer to Figure 12, Attu Landing Plan, page 117).⁴²

The objective of these landings was to force the entire Japanese force into the Chichagof Valley, and squeeze them north-east toward Chichagof Harbor. This is the harbor used by the Japanese throughout their occupation of Attu, and it would be natural for them to withdraw into that part of the island under pressure from the Americans. Unfortunately, the commander's intent was not made clear because only the broad aspects of the plan was communicated to the subordinate troop commanders prior the task force's departure from Cold Bay. Once at sea, the only means of communication between the divisional command post, embarked on Zeilan, Rockwell, embarked on Pennsylvania, and the regimental commanders was blinker signal during daylight only. The typical Aleutian fog rendered even this awkward signal method unusable most of the time. This failure of key subordinate commanders to fully understand General Brown's intent would adversely affect operations ashore.⁴⁴

⁴²U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 76.

⁴⁴U.S. Army, "Report on Attu Landing," 4.

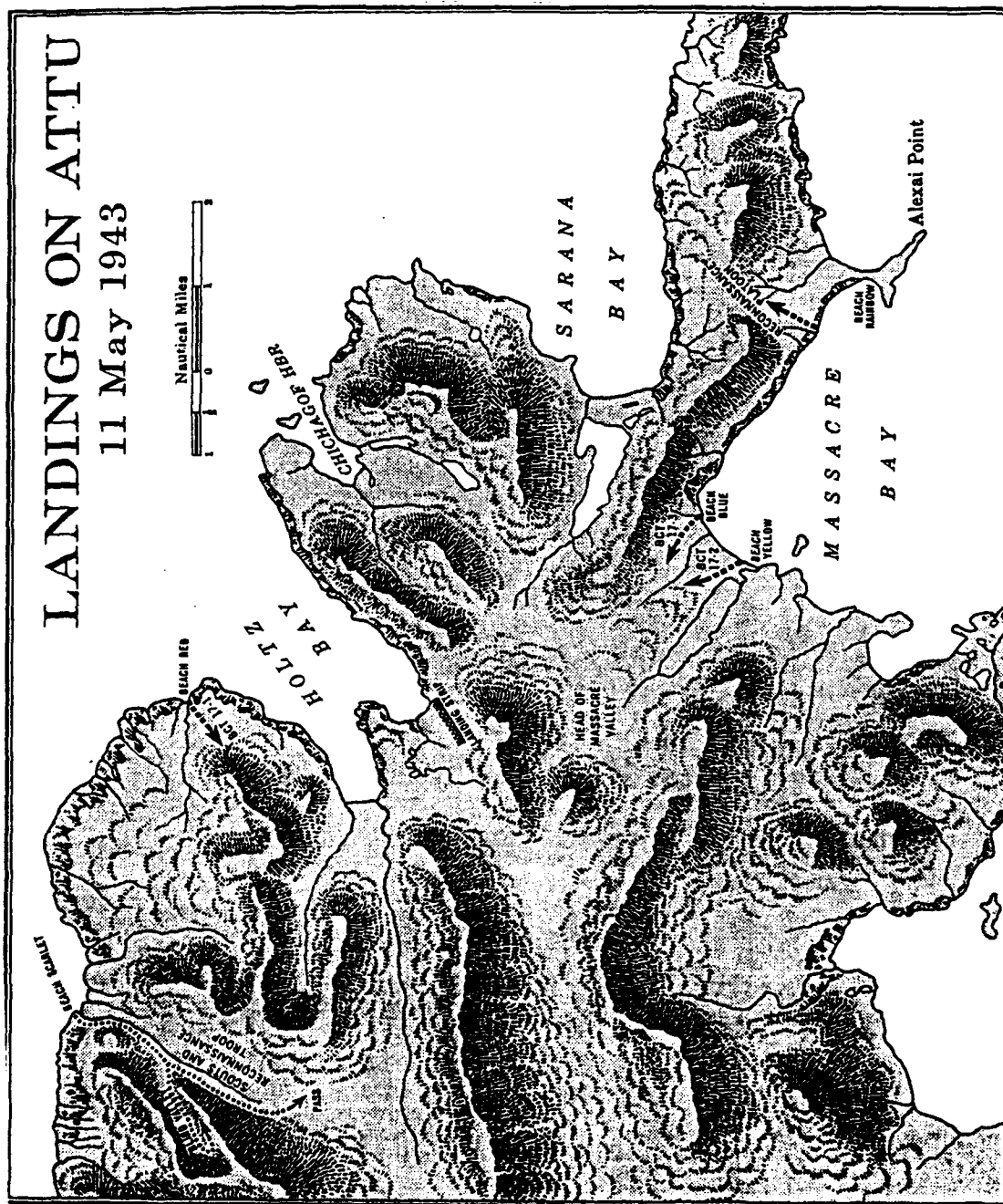


Fig. 12. The Attu Landing Plan. Reprinted from U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," Combat Narratives, Office of Naval Intelligence, 92.

Another incident that hurt the performance of the U.S. force resulted from the failure the division commander to use terrain walks for unit leaders to become accustomed enough with Alaskan/Aleutian terrain. None of the troops in the 7th Infantry Division was familiar with the unique properties of tundra and muskeg of the region. When officers of the Alaska Defense Command recommended that terrain walks be conducted, only about sixty officers participated. Neither General Brown nor any of the naval officers supported the suggestion, and the troops and Non-Commissioned Officers missed this training opportunity.⁴⁵

While General Brown, the division staff, and subordinate commanders finalized their tactical planning aboard ship at Cold Bay, Admiral Kinkaid and his naval staff struggled with the decision of establishing D-Day for the operation. Originally scheduled for 7 May, bad weather caused a one day postponement. The task force main body departed Cold Bay for the Aleutians on 4 May. When the weather in the remained too bad for operations, Kinkaid eventually settled on 11 May for the new D-Day.

On the 7th, Kinkaid learned that the Japanese were most probably deploying a convoy, protected by a strong naval force, to the western Aleutians. Kinkaid deployed his covering forces to intercept any Japanese naval forces, however no contact was made with this force. Japanese records do not indicate that they had deployed any ships in the Aleutians during this period. U.S. records after the operation estimated that the Japanese had one heavy cruiser, one light cruiser,

⁴⁵Ibid.

and three destroyers in the North Pacific but this claim has not been substantiated by any other sources.⁴⁴

Aircraft from Butler's Eleventh Air Force (Task Group 16.1) were conducting near continuous surveillance of Attu in an effort to obtain the most current intelligence on Japanese defenses. The effectiveness of collecting photographic intelligence was restricted because of fog and low cloud. However, aerial photographs were the only source of intelligence available to the U.S. commander concerning Japanese troop strength on the island. Army Air Forces also increased pressure not only on Attu but also against Kiska during the six weeks prior to Operation LANDCRAB.

During the period 8-21 April in which the weather in the western Aleutians was unusually good, the Eleventh Air Force, averaging 226 aircraft per day for missions, flew 1,175 sorties. Most of these missions were flown against Kiska instead of Attu. There were two primary reasons for this--to achieve a level of tactical surprise for the Attu assault by focusing on Kiska, and the weather over Kiska was more favorable than Attu. For this effort, the airmen used every possible combination of aircraft, including Amchitka based P-38 and P-40 aircraft as fighter-bombers. From Amchitka, the fighters and heavy bombers could complete multiple sorties each day and react to favorable weather windows over the target area. The fighters were able to complete seven or eight missions on some days, with each P-38 carrying two 500 pound bombs and the P-40 armed with one 500 pound

⁴⁴U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88," 81. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 77.

and six twenty pound fragmentary or incendiary bombs. In this fashion, the fighters delivered 216 tons of bombs in April 1943 while flying 685 sorties against Kiska. In comparison, medium and heavy bombers flying 288 sorties, dropped 506 tons of bombs during the same period. During these raids, the Americans lost only one P-40 and one B-24 to Japanese ground fire. Nine other fighters were lost in operational mishaps.⁴⁷

With Task Force forming at Cold Bay and Operation LANDCRAB due to commence on 11 May, the Eleventh Air Force shifted into their assault preparation phase. During this ten day period, weather prevented Butler from accomplishing all of his objectives however his airmen managed to deliver 95 tons of bombs on Attu and 155 tons on Kiska. Most of the bombs dropped on Kiska were done so by aircraft returning from Attu that were unable to drop on targets there because of the weather. During the final four days prior to the Attu landings, the same weather that had forced Kinkaid to postpone D-Day prevented the Eleventh Air Force from conducting any attack missions.⁴⁸

The Japanese, with their lines of communication to the Japanese home islands completely severed, knew it would only be a matter of time before the Americans assaulted the Aleutians. With Kiska being the eastern-most Japanese bastion, they expected the Americans to strike there first. Accordingly, it received the most attention in the

⁴⁷U.S. Army Air Forces, "Eleventh Air Force History," Eleventh U.S. Air Force, 12 August 1945, 262-266. Craven, Cate, Air Force Historical Division, et. al., The Army Air Forces in World War II, 379.

⁴⁸Craven, Cate, Air Force Historical Division, et. al., The Army Air Forces in World War II, 381.

preparation of defenses. The Japanese Navy, which had primary responsibility for Kiska, had reinforced its "naval infantry" with two infantry battalions, four regimental gun units, and one and one-half engineer units (effectively doubling Kiska's strength to over 5,000 defenders) from the Japanese Army's North Sea Garrison Force.⁴⁹

On Attu, Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki, garrison commander (2nd District Commander) since the first of April 1943, had a force built around one and one-half infantry Battalions, one machine gun company, twelve anti-aircraft guns and one engineer platoon. This entire force totalled about 2500 men. Available to reinforce Attu or Kiska was the main body of the North Sea Garrison Force garrisoned at several locations in the Kurils and on the home island of Hokkaido.⁵⁰

Specific Japanese order of battle on Attu in May 1943 follows:⁵¹

-303rd Independent Infantry Battalion, Major Jokuji Watanabe commanding 644 officers and men, organized into four infantry companies, one machine gun company, one infantry-artillery gun company, one transportation company.

-Aoto Provisional AA Defense Battalion, Major Seiji Aoto commanding 526 officers and men, organized into four

⁴⁹U.S. Army, "The Aleutian Islands Campaign, Japanese Monograph No. 46," Far East Command, G-2, Historical Section, n.d., 111.

⁵⁰Ibid. Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, in its "Final Report of Reduction and Occupation of Attu from the Intelligence Point of View, Intelligence Memorandum No. 8," 9 August 1943, placed total strength of the Attu garrison at 2234. This number is lower than those generally accepted by historians (most place the number of Japanese on Attu at slightly over 2,600), however the Western Defense Command intelligence report reflected "foxhole" strength and accounted for attrition from U.S. bombings, sickness, medical evacuees and other transfers.

⁵¹U.S. Army, "Intelligence Memorandum No. 8," 15-23.

anti-aircraft companies.³²

-6th Independent Mountain Artillery Unit, Second Lieutenant Taira Endo commanding 160 officers and men, organized into three platoons.

-Northern Kurile [sic] Fortress Infantry Unit, Captain Yoshizo Ishigaki commanding 430 officers and men organized into three company sized units.

-302nd Independent Engineer Company, Captain Chinzo Ono commanding 140 officers and men, organized into four platoons.

-Field Hospital, North Sea Garrison (Attu), Captain Yamamoto commanding 70 officers and men.³³

-2nd Company, 6th Ship Engineer Regiment, Captain Kobayashi commanding 150 officers and men.³⁴

-Miscellaneous Groups, civilian radio construction crews involved in the installation of radar vicinity of Chichagof Harbor. This group had arrived from Kiska where they had been installing radar before the U.S. assault on Attu

-Navy Personnel, (30 personnel) with mission of barracks construction for naval air force personnel expected to man the Attu airfield then under construction.

-Miscellaneous Units, totalling 50 personnel, including the 11th Independent Wireless Platoon, a construction section, and a weather section.

The Japanese defensive plan for Attu consisted of two main sectors--the Holtz Bay Sector and the Chichagof Sector (refer to Figure 13, Enemy Dispositions on Attu, page 125). Defense of Massacre and

³²One of these anti-aircraft companies was a provisional unit and had not been issued crew-served weapons at the time of Operation LANDCRAB.

³³It is the best estimate that Yamamoto commanded the Attu Field Hospital. The main body of this hospital, 183 personnel, departed Attu for Kiska on 31 December 1942 to reinforce this garrison.

³⁴This unit's primary mission involved the loading, unloading, and lightering cargo from both ship to shore and transporting cargo between Attu's harbors.

Sarana Bays were the responsibility of Chichagof Sector. However, the Japanese on Attu had not taken all defensive measures prior to the American attack. It was not until 25 April that full scale distribution of arms and ammunition took place. Also, the Americans found large quantities of defensive barrier material unused on the island. As noted earlier, indications are that the Japanese expected the American amphibious assault to come at Kiska. Troops on Attu suffered some degree of complacency because they were "behind the lines" and unlikely to face ground combat. The Japanese assessment of their defense effort in the Aleutians point this disparaged situation: "...All in all, the defenses of this strong-hold [Kiska] were shaping up.... Development of Kiska was much more extensive than was the development of Attu."⁵⁵

With the Japanese garrisons preparing for the expected American assault, the Japanese Fifth Fleet and the Northern Area Forces continued their "watchful waiting" at their Kuril Islands bases. On the eve of Operation LANDCRAB the Japanese were thoroughly checkmated. The Americans had avoided a decisive engagement when the odds were with the Japanese, had won a decisive engagement when it really counted (Battle of the Komandorski's), and had cut the Japanese garrisons off from the home islands. The Japanese attributed their failure in the Aleutians to this point to their failure to construct airfields. They attributed U.S. success in the campaign to the American's unmatched ability to quickly construct and make operational airfields

⁵⁵U.S. Army, "Intelligence Memorandum No. 8, 9. U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 88," 62.

throughout the Aleutians. With the Japanese Aleutian garrisons isolated it only remained for the Americans to root the defenders out with infantry and reclaim full and complete control of the North Pacific.

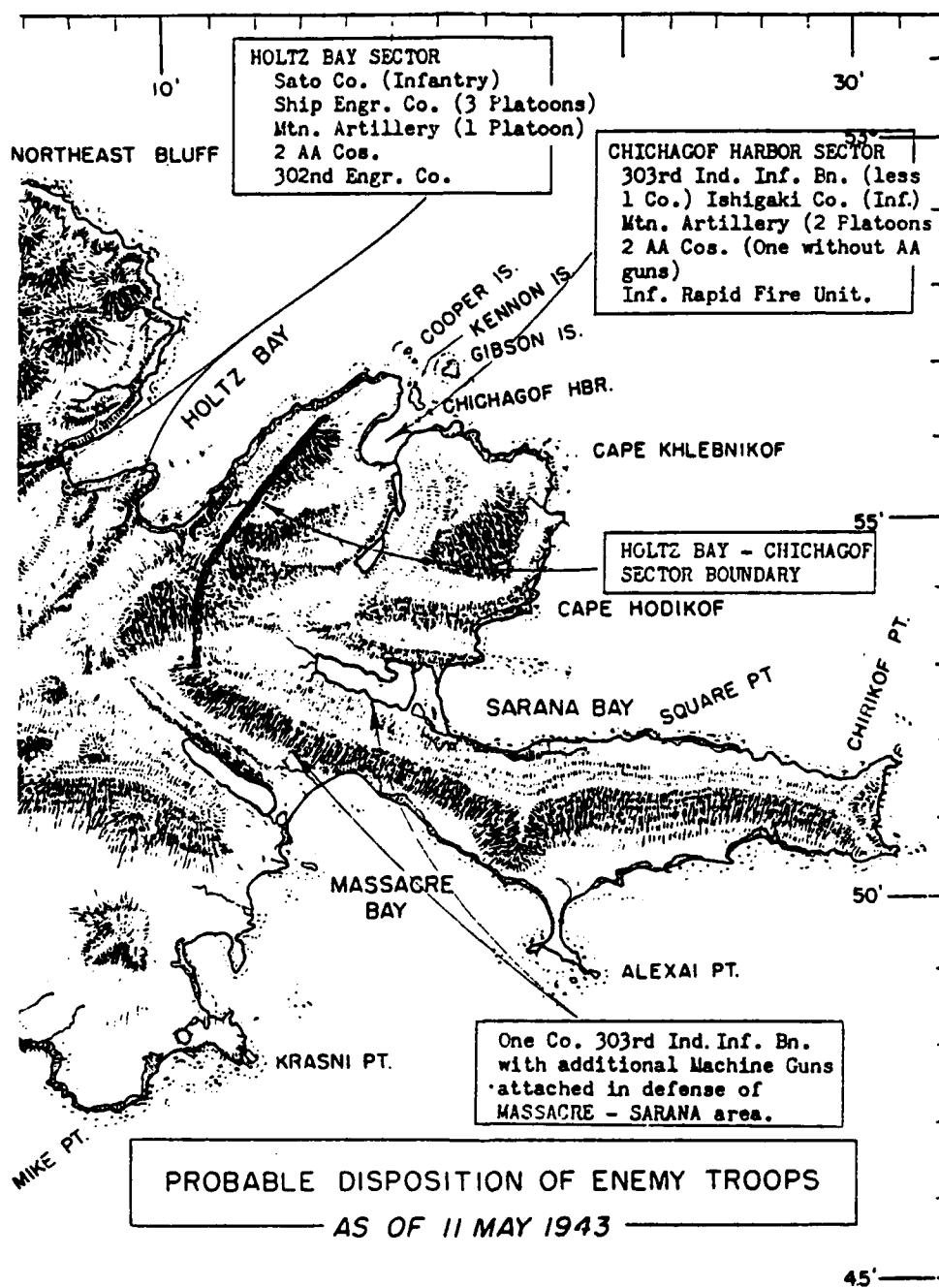


Fig. 13, Disposition of Japanese Forces on Attu, Reprinted from U.S. Army, "Final Report of Reduction and Occupation of Attu from the Combat Intelligence Point of View, Intelligence Memorandum No. 8," Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, 9 August 1943, 10.

CHAPTER IV

Assault on Attu and Kiska

Offensive military operations are rarely easy, and amphibious attacks have special hazards of their own.

Bernard Brodie, A Guide to Naval Strategy

Late in the afternoon of 10 May 1943 in the waters east of Attu, Rockwell's battleships rejoined the Main Body of Task Force Fifty-One after conducting a 48 hour search for a non-existent Japanese naval force previously reported en route to reinforce Attu. With all units of his task force joined, Rockwell could fine tune his formations in preparation for the Attu amphibious assault slated to commence at 0300 hours the next day (11 May). During these last minute, late night adjustments the light mine layer Sicord and the destroyer Macdonough collided in the thick Aleutian fog. The resulting damage forced both vessels to withdraw to Adak for repairs, with Sicord ignobly tasked to take Macdonough in tow. Neither Rockwell nor the army ground commander, General Brown, could know what this event portended for the operation--the Sicord was to have performed the critical duty of boat control vessel. One of the controversial issues that continued beyond the successful conclusion of Operation LANDCRAB involved command and control.¹

Task Force Fifty-one, with the main assault forces organized into

¹U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," Washington: Navy Department, Office of Naval Intelligence, 1945, 77. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary and Running Intelligence Estimate," Daily report of 10 May, CINCPAC Headquarters, (Combined Arms Research Library, Microfilm File D000717), Frame 1532.

two main forces--the Northern Group and the Southern Group--eased southward through dense fog from their assembly areas toward the Attu beaches. The adverse weather that had been the hallmark of the Aleutians campaign would continue to impact combat operations of both the Japanese and the Americans until the campaign's end.

The submarine landings over Beach Scarlet (north side of the island) by the Composite Scout Battalion, originally planned for 0300, started at 0309. Before daybreak, the Scout Battalion had completed its landings and was en route to its first objective. The Scout Battalion's mission was to report the conditions at Beach Scarlet, then drive south through the pass leading to the Holtz Bay drainage (Addison Valley). From this location, the battalion could prevent any Japanese from withdrawing east away from the Holtz Bay/Chichagof Harbor which intelligence had identified as the main Japanese enclave. Brown's plan had been based on the assumption that the Japanese would react to the landing in just that manner. Also, the Composite Battalion's maneuver would force the Japanese in vicinity of the West Arm of Holtz Bay to fight facing west. A unit of Alaska Defense Command's Aleut Scouts landed shortly after 0900 hours to recon Beach Red (also on the north side of the island, but southeast of Beach Scarlet) in advance of Battalion Combat Team (BCT 17-1). The other reconnaissance element, a platoon of the 7th Reconnaissance Troop, supported the Massacre Bay landings after going ashore over Beach Rainbow (northeast side of Massacre Bay) near Alexai Point. The troop's main mission was to cover the rear of Regimental Landing Group 17 by establishing a line of

outposts across the East Cape Peninsula.² (Refer to Figure 14, The Capture of Attu, page 129.)

After failing to receive the expected recon reports from his Aleut Scouts concerning Beach Red conditions and, still blinded by the heavy fog, Brown finally selected Beach Red over Scarlet for the main effort in the north despite his lack of information on beach conditions. At 1450 the Northern Force (BCT 17-1, composed of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry plus combat support troops) landed on Beach Red without incident. The Aleut Scouts had experienced radio problems and were unable to get the word to Brown that Beach Red was clear. Throughout these early efforts, planned naval gunfire preps could not be fired due to the fog. Japanese positions in vicinity of Chichagof Harbor were pounded by radar directed gun fire from two of the Northern Group's battleships.³

South of the island, the main landings on Beach Yellow (BCT 17-2, composed of 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry plus combat support troops) and Beach Blue (BCT 17-3, composed of 3rd Battalion, 17th Infantry plus combat support troops), scheduled for 1530, were hindered by the dense fog. Maneuvering of landing craft was further complicated by

²U.S. Army, "Field Order No. 1, Plan "E" (Corrected Copy)," Headquarters, Regimental Landing Group 17 (17th Infantry Regiment), 2 May 1943, 1-2. Copy of order contained in "Attu Campaign, Historical Documents of World War II," Combined Arms Research Library (Archives), Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas. U.S. Army, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing," Western Defense Command & Fourth Army, Report of Lieutenant Colonel Lynn Davis Smith, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3 to Commander, Western Defense Command, May 30, 1943, 2-3.

³U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 78-79. Edmund G. Love, The Hourglass. A History of the 7th Infantry Division in World War II (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1988), 16.

the large number of rocks common in Massacre Bay. However, the lead units of BCT's 17-2 and 17-3 crossed the line of departure at 1445 and, despite the confusion caused by near zero visibility, successfully landed all major elements before 1700 hours. Neither these units nor BCT 17-1 at Beach Red had made contact with the main force of Japanese defenders throughout the landings and initial lodgement operations. By 2000 hours, Kinkaid and Brown had completed the unopposed landing of 3,100 troops over the two main beaches plus the 400 man Composite Scout Battalion, steadily pushing South from Beach Scarlet.⁴

General Brown came ashore at about 2300 hours on D-Day and established his divisional Command Post (CP) on Beach Yellow. The division had been fortunate during the initial landings given the number of ships and boats maneuvering in the zero visibility conditions and the small number of mishaps. The worst accident occurred when a landing craft hit a rock in Massacre Bay, resulting in the front ramp being dropped while underway. The craft filled with water and sank, drowning four soldiers. In the unfavorable conditions around Attu on the 11th it is remarkable that the amphibious operation went so smoothly. Though the fog had severely disrupted the planned naval bombardment, it did provide concealment for the amphibious forces. The Japanese commander did not realize an amphibious operation was underway until mid-afternoon, and even then could not react in any meaningful

⁴U.S. War Department, The Capture of Attu. As Told by the Men Who Fought There (Washington: The Infantry Journal, 1944), 12-13. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 81.

way to disrupt operations at the beaches.³

The main body of the 17th Infantry Regiment (BCT's 17-2 and 17-3), which came ashore at Beach Yellow and Beach Blue (Massacre Bay), pushed inland up Massacre Valley with two battalions on line. Their immediate objective, Jarmin Pass, lead from Massacre Valley to the Holtz Bay area. However, they encountered heavy resistance and the advance bogged down just short of their objective by early evening. The regiment established hasty defenses for the night under heavy fire from the Japanese positions in the higher terrain. The 17th Infantry would require five days of repeated assaults into the teeth of the Japanese defenses, reinforcement with several battalions and, in the end, suffer many casualties--including the regimental commander--before reaching its objective.⁴

³U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 81. Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, Coral and Brass (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 103.

In his book Coral and Brass, General Holland M. Smith, USMC (Retired) wrote that he considered the Attu amphibious landing "an amphibious landing without parallel in our military history." At the time of the assault on Attu, General Smith commanded the Second Joint Training Force, Camp Elliot, California. Smith supervised the amphibious training of the 7th Infantry Division and followed the division to the North Pacific as an observer. Smith later commanded major USMC amphibious units throughout the Central Pacific campaign.

⁴U.S. Army, "Attu Campaign, 7-30 May 43-17th Infantry Regiment, Initial Landing, Holtz Bay Pass," Microfilm Number 325, Item 1556, Combined Arms Research Library (Archives), Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, 1-3.

Colonel Edward P. Earle, commanding the Southern Force (main effort of the Attu operation) and the 17th Infantry Regiment, died on 12 May. Out of communication with his 2nd Battalion, Colonel Earle, accompanied by an Alaskan Scout and a wire crew, departed his CP just prior to noon on the 12th to assess the situation. His body, together with the seriously wounded scout, was located at 1600 later in the day near the 2nd Battalion CP.

BCT 17-1 completed its initial reorganization after landing at Beach Red and pressed toward its first objective--a series of peaks called "Hill X" by the Americans and located just over three kilometers southwest of Beach Red. After moving toward his objective for four hours, and unsure of his exact position in the fog and low light, the commander of the lead battalion called a halt for the night. The Americans were less than one kilometer from the objective when they halted. This decision proved costly because the Japanese, having detected the American battalion, rushed forces onto heretofore vacant Hill X and prepared hasty defensive positions. BCT 17-1 would be facing a determined enemy holding easily defendable terrain on the second day of the operation and would not seize the Hill X area until 14 May.⁷

The second day of the assault, 12 May, began with a slight improvement in visibility which enabled the use of naval gunfire controlled by shore parties. Initial contact with the Japanese defenders came when a flight of aircraft from the Nassau, providing close air support to BCT 17-1 in the vicinity of Holtz Bay, came under intense anti-aircraft fire. The battleship Idaho pounded these anti-aircraft positions with 14 inch rounds. The Japanese responded by firing artillery and anti-aircraft rounds into Beach Red from positions in the Chichagof Harbor area. The lifting fog around the island's beaches allowed the Japanese to fire northwest across Holtz Bay from their main defensive enclave into the BCT 17-1 beachhead.⁸

⁷ U.S. Army, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing," 8-9.

⁸U.S. Army, "Preliminary Report of Attu Landing," 9.

By 0800 on the 12th the Scout Battalion had managed to approach the Japanese positions at Holtz Bay from the northwest after traversing the difficult terrain across Attu from Beach Scarlet. This placed the Americans on high ground and in position to engage the rear of the Japanese defending the Holtz Bay area. The Composite Battalion was the only U.S. unit to gain a key terrain advantage over the Japanese in the early days of the Attu battle.

North of Holtz Bay, BCT 17-1 mounted a series of assaults supported by regimental artillery and naval gun fire. Late in the afternoon, BCT 17-1 managed to over-run the first echelon Japanese positions only to be thrown back by a vicious counter attack. The Americans responded with a counter attack of their own with moderate success. After heavy fighting, BCT 17-1 finally secured the immediate crest of Hill X by mid-morning on 13 May and the surrounding peaks the next day. After 36 hours of heavy fighting, and suffering from the effects of the weather, the troops of BCT-1 were spent. The task force required reinforcement before it could continue attacking across the rough terrain in the face of the determined Japanese defense."

With his forces in the north and south stalled by strong Japanese forces, Brown began calling for his two battalion reserve. Communications problems had earlier prevented Brown from sending situation reports to Admiral Rockwell and now, with both advances checked by strong Japanese defenses, Brown could not get his badly needed reserve ashore. The 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 32nd Infantry Regiment, scheduled for landing early on the 12th to assume the reserve

"U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 82.

mission, had not made it ashore. It was not until the next day that Rockwell received Brown's urgent request for these battalions. This was the first indication Rockwell had that the reserve battalions, embarked on the transports Grant and Chirikoff, had not landed in accordance with the plan.

Finally Rockwell sorted out the confusing situation with the reserve battalions and ordered them ashore. The 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry, embarked on Grant, landed without incident on the Massacre Bay beaches to reinforce the Southern Force. When Chirikoff, with 3rd Battalion, 32nd Infantry on board, attempted to land at Beach Red in the north, intense fire from Japanese direct and indirect weapons from the Chichagof Harbor area prevented the transport from approaching the beach. Naval gun fire from Task Force Fifty-one's battleships and cruisers, synchronized with strafing attacks from Nassau's fighters, finally suppressed the fire from those positions. This allowed 3rd Battalion, 32nd Infantry to land and reinforce the bloodied Northern Force.¹⁰

With reinforcements for both the Northern and Southern Force ashore, Southern Force launched repeated counter attacks against the Japanese defending Jarmin Pass. The results of each assault were the same--7th Division Infantry moving uphill, with scant cover and concealment, in the teeth of well prepared, fog shrouded Japanese positions and being repulsed every time. The Northern Force, successful

¹⁰Love, The Hourglass. A History of the 7th Infantry, 33. U.S. Navy, "Operation Plan No. 3-43 (Operation LANDCRAB), 1-9, 26, 33. Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 220.

The 2nd Battalion, 32nd Infantry had gone ashore with the main assault waves at Massacre Bay as part of the Southern Force.

In gaining the crest of Hill X, launched attacks to penetrate the Japanese' subsequent positions with only slight success. None of Brown's forces on the three different axis of advance could break through the Japanese defenses and link-up in accordance with the plan. With the continued stalemate, Brown called for the commitment of the operation's last reserves--Alaska Defense Command's 4th Infantry Regiment, standing by on Adak. Rockwell immediately disapproved this request.⁴⁴

A number of significant problems prevented Brown from influencing the division's bleak situation in a positive manner. The Japanese were well dug in with mutually supporting primary and supplementary positions. The Japanese enjoyed the benefits of internal lines of communication and possessed a degree of protection in moving men and materiel through their trench system. They also held all the high ground (except that terrain held by the under strength and isolated Composite Scout Battalion). Typically, the Japanese fought from horse shoe shaped positions with the opening toward the Americans. The dense fog that restricted the Americans vision did not affect the Japanese defenders to the same degree--the Japanese could see and shoot down through the fog at greater ranges than the Americans could see and shoot. For the attacker, especially one lacking key combat multipliers, this situation could be deadly.

The inability of the Americans to clear incoming supplies from the beaches, especially the Massacre Bay beaches, hampered their entire effort. All movement of supplies forward from the beaches required

⁴⁴Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 223-224.

manual handling due to the near zero trafficability of vehicles over the muskeg and tundra on Attu. This man-power requirement siphoned combat troops from the front lines to shuttle supplies forward. During planning of Operation LANDCRAB Colonel William Alexander, one of the Joint Alaskan Staff sent from Buckner's Alaska Defense Command to assist development of the plan, attempted to account for this requirement. Alexander, having served continuously in Alaska and the Aleutians since the start of the war, estimated that for each soldier fighting, two more would be required to move supplies forward. Unfortunately, his recommendations to the staff of Task Force Fifty-one and 7th Infantry Division were neither studied nor acted upon. This caused the beaches to become snarled with mounds of materiel when they could not be cleared faster than the navy amphibious vessels could deliver it. Additionally, supplies from Beach Red had to be hauled up a 200 foot escarpment into the island's interior.¹²

The other factor that seriously added to Brown's problems were the ever growing number of non-battle injuries--not only from accidents but from the effects of the weather. Inadequately equipped with individual cold/wet weather clothing and equipment, the U.S. soldiers were being lost to frostbite and trench foot at an alarming rate. This further

¹²Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 195.

Organization at Beach Red was the exception, despite the escarpment over which materiel had to be winched and hauled. The beachmaster, Commander Carl Anderson, had gained experience at beach operations during the Adak landings and possessed remarkable organizational ability and a talent for getting things done however difficult the mission.

reduced fighting strength, offsetting the effect of troop reinforcements.¹³

With his artillery support--though providing a degree of accurate supporting fire--restricted to the beaches due to poor trafficability over the tundra and all of his combat units committed to the battle, General Brown's forces in the south were firmly stalled on 15 May (D-Day plus four). Northern Force had achieved a degree of success in their drive inland from Beach Red, and would link-up with the Composite Scout Battalion in the valley above the west arm of Holtz Bay on the 15th. From this position, once the two forces were consolidated, they could turn south, forcing the Japanese into the Chichagof Harbor pocket and threatening the rear of the Japanese defending Jarmin Pass against the Southern Force. With this situation--stalemate in the south, moderate success in the north--Brown left his CP in the afternoon of the 15th to confer with Rockwell aboard Pennsylvania.¹⁴

Brown's intent was to press Rockwell to commit the 4th Infantry

¹³U.S. Army, "Attu Campaign, 7-30 May 43," Regimental After Action Reports.

¹⁴The Composite Battalion, upon linking with Northern Force early on 15 May, had suffered approximately 50% casualties requiring evacuation. Most of these injuries resulted from the effects of frostbite and exposure, despite a highly effective effort by the battalion leadership in preventing these types of injuries. The battalion had not been resupplied since coming ashore and had traversed the island's east end from north to south over high, rough terrain. U.S. Army, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing," Western Defense Command and Fourth Army, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, report written by Lt. Col. Lynn Davis Smith for Commanding General, Western Defense Command, 12. Smith's report covers action only until 20 May, when he was ordered to return to Adak by Buckner. Apparently, Buckner had issued an "all points bulletin" on Smith prior to the 20th because of the number of messages and log entries asking anyone with information on Smith's whereabouts to order him to report to Buckner immediately.

Regiment (a unit of the Alaska Defense Command) being held in reserve on Adak Island. His earlier request denied, Brown intended to convince Rockwell of the criticality of need for this last unit. Unknown to Brown, Rockwell had reconsidered his earlier decision and, buoyed by Northern Force's success, had already sent an endorsement to Kinkaid recommending commitment of the 4th Infantry.

Kinkaid, commanding from his headquarters on Adak, had been joined by Lieutenant General DeWitt (Buckner, also present and anxious to get his troops into the fight, had been sitting out the operation on Adak). Based on Brown's personal report aboard the Pennsylvania, Rockwell had sent an additional situation report late on the 15th outlining, he thought, the reason for optimism and urging the commitment of the 4th Infantry. Unfortunately the message failed to convey any degree of optimism to Kinkaid. In the dispatch, Rockwell quoted Brown as stating that he doubted the Holtz Bay area could be captured with present forces and that his position was insecure. Rockwell made it clear that Brown considered the commitment of the 4th Infantry Regiment and the remainder of the 32nd Infantry critical to the operation.¹⁵

In the same message, Rockwell included a request that the Alaska Defense Command's engineers, embarked aboard two transports riding anchor at Adak, be rushed to Attu. Brown's engineer officer wanted the heavy engineers ashore so he could speed up the effort to clear the beaches--reducing grades, constructing roads, etc. When this report

¹⁵U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message from Rockwell to Kinkaid, 160602 May 43, Frame 1547.

was received at Kinkaid's Adak Command Post, the request for engineers was interpreted to mean Brown wanted to adopt a defensive posture. This alarmed Rockwell and caused DeWitt a great amount of consternation.

After discussing the situation with DeWitt and Buckner, Kinkaid considered relieving Brown as the ground force commander. Less than 24 hours after receiving Rockwell's report, Kinkaid fired a stinging message stating his assessment of the situation:

...Brown requesting large shipment heavy engineer road building equipment indicate that Brown has stopped fighting...for an indefinite time. Evidently he does not intend to move his front line or to use his vastly superior numbers ...until provided with a road net. The view that the reduction of Attu will be slow is not acceptable. If in your opinion Brown lacks stamina and aggressive spirit ...I intend that he be relieved from command....¹⁴

DeWitt had sold the Attu operation to the War Department as a quick strike on the lessor defended Attu--an operation that could be concluded, DeWitt estimated, in three days. Now, four days into the operation, the U.S. forces were generally bogged down with mission accomplishment nowhere in sight. DeWitt chafed at the delay and was inclined to blame Brown.

The request for the heavy engineers, viewed by Rockwell as a move toward a defensive mind-set, had the effect of totally souring Rockwell on Brown's performance. As for DeWitt he, influenced by Buckner, had never wanted Brown in the first place. Early in the LANDCRAB planning phase Buckner successfully convinced DeWitt that Major General Eugene

¹⁴U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message from Kinkaid to Rockwell, Info COMINCH (King), Nimitz, 160400 May 43, Frame 1558.

M. Landrum should command the 7th Infantry Division during the Attu operation (Landrum, a Buckner deputy, had experience in the Aleutians and had actually commanded the unopposed landing and occupation of Adak). DeWitt fought for this change back in California, however he could not convince the Army Chief of Staff to replace Brown.

Six hours after receiving this latest message, Rockwell cautioned Kinkaid that apparently the situation on Attu was not fully understood by the senior commanders on Adak. He stated that Brown had been unaware of the request for engineers and that no decision about Brown's relief should be made until a Rockwell representative could complete a personal assessment then underway. However, Rockwell contradicted himself somewhat by also stating it was his feeling that "the offensive potentialities of our land forces are not being fully exploited."¹⁷

However, Rockwell's appeal to delay making a decision on relieving Brown was to no avail. Later in the day, Kinkaid notified Rockwell of his decision to replace Brown. Kinkaid appointed Landrum, under Buckner's influence, to command the Attu ground forces. By the 16th, Rockwell had become a firm Brown supporter and did not agree with Kinkaid's decision. However, in the interest of the operation he did not seriously protest Kinkaid's decision.

Landrum, strategically standing by on Amchitka, flew to Attu and reported to Rockwell before dark on the 16th (D-Day plus five). After receiving a brief situation report from Brown aboard Rockwell's flag vessel, Landrum went ashore and assumed responsibility for the

¹⁷U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message from Rockwell to Kinkaid, 161016 May 43, Frame 1558.

execution of Brown's plan. Before dark, General Brown was flying east for Kodiak and his subsequent departure from the theater of operations.¹⁰

The Japanese unit defending against the Southern Force's attempts to punch through Jarmin Pass and link up with the Northern Force continued to turn back the repeated assaults by the Americans. It is doubtful that the Americans could have dislodged the defenders from the pass using these frontal assault tactics. With the success of the Northern Force however, the Japanese commander realized that his Jarmin Pass unit was becoming vulnerable to attack from the rear by the U.S. Northern Force. On the night of the 16th, the Northern Force launched an attack south into the Japanese positions only to find that the Japanese had withdrawn east toward Chichagof Harbor. Just as General Brown and his planners had predicted, the Japanese commander gradually and systematically withdrew his forces into the Chichagof Harbor area to solidify his main defensive area.

After halting major offensive action on 18 May, General Landrum allowed his subordinate commanders to reorganize and resupply in preparation for the last phase of the assault--collapsing the Japanese

¹⁰U.S. Army, "Order of Battle of the United States Army Ground Forces in World War II Pacific Theater of Operations," Washington: Department of the Army, 1959, 427-428. Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 230-233, 317.

Major General Brown transferred to the European Theater of Operations where he commanded the 5th Infantry Division. After the war, Brown commanded the 6th Infantry Division in Korea before returning to the United States in 1947. After appealing to the Army Chief of Staff for correction of the record, Brown's record and name were cleared of any failure during the Attu operation. Unfortunately, Brown lost command of his division--a division that participated in key campaigns throughout the Pacific during the remainder of the war.

strong holds in the rough terrain leading to Chichagof Harbor. The Japanese commander had withdrawn his forces into the peninsula with the intention of making the Americans pay in blood for every yard of Attu soil. According to U.S. reports, the Japanese expertly positioned and camouflaged their positions in the natural formations--utilizing even cracks in the rocks from which to fight. This tactic required the Americans to haul their heavy 37mm guns into the mountains and blast the defenders out of the crevices using High Explosive ammunition.¹⁹

On 19 May the Americans launched a slow, determined advance toward Chichagof Harbor. The Japanese continued their skillful use of terrain and weather to slow the American advance to a crawl. On the night of 19 May (D-Day plus eight), the Americans were only six kilometers from the shore of Chichagof Harbor. It would be another eleven days before the Americans, with over 16,000 troops ashore by that time, would make it to that beach. Along the way the Americans became very familiar with the fortified Japanese positions on key terrain in the rugged mountains--terrain features they tagged with ominous sounding names like Fish Hook, Black Mountain, Cold Mountain, and Buffalo Nose. This type of brutal fighting over inhospitable terrain, at times requiring the infantry to assault up inclines of 60°, was not unlike that the U.S. infantry would experience during the Korean War.²⁰

By the 28th of May the Japanese commander, Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki, found himself trapped against the beach at Chichagof Harbor

¹⁹U.S. Army, "Attu Campaign, 17th Infantry Regiment," After Action Report.

²⁰U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 91.

with only 800 troops fit for duty out of his original force of over 2,600. Yamasaki had conducted the defense of Attu in a remarkably effective manner. Other than a failure to meet the Americans at the beach, each of his decisions had cost the Americans dearly while preserving the bulk of his forces. By the end of 14 May, Yamasaki had lost only 59 KIA and 64 WIA, actually less casualties than the Americans had sustained.²¹

Yamasaki skillfully controlled the forces manning his outer perimeter and orchestrated their timely withdrawal into the Chichagof Harbor pocket without any units becoming isolated. His conduct of the battle is all the more remarkable when considering he had only arrived on Attu during the first week of April. His force had delayed the Americans sufficiently to allow the Imperial General Headquarters adequate time to mount a response to the American assault.

On 22 March 1943, a 550 man package of reinforcements had departed Paramushiro for Attu in what the Japanese called the "Second Forced Convoy for Attu." Colonel Yamasaki was part of this significant force dedicated to strengthening Attu's defenses. However, this was the convoy that ran into McMorris' task force (Battle of the Komandorski Islands) on 26 March and returned to Paramushiro. During the first week of April, Yamasaki infiltrated to Attu by submarine to assume

²¹U.S. Army, "The Aleutian Islands Campaign, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph No. 46," 129. In comparison, General Brown reported his losses as of the 13th to be 44 KIA, 171 WIA, 74 MIA. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Message from CTF 51 (Rockwell) to CTF 16 (Kinkaid) Info CINCPAC (Nimitz), 160602 May 43, Fram 1547.

command of the garrison.²²

The initial response of the Northern Army Commander (General Kiichiro Hicuchi) and the General Headquarters to Yamasaki's report of the American's landing was to order Attu reinforced with an infantry unit from Paramushiro and an infantry unit from the North Sea Garrison in Hokkaido. To accomplish this, Northern Army Operation Order Number 19 was published. It called for the movement of a force of about 4,700 troops--three infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, and combat support troops to reinforce Yamasaki.

The Japanese' North Sea Garrison Headquarters at Hokkaido had reason to view an effort to reinforce Attu with optimism. On 13 May, Japanese based in the northern Kurils intercepted a U.S. message transmitted in plain language that stated (translated from English, to Japanese, and back to English): "The advanced base now is in danger; please send reinforcements." This supported Yamasaki's reports and led the Japanese to assume the American's situation on Attu was tenuous. To encourage the troops on Attu, the intercepted message was sent to Yamasaki on the 14th with an additional exhortation in the name of the Emperor:

We admire your desperate and courageous fighting. The Army is steadily making preparations to send powerful units which will annihilate the enemy who have landed there. The success of this plan will depend on your ability to hold strategic positions

²²Ibid., 107-108.

The Japanese had begun resupplying their forces on Kiska and Attu by submarine in response to the U.S. blockade of these islands. Lacking combat power to punch through the blockade, not attempted since the Battle of the Komandorski's, the Japanese did manage to infiltrate surface supply vessels into the Aleutians during periods of extended fog.

there. We wish you to fight all the more.²²

Also on the 14th the Imperial Navy launched nineteen attack aircraft to against Rockwell's naval task force. However, bad weather and poor visibility caused the mission to be aborted prior to reaching Aleutian airspace. The North Sea Garrison commander also directed Yamasaki to report his critical supply requests for a planned aerial resupply effort. Yamasaki requested dry batteries for his radios, telephone wire and signal maintenance supplies, ammunition, and dry rations of 2,700 men for ten days.²⁴

The Japanese army rushed cargo parachutes, aircraft, and combat units to their northern Kuril base on Paramushiro Island in preparation for execution of Operation Order 19, the reinforcement of Attu. Headquarters at every level rushed about issuing eloquent directives that had little effect on Yamasaki's plight. In the end about the only thing the Japanese Army accomplished was their success in getting numerous flights of medium bombers and torpedo planes over Attu in an ineffectual bombing campaign of the Americans. These bombers also air

²²U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 127.

²⁴Ibid., 130.

It is interesting that the Japanese forces on Attu continually reported being bombarded with shells containing non-persistent gas. These reports did not seem to consider such an occurrence as an outrage, and seemingly took it in stride. All Japanese soldiers carried gas masks similar to the current U.S. M-24/M-25 series protective mask (filter element contained in a cannister). Reports indicate the Japanese routinely donned their masks when hit with "gas" and reported their masks to be quite effective. U.S. forces landed without masks, and I assume the Japanese mistook the U.S. white phosphorus shells for "gas." Diagram and description of gas mask taken from "Final Report of Reduction and Occupation of Attu from the Combat Intelligence Point of View," Intelligence Memorandum No. 8, Western Defense Command, 72-73.

dropped an inconsequential amount of supplies. In addition to the bombing missions flown by Japanese army aircraft, the Imperial Navy did launch several missions against the U.S. invasion force. On 22 May, fifteen aircraft attacked the U.S. Navy off the Attu beach, pressing torpedo attacks on the cruiser Charleston and destroyer Phelps. Damage inflicted on the Americans in all of these attacks was negligible. However, the Japanese Navy, grateful that the primary responsibility for the defense of Attu rested with the Army, did little to successfully challenge Rockwell's powerful naval force. Japanese submarines did manage to execute several ineffective attacks against American warships, including an attack against Rockwell's flagship (Pennsylvania).²⁵

By 19 May, the enthusiasm among the Imperial General Staff for Operation Order 19 had waned considerably. Early plans called for the reinforcement of troops and materiel by the forced landing using destroyers and submarines even if "it is necessary to strand the destroyers on the shoal." Even then a destroyer could carry only 200 soldiers and 200 sailors--even fewer if materiel were transported on the destroyers. With very accurate reports of the strength of the American landing force (Japanese estimates were that the Americans had

²⁵CINCPAC was aware of this frenzied movement of aircraft and vessels to Paramushiro, and carefully monitored the Japanese for indications of the dispatch of any sizable naval surface units toward the Aleutians. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Daily situation report of 13 May 1943, Frame 1533. Typical of the Japanese air attacks against the Attu invasion force were the attacks of 22 May when 12-15 (reports vary regarding the number of aircraft in this attack) torpedo planes attacked U.S. warships and 23 May when 16 army bombers attacked U.S. troops on Attu. These efforts did little damage and were not a factor in the battle. Kit C. Carter and Robert Mueller, comp., The Army Air Forces in World War II. Combat Chronology, 1941-1945, Washington: (Albert F. Simpson Historical Research Center and Office of Air Force History, 1973), 138.

over 10,000 troops ashore by the 15th--Kinkaid actually had about 11,000 men on Attu by the 14th), cooler heads on the Imperial Staff realized that, rhetoric aside, it would be difficult if not impossible to save the Attu garrison.²⁴

The few surface units that had sailed toward the Aleutians since the 12th had all been forced to turn about in the face of strong U.S. naval and air forces screening the operation. In consideration of the U.S. superiority in the region and the adverse Aleutian weather the Imperial General Headquarters rescinded Operation Order 19, ironically, on 19 May. Thanks to the excellent job Yamasaki's communications personnel were doing in maintaining contact with the Northern Area Force headquarters and Yamasaki's accurate and timely reporting, the Imperial Staff had a clear picture of the Attu battle. Concerned with the impact the shift of resources to the North Pacific would have on other theaters of operation, especially New Guinea and Burma, the Japanese made the decision to cut their losses and abandon any effort to substantially aid the Attu garrison.²⁵

The Imperial Staff directed that the forces and materiel that had already been sent to Hokkaido and Paramushiro be used to strengthen the line many on the staff realized would soon be the home islands new northern perimeter--Kuril Islands. To the credit of the Japanese, they developed a plan on the 24th, in the wake of the cancellation of Operation Order 19, to evacuate the Attu survivors using destroyers.

²⁴U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 132-133. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Daily Situation Report, 14 May 1943, Frame 1534.

²⁵U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 136, 147.

This mission had no chance for success. The destroyers were also turned back by the American navy. This led to the Japanese navy agreeing to conduct the evacuation using submarines, a tactic at which the Japanese were very adept.²⁸

Imperial Headquarters notified Yamasaki of this plan and that the submarines were en route to evacuate the survivors of his force. However, on the 28th Admiral Kawase had to radio Yamasaki that the submarines could not penetrate the tight picket of U.S. destroyers screening the western and southern approaches to the Aleutians, making evacuation impossible. The Attu defenders were isolated and facing the final blow from the Americans who were finally accumulating overwhelming combat power. Landrum had paused to bring up all indirect fire weapons, feed and rest his troops, and coordinate close air support in preparation of what he saw as the last phase of the operation. In keeping with the Japanese spirit of "bushido," surrender was not one of Yamasaki's options. However, he decided attack was an option and that is exactly what he did.²⁹

Yamasaki figured the Americans would be surprised by an attack--after all during the past twelve days the Japanese had only defended, never attacked. His plan, though not involving much in the way of coordinated maneuver and lacking indirect fire support, was quite ambitious. On the 28th, Yamasaki ordered his 800 troops to prepare for an all out attempt to break through the American cordon with the

²⁸Ibid., 140-141.

²⁹Captain Walter Karig and Commander Eric Purdon, Battle Report. Pacific War: Middle Phase (New York: Rinehart and Company, Inc., 1947), 332-333.

objective being the main U.S. beach head at Massacre Bay. Specifically, his intent was to capture the U.S. artillery that had been laboriously towed forward to support Landrum's final effort and turn the howitzers on the American beaches. One of the actions Yamasaki ordered prior to launching his "go for broke" attack was the killing of his 600 wounded soldiers. Of this number, 200 men were able to kill themselves. For 400 of the wounded that were incapacitated, medical personnel had to perform the ritual for them.²⁰

Before dawn on May 29th, Yamasaki led his men in a massed "Banzai" charge to the west from the Chichagof area. Catching the Americans totally by surprise, the Japanese completely overran the initial U.S. positions and, creating panic throughout the area, penetrated through to Engineer Hill. The Assistant Division Commander, Brigadier General Archibald V. Arnold, was manning a forward CP on Engineer Hill not far from the artillery. Arnold successfully organized a hasty defense on Engineer Hill using combat service support troops. This ad hoc force checked the Japanese advance long enough for infantry reinforcements to be rushed up from rest areas. Unable to continue the advance and with his force separated and incapable of mounting coordinated attacks, Yamasaki led a last disjointed and desperate assault that failed against the crest of Engineer Hill. The Japanese commander died in this attack. His surviving force of about 500 men committed mass suicide instead of surrendering. Over the next several days, the U.S. completed mopping up operations, with the ground force

²⁰Garfield, The Thousand-Mile War, 252.

commander declaring Attu secure on 30 May.²¹

The Japanese government wasted no time in cranking up its propaganda machine to put the best spin possible on the loss of Attu and their situation in the North Pacific. Typical of their domestic messages were:

Kiska is still in our hands. When the nation heard about the courageous suicidal charge of the Attu Garrison Unit, they expressed profound admiration and condolence. This added fuel to the fire of the national spirit and stimulated the production of munitions. In short, the Attu suicidal charge was a tremendous stimulant to the fighting spirit of our nation.²²

Not limiting the propaganda effort to reporting reaction only in the home islands, the government widely published the following messages from abroad:

When the incident of the Attu suicidal charge became known all over the world, every country praised their courage.... the Axis powers was [sic] particularly great....

The German Military Attache wrote: "We...wish to express our deepest admiration for the heroic deeds carried out by the Attu Garrison Unit, which fought to the last man...."

From the Italian Attache: "We...wish to express our deepest condolences for the heroic deaths of Colonel Yamasaki and his men. ...as long as the nation spirit remains as it is, Japan will emerge victorious."

²¹Ibid., 254. U.S. Army, "Attu Campaign, 17th Infantry Regiment," After Action Reports.

Routing the remaining pockets of Japanese continued through the first of June. CINCPAC's daily situation report of 7 June report 18 Japanese killed, that of 10 June show 66 more Japanese killed and one captured. U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," 7 June and 10 June 1943, Frames 1567 and 1569.

²²U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 176.

It is of interest to note that the Japanese did not shrink from calling Yamasaki's attack a "suicide attack." General Landrum, in the days following the attack, made the fact that Yamasaki had an objective (Massacre Bay beaches) a matter of command information.

According to the Japanese Ambassador in Russia: Generalissimo Stalin regarded the suicidal charge of the Attu Garrison Unit as the Japanese symbol of Bushido. He ordered the insertion of this incident in the primary school textbooks....²³

Though the Japanese government beat the propaganda drum to glorify the sacrifices of the Attu garrison, the 5,639 soldiers, sailors, and civilians on Kiska were not cheered by the defeat in the least. The Kiska garrison had tracked the conduct of Yamasaki's defense and ultimate destruction, observed the overflights of U.S. aircraft involved in the operation, and strengthened defenses. The Japanese knew that the Americans would soon turn their undivided attention to Kiska, further tightening the already tight naval and air blockade.²⁴

On Attu, the Americans completed the round up of the few remaining Japanese defenders and began a massive clean-up operation of the battlefield. Also, in keeping with the American way in the Aleutians, the Navy Construction Battalions (SeaBees) and Army engineers began constructing airfields--one on the south shore (eastern end) and one on the western side of Attu. What the Japanese could not do in twelve months, the Americans planned to do twice in a matter of days. On 8 June the strip on the eastern end of Attu (near Alexai Point) was complete enough to allow a transport plane to land. The Americans also occupied Shemya Island, long an objective of the Japanese--an objective that went unaccomplished.²⁵

²³Ibid.

²⁴U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 149.

²⁵U.S. Navy, "Admiral Nimitz Command Summary," Daily Situation Report from North Pacific, 5 June and 8 June 1943, Frame 1566 and 1567. The U.S. Navy combat narrative "The Aleutians Campaign," Office of Naval Intelligence reports show the first Attu flight strip operational on 9

By 5 June the Attu Landing Force had accounted for its casualties, and they were significant. DeWitt, on 1 April, had assured General Marshall that during the Attu assault the "...greatest enemy would be the weather and not the Japanese." DeWitt's estimate was correct regarding the weather, however he grossly underestimated the Japanese defenders. Against a Japanese garrison of about 2,800 troops, of which all but twenty-nine were killed (U.S. forces counted 2,350 Japanese dead), the Americans utilized about 11,000 soldiers. During the fifteen day main battle, the U.S. sustained 3,829 casualties, with 549 of this number killed in action and 1,148 wounded in action. The balance of the remaining casualties were the tragic 1,200 cases of cold weather injuries (frostbite and trenchfoot), 614 disease casualties, and 318 casualties from accidental and medical causes.²⁴

Even before Task Force Fifty-one sailed for Attu, CINCPAC and Western Defense Command had made proposals to the Joint Chiefs for the next phase of the Aleutians/North Pacific Campaign--reduction of the Kiska garrison. With Attu in American hands again and the occupation of Shemya and the construction of an airfield thereon, the U.S. completely severed any vestiges of a Japanese line of communication to Kiska. The Americans began a systematic bombardment campaign of Kiska by sea and air, despite the continuing unfavorable weather conditions.

June.

²⁴U.S. Army, "Army Battle Casualties and Nonbattle Deaths in World War II, Final Report, 7 December 1941-31 December 1946," Department of the Army, Statistical and Accounting Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, 31 December 1946, 88, 89. Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, United States Army in World War II, The Western Hemisphere (Washington, D.C: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1964), 295.

From 24 May to 15 August 1943, the Eleventh Air Force, dropped over 1,300 tons of bombs. During the same period, the Navy pounded Kiska with naval shell fire totalling 600 tons. Additionally, the aggressive U.S. airmen subjected the island to constant strafing attacks. The near by air bases on Amchitka, Attu, and Shemya enabled the U.S. fighters to make quick turn-around between sorties and to take advantage of the opening of weather "windows" over Kiska. During the period mentioned above, the Eleventh Air Force successfully completed 1,581 fighter sorties against Kiska.²⁷

Initially, only Admiral King fully supported the concept of directly reducing the Japanese garrison on Kiska. The decision boiled down to a choice between pursuing a war of attrition or opting for invasion. The big negative for the direct action choice included the requirement to assemble a larger amphibious force than that used for Operation LANDCRAB. The shortage of amphibious shipping continued to be critical for the allies in both theaters of war. This requirement, plus that of committing almost 20,000 combat troops to the region, initially caused the Army planners to prefer the attrition option.

King and his navy staff voiced a strong preference for taking direct action instead of maintaining the strict blockade. Naval forces in the North Pacific had been stretched to the limit in maintaining task groups on the western Aleutian blockade line (an area

²⁷U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 94. U.S. Army, "Official History of Alaskan Department," U.S. Army Alaskan Department, on microfilm, box number 3090, item 3499, Chapter IV, Appendix E (Part III), U.S. Army Combined Arms Research Library, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1946.

that lay between the bearings of 160° and 250° true from Kiska's Vega Point)). It is easy to understand why both Nimitz and King supported DeWitt's plan for offensive amphibious operations against Kiska instead of covering this immense, storm swept and fog shrouded area of ocean, with warships. The vessels were constantly battered by the rough North Pacific seas, the duty was particularly hard on the crews, and the naval assets were needed elsewhere in the Pacific.

In early June, despite the concerns of his army planners, Marshall consented to leave the final decision to King with the understanding that he, Marshall, would support whatever the navy recommended. King refused to make the decision on those conditions and instead recommended that the entire DeWitt/Nimitz plan for the Kiska invasion be turned over to the Joint Staff Planners for detailed study. On 11 June those planners came back to the Joint Chiefs with the recommendation that the operation be immediately approved with the exact date of the assault to be set by Nimitz and DeWitt. The Joint Chiefs concurred with the planners recommendation and approved the plan the same day.²⁰

The stated purpose of taking Kiska was, besides destroying the remaining Japanese forces in the Aleutians, to create a "base for future operations against enemy [sic] in North Pacific." The plan called for a supreme commander for all forces participating in the operation. Like Operation LANDCRAB, the Kiska operation would be under command of Commander, North Pacific Force and Task Force 16 (Kinkaid). The naval and amphibious forces would again be organized into Task Force Fifty-one (Rockwell) for the assault. The landing force

²⁰Morton, Strategy and Command: The First Two Years, 431-432.

commander would be Major General Charles H. Corlett, a Buckner assistant that had much experience in Alaska. After the awkward situation with General Brown on Attu, the Army General Staff allowed DeWitt to select the ground commander without comment.³⁹

Throughout July, while planning for Operation COTTAGE (Kiska invasion), the U.S. Navy conducted frequent bombardment of Kiska using battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. Major bombardments were conducted on 6 and 22 July, with the latter bombardment group consisting of two battleships, five cruisers, and nine destroyers. The 22 July mission was conducted in coordination with an attack by medium and heavy bombers of the Eleventh Air Force. The results of this mission was particularly effective owing, in addition to the heavy firepower (the navy expended 2,793 shells), to the unusually clear weather. Aerial reconnaissance showed extensive damage from this action, however Japanese records indicate the Kiska garrison suffered only fifteen dead, thirteen wounded, and twelve "establishments" badly damaged. The Japanese had industriously dug themselves into the Kiska underground with all of their personnel support facilities operating from these locations. This undoubtedly accounts for the relatively few casualties suffered by the Japanese during their occupation.⁴⁰

³⁹U.S. Navy, "Nimitz Command Summary," message from CINCPAC and CG, WDC to COMINCH, War Department, 292240 May 43, Frame 1564. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 100. Kinkaid was promoted to Vice Admiral after Operation LANDCRAB.

⁴⁰U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 95-97. U.S. Army, "Northern Area Monthly Combat Reports, Jan-May 1943, Japanese Monograph No. 47," Headquarters, Far East Command, n.d., 62. The Japanese had wired their underground facilities for electricity. The source for the electricity was a centralized power plant.

On 26 July, the two U.S. naval task groups maintaining the Kiska blockade entered into a night-time, radar directed gun engagement with targets detected by on-board systems of both groups. Rear Admiral Robert M. Giffen, Task Force Commander of two groups (Task Group 16.12 and 16.7), had been alerted to a probable attempt by the Japanese to reinforce Kiska. On 23 July, a Catalina flying boat reported multiple radar contacts 315 nautical miles west-southwest of Kiska. However contact was soon lost but this event, coupled with more intelligence updates from CINCPAC that pointed to Japanese movement toward the Aleutians, gave Giffen and his staff good reason to feel contact was imminent.

In the early morning on 26 July, Giffen's task force was about eighty miles south of Kiska, steaming east. At 0045 hours the battleship Mississippi, radar guard for the task force, detected multiple targets on radar to the northeast. These reports were immediately verified by the radar operators aboard the battleship New Mexico, and the cruisers Portland, and Wichita. Giffen immediately ordered a course change to due north, and plots of the "enemy" ships showed them moving north also--directly for Kiska. At this point radar indicated the enemy to be roughly seventy-five miles south of Kiska proceeding at sixteen knots, and well clear of land in deep water (24,000 feet).⁴¹

Closing to within 24,000 yards of the radar targets, Giffen ordered the cruisers and battleships that had radar contact to open

⁴¹ Bruce McCandless, Rear Admiral, USN (Ret.), "The Battle of the Pips," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, February 1958, 51, 53.

fire. The three cruisers in the van, Wichita, Louisville, and Portland commenced firing at 0113 and both of the battleships, New Mexico and Mississippi, followed suit almost immediately afterwards. Respectful of the Japanese 24-inch "long lance" torpedoes, Giffen decided to stand-off from around 20,000 yards and rely on his big guns and superior fire control systems. For almost one and a quarter hours, the big guns poured well over 1,000 shells (8- and 11-inch) onto these contacts. Two of the cruisers, San Francisco and Santa Fe, never established radar contact with the targets nor did every one of the destroyers. The radar operators aboard these cruisers could "see" the splashes of water thrown up by the exploding shells but, strange as it seems, could not "see" the vessels being fiercely engaged by the other warships of the task force. So savage was the firing that the Japanese on Kiska could easily see the muzzle flashes, even though they were seventy-five miles distant.⁴²

At 0222 hours contact with the targets was lost and Giffen closed on the area for battle damage assessment. In a detailed search that extended into the next day, no evidence was found that would indicate damage to an enemy flotilla--no oil slicks, no flotsam, and not even any whale blubber.⁴³

This action, which became known as the "Battle of the Pips," ended with the Americans still "in the dark" regarding the identity of the targets. Apparently, the contacts were radar/atmospheric anomalies

⁴²Ibid., 53.

⁴³It was common for the American airborne and naval radar to "paint" whales, especially during the summer when the migratory mammals were especially plentiful in the Aleutians waters.

that manifested themselves as hard targets. Whatever the cause of the phenomenon, the battle had significant consequences for the Americans and proved to be a fortuitous event for the Japanese. Ammunition magazines depleted and low on fuel, Gliffen's task force had to withdraw to their replenishment area south-southeast of Kiska. The task force arrived at the rendezvous point early on the 28th. The requirement to depart the blockade line late on the 27th left the southern and southwest approaches to Kiska open until late on 29 July. Even the two U.S. destroyers that had guarded the mouth of Kiska harbor against Japanese submarines had to be pulled off. The wily Japanese admiral commanding the Kiska evacuation force had been biding his time for an opening and, due to skill on his part and hardware malfunction on the American's part (fog of war and fog of the Aleutians), on 28 July his bid paid off.⁴⁴

About a month earlier, on 27 May, the Japanese had begun evacuating members of the Kiska garrison using submarines. This proved to be not only inefficient, it proved downright dangerous and costly. By 23 June when the procedure was abandoned, the Japanese had only evacuated 820 of the almost 6,000 man garrison. Three submarines had been sunk in this undertaking. The next plan that the commander of the Japanese Fifth Fleet, Vice Admiral S. Kawase, came up with was an evacuation by surface forces. To direct this effort, Kawase appointed Rear Admiral Masatomi Kimura, an officer experienced in the North

⁴⁴U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 97-98. Masataka Chihaya, "Mysterious Withdrawal from Kiska," United States Naval Institute Proceedings, February 1958, 44, 46. Dates and times used in this article are Tokyo time. The writer has converted this to the date/time used by the U.S. Navy during the period (Greenwich plus 9).

Pacific. Kimura assessed the allocated naval force, two light cruisers and four destroyers, and declared them inadequate. He requested a new type of high speed, radar equipped destroyer (the Shimakaze), and additional typical destroyers. Admiral Mineichi Koga, Combined Fleet CINC and successor to Yamamoto, responded by giving Kimura not only the Shimakaze but also five additional destroyers.⁴³

On Kiska, the Japanese had only ten surviving landing craft to use for transporting the troops from the beach out to the warships. This number of landing craft was insufficient to move all 5,200 troops in one lift, so Kimura took thirteen additional landing craft to Kiska aboard his warships. He did not want to remain in Kiska harbor any longer than necessary--to get caught in the harbor by the Eleventh Air Force could be disastrous. By 6 July Kimura was ready and, with a forecast of fog for the North Pacific in hand, departed Paramushiro with two light cruisers, ten destroyers, and a tanker. The route Kimura intended for the dangerous final approach into Kiska harbor was non-standard for the Japanese to date. He elected to proceed north well west of Kiska, enter the Bering Sea, turn east and then approach Kiska from the northeast.⁴⁴

Unwilling to discuss the Kiska evacuation using radio traffic (fearing American radio intercept capability), Vice Admiral Kawase had dispatched a submarine to fetch staff officers from Kiska to assist in the planning. Once the plan was approved, one of these officers was returned to brief the Kiska commanders--Rear Admiral Katsuzo Akiyama,

⁴³Chihaya, "Mysterious Withdrawal from Kiska," 31.

⁴⁴Ibid., 37.

commander of the naval garrison (51st Naval Base Commander), and Major General Tolchiro Mineki, commander of the army garrison (North Seas Garrison Force Commander). The key problem was how to key the garrison on what day to assemble the force on the beach for the evacuation. Since the operation hinged on the availability of fog, no exact date could be set. The solution decided upon was that the Kiska garrison would, beginning five days after Kimura departed Paramushiro, assemble on the beach from one-half hour before sunrise to midnight.⁴⁷

By 12 July, Kimura's evacuation force had been at sea for six days with the weather continuing relatively clear. Theorizing that it would be better to withdraw to Paramushiro in order to fight another day, Kimura, with low fuel and in imminent danger of detection by U.S. naval or air elements, called off the operation. Arriving back at Paramushiro, Kimura suffered severe criticism by members of the Fifth Fleet staff. Fleet Headquarters signalled Kiska to call off the nightly assembling of the troops on the beach--a procedure that had been conducted for five nights. After refining the plan back at Paramushiro, Kimura readied for another sortie. This time, in an effort to quell criticism, he invited the Fifth Fleet Commander to accompany the task force with his flag ship, the Tama.

⁴⁷Ibid., 37-38. Assembling the Kiska force on the beach could not be a subject taken lightly. In the event the Americans happened to catch the 5,200 man garrison massed on the beach with a naval bombardment the potential existed for the Japanese to sustain hundreds of casualties in minutes. Also, the Kiska defensive perimeter was extensive, requiring the defenders to march over rough terrain at distances of up to five miles from their defensive positions to the beach. Kawase's headquarters would send a short, coded signal to Kiska giving the date/time of Kimura's departure from Paramushiro, then start the nightly movement to the beach five days later. This procedure would occur each night until the fleet arrived in Kiska harbor.

Late on 21 July the Kimura task force again sailed for Kiska in heavy fog. What the Japanese had wished for they now had in huge, dense quantity. The fog slowed the task force, made navigation almost impossible, and increased the danger of collision. Six days later, after suffering a collision between a cruiser, two destroyers, and an escort vessel, the task force refueled from their tanker early on the 27th for the last time and began to ready for the final run to Kiska. Approaching on the 28th, the task force began receiving the directional beacon on Kiska which allowed adjustments to what had largely been, up to that point, navigation by dead reckoning due to the fog. Kimura had earlier decided to approach Kiska from the south-southwest, the traditional track used by the Japanese and the most direct, but more dangerous, of the routes. Ironically, his task force steamed right through the area that on the 26th had been the scene of the "Battle of the Pips." Unfortunately for the Americans, Giffen's task force was hundred's of miles to the east undergoing replenishment. The gate into Kiska had been left wide open.⁴⁰

At 1640 on 28 July the Japanese warships, gliding out of the heavy fog like ghosts, dropped anchor in Kiska Harbor. The well planned and rehearsed embarkation began immediately. Incredibly, 5,183 soldiers and sailors were moved from the beach, using Kiska's surviving landing craft and those transported from the Kurils, and embarked on the

⁴⁰Ibid., 41-43. Approaching the mouth of Kiska harbor, the nervous Japanese look-outs detected an ominous shape in the fog and gave the alarm taking the shape for an American cruiser. The Abukuma, Kimura's flagship, immediately executed an emergency turn and fired four torpedo's. The "enemy cruiser" turned out to be Little Kiska Island.

warships without incident. Fifty-five minutes after starting the embarkation, the task force weighed anchor and set out for Paramushiro. For the Kiska garrison it was the last chapter of a book spanning fourteen tough, dangerous, and generally unproductive months.

Ever since the Joint Chiefs approved Operation COTTAGE (Kiska invasion), Army and Navy commanders and staff were urgently organizing the allocated combat forces into combat teams and conducting intensive training. The training included not only amphibious operations, but also training on Japanese tactics and equipment and cold weather survival. Taking advantage of the lessons learned during the Attu battle, the soldiers were being reequipped with better wet and cold weather gear, and more importantly, trained in the use of that equipment, in an attempt to reduce non-combat casualties.

On 4 May 1943 Western Defense Command activated the headquarters that would retake Kiska--Amphibious Training Force #9 (ATF #9) commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett. The staff for ATF #9 came primarily from Western Defense Command and Alaska Defense Command. The ground troops allocated to ATF #9 consisted of the 7th Infantry Division with several additional regiments attached for Operation COTTAGE. Regiments of the Kiska invasion force were the 17th Infantry, 53rd Infantry (composite unit formed from ADC units), 87th Mountain Infantry (previously undergoing mountain training at Camp Hale, Colorado), 184th Infantry, 13th Canadian Infantry Brigade Group (a unit of 4,800 men called the Greenlight Force by the Canadians), and First Special Service Force (a specially trained unit of 700 Canadian troops trained for special operations). The American command attached a U.S.

combat service support battalion to the Regiment. Troop strength for Operation COTTAGE eventually totalled 34,400. Amphibious training for the troops already in the theater of operations took place under the guidance of Major General Holland M. Smith, USMC at Adak (Smith the same officer that trained the 7th Infantry Division in California for the Attu operation). The 87th Mountain trained at San Diego and Ft. Ord for the Kiska operation.⁴⁹

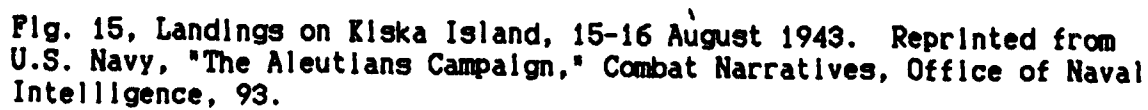
The plan developed by Rockwell and his staff called for the landing of the main force from the north (Bering Sea side), and focused on the central part of the island. These landings were to be preceded by the First Special Service Force (Canadian) to secure the key terrain to the south of the beaches. Included in the plan was a demonstration by miscellaneous warships and transports on the southern side of the island. Naval fire support would be provided by the battleships and cruisers of Task Force Fifty-one from sectors south and west of the island--the primary missions of these forces would actually be to cover the landings from any Japanese naval forces attempting to disrupt the operation (Refer to Figure 15, Plan for Landing on Kiska, page 164).⁵⁰

Amphibious training had progressed well, both in California and in the Aleutians. The troops also received intensive training in cold weather survival. This was in sharp contrast to the dearth of cold weather training conducted by the Attu invasion force--the American

⁴⁹U.S. Navy, "The Aleutian Campaign," 100-101. Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Faircloth, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, 296. Robert D. Burhans, The First Special Service Force: A War History of the North Americans, 1942-1944 (Nashville, Tennessee: The Battery Press, 1975), 23-30.

⁵⁰U.S. Navy, "The Aleutian Campaign," 101-102.

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commander's were determined to prevent a reoccurrence of the large number of frostbite, hyperthermia, and trench foot injuries incurred in Operation LANDCRAB. One veteran of the Aleutians campaign interviewed during research for this work remembers the lack of cold weather training, and the lack of confidence many of the troops had in operating in the severe weather, as one of the major failings of the Alaska Defense Command--a failing that resulted in many needless injuries that sharply reduced U.S. combat power.⁵¹

Training literature used for Operation COTTAGE troops included a "Soldiers' Manual" hurriedly printed and distributed to all troops. Improvements in equipment included the issue of water resistant boots, mittens, and other cold weather clothing. The heavy, blucher type loggers' boot worn by the 7th Infantry lacked water proofing and insulation under wet conditions and directly contributed to the high number of cold weather injuries to soldiers' feet. In his After Action Report of 10 June 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Albert V. Hartl, commander of 2nd Battalion, 17th Infantry, modestly summed his feelings regarding individual cold weather equipment in the following terms: "...our clothing as issued was not entirely suitable."⁵²

⁵¹Ibid., 101. February 1991 Interview by the author with James Benewiat, veteran of several combat operations in the Aleutians, including the occupation of Adak and Amchitka, concerning orientation and sustanment individual training program of the Alaska Defense Command.

⁵²U.S. Army, "After Action Report of Commander, BCT 17-1, Subject: Report of Action on Attu, 10 June 1945, contained in Attu Campaign, 7-30 May 43, 17th Infantry Regiment, Initial Landing, Holtz Bay Pass," Microfilm Box 356, Item 1556, Combined Arms Research Library (Archives), Command and General Staff College, Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas.

Also based on Attu experience, General Corlett organized his allocated units around the basic fighting unit for the operation--the Battalion Landing Team (BLT). This organization was structured to have the sustainment and administration supporting units integrated, giving it the capability to fight its way ashore, establishing a position, then sustaining itself. The distribution was done in June and July to give the BLT maximum training time together.³³

Starting mid-July and continuing until the end of the month, the units in California and Canada were moved into the Aleutian staging areas on Adak and Amchitka. Even in the staging areas, training continued. This differed greatly from procedures used during the Attu operation when the units were kept for an extended time aboard the cramped transports. While the troops underwent last minute training, the ALF headquarters organized the Battalion Landing Teams into three major groups, designated Northern Sector Force, Southern Sector Force, and the Floating Reserve. The two functional sectors each had responsibility for one of the two zones of action into which Kiska had been divided and each of the Sector Group's were assigned a commander and staff. Brigadier General Joseph L. Ready directed operations in the Northern Sector and Colonel Edwin M. Sutherland commanded the Southern Sector.³⁴

³³U.S. Army, "Official History of the Alaskan Department," Chapter IV, 10. The components of these BLT's were an infantry battalion, a cannon platoon, an anti-tank platoon, an infantry service detachment, an infantry medical detachment, a field artillery battery (reinforced), a combat engineer platoon, and a regimental headquarters company detachment.

³⁴Ibid., 17-18.

When Corlett requested a postponement of D-Day, set for 15 August, to train about 1,000 green replacements and to assess intelligence reports that indicated a possible Japanese evacuation, Kinkaid refused. On 9 August Kinkaid declared Operation Plan 6-43 (Operation COTTAGE) to be in effect. As a result, the BLT's and their layers of controlling headquarters completed loading and set sail for Kiska beginning 9 August, with the last units sailing on 14 August. H-Hour for the operation was set for 0620 hours on 15 August.

Task Force 16, commanded by Admiral Rockwell and with Amphibious Task Force #9 embarked, maneuvered into position for the final assault of the Aleutian campaign without incident. Rockwell's powerful screening force had detected no activity from Japanese air or naval units at all since the end of July. Similarly, intelligence assets at CINCPAC reported no unusual Japanese radio traffic that would indicate the Japanese were aware of Operation COTTAGE. Shortly after 0100 on 15 August, elements of the First Special Service Force (Canadian) landed on Kiska to carry out their special operations missions as a prelude to the main landings scheduled for 0620. Landing without incident, these units quickly seized their objectives. Of course the Japanese defenders had evacuated the island eighteen days before. The Canadian special operations teams would not have been able to gain sufficient intelligence in the pre-landing hours to realize that the island had been abandoned. Kiska is twenty-five miles by eight miles with typically rugged Aleutian terrain--it would require days to scour the island in sufficient detail to confirm the American's earlier

suspicions.³³

At 0621 hours the first wave of the main invasion landing craft hit the beach. Follow-on echelons continued the smooth running amphibious operation without any serious incident. When Rockwell and Corlett received the initial reports of no enemy contact they logically assumed the Japanese had abandoned the beach and harbor areas and withdrawn their combat forces into the mountains. Based on this assumption, they decided to continue landings into the next day, as planned, to clear the rugged inland terrain.

By the end of the day on the 17th the Americans had cleared all key terrain on Kiska, and elements of the First Special Service Regiment had secured Little Kiska (the Japanese had maintained a detachment on this small island throughout the campaign). The operation had actually gone quite well though Nimitz and DeWitt were later criticized for invading a deserted island. Tragically, 21 U.S. soldiers were killed by friendly fire and 121 were wounded or suffered various medical problems requiring evacuation. The Canadians suffered four men killed and four wounded during the operation. At sea the destroyer Abner Read suffered an underwater explosion, most probably a Japanese mine, that blew off the fantail. The force of this explosion killed seventy sailors, with forty-seven of the ships company sustaining serious wounds.³⁴

The completion of Operation COTTAGE brought a practical end to the Aleutians Campaign. The Americans had allowed over 5,000 of the enemy

³³Ibid., 19-20.

³⁴Ibid., 24-30. U.S. Navy, "The Aleutians Campaign," 103. Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, 298.

to escape, however they finally forced the Japanese from the region that had dominated the concerns of the population of the U.S. Pacific Northwest and Alaska for fourteen months. In a U.S. Public Opinion Research nation-wide poll taken in June 1942, 71% of the people could locate Alaska and the Aleutians on a map. Only 21%, could fully locate the Hawaiian Islands. This illustrates the impact the war in the North Pacific had on the American public.⁵⁷

Despite harsh censorship in the early months of the campaign (bitterly resented by the U.S. press, especially the weekly news magazines), the American public managed to keep abreast of the general situation in the Aleutians. Victory there, even in the wake of other victories in the Pacific in 1943, went far in improving morale at home.

From a purely military aspect, securing the Aleutians and gaining control of the North Pacific allowed critical resources, flowing to the north in huge quantities, to be used in the Southwest and Central Pacific. It also allowed headquarter staffs--from CINCPAC to the Joint Chiefs of Staff--to focus on planning other campaigns (though planning did continue toward expanding the North Pacific theater to threaten the Japanese from the Aleutians and the eastern Soviet Union). The U.S. did continue to mature the North Pacific theater by completing a modern infrastructure from which such offenses could be launched.

⁵⁷Hadley Cantrill, ed., Public Opinion, 1935-1946 (Princeton: Office of Public Opinion Research, 1951), 32, 51, 66.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Aleutians Campaign: A Current Perspective

War plans cover every aspect of a war, and weave them all into a single operation that must have a single, ultimate objective in which all particular aims are reconciled.

Karl von Clausewitz, On War

MISSION

The Joint Chiefs of Staff never issued a mission statement to the Commander in Chief, Pacific Ocean Area for the North Pacific theater of operations. Instead, operational directives were issued prior to each Japanese threat (attack into the Aleutians in June 1942) and combat operation (occupation of Amchitka and amphibious assault on Attu, and Kiska). President Roosevelt talked in 1942 of various possible directives to the CINC to eject the Japanese from the Aleutians, but these statements were never formulated into a mission statement. Lacking an explicit statement, the conduct of operations was left in the hands of, not only CINCPAC, but also the land force commander (Lieutenant General DeWitt). Because of this failing, no coherent planning could be conducted in the framework of an overall mission analysis effort. What could be done in recognition of the impossibility of an outright attack on enemy forces in the theater of operations (Attu and Kiska Islands) was to defend key forces and installations, and retaining control of a limited part of the theater. In this case, Nimitz decided to defend the army and navy installations in the eastern Aleutians (Unalakleet Army Airfield and Dutch Harbor) and in the Gulf of Alaska (Kodiak Naval Station, Kodiak Island). Implied in

this operational objective was control of the sea and air in the vicinity of these key sites. Once priorities in the Pacific theater of war allowed the shift of resources to the North Pacific and the establishment of forward operating bases, operational objectives could be redefined to include ejection or destruction of Japanese forces. The process was accomplished in this manner not because the North Pacific was declared a secondary theater of operations but because of the nature of the enemy threat.

FORCES

In considering force levels, mix, and capability, the CINC was initially obligated to respond to the Japanese threat by committing available forces after development of the Midway defense plan. Due to the reduced strength of the Pacific Fleet, the CINC could not complete an up front analysis of the forces required to properly defend the North Pacific and Aleutians. In light of the immediate threat of June '42, Nimitz made a wise division of forces. Of course, Task Force Eight did not directly engage the Japanese Fifth fleet when it attacked Dutch Harbor on 2 and 3 June, nor did it interfere with the Japanese occupation of Attu and Kiska a few days later. This brings Nimitz' decision to even move forces into the North Pacific into question. It may have been a more sound decision to commit all forces to the Midway defense and allow the North Pacific to remain uncontested except for the land and air forces in Alaska and on Unalaska Island (Dutch Harbor).

While it is true that intercepts of Japanese signals about the

planned attack on Midway enabled the Americans to paint a fairly complete picture of the Japanese main effort, doubt did exist about the accuracy of that intelligence estimate. It was with a great deal of relief at CINCPAC that the Americans gained contact with the Japanese naval force bearing down on Midway. Further, Nimitz realized the importance of the North Pacific and the vulnerability of Alaska to even minor Japanese attacks--he considered the Aleutians the gateway to Alaska and felt compelled to deploy forces to defend the region.

An additional factor that entered into Nimitz' decision to send naval surface forces was the concern uncontested landings in the Aleutians, or even Dutch Harbor or Kodiak, would have on the American public. Public morale had recently suffered a blow on 6 May with the surrender of Corregidor. He felt that a small task force reinforced with land base aircraft could, by wise use of the Aleutian weather, turn back a Japanese landing attempt. Nimitz couldn't defend fully in the Central and North Pacific so he undertook an economy of force operation that produced at an appropriate level of payoff and at an acceptable level of risk.

During planning for the amphibious assaults on Attu and Kiska, decisions about force mix and strength were largely driven by events not only in the Pacific theater, but also in the European Theater. The campaign in the North Pacific consisted of three phases. The first phase started in late May and continued through August 1942 with the occupation and consolidation of the western Aleutians by the Japanese. The second phase, the projection of combat power into the archipelago, achieve air superiority, and gain control of the sea, went into high

gear in late August with the occupation of Adak Island and culminated in March 1943 with the Battle of the Komandorski Islands. The aerial battle started in June on a limited basis, however the dependency on land-based air and the distance from the existing U.S. air bases in the eastern Aleutians meant the air war could not start in earnest until forward operating bases could be established. The third phase began in May 1943 with the amphibious operation to retake Attu, and ended with the Kiska landings in August 1943.

AREA GEOGRAPHIC AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

The strategic importance of the Aleutians is rooted in the geometric realities of the Great Circle Route. This route passes over Alaska and parts of the Aleutians, reducing the distance from California to Japan to just over 3,000 statute miles. In comparison, the route through the central Pacific is over 1,500 statute miles longer. Adding to the attractiveness of the North Pacific route is the many islands that comprise the Aleutian archipelago. Though the islands west of Unalaska (on which Dutch Harbor is located) lacked any type of infrastructure, military planners were drawn to the geographical potential of the Aleutians. The Aleutians' natural chain of islands provide the opportunity to establish sustanment bases from which combat power can be projected along the shortest route to the Eastern Soviet Union and Japan. Unfortunately, the region's physical environment off-set these advantages.

The physical environment of the Aleutian Islands can be characterized, plain and simple, as fog shrouded and wind swept.

Similarly, the North Pacific is wracked by fast moving storms that generate high seas. Dividing the waters of the Arctic and Pacific Oceans, the islands come under the influence of unique weather patterns and ocean currents. The collision of the Oyashio Current pouring southward out of the Arctic Ocean with the Kuroshio (Black) and North Pacific Current tend to produce a dense and seemingly constant fog. Major Arctic and Siberian cold fronts frequently clash with the warmer air over the Pacific and, under influence of strong low pressure areas, create strong winds that lash the Aleutians and create rough seas.

These weather conditions created advantages and disadvantages for both the Japanese and the Americans throughout the campaign. In the early months of the campaign, the fog and storms benefited the Japanese because it shielded their forces from U.S. air power. Also, Japanese naval personnel were more experienced in operations in the North Pacific--mainly by service aboard vessels of the Japanese fishing fleet. The Japanese relied on rudimentary measures to operate their ships in the fog and thus held an advantage over the Americans early on. An example of an effective technique used by the Japanese was the use of a towed buoy from each vessel to allow the following vessel a margin of safety in the event it drifted from its position in the convoy. Of course later the Americans fielded radar on their primary warships which gave them a technological edge in navigating and fighting in reduced visibility.

The U.S. Eleventh Air Force saw its flight operations seriously interrupted by the weather. Sorties were aborted routinely despite innovative and risky flight procedures to overcome the limitations to

flight. Throughout the campaign, the bombers conducted dead reckoning bombing runs from the Kiska and Attu mountain peaks protruding from the fog and cloud to bomb blind. The weather had a significant impact during Operation LANDCRAB when close air support was effectively negated by fog and low cloud. The Aleutians Campaign was very much a battle dominated as much by the physical environment as with the enemy.

COMMAND AND CONTROL

Forces in the North Pacific during World War II labored and fought without a unified command in place. The Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Area (Nimitz) exercised command and control of the theater of operations through a subordinate. This arrangement had the effect of lengthening communications to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and complicating the decision making process. Detailed coordination had to be conducted through the Alaska Defense Command (Buckner) to the Western Defense Command (DeWitt) concerning every aspect of the campaign. Admiral King admitted that the lack of a unified command in the North Pacific created problems though he claimed success on the whole for the U.S. command and control system. One of the reasons the Americans were so successful and the command and control system worked as well as it did can be attributed to the length of the campaign. Given the same situation but with a more aggressive and determined enemy, the convoluted U.S. command and control system may not have worked so well.

An example of system deficiencies can be illustrated by the debate

over selection of the forward operating base on Adak. The original proposal to establish the first base west of Umnak Island came from Buckner's command.¹ The Army wanted to construct an airfield and operating base on Tanaga Island, however Theobald objected to the poor natural harbor of that island and offered Adak as an alternative. This dispute was elevated past CINCPAC and embroiled the Joint Chiefs of Staff in a bitter debate. King became so emotional over the issue that he plainly stated that if Adak wasn't selected over Tanaga the "whole project could be cancelled." General Marshall wisely gave way to the Navy's wishes in this relatively minor matter and the landings were made on Adak on 30 August 1942. This decision should have been made at the CINC level with only a concurrence or non-concurrence from the Joint Chiefs.

In an effort to solve problems in joint operations, a Joint Operations Center was established at Fort Richardson in early summer 1942. This center failed to function with any degree of efficiency at all, so it was moved to Kodiak Island, headquarters of the North Pacific Force and Task Force Eight (Theobald), in August. Until then, the coordination of joint operations, including the sharing of

¹Buckner had built an airfield on Umnak Island, called Umnak Army Airfield during the war and Cape Air Force Base after the war, to protect the U.S. Navy base at Dutch Harbor. Construction began on 17 January 1942 and was complete enough to allow forward basing of fighter aircraft in late May. Lacking an early warning system, the fighters on Umnak could have been destroyed on the ground when the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor on 2 June. However the Japanese, lacking intelligence assets in the Aleutians, did not even know of the airfield's existence.

Intelligence information, was "slow and faulty."²

Of an even more serious note on the command and control system in the North Pacific were allegations by naval officers at Kodiak that army air was slow to respond to the Dutch Harbor attacks because of "the Army's lack of understanding of command arrangements."³

Theoretically, the Eleventh Air Force was placed under the operational control of Commander, Task Force 8 in late May just prior to the Dutch Harbor attacks. Unfortunately, action to implement this command arrangement wasn't wholeheartedly taken until after the Dutch Harbor raid when a terse message from Washington incontrovertibly put both services on the same sheet of music.

Hovering above all command and control issues in Alaska and the Aleutians was the lack of a spirit of cooperation between Theobald and Buckner. In June 1941 serious consideration was given to establishing a unified command in Alaska. The politics of this problem was not confined to the Joint Chiefs and the War Department--Governor Ernest Gruening and several U.S. Senators even became involved in the situation. After studying the problem, the Joint Chiefs reaffirmed their earlier decision regarding unified command for Alaska. By early January 1943, Theobald was discreetly reassigned effectively solving the cooperation problems between the two services.

In organizing a command and control system for the amphibious

²Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, United States Army in World War II, The Western Hemisphere (Washington, D.C: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1964), 266.

³Ibid.

assaults on Attu and Kiska CINCPAC vested over-all command of the operations in Commander, Task Force Eight (Kinkaid). The command system for the actual amphibious assault was built around an amphibious task force--Task Force Fifty-one (Rockwell). The coordination of joint operations was carried out by the joint staff of this task force. In what would become the standard system for amphibious operations throughout the Pacific, command of the operation would pass to the ground or land component commander once he was established ashore and could assume control. This decision was in fact made by the ground commander. The system worked quite well, excepting the incident during Operation LANDCRAB (Attu) that resulted in Admiral Kinkaid's relief of General Brown, the ground force commander. Even then, when all factors involved in the situation are considered, the influence of the army commanders in the theater (Buckner and DeWitt) in urging that Brown be relieved of command deflate any claim of inter-service parochialism on Kinkaid's part.

On balance, even considering the initial breakdown in joint interoperability, the public debate over operational decisions, and the quasi-public squabbles between Theobald and Buckner, the command system in the North Pacific and Alaska worked quite well. This was especially true after January 1943 with the assignment of Admiral Kinkaid to command the North Pacific Force and Task Force Eight.

Employment

The North Pacific theater of operations was declared a fleet opposed operation, mandating a naval commander to serve as Nimitz'

representative in the region. Also, the Eleventh Air Force and naval air were both employed and fought under the direction of a single air commander (Commander, Eleventh Air Force). After overcoming the initial problems that manifested themselves during the Dutch Harbor attack, the Eleventh Air Force and attached naval aviation units bore the load in carrying the fight to the Japanese on Kiska. Flying from their bases at Cold Bay on the Alaska Peninsula and Umnak Army Air Field in the eastern Aleutians, the air forces of the North Pacific Force pounded Kiska throughout the summer and fall in 1942. Attu lay beyond the range of U.S. aircraft and had to carry much reduced bomb loads just to reach Kiska. It quickly became obvious that the Americans must project more power into the Aleutians and this required a mature base of support in Alaska and forward operating bases further out in the Aleutians.

To accomplish this, however, the U.S. Navy had to gain control of the North Pacific Ocean. In the months following the Japanese landings on Attu and Kiska, the Japanese Imperial Fleet maintained overwhelming combat power in the waters of the western Aleutians. With the exception of the ineffectual naval bombardment from warships of Task Force Eight in early August 1942, the U.S. Navy did not attempt to directly contest control of the sea west of Adak Island until January 1943.

Beginning with the establishment of the important operating base on Adak and the less critical base on Atka in September 1942 and continuing through the occupation of Amchitka in January 1943, the Americans steadily expanded westward through the Aleutians. The

Japanese viewed the occupation of Adak as definitive evidence of U.S. intent to attack Kiska. To counter this move by the Americans, the Japanese decided to seize Amchitka to block additional westward movement by the Americans. However, before they could husband the necessary resources the Americans occupied Amchitka thus giving them the upper hand in gaining sea and air superiority in the western Aleutians.

By the end of January 1943 the U.S. Navy, working with the Eleventh Air Force, had made its major move to cut the Japanese sea lines of communication with the western Aleutians. By March, the Japanese made a major attempt to tear down the U.S. blockade, resupply their garrisons, and regain control of western Aleutian waters. They failed miserably on 26 March in the Battle of the Komandorski Islands. This failure was a major turning point, sealed the fate of the Japanese garrisons, and validated the American's operational plan. It only remained for CINCPAC to assemble the required combat forces once the situation across the Pacific allowed the diversion of resources to the North Pacific.

The U.S. effort to maintain pressure on Kiska by means available--air and naval bombardment--was very effective despite the adverse weather. In February 1943, aircraft dropped 150 tons of bombs on Kiska. Attempts are made at comparing this effort by the Eleventh Air Force with that of the Eighth Air Force in Europe to depict the secondary priority of the North Pacific. A better comparison can be made with the other Allied effort on-going in the Pacific at the time--the Rabaul campaign. In December the Allies delivered 197 tons

of bombs against the Japanese on Rabaul compared to the 150 tons dropped on Kiska in January. By spring, the Eleventh Air Force was routinely delivering three times this tonnage on Kiska and the Navy was shelling Kiska with heavy shells from cruisers and battleships. This aerial pounding was sustained despite non-combat aircraft loss rates that were over twice as high as other Pacific theaters.*

For the assault on Attu, the Americans put together a comprehensive amphibious force that was well organized for the mission at hand. The major shortfall, other than shortcomings with the employment of crew-served weapons and equipment, vehicles, and individual clothing and equipment, was the under estimation of combat forces required for the operation. This failure stemmed from an initial estimate that Attu was defended by only 500 Japanese, adjusted in later estimates to 1,700 (still over 600 troops too low). Employment of the ground force, built around elements of the 7th Infantry Division was sound throughout the operation with the exception of a few key points.

The Americans failed to allow for the near impossible trafficability over the tundra when designing their fire support plan. Once ashore, the artillery was stranded in the immediate vicinity of the beachhead which drastically reduced its effectiveness. This, coupled with heavy fog that severely restricted the effectiveness of

*The aircraft loss rate due to direct non-combat causes in the North Pacific was 6.5 to 1 compared to a 3 to 1 for the rest of the Pacific theater of war. This high rate was due to the weather hazards in the Aleutians. United States Strategic Bombing Survey, The Campaigns of the Pacific War, United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific) (Washington, D.C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1946), 85.

naval gunfire and aircraft close air support, robbed the Americans of key combat multipliers.

The failure of the Americans to train the 7th Infantry Division at an Intermediate Staging Base in the Aleutians resulted in a drop in combat power. The troops had never experienced muskeg or tundra, and were ill-trained and ill-equipped to handle the cold, wet conditions of Attu. In fact, the troops were acclimatized to California and had, prior to undergoing amphibious training off the coast of California, been involved only in desert training in the Mojave.

The initial under estimation of enemy forces, loss of combat multipliers, and high casualty rates caused by inadequate training closed the gap between U.S. superiority and Japanese inferiority of forces sufficient to place the success of Operation LANDCRAB in jeopardy. The Americans were forced to commit all of their reserves to the operation before realizing success. Victorious but costly--for every hundred Japanese killed, seventy-one Americans were killed or wounded--the battle to retake Attu was second only to Iwo Jima in the ratio of American to Japanese casualties.³

Following the operation to retake Attu, the U.S. set their sights on Kiska. Forces for Operation COTTAGE were employed with the same efficiency of organization and execution as Operation LANDCRAB, except the hard lessons learned on Attu were used to correct shortfalls with the Kiska force. The only failure that can be looked to for analysis is that of the intelligence effort.

Neither Nimitz, Kinkaid, nor Buckner read the intelligence

³Ibid., 295.

Indicators correctly (although Buckner alone felt that something was up on Kiska and recommended that a reconnaissance mission should be conducted) and missed the fact that the Japanese had evacuated the entire Kiska garrison on 28 July. The intelligence officers of every command in the North Pacific--Eleventh Air Force, Alaska Defense Command, and even Kinkaid's own North Pacific Force pointed to a significant change in the Kiska garrison. Yet Kinkaid refused to send reconnaissance units ashore ahead of the planned assault.

Proceeding with the full-scale amphibious assault--with the approximately 35,000 man combined assault force (Canada committed two brigade-sized units to Operation COTTAGE) supported by over a hundred warships--without confirming or denying the intelligence has been severely criticized. Admiral Kinkaid made a conscious decision to proceed with the operation even in light of indications that the situation on Kiska had changed. Aside from the ninety-one U.S. and Canadian troops killed, following through with the full assault consumed invaluable resources sorely needed elsewhere in the theater.⁴

The employment of forces in the North Pacific and the operational techniques used were sufficiently tailored to the environment to achieve maximum combat effectiveness. There were deficiencies in certain battlefield operating systems--most notably intelligence and fire support--that did hinder effective combat effectiveness. Throughout the campaign, the U.S. commanders skillfully utilized economy of force and agility to maintain the initiative.

⁴Twenty-one ground troops killed on Kiska plus seventy sailors killed aboard the U.S. destroyer Abner Read.

SUSTAINMENT

Sustainment, perhaps even more so than aggressive combat, weighted the scale to the American side. Initially the Japanese enjoyed--and perhaps squandered--air and sea superiority in the western Aleutians. With secure sea lines of communication and sufficient shipping to build then sustain strong garrisons in the Aleutians, they failed to focus their efforts in key areas of base development. Foremost is their failure to deploy sufficient engineer and construction units to quickly build airfields from which land based aircraft could fight for air parity and assist the navy in maintaining superiority in the North Pacific. In comparison, the Americans time and again had at least a fighter strip operational within days of occupying forward islands, then continued expanding and building to increase capability.

Another advantage the Americans had was the initiative gained from Buckner's frantic construction of a fairly complete theater infrastructure in Alaska, starting even before the war and gaining speed after Pearl Harbor. By the time of the Japanese move into the Aleutians, the Americans had major naval installations at Kodiak and Dutch Harbor and airfields, not only in Alaska's interior, but also at Cold Bay on the Alaskan Peninsula and on Umnak Island just west of Dutch Harbor. These theater sustainment bases gave the U.S. a launching point from which to drive out into the Aleutian Chain in due course.

To get supplies into the theater, the Americans enjoyed multiple, secure sea lines of communication from ports in the Pacific Northwest

and from Pearl Harbor. Roads and railroads were built throughout Alaska for the distribution of supplies, however the logistics build-up for the Aleutian Campaign largely bypassed the Alaskan mainland and went directly into the islands (including Kodiak Island). To keep supplies moving into Alaska, a railway was built from the ice-free port at Whittier, Alaska to the main rail line on the Anchorage side of the mountain range. From this point, materiel could be moved north on the Anchorage railroad or transferred to a different transportation mode. Additional port facilities were constructed at Anchorage, Juneau, and Seward to handle the increased flow of materiel.

Local procurement of coal and lumber met all local needs in Alaska, but both of these two commodities had to be transported to the Aleutians. In addition, construction material was sent from the U.S. in ever increasing amounts. In 1941, for example, 182,531 tons of construction material was sent into Alaska from Seattle. In 1942, the amount had increased to 585,443 tons. Despite this, the lack of enough supply shipping slowed the build-up greatly. Adding to the demand on shipping was the requirement to continue the transport of materiel to support the civilian population throughout Alaska. Alaska could produce almost none of its food and consumable requirements, requiring almost 100% support from the U.S. The Army and Navy both established marine repair shops at Kodiak to speed maintenance of supply vessels--a requirement that exceeded the norm due to the rough seas the vessels were subjected to in the North Pacific--in an effort to continue the materiel buildup.

The sustainment of the replacement personnel flow into the North

Pacific, exclusive of tactical units that deployed into the theater for specific combat operations, totalled 131,741 troops for 1941 through 1943 (end of the campaign). In comparison the Central Pacific received 164,313 troops, the South Pacific 133,214 troops, and the Southwest Pacific 221,904 troops. This flow of replacement troops into Alaska and the Aleutians represented 20% of the total troops moved into the Pacific during those years.⁷ When this total is added to the tactical units that fought in the theater (7th Infantry Division, Service Units, and Canadian units) during Operations LANDCRAB and COTTAGE, the total is close to 30% of new troops introduced into the theater. The personnel replacement system adequately supported the North Pacific.

In the same time period (1941-1943) the U.S. Army alone shipped 3,375,948 tons of cargo into Alaska, including the Aleutians. Using the number of measurement tons of materiel shipped to each of the Pacific theaters of operation as a basis to weigh relative priorities in the Pacific theater, a case can be made that the North Pacific enjoyed a very high priority. Only 2,280,018 tons of cargo went into the Central Pacific (this does not include navy materiel), 1,446,665 tons into the South Pacific, and 2,272,415 tons went to the Southwest Pacific. The North Pacific received 36% of all materiel shipped into the Pacific from 1941 through 1943 by the U.S. Army.⁸

Though the U.S. Army and Navy command and control system faltered at times due to an inability to cooperate in joint matters, the

⁷Richard M. Leighton and Robert W. Coakley, Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940-1943, United States Army in World II, The War Department (Washington, D. C: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1955), 732.

⁸Ibid., 733.

logistics services worked together from the outset. A cross-servicing agreement resulted in a single service providing a particular class of supply for both. For instance, fresh provisions were provided through the Army Marketing System in Seattle and loaded aboard refrigerator ships for deliver to both army and navy bases in Alaska. An accounting system allowed the support to be conducted across service lines with no significant problems. A similar joint agreement for petroleum products resulted in the army providing non-bulk fuel and lubricants throughout the North Pacific and Alaska, except for Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, and Sitka. The latter bases were major naval fueling stations and were supplied through regular navy channels. The navy provided bulk fuel for both services.

During both the build-up and combat phase the U.S. functioned with a severe shortage of supply and service units. Massive amounts of materiel flowed into the theater and, unfortunately, the flow was at times overwhelming due to the lack of supply units to properly receive, store, and issue. Moreover, the supply and service units committed to the North Pacific received little amphibious training and was forced to rely on improvisation during the operations to overcome, not only normal supply and service problems, but also the peculiarities of amphibious warfare.

In the amphibious assault on Attu, the inability to clear the beaches is in a great part due to the lack of service support units to deal with the volume of supplies landed on the beaches. Though loading for the amphibious operation was planned and carried out extremely well, and the plan for the unloading was also completed in detail, the

execution of the supply plan was a disaster. By D-Day plus one, the third echelon of combat troops completed their landing but no supplies had been put across the beach. The troops, after consuming the single food ration they had carried ashore, went unfed for several days because of the break-down of the supply system. The failure to get supplies ashore, including the troop's sleeping bags which were to be pushed to the troops, contributed to the high number of non-combat injuries among the assault troops.*

Except for the shortage of supply vessels to transport materiel into the theater, Alaska and the Aleutians actually had priority for infrastructure and base development. The entry and exit of U.S. Navy warships and U.S. Army combat units can not be interpreted as an abandonment of the U.S. campaign in the North Pacific in favor of other theaters. Recognition must be made of the type of economy of force strategy pursued by Admiral Nimitz and the Joint Chiefs in not only the Pacific Ocean Areas, but also throughout the Pacific theater of war.

The sustainment effort for Operation LANDCRAB forces suffered from several key deficiencies. First among these deficiencies lay in the manning function of operational sustainment--poor individual clothing and equipment and a system of personnel replacements (either unit or individual).

The poor quality of the troop's individual clothing--especially footwear and rain gear--led to a significant depletion of infantry

*U.S. Army, "Official History of the Alaskan Department," Headquarters, Alaskan Department, n.d., 1st endorsement by Historical Division, WDSS, Pentagon, Washington, D.C., 14 January 1945, Chapter VII, Logistics.

fighting strength. Besides the 549 soldiers killed in action and the 1,148 wounded in action, the Americans lost an additional 2,100 to non-battle injuries. The majority of these injuries were trenchfoot and frostbite caused by the lack of an insulated and water-proof boot. The leather, logger-type blucher boot worn by the majority of the 7th Infantry Division troops became wet very soon after landing resulting in the complete loss of insulation. The Americans had a one-piece heavy coat that offered some degree of protection from the rain, however many of the after action reports of the Infantry battallions recommended the use of a two piece ensemble with better water proofing.

The Americans launched Operation LANDCRAB without planning for a personnel replacement system. Beyond the tactical reserve--100% of which was committed to the battle--the plan called for the island to be seized with only the troops comprising the original task force. One reason for this was the underestimation of the strength and determination of the Japanese on Attu and the estimate that the operation would last only 72 hours. With the high combat casualties, non-battle injuries (together over 25% of the total force ashore), and the requirement to syphon infantry to haul supplies inland from the beach, the American commanders came close to diluting their combat power below that necessary to complete the destruction of the Japanese force. The Japanese came very close to completely stalling the American assault. If this had occurred, the Americans would have had to bring up fresh troops from the Alaska mainland and resupplied the entire naval and ground task force. This delay would have resulted in

the diversion of even more resources from the Central Pacific and given the Japanese a great moral and propaganda victory.

Many of the logistical lessons learned during Operation LANDCRAB were applied to sustainment planning for Operation COTTAGE. Involving a much larger task force (almost 35,000 soldiers), COTTAGE would, more so than Attu, require the proper application of sustainment and amphibious principles. Adding to the scope of the problem was the inclusion of two brigade sized Canadian units that required combat service support from the Americans. The task force commander assigned a U.S. service support battalion each of these brigades to provide direct support--an arrangement that worked extremely well.

The tough logistics requirements of the North Pacific and Alaska served to provide the senior commanders with invaluable experience. Kinkaid would participate in the great island hopping campaign across the Central Pacific and Buckner would command the U.S. Tenth Army in the Okinawa campaign. Key combat units--the 7th Infantry Division, the First Special Services Regiment, and other principal staff officers and commanders--benefited from the North Pacific campaign and applied the experience to other theaters throughout the Pacific and in Europe.

DEPLOYMENT

The means to effectively and rapidly deploy combat forces both on an inter- and intra-theater basis plagued the American commanders throughout the North Pacific campaign. Operational decisions were made, altered, and cancelled based on the availability of landing craft and other amphibious shipping. This consideration went beyond even the

U.S. Joint Chiefs level and became a topic of the Combined Chiefs and, at the Casablanca Conference, a matter of discussion between the President and Prime Minister.

Deployment considerations for sustainment operations were less critical than those involved with the strategic or operational deployment of combat forces. With secure lines of communication, the Americans were able to use contractor and commercial vessels to deploy not only cargo, but also troops into the theater.

The deployment of major combat units into the North Pacific was no doubt strongly influenced by political considerations. The American public felt strongly that the Japanese should be forced out of the Aleutians, even after it became clear to military strategists that the Japanese garrisons were defensive bases only. Once approval to mount U.S. offensive operations was obtained from the Joint Chiefs, forces and resources were assembled and deployed in a timely manner.

TRAINING

The training program of the Alaska Defense Command ran the gamut from excellent to non-existent. During the hectic build-up in Alaska during the post-Pearl Harbor days, small units of technical troops--airfield services, anti-aircraft, supply and services--were rushed to Alaska. The subsequent command relationships for these units and the decentralized nature of their mission made training hard to plan and execute. Many soldiers received no training in the theater at all, and were left to their own devices to handle situations like cold weather operations.

Alaska Defense Command's combat units, most of whom had parent headquarters to provide centralized training, had well developed training plans and executed these plans very well. Of course most of these units did not participate in Operation LANDCRAB and, though they were well acclimatized to the conditions, never had a chance to assist in training the troops of the 7th Infantry Division.

The 7th Infantry Division, around which the combat forces for LANDCRAB were organized, conducted extensive and well run amphibious training exercises in California that were designed and monitored by the U.S. Marine Corps general, Holland Smith. The one deficient area in the training plan was the failure to conduct training under Aleutian conditions at an Intermediate Staging Base prior to entering combat. The first time the officers and troops set foot in the Aleutians was on Attu's beaches. They were ill-prepared for the experience. Another significant training shortfall was the lack of training between the 7th Infantry Division and the Eleventh Air Force. This resulted in reduced effectiveness of close air support, already greatly hampered by the bad weather, and several cases of U.S. aircraft strafing friendly troops. In preparing for Operation COTTAGE, Admiral Kinkaid directed that training of all troops be first conducted in theater before participating in the operation.

The Aleutians Campaign came to an end in August 1943 with the completion of Operation COTTAGE. The War Department gradually changed the status of the theater to a much lower level of threat from possible invasion from Japan, but continued planning for use of the Aleutians as an axis of attack. If the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan,

the Joint Staff planners wanted the option of establishing airfields and forward sustainment bases in eastern Siberia and on the Kamchatka peninsula. The airfields on Shemya and Amchitka were lengthened and prepared for use, if needed, by U.S. B-29 Superfortresses to bomb Japan. Largely due to the particularly bad weather around Amchitka (southernmost of the Aleutian Chain), the generally bad flying weather in the western Aleutians, and the successes in the Central Pacific and China the islands were never used as B-29 bases.

At the direction of the Joint Chiefs, using the staffs of Buckner's Alaska Defense Command and Kinkaid's North Pacific Force, planning began on a concept plan for the invasion of the northern Kurils in the spring of 1945. The Joint Chiefs agreed with General DeWitt that forces were available for the seizure of the northern Kurils as early as spring 1944. However it was pointed out by Admiral King that unless that attack was given sufficient priority to allow a full scale invasion through northern Japan the Americans could likely find themselves in the same position as the Japanese in the Aleutians. The premature occupation of positions that put forces far forward of those in other theaters of operation, at the end of lengthy lines of communication, and vulnerable to strong counterattack would contribute nothing to the effort in the Pacific theater of war.

As the war progressed in the Central Pacific the possibility of a major operational campaign in the North Pacific receded rapidly. By January 1944 the strength of Buckner's Alaska Defense Command had dropped to 113,000 troops. Construction of the infrastructure continued throughout Alaska and the Aleutians with the improvement of airfields,

roads, ports, and communication and navigation systems. The airfields in the Aleutians would gain importance after World War II in support of national level intelligence collection efforts directed at the eastern part of the Soviet Union.

The fourteen month Aleutian campaign did not hinge upon significant strategic considerations that shaped the conduct of the war in other theaters. After the summer of 1942 it was obvious to the U.S. planners that the Japanese were not going to conduct any additional offensive operations in the Aleutians. The occupation of Kiska was a strategic defensive move to keep the Americans beyond range of strikes on Japan proper. The campaign objective to force the Japanese out of the Aleutians was established to fulfill a psychological need of the American people. Certainly with the effectiveness of the air and sea blockade of the western Aleutians, the Japanese were completely bottled up and cut off from their sustainment base.

The Japanese never did develop a comprehensive strategy for the North Pacific other than to extend their eastern defensive perimeter. Even then they backed into this fragmented strategy by way of playing up their success in the North Pacific in the wake of the Midway defeat. By establishing garrisons in the Aleutians relatively cheaply, the gains were never exploited nor were adequate resources committed to strengthening defenses. When it became obvious that the Americans were building combat power in the theater to launch an offensive, the Japanese belatedly rushed additional materiel toward Kiska and Attu. Most of these resources went to the bottom of the North Pacific ocean.

Regarding the strategic implications of the campaign, both sides

committed valuable resources to the theater. The Americans spent billions of dollars--primarily to construct an infrastructure in Alaska--and diverted critical equipment and combat troops. By the end of 1943 the U.S. Corps of Engineers alone was spending over one million dollars every day in construction costs. Many other projects were implemented in Alaska as an exception to the operating command due to their strategic importance. Examples are the 138 million dollar Alaska-Canadian highway and the Alaska-Siberian Air Ferry Route that ran through Canada to Fairbanks where aircraft were transferred to the Russians. U.S. troop strength in the theater exceeded 400,000 in the summer of 1943--manpower that could have been put to good use in the Southwest Pacific. Compared to the other theaters, the North Pacific was relatively bloodless.¹⁰

The Japanese lost over 3,000 personnel in the Aleutians Campaign and over twenty-five vessels. The real drain on the Japanese war effort came when they heavily reinforced their Kuril garrisons with a major part of the Japanese 7th Division and the Fifth Fleet with additional cargo vessels, warships, and aircraft.

The Aleutians Campaign offers an excellent study of a secondary theater of operations that had a degree of strategic consideration and was fought using the principle of war of economy of force. On balance

¹⁰The Alaska Defense Command suffered only 1,875 total battle casualties. This figure does not include the 1,839 battle casualties sustained by forces external to the Alaska Defense Command (i.e. 7th Infantry Division, etc.) that participated in Operations LANDCRAB and COTTAGE. U.S. Army, "Army Battle Casualties and Nonbattle Deaths in World War II, Final Report, 7 December 1941-31 December 1946," Statistical and Accounting Branch, Office of the Adjutant General, n.d., 36, 58, 88.

the U.S. gained significant psychological advantage in the Aleutians. The Pacific Fleet and major army units gained confidence and experience that paid dividends in the major battles to come in other parts of the Pacific. The North Pacific illustrates the advantages of unified command, joint air, land, and sea operations, and operational campaign development have practical and valuable lessons for the modern operational planner.

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