THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS CAMPAIGN: THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ITS PLANNING PROCESS AND EXECUTION

A Monograph

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During the planning and execution of the Aleutian Islands Campaign, what did the commanders and planners do well, and what could they have done to reduce the loss of life? Analyzing this campaign reveals strengths and weaknesses of the planning process, which resulted in an erratic execution of the plan. Furthermore, this analysis reveals how modern doctrine accounts for the weaknesses exhibited in the planning of this campaign.

Examination reveals how the "island-hopping" approach enabled the Eleventh Air Force to build combat power, facilitated a strategic turning movement against the Japanese on Kiska, and served as the only viable alternative to assaulting Kiska first. Similarly, the Eleventh Air Force provided constant and effective pressure on the enemy, expedited the Japanese abandonment of Kiska, and offered crucial reconnaissance and close air support during the assault on Attu. On the other hand, the intelligence estimate did not include accurate maps for use during the Attu assault, resulted in a hasty and drastic change to the assault plan, and ensured an anti-climactic assault on the abandoned island of Kiska. Finally, by misconstruing Japanese intent and perceiving idleness in the Pacific, political and senior military leaders conducted a flawed strategic assessment, resulting in the expenditure of valuable resources for insignificant gains. Regardless of its strategic insignificance, a campaign analysis still proves beneficial for today's operational planners.

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ABSTRACT

THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS CAMPAIGN: THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF ITS PLANNING PROCESS AND EXECUTION, by MAJ Jeremy Easley, 50 pages.

During the planning and execution of the Aleutian Islands Campaign, what did the commanders and planners do well, and what could they have done differently to reduce the loss of life? An analysis of this campaign reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the planning process, which resulted in a somewhat erratic execution of the plan. Furthermore, this analysis reveals how modern doctrine accounts for the weaknesses exhibited in the planning of this campaign.

Examination of this campaign revealed how the “island-hopping” approach enabled the Eleventh Air Force to build combat power during the westward advance, facilitated a strategic turning movement against the Japanese on Kiska, and served as the only viable alternative to assaulting Kiska first. Similarly, the contribution of the Eleventh Air Force provided the only constant and effective pressure on the enemy, expedited the Japanese abandonment of Kiska, and offered crucial reconnaissance and close air support needed during the assault on Attu. On the other hand, the intelligence analysis and estimate did not include accurate maps for use during the Attu assault, resulted in a hasty and drastic change to the assault plan, and ensured the anti-climactic amphibious assault on the abandoned island of Kiska. Finally, by misconstruing Japanese intent and perceiving idleness in the Pacific, political and senior military leaders conducted a flawed strategic assessment, which ended with the expenditure of valuable resources for insignificant gains. Regardless of its strategic insignificance during the war, an analysis of this campaign still proves beneficial for today’s operational planners.

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ACRONYMS

ADC	Alaska Defense Command
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
AKA	Attack Cargo Ship
APA	Attack Transport Ship
BCT	Battalion Combat Team
FM	Field Manual
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JOPP	Joint Operation Planning Process
JP	Joint Publication

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A soldier stood at the Pearly Gate;
His face was wan and old.
He gently asked the man of fate
Admission to the fold.
"What have you done," St. Peter asked,
"To gain admission here?"
"I've been in the Aleutians
For nigh unto a year."
Then the gates swung open sharply
As St. Peter tolled the bell.
"Come in," said he, "and take a harp. You've had your share of hell."
—Warrant Officer Boswell Boomhower, untitled poem written in summer 1943

INTRODUCTION

Many military historians have claimed that the Aleutian Islands Campaign served as nothing but a sideshow of the larger Pacific Theater of War in World War II.[1] These historians reason that the combat power diverted to conduct this campaign would have proven more beneficial to commanders in the South Pacific, and that the campaign's outcome contributed very little to the American and Japanese strategic end states. Even Major General Simon B. Buckner Jr., the Alaska Defense Commander (ADC), said in 1941, "we're not even the second team up here–we're a sandlot club."[2] As a result, some would say that further significant academic and military study of this campaign is rather pointless. Yet this campaign led to the second highest percentage loss of American to Japanese troops killed.[3] In the Battle of Attu alone, of the 15,000 total U.S. Army personnel who participated, losses amounted to 549 killed in action, 1,148 wounded in action, and 2,100 evacuated for non-battle injuries. Eclipsed only by the losses at Iwo

[1]Samuel Eliot Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944*, vol. VIII of *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company in Association with the Atlantic Monthly Press, 1982), 66; Robert A. Anderson, "Attu: WWII's Bloody Sideshow," *Army* (May 1983): 46.

[2]Brian Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1969), 12. Garfield wrote, "In terms of Japanese destroyed, the cost of taking Attu was second only to Iwo Jima: for every hundred of the enemy on the island, about seventy-one Americans were killed or wounded."

[3]Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, vol. 4, bk. 2 of *United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), 295.

Jima, Americans suffered 71 killed or wounded for every 100 Japanese personnel on Attu.[4] This heavy cost of American lives makes one wonder what commanders and planners could have done differently to reduce the loss in life for relatively minimal gains. Operational planners can glean many lessons when studying this military campaign from the American perspective. Furthermore, despite the fact that this campaign had no decisive effect on the outcome of the fighting in World War II's Pacific Theater, military historians and operational planners who study it can see the later applications of lessons learned – particularly in amphibious assaults, aerial and naval bombardment preparation, and the so-called "island hopping" technique, which proved so successful in the final years of the War in the Pacific. Strategic significance of the outcome aside, this campaign gave the United States Army an early experience of WWII-style amphibious assaults.[5]

One can therefore derive much benefit from analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the planning process for the Aleutian Islands Campaign of 1943 – particularly how the planning affected the outcome of the campaign, and what insights this can provide to modern-day campaign planners. In particular, the erratic execution of the campaign highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the planning process used to develop the campaign plan. The strengths in execution include the amphibious island-hopping approach and effective air effort, while the weaknesses include an incomplete intelligence analysis prior to the assaults on Attu and Kiska and a flawed strategic assessment.

During the conduct of the Aleutians campaign, the operational distances required both army and navy commanders to conduct sequential amphibious landings, in what the Americans

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[4]George L. MacGarrigle, *Aleutian Islands: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II* (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1992), 23; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 295.

[5]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 207.

adopted as the island-hopping theater strategy, to support the final assaults on Attu and Kiska. Historians Mark Roehrs and William Renzi assert that the concept of island-hopping developed from the debate between General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz that took place in late 1943, during which they struggled to identify the best strategy to facilitate the final assault on the Japanese main island. This debate centered on relative merits of a strategic approach through the Southwest Pacific versus the Central Pacific. The Joint Chiefs of Staff ultimately decided upon a combination of the two. During this debate, they also worked out the beginnings of an operational approach, including the concept of island-hopping.[6] With respect to the Aleutians Campaign, in bypassing the Japanese stronghold of Kiska, for an initial assault on Attu, the campaign planners acted in accordance with a central tenet of the future island-hopping strategy – the practice of bypassing strongholds in order to seize less fortified areas, thereby saving American lives while enabling interdiction of Japanese shipping and resupply of the strongholds.[7] As for the effective air effort, the Eleventh Air Force conducted frequent sorties, from June 1942 through the completion of the campaign, establishing favorable conditions for the final assaults.

The weaknesses in American planning for the campaign, however, outweigh the strengths, and provide more insight for the modern campaign planner. An incomplete intelligence analysis resulted in haphazard conduct of the assault on Attu, and the operational surprise of conducting an uncontested amphibious assault on the enemy-deserted island of Kiska. Moreover, a flawed strategic assessment by political leaders and planners from the Army and Navy led the

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[6]Robert W. Coakley and Richard M. Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, vol. 1, bk. 6 of *United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1968), 78-79, 518-19; Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare in 1943-1944*, vol. 1, bk. 4 of *United States Army in World War II* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), 190-96; Mark D. Roehrs and William A. Renzi, *World War II in the Pacific*, 2nd ed. (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 122-24.

[7]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 279.

Americans to undertake a campaign that, in retrospect, appears to have wasted time and resources for no appreciable operational benefit.

A chronological background of major events in this campaign provides context within which one can understand when and how these strengths and weaknesses unfolded during the Aleutian Island Campaign and the Battles of Attu and Kiska. The Alaska Defense Command, 11th Air Force, and Task Force 8 (all headquarters of echelons above division size) cooperatively planned the Aleutian Island Campaign. As for the Battle of Attu, although these same headquarters provided assistance, the 7th Infantry Division conducted the majority of the planning, and served as the ground force command and control headquarters on the island. In the course of assessing the campaign, a review of the 1941 version of *Field Manual (FM) 100-5, Field Service Regulations (Operations)* and the 1942 version of *FM 100-15, Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, which were utilized by these organizations, will shed light on why commanders and their staffs planned and executed the campaign the way that they did. Given their significant impact on contemporary thinking throughout the Army, any analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Aleutian Island Campaign must consider the influence of these two key doctrinal manuals. Contrasting this contemporary planning doctrine with the actual planning and execution of this campaign serves as the foundation for the analysis that follows. Finally, comparison of contemporary doctrine with today's U.S. Army Operations Process, as described in *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, The Operations Process*, and the Joint Operation Planning Process (JOPP), as described in *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning*, illustrates how today's operational planners can learn from the Aleutians

campaign, enabling them to capitalize on its strengths while avoiding its pitfalls when planning similar campaigns in the future.[8]

Methodology

In 1941, the United States Army published an update to its 1939 *FM 100-5, Tentative Field Service Regulations (Operations)*. The 1939 manual encapsulated the development and progression of doctrine during the interwar period, and replaced the dated doctrine of the 1923 *Field Service Regulations*. Remarkably, by 1941 the United States Army had grown to eight times its size in 1939, and therefore it required updated doctrine for adequate command and control of such a large organization. The answer to this requirement appeared in the form of the 1941 version of *FM 100-5*. A quick review its table of contents reveals that this manual covered subjects including Arms & Services, Exercise of Command, Intelligence & Reconnaissance, Offensive & Defensive Operations, and the Division (organization and combat employment). Discourse on these subjects would of course be most valuable to planners at echelons of division and below.[9]

In addition to *FM 100-5*, the War Department published a provisional version of *FM 100-15, A Manual for Commanders of Large Units* in 1930. Among the many lessons Army leaders learned from World War I, they understood that contemporary warfare required new command

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[8]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 270; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 195–98; Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2011); Department of the Army Headquarters, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, The Operations Process (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012).

[9]Christopher R. Gabel, "Preface," in *FM 100-5 Field Service Regulations - Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1992), 3, http://cgsc.contentdm.oclc.org/utils/getfile/collection/p4013coll9/id/20/filename/21.pdf (accessed October 14, 2014); War Department, *FM 100-5 Field Service Regulations - Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1941), III-V.

and control processes, leading to their effort to describe such processes in doctrine.[10] Guided largely by the ideas of American Expeditionary Force Commander John J. Pershing, the United States Army of World War I fielded exceptionally large organizational structures to effectively counter the enemy. The War Department's response to the command and control processes of such large organizations, found its place in *FM 100-15*. However, as mentioned earlier, this version of the manual appeared in provisional form with the understanding that it served as a body of current thought that doctrine writers would revise at a later date.[11]

The War Department finally published the updated version of this manual on 29 June 1942. The updated manual differed from its predecessor primarily regarding the unit echelons to which it applied. As written in the 1930 version, "the term 'large unit' applied to the division, corps, army, and group of armies."[12] By contrast, the 1942 version served "as a guide for commanders and staffs of air forces, corps, armies, or a group of armies."[13] Significantly, the War Department made the conscious decision to remove the division echelon from the category "large unit." This manual included chapters that covered topics ranging from Planning a Campaign, Strategic Concentration, Strategic Maneuvers, and Larger Units, to Air Forces and Defense of Air Bases. Undoubtedly, this manual would serve as the base doctrine and body of knowledge for

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[10]Mark E. Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-10.

[11]C. P. Summerall, "Preface," in *FM 100-15 A Manual For Commanders of Large Units (Provisional)*, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1930), III.

[12]Ibid.

[13]George C. Marshall, "Preface," in *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), II.

campaign planners of this period.[14] Finally, the War Department published this manual prior to planning for the Aleutian Island Campaign, resulting in its availability as approved doctrine for use by the campaign planners. Thus, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the planning and execution of the campaign will consider both the strategic and operational context, and the influence of contemporary doctrine as contained in these manuals.

Finally, a brief examination of applicable modern doctrine such as that contained in *JP 5-0* and *ADRP 5-0* will illustrate the significance of lessons learned from the Aleutian Island Campaign for planners seeking to prepare coherent and complete orders and plans for future operations. This examination reveals how the development of modern doctrine encapsulates these strengths and prevents a repeat of these weaknesses.

Regardless of the availability of the new contemporary doctrine, planners did not adequately account for all considerations influencing the outcome of the campaign. The campaign resulted in a victory, but only achieved through a somewhat flawed campaign. From the past to the present, doctrine writers have captured the lessons learned from this campaign, like many of the other campaigns in the Pacific, in modern joint and Army doctrine.

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[14]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1942), III; M.R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945*, Campaigns and Commanders (University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 50-55. Due to the late publication of *FM 100-15*, there is some concern as to whether or not commanders and planners utilized this doctrinal manual. However, these individuals attended the General Services School and the Command and General Staff College in the 1920s-30s. At these two schools, LTC Oliver Prescott Robinson and COL William K. Naylor lectured and formed the body of knowledge for the 1942 version of *FM 100-15*. This manual is the doctrinal codification of *The Principles of Strategy for an Independent Corps or Army in a Theater of Operations* published by the Command and General Staff School (1935-36). This document is the compilation of *The Fundamentals of Military Strategy* by LTC Robinson (1928) and *Principles of Strategy* by COL William K. Naylor (1921). So whether or not they strictly used the contemporary version of *FM 100-15*, one can surmise they followed the essence of this manual as it formed the body of their previous professional military education.

Background

The Aleutian Islands are comprised of 120 volcanic islands extending west from the southwestern tip of Alaska. The islands stretch for nearly a thousand miles from the Alaska mainland with Attu, the farthest western American island, laying only ninety miles from Kamchatka, Russia. The easternmost island is Unimak followed by Unalaska, which contains the port town of Dutch Harbor. Kiska is 610 miles west of Dutch Harbor, and Attu lays nearly two hundred miles to the west of Kiska. Unalaska is nearly two thousand miles from Hawaii and San Francisco.[15] Although there are many islands in this chain, the order of islands, of pertinence for the Aleutian Island campaign, from east to west is: Unalaska, Umnak, Atka, Adak, Tanaga, Amchitka, Kiska, and Attu.

[15]Office of Naval Intelligence, *The Aleutians Campaign: June 1942-August 1943* (Washington, DC: Publications Branch, Office of Naval Intelligence, United States Navy, 1945), 2; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 195.

Figure 1: Map of Aleutian Island Chain

Source: Dr. Curtis King, map by Combat Studies Institute, email message with author, January 6, 2014.

On 29 December 1934, Japan formally announced its withdrawal from the *Five Powers Treaty*, which placed strict limitations on the expansion of its navy. Subsequently, Japan and America fell into a naval arms race for supremacy in the Pacific. This arms race, however, did not yet necessitate the expansion of garrisons in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. Then, on 27 December 1938, Admiral Arthur Hepburn submitted the findings of his report to congress, leading to its authorization of $19 million for the construction of air and naval bases in Alaska and the Aleutian Islands, in addition to naval expansion projects elsewhere in the Pacific that served as a countermeasure to the increasing likelihood of Japanese aggression. In August 1940, the United States and Canada established the Permanent Joint Board on Defense to facilitate the collective establishment of bases to support both countries' strategic interests in the Pacific. That

same month, a Joint Planning Committee for the board recommended building Army and Navy airfields and bases at Sitka, Kodiak, Dutch Harbor, Anchorage, and Fairbanks. Over the next six months, under naval contracting, Army and Navy planners resolved land issues for the garrisons of Army personnel responsible for securing these new bases. Finally, construction on Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor began in January and February 1941.[16]

In May 1940, General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, authorized the temporary emergency garrisoning of approximately 3,100 personnel to provide security for both army bases and airfields and naval bases in Alaska. On 9 July 1940, at the recommendation of General John L. DeWitt, Commanding General of Western Defense Command, Colonel Buckner assumed command of all Army troops in Alaska. These troops consolidated under the new moniker of the Alaska Defense Command, and Buckner received a promotion to Brigadier General commensurate with his increased responsibilities on 1 September 1940. Despite plans to garrison troops on Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor, DeWitt and Buckner agreed to postpone their arrival until completion of housing. This plan changed with the March 1942 submission of an Army G-2 report indicating that Japan might take advantage of the Soviet Union's focus on fighting the Germans to attack Alaska. By the end of summer 1941, troop numbers at those locations jumped from a temporary emergency garrison of 3,100 to a permanent garrison of 13,300 personnel.[17]

THE ALEUTIANS CAMPAIGN

Days after his promotion, Buckner submitted a report to DeWitt in which he assessed a major overland Japanese invasion by way of Alaska as infeasible, but he considered it likely that the Japanese could threaten Alaska and mainland America with bombers if the Navy lost control

[16]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 7, 223-24, 234-36.

[17]Ibid., 230–31, 237.

of the North Pacific. Based on this assessment, he outlined his plan for the defense of Alaska, which included constructing auxiliary airfields to enable dispersal of friendly aircraft, a chain of air bases connecting the United States and Alaska, an aircraft warning service, and the establishment of a transport and combat aircraft reserve equipped and trained in cold weather flying. Buckner envisioned a concept of aggressive defense with the use of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands to project power into the Western Pacific in the event of a war with Japan. In order to do so, he planned to take advantage of the new capabilities provided by long-range bombers. Buckner surveyed several locations before finally receiving DeWitt's approval to construct an auxiliary airfield at Port Heiden, and all-purpose airfields on Umnak and at Cold Bay. When the Japanese attacked Dutch Harbor on 3 June 1942, these new and secretly built airfields proved pivotal in altering Japan's plan to land on Adak, Kiska, and Attu to just the latter two.[18]

On 15 May 1942, in a Honolulu basement and only days after cryptanalysts in Washington D.C. broke the Japanese Naval Code, Lieutenant Commander Joseph J. Rochefort Jr. pieced together several intercepted Japanese messages. From these intercepts, he informed Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, that the Japanese planned to conduct a two-pronged attack on Midway and the Aleutian Islands shortly after 1 June. In order to prepare for this attack, the Navy organized Task Force 8, under Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald, to reinforce the sparse Alaskan Navy. Theobald departed Honolulu on 21 May 1942 with five cruisers, fourteen destroyers, six submarines, and other auxiliary vessels. At the same time, the Eleventh Air Force, commanded by Brigadier General William O. Butler, consolidated all Army and Navy air units in Alaska into a task force consisting of four heavy bombers, thirty-one medium bombers, and several squadrons of P-40 Warhawks. Although this new task force fell

[18]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 7; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 240, 242.

under the command of Theobald's Task Force 8, Nimitz and DeWitt agreed upon a different command relationship between the ADC and Task Force 8 – one of "mutual cooperation" between Buckner and Theobald. Although a common practice amongst Army and Naval leaders in the Pacific since 1941, this resulted in a relationship fraught with difficulties for Buckner and Theobald. On 27 May 1942, Task Force 8 arrived at Kodiak and found the Alaskan defenders making final preparations for the imminent Japanese attack. [19]

Imperial General Headquarters issued Navy Order Eighteen on 5 May 1942, ordering the Combined Imperial Fleet, under the command of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, to conduct a two-pronged attack on Midway and the Aleutian Islands in order to destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet. Yamamoto gave the duly named Northern Area Force, under the command of Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya, the requirement of occupying Adak, Attu, and Kiska. Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, commander of the Second Mobile Force of the Northern Area Force, led the attack on Dutch Harbor. After receiving orders, Hosogaya left Ominato on 25 May 1942 with two aircraft carriers, six cruisers, twelve destroyers, three transports, and various submarines and support vessels. Hosogaya intended the Northern Area Force to conduct a diversionary attack on Dutch Harbor, and subsequently conduct amphibious assaults on Adak, Attu, and Kiska. He divided his command into two separate task forces to carry out these assaults. First, a task force of 1,200 troops would land on Adak and destroy any American forces on the island. At that point, this force would withdraw and support the occupation of Attu and Kiska. The second task force of approximately 550 combat and 700 troops would sail directly to and occupy Kiska.[20]

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[19]Michael Smith, *The Emperor's Codes* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2000), 137-38; Stephen Budiansky, *Battle of Wits* (New York, NY: Touchstone Books, 2000), 12-15; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 12, 15, 18; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 165, 260.

[20]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 3, 7; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 259.

As the Japanese Northern Area Force sailed east for Dutch Harbor, it took advantage of an eastward approaching storm front to mask its movement. While Buckner had established a seemingly effective aircraft warning system, weather played a key role in masking the Japanese force. At the time of the task force's approach, a Catalina patrol boat plane assigned to provide early warning of an impending attack spotted the Japanese fleet through a break in the clouds around noon on 2 June 1942, approximately 400 miles south of Kiska. With the time required for intelligence personnel to vet and disseminate incoming information, the Japanese force closed to within 250 miles southeast of Dutch Harbor before the American defenders there received the reports and began to prepare for the imminent attack. At 2:43 am on 3 June 1942, Japanese carriers *Ryujo* and *Junyo* launched their compliment of bombers, torpedo, and fighter planes for their attack on Dutch Harbor. Luckily for the Americans, Japanese intelligence estimates, provided to Hosogaya before his fleet's departure, led him to believe that the nearest American planes were at Kodiak, hundreds of miles from Dutch Harbor, when in fact, they were much closer at Umnak and Cold Bay.[21]

At 5:45 am on 3 June 1942, the Japanese aircraft commenced bombing and strafing runs at Dutch Harbor. Upon completion of their attack, a second wave of aircraft launched at 9:00 am to attack five destroyers sighted by the first wave. Weather closed in over Dutch Harbor and forced these aircraft to return to their carriers unsuccessful. These attacks on the first day resulted in twenty-five KIA and some damage to barracks and other facilities, but they proved relatively insignificant given the size of the attacking force. During the course of the attack, anti-aircraft guns at Dutch Harbor shot down two aircraft, and fighters at Umnak shot down two of four cruiser-launched aircraft that overflew the island. Further limiting Japanese success, weather on Umnak quickly grew overcast, thus preventing Japanese discovery of the airfield. After the return

[21]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 10-11; Wilder, "Weather as the Decisive Factor of the Aleutian Campaign, June 1942-August 1943," 26.

of the Japanese aircraft, Kakuta attempted to carry out orders as planned by providing air support for the Adak landing, but foreseeing the weather precluding his timely arrival, he instead opted for a follow-up attack on 4 June 1942. This second round of attacks destroyed part of a naval hospital and four large oil tanks, and inflicted heavy damage on a beached ship, the *Northwestern*, which the Americans used as a field-expedient barracks. Unable to prevent this second round of attacks, fighters from Umnak successfully intercepted and downed four of *Junyo's* eight aircraft upon their return from Dutch Harbor. However, during this attack Japanese forces discovered the location of the airfield at Umnak. Additionally, a Navy Catalina patrol plane spotted the Japanese task force early on 4 June, and radioed for bombers at Kodiak and Umnak. When the bombers arrived, they successfully released several bombs and two torpedoes with no damage to any Japanese vessels despite conflicting friendly reports of battle damage. Ultimately, in the two-day Dutch Harbor attack, the U.S. Army Air Force lost five planes, the U.S. Navy lost six patrol planes, and the Japanese lost ten aircraft.[22]

Shortly after launching Japanese aircraft for the second attack on Dutch Harbor, Hosogaya and Kakuta received a distressing message from Yamamoto indicating the imminent failure of the Midway attack, and ordered Hosogaya to delay the Aleutian landings and sail for Midway. While waiting for the return of Kakuta's aircraft, Hosogaya, commanding the occupation forces, changed the course of his fleet to head for Midway. Then, before Kakuta's aircraft returned, the two Japanese commanders received another change in orders, directing them to continue the attack and occupation. In light of the failure at Midway, Yamamoto and his staff viewed any level of success important to maintaining morale on the home front. Faced with this new order, Hosogaya reconsidered the size of his occupation force given the location of a new American airfield at Umnak, and on 5 June 1942 decided to postpone the Adak attack in favor of

[22]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 38; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 261-62.

only assaulting Attu and Kiska.[23] The occupation of these two islands would still ensure the attainment of the strategic aim.

Task Force 8 quickly responded to the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor by deploying the seaplane tender *Gillis* to Atka Island's Nazan Bay. On 10 June, one of the *Gillis*' seaplanes discovered the Japanese occupation of Kiska. Over the next three days, both these seaplanes and Army bombers from Umnak and Cold Bay conducted several attacks on Kiska, but inflicted no visible damage on their targets. Shortly afterwards, the threat of a Japanese counterattack by flying boats forced the withdrawal of the *Gillis*, leaving the responsibility of attacking to the Eleventh Air Force bombers from Cold Bay, Umnak, and Kodiak. The bombers continued to attack through the rest of June and July, but with constantly poor weather and low clouds in overcast skies, only half of the aircraft could locate and bomb their targets, and if they managed to locate their targets they inflicted only minor damage. Theobald sent four cruisers under the command of Rear Admiral William "Poco" W. Smith to assist the Eleventh Air Force by conducting a naval bombardment on 7 August. Sardonically, Japanese spotter planes called in fire from Kiska's batteries, and Smith, enraged, let loose every high explosive round in his magazine in a seven-minute continuous barrage that "plowed" a huge hole in the Kiska tundra a half-mile from any target of importance. It started to appear that only a large-scale invasion would expel the Japanese out of the Aleutian Islands. As early as 15 June, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) started to come to this conclusion. [24]

The JCS assessed Japan's occupation of the Aleutians as an effort to emplace a covering force for Japanese expansion into the Siberian maritime environment and the Kamchatka

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[23]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 42.

[24]AAF Historical Office, *Army Air Forces In the War Against Japan: 1941-1942* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, Army Air Forces, 1945), 126; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 263-64; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 121.

Peninsula, which might include the seizure and occupation of Saint Lawrence Island and Nome. Upon hearing of this threat, Marshall ordered the reinforcement of Nome and Port Heiden with personnel and antiaircraft guns, and sent the Eleventh Air Force two heavy and two medium bombers squadrons and an entire fighter group. Buckner and DeWitt developed similar assessments to that of the JCS, but grew more concerned that the Japanese occupation and build-up of Attu and Kiska signaled an eventual offensive eastward to seize Dutch Harbor. To prevent this from happening and force Japanese expulsion from the Aleutians, Buckner drew up plans to emplace advanced air bases increasingly farther westward, initially to Tanaga Island, thus enabling aerial bombardment and to provide air support for the eventual amphibious assault on Kiska. As Buckner and DeWitt prepared these recommendations to brief leaders in Washington, they received a visit from Brigadier General Laurence S. Kuter, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, who informed them that the War Department viewed the situation in the Aleutian Islands with little importance. Kuter remarked that American forces should maintain a defensive posture in this region, and that few, if any, additional air reinforcements would be forthcoming. Marshall quickly disavowed Kuter's remarks to Buckner and DeWitt, but Kuter's remarks did signify a growing reluctance in Washington to commit additional forces in the Aleutians. A joint directive issued on 2 July to commence limited offensives in the South Pacific confirmed this assessment, and effectively ruled out the use of Pacific Fleet forces, including the North Pacific's Amphibious Forces, in the Aleutians. For the time being, any Aleutian offensive would have to be undertaken by Army and Navy forces currently in Alaska.[25]

In light of scarce resources, DeWitt submitted a revised plan on 16 July to occupy Tanaga Island as an air base and to station 3,200 troops there to halt any Japanese expansion east, and to set conditions for an eventual assault on Kiska. The Navy, in Washington, and at Theobald's

[25]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 264-66.

insistence, recommended the occupation of Adak Island instead. Theobald warned of navigational hazards at landing sites, and Adak offered a more secure harbor. Buckner's survey team warned that construction of an airbase on Adak would take much longer than on Tanaga. Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief United States Fleet and Chief of Naval Operations, agreed with Theobald in his recommendation for Adak. Given the need of the Navy for an amphibious assault and transport of troops and equipment, DeWitt yielded, and the War Department issued a joint directive on 22 August for Adak and an intermediate emergency airfield on Atka Island.[26]

The occupation of Adak and Atka occurred on 30 August and 16 September, respectively. Now 260 miles from Kiska, initial plans called for an occupation force of 4,500 on Adak and 800 on Atka, with an increase to 10,000 troops by mid-October. By 14 September, engineers completed the airfield on Adak and twelve B-24 bombers and twenty-eight fighters, based there, delivered a devastating blow to Kiska, shelling three small submarines, destroying a large flying boat and several seaplanes, and sinking two mine sweepers and three cargo vessels. Bombers and fighters continued to attack Kiska dropping 116 tons of ordnance in September and 200 in October. In November, bad weather severely limited further air operations to reconnaissance and intermittent bombing until February.[27]

By October, both Army and Navy leaders agreed that a large amphibious assault, divisional in size, would be required to dislodge the Japanese from Kiska. Unfortunately, King stripped Task Force 8 in response to an emergency at Guadalcanal, and the required three month amphibious training regimen, for the yet to be determined infantry division, precluded any action

[26]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 270.

[27]Ibid., 272–273.

until at least March 1943. Meanwhile, planning and preparations for the occupation of Amchitka Island commenced.[28]

Both Army and Navy leaders in Washington and Alaska vacillated for months over which island to occupy next – Tanaga or Amchitka. Buckner and Dewitt, in keeping with their original plan, wanted to occupy Tanaga, while planners in Washington, as early as August, considered Amchitka as a suitable location. Regardless of the location, planners intended the new occupation to halt the expansion of the Japanese eastward. At Marshall's 'gentle' prodding; DeWitt requested Buckner's survey team to reassess the suitability of Amchitka, which put them forty miles from Kiska. Theobald, having previously delayed the survey party's delivery to Tanaga for almost a month due to a supposed threat of Japanese attack, received notification from King that Vice Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid would replace him as commander of Task Force 8. During a 13 December conversation with King, Kinkaid concluded the need of an airfield on Amchitka to prevent the Japanese from doing so, and further enable air support for the Kiska assault. From 17-19 December, a reconnaissance and survey party landed on Amchitka and surprisingly determined that a fighter landing strip could be built in two to three weeks with a follow on 5,000 foot runway for bombers could be built in three to four months. King, pending the results of the survey, sent a draft joint directive to Marshall requesting the occupation of Amchitka and the selection of the infantry division to conduct the assault on Kiska. When Kinkaid arrived on 5 January and with the favorable results of the survey, he immediately ordered the landings to commence. Fighting terrible weather conditions, a security element landed in the evening of 11 January followed by an occupation force of 2,000 troops the next morning. Engineers completed the fighter strip on 16 February with a group of eight P-40s arriving that day. Within one week, the new fighters started combat air patrols over Kiska. With the final stage

[28]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 274.

of the westward expansion complete, Dewitt, Buckner, and Kinkaid made final preparations for the amphibious assault on Kiska.[29]

In late December 1942, the War Department recommended DeWitt assign the 7th Infantry Division, under the command of Major General Albert E. Brown, the task of assaulting Kiska. DeWitt originally intended to build a 25,000 man infantry division, commanded by Major General Charles H. Corlett and Brigadier General Eugene M. Landrum, but the 7th Infantry Division was in a better state of preparation. In early January 1943, the 7th Infantry Division divided into regimental combat teams at Fort Ord and San Diego, and began an amphibious assault-training regimen designed by United States Marine Corps' Major General Holland M. Smith. Meanwhile, Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell, the Amphibious Force, North Pacific commander and assigned as the assault force commander, established a joint planning team in San Diego with officers from the Western Defense Command.[30]

Although weather had forced the Eleventh Air Force to take a hiatus, in early February its fighter and bombers returned with vigor, dropping nearly 150 tons of ordnance on Kiska and Attu during nine total days of good weather. Butler continued to press the air missions in March as well, but on 26 March they missed an excellent opportunity to destroy Japanese shipping and reinforcements near the Komandorski Islands. On that day, Rear Admiral Charles H. McMorris, commanding a task force of four destroyers, one light cruiser, and one heavy cruiser, interdicted Hosogaya's fleet of four destroyers, two heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and two merchant cruisers destined for Kiska and Attu. Overmatched, Kinkaid recommended that McMorris fight a retiring action to draw the Japanese under Eleventh Air Force bomber coverage. Unfortunately,

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[29]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 162; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 274-76.

[30]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 277–278; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 196; Robert J. Mitchell, Sewell T. Tyng, and Nelson L. Drummond Jr., *The Capture of Attu: A World War II Battle as Told by the Men Who Fought There* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 4.

Butler's one-hour estimation of replacing the bomber's light bombs with heavy bombs took longer than expected and the Japanese fleet retreated. However, McMorris adroitly fought a *tour de force* of ship-to-ship engagements labeled the Battle of the Komandorski Islands, the likes of which Naval leaders envisioned coming out of World War I. Although, either side suffered little damage, McMorris masterfully maneuvered his vessels to not only screen the *Salt Lake City*, now dead in the water, but also forced the retreat of Japanese fleet nearly twice the size of McMorris' task force.[31] The prevention of these reinforcements and supplies from reaching Attu would soon prove disastrous for the Japanese.

In early March, Kinkaid, realizing not enough shipping would be available to capture Kiska, recommended changing the plan to assaulting Attu first. The capture of Attu would place the Americans in an excellent position to interdict any Japanese resupply of Kiska from their home island, thus achieving a blockade, weakened enemy for the eventual assault, and possibly force a capitulation of Kiska. Intelligence reported Attu as being the weaker defended of the two islands with estimates of only 500 troops versus 10,000 on Kiska. So on 10 March, Nimitz and DeWitt received notification from King that the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed with the estimates and recommendation, and approved the change of plans. Immediately, Rockwell and Brown started detailed planning for the assault. However, with limited intelligence on the island's topography and hydrography, planners developed five options by the time the assault force set sail for Cold Bay on 24 April. Upon their arrival, Rockwell and Brown expected updated intelligence to enable selection and refinement of their plan.[32]

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[31]Morison, Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944, 2236; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts, 278-79.

[32]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 195-96; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 277, 279, 283-84.

Plan A required landing a main force at Massacre Bay with a secondary landing at Beach Red. Plan B called for the main force to land at Sarana Bay, with a similar landing at Beach Red. Plan C entailed landing the entire assault force at Massacre Bay. Plan D allowed for the main landing to occur in the West Arm of Holtz Bay with a secondary landing at Beach Red. Finally, Plan E stipulated three landings to occur in Massacre Bay, Sarana Bay, and one at either the West Arm of Holtz Bay or Beach Red.[33]

The commanders and planners arrived at Cold Bay on 1 May and shortly after arrival they met aboard the battleship *Pennsylvania* to review intelligence, study the only available hydrography and topography products, and refine their plan. At the conclusion of this review, the commanders settled upon a plan to conduct the landing of the main force at Massacre Bay, and secondary landings at Beaches Red and Scarlet; both northwest of Holtz Bay. The 7th Division's Scout Company and Reconnaissance Troop, combined to become a provisional combat battalion commanded by Captain William H. Willoughby, would land before H-hour at Beach Scarlet and scout south through a canyon in order to assist 17-1 Battalion Combat Team (BCT) in securing the West Arm of Holtz Bay. At Beach Red, a detachment of Alaskan Scouts would land and conduct a reconnaissance to determine its feasibility as a landing site for the entire BCT. If feasible, 17-1 BCT would land and seize the West Arm of Holtz Bay before the final assault on the Japanese defenses. If not feasible, the BCT would land at Beach Scarlet and use the same canyon approach as Willoughby. If neither Beach Scarlet nor the canyon approach appeared feasible, then 17-1 BCT would remain a floating reserve. The main force would land at Massacre Bay, and make its way northwest before linking up with 17-1 BCT for the final assault.[34]

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[33]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 284.

[34]Lynn Davis Smith, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing" (Preliminary Report, Presidio of San Francisco, CA: Western Defense Command, 1943), 4.

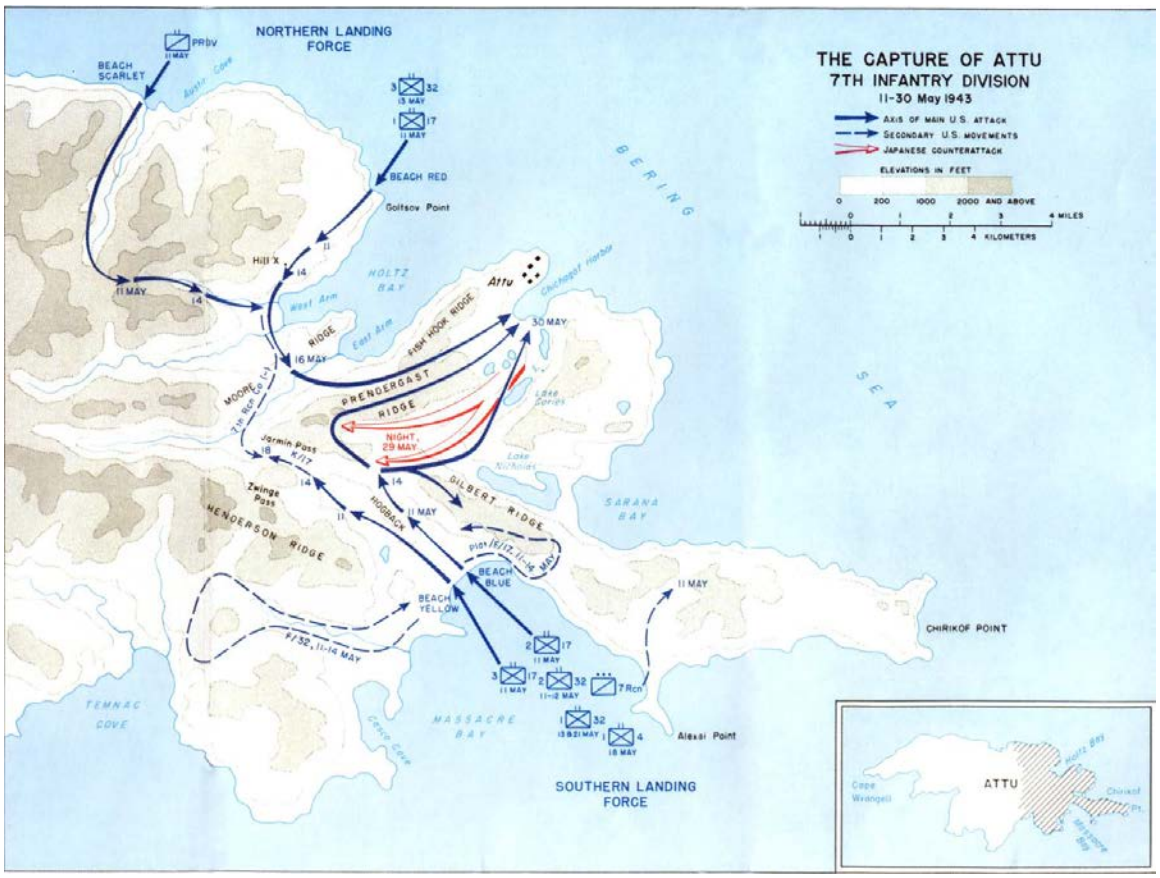

Figure 2: Refined Plan E

Source: H.C. Brewer Jr., "The Capture of Attu," in *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1959), Map III.

The plan directed Kinkaid to provide naval support in the form of three battleships (*Pennsylvania*, *Idaho*, and *Nevada*), three heavy and three light cruisers, one escort carrier (*Nassau*), nineteen destroyers, two submarines (*Narwhal* and *Nautilus*), and other logistics vessels. The escort carrier would provide close air support, the first such assignment for a carrier in the Pacific. The three battleships would provide naval gunfire support, while the two submarines would land the provisional combat battalion at Beach Scarlet. Butler and the Eleventh

Air Force reinforced Adak and Amchitka with four Royal Canadian Air Force squadrons bringing the total count of Army and Navy fighters and bombers to 246.[35]

On 4 May, prior to the assault on Attu, DeWitt authorized the training of an amphibious assault force at Fort Ord, under the command of Corlett, for the assault on Kiska. Given the estimate of nine to ten thousand Japanese on the island and the lessons learned from Attu, this assault force increased to 34,000 troops with the addition of a mountain combat team, a regimental combat team from ADC, the First Special Service Force, and a 4,800-troop Canadian Brigade.[36]

Kinkaid set D-day for 8 May and led the task force out of Cold Bay on 4 May to conduct the assault. As the ships neared Attu, the weather turned foul with clouds, fog, and heavy surf at the beaches, forcing Kinkaid to postpone D-day to 11 May. At 1:00 am on 11 May, the submarines *Narwhal* and *Nautilus* surfaced in the Bering Sea and disgorged Willoughby's Scout Troop to initiate the recapture of Attu. Immediately after the landing, fog descended upon the eastern end of the island, delaying the arrival of the Reconnaissance Troop, the rest of his 244-man provisional combat battalion, until noon. This same fog also delayed the landings at Massacre Bay and Beach Red from the early morning to 3:30 pm and 4:15 pm, respectively. This fog, however, also prevented enemy observation of the task force ships massing off the coast of Attu, thus inhibiting Japanese opposition to U.S. forces at all three landing sites. This fortuitous effect of the weather proved very beneficial to the American troops, particularly since two Japanese infantry companies occupied the high ground overlooking Massacre Valley. Although unable to see the mass of ships, the Japanese soldiers peered through the base of the fog to

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[35]Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944*, 38-39; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 202-203.

[36]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 295, 296.

observe the landings. Out of range, they prepared their guns and mortars while waiting for the Americans to take care of that problem.[37]

Slowly, BCT 17-2 progressed northwest through Massacre Valley with the hogback to its left and Henderson Ridge to its right, while BCT 17-3 advanced with the hogback to its right and Gilbert Ridge to its left. At 7:00 pm, with both BCTs in range, the Japanese opened fire from both these ridges. During the first amphibious assault waves, a platoon landed northeast of Beach Blue, and a company landed west of Beach Yellow with the intent to seize and secure Gilbert and Henderson Ridges, respectively. Unable to complete their missions, heavy fighting continued in Massacre Valley until 14 May. Fearing a stalemate, Kinkaid consulted with DeWitt and Buckner before deciding to relieve Brown and appoint Landrum as the new division commander on 16 May. Ironically, that same day, the two BCTs in Massacre Valley broke through Japanese lines, ending the deadlock.[38]

To the north, both 17-1 BCT and the Provisional Battalion fought a similarly protracted battle against the entrenched Japanese, who delayed their progress such that the two units could not make their planned rendezvous at the West Arm of Holtz Bay until 16 May. Finally, on 18 May elements of the Provisional Battalion made contact with BCT 17-3 at Jarmin Pass, signaling the eventual end of Japanese occupation. For nearly two more weeks, the fighting slowly but steadily progressed north towards the Japanese Headquarters at Chichagof Harbor, as the division captured the retreating enemy's mortar and machine gun nests. Then on the night of 29 May, the remaining one thousand Japanese conducted a suicide bayonet-charge. By the morning of 30 May, Attu fell back into American hands.[39]

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[37]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 285, 287.

[38]Ibid., 289, 290, 294.

[39]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 294-95.

In hopes of preventing an initial stalemate, Kiska received heavy preparation fires from naval and air bombardments in July and early August. With D-day set for 15 August, the assault force landed unopposed at the beaches, and made its way inland. In an anti-climactic amphibious assault, the Americans discovered that the Japanese had already abandoned the island.

ANALYSIS

An analysis of the Aleutian Islands Campaign reveals several strengths and weaknesses in the planning process, which resulted in an erratic execution of the plan. The island-hopping theater strategy enabled U.S. forces to bypass the Japanese stronghold, Kiska, in favor of seizing Attu – a less well-defended island. This strategy placed Kiska at risk of being isolated from Japan, and would prove to be an effective strategy throughout the Pacific theater later in the war. Additionally, the Eleventh Air Force led an effective air effort that set the conditions for and supported the final assaults on Attu and Kiska. However, an incomplete intelligence analysis and estimate during the conduct of the campaign led to the haphazard conduct of the Attu assault, and the assault on the enemy-deserted island of Kiska. Finally, a flawed strategic assessment by political and senior leaders led to the loss of many lives conducting a military operation that actually provided very little strategic benefit.

Strengths

The island-hopping theater strategy provided a strong foundation for the Aleutian Islands Campaign plan, benefiting it in several ways. First, it enabled the Eleventh Air Force to generate combat power for continuous operations against the Japanese. Second, the ‘Attu first’ approach effectively served as a strategic turning movement against the Japanese. Finally, the number of U.S. forces required to defeat the initial enemy estimate on Attu made it a logical alternative for the initial assault, since the Americans did not possess adequate shipping to make Kiska a feasible initial objective.

Establishing air bases at Adak and Amchitka facilitated the generation of combat power for the Eleventh Air Force's continuous bombardment Kiska and Attu. As advised in the 1942 *FM 100-15*, "Wise strategic location of our air bases and maximum radius of operation for our airplanes are important factors in gaining superiority of operating range over the enemy. It may frequently require the seizure or occupation of suitable bases and the construction and operation of necessary facilities."[40] In accordance with this doctrine, commanders and planners quickly realized the need to reduce aircraft operational distances from air bases at Umnak and Kodiak to Kiska and Attu. The B17's and B-24's left Umnak for the 1,200-mile round trip bombing missions to Kiska, with bomb bay tanks, reducing the aircraft's maximum payload of bombs by fifty percent. With the occupation of Adak, the operational distance decreased by half, the bombers finally enjoyed P-38/P-39 fighter escort, and Attu became a viable alternative bomber target when weather closed on Kiska. Previously, Eleventh Air Force's Bomber Commander Colonel William O. Eareckson, while stationed at Umnak, ordered a single bomber to conduct a daily reconnaissance flight to Kiska to determine if weather would allow a follow-on bombardment that day. When stationed at Adak, the reconnaissance flight also included Attu. Surprisingly, the weather flight might report clear skies over Kiska, but be completely socked in by the time bombers arrived. With the capture of Amchitka, Kiska now lay only forty miles distant. This precluded the need for weather reconnaissance flights over Kiska as planes only a few hundred feet off the ground could visually acquire the island. Bombers and fighter escorts took off with full weapons payloads, and without the need to make an in-flight adjustment to strike Kiska or Attu. By February 1943, the Eleventh Air Force closed the operational distance by

[40]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 77.

600 miles, enabling multiple bomber targets, securing fighter escort, increasing payload capacity, and reducing fuel and maintenance costs.[41]

Additionally, the decision to assault Attu first, rather than Kiska, effectively served as a strategic turning movement, which ultimately led to the abandonment of Kiska without a fight. Contemporary doctrine characterizes the strategic turning movement, "To deprive the field commander of essential supplies reduces his otherwise effective army to the status of a force equipped only with primitive means of combat… This may be accomplished by the turning movement or maneuver wherein the final defeat or destruction of the hostile forces is achieved or aided by directing a suitable proportion of the offensive forces deep against the hostile rear, the hostile lines of communication, or specifically against the sources of enemy supply."[42] At the conclusion of the 18 February 1942 naval bombardment on Attu, McMorris sailed his 2 cruiser and 4 destroyer task force west to conduct anti-shipping patrols. As a result, early on the morning of 19 February, his task force sunk the 3,100-ton *Akagane Maru*, which carried an infantry platoon, airfield construction material, ammunition, and essential supplies destined for Attu. In addition, McMorris' successful Battle of the Komandorskis reduced the supplies reaching Kiska and Attu to those transported by submarine. Burgeoned by the success of McMorris' Japanese naval blockade, Kinkaid realized that by seizing Attu, American forces would be closer to the Japanese mainland, and in a position to interdict Japanese lines of communications to Kiska. In effect, the Japanese would either 'wither on the vine' or abandon Kiska.[43]

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[41]AAF Historical Office, *Army Air Forces In the War Against Japan: 1941-1942*, 151-55; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 112, 128, 149, 162.

[42]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 39.

[43]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 279; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 166-67; Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944*, 20; MacGarrigle, *Aleutian Islands*, 13; U.S. Army, "The Aleutian Islands Campaign, Japanese Studies in World War II, Japanese Monograph Number 46" (General Headquarters Far East Command-Foreign Histories Division, 1950), 2.

Finally, the decision to assault Attu first proved to be the only suitable and desirable alternative to an assault on Kiska. According to the 1941 *FM 100-5*, "Troop movements are made by marching, by motor transport, by rail, by water, by air, and by various combinations of these methods. The method to be employed depends upon the situation, the size and composition of the unit to be moved, the distance to be covered, the urgency of execution, the condition of the troops, and the availability, suitability, and capacity of the different means of transportation."[44] In early February, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, United State Fleet, recommended Kinkaid and DeWitt alter their Kiska plans, as he reassigned all attack cargo ships (AKAs) and all but two attack transport ships (APAs) from amphibious training for the Aleutian Islands Campaign to combat duties. This prevented effective training for the amphibious assault. Also, early Attu enemy assessments indicated only the need for one infantry regiment and the 7th Division's mountain artillery to conduct the assault. This would only require the use of four APAs and two or three AKAs. On the other hand, early enemy assessments for Kiska required at least the use of the entire 7th Division. Given that they could not secure the required shipping for an assault on Kiska, Kinkaid and DeWitt decided on 3 March 1943 to attack Attu and put Kiska on hold. Further strengthening their decision, the aerial reconnaissance from the Attu naval bombardment indicated no enemy airfield, coastal defense guns, and minimal anti-aircraft. All told, Attu would be much easier to defeat than Kiska. With all of these considerations supporting their decision, Kinkaid and DeWitt realized that they had no viable alternative but to assault Attu before Kiska.[45]

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[44]War Department, *FM 100-5 Field Service Regulations - Operations*, 69.

[45]Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944*, 20; Office of Naval Intelligence, *The Aleutians Campaign: June 1942-August 1943*, 68-69; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 279.

One can attribute another significant American advantage during the Aleutian Islands Campaign to the effectiveness of the Eleventh Air Force's support. This air organization's operational reach enabled American forces to maintain contact with and constant pressure on the Japanese. Its effective aerial bombardment also significantly contributed to the Japanese decision to abandon Kiska. Similarly, this organization provided reconnaissance and close air support to ground forces, which proved vital to American success during the assault on Attu.

Throughout the duration of the Aleutian Island Campaign, skillful employment of the Eleventh Air Force enabled the Americans to disrupt Japanese operations. As described in *FM 100-15*, "Operations beyond the sphere of influence of surface forces are conducted to destroy systems of objectives which are vital to the will or ability of the hostile nation to wage war."[46] Before the Adak and Amchitka occupations, Kiska sat nearly 600 miles from the nearest American air base. After the seaplane tender *Gillis'* discovery of the Kiska occupation and the subsequent joint aerial bombardment by the Navy and Eleventh Air Force, the *Gillis* retired to avoid a Japanese attack. The Eleventh Air Force then provided the only available means to continue the aerial bombardment. On 7 August 1942, Smith's unsuccessful execution of a naval bombardment on Kiska served as the first and last attempt for any weapon in the U.S. military arsenal, other than the Eleventh Air Force, to strike the island prior to preparations for the amphibious assault.[47] Even his Attu naval bombardment resulted in only minimal damage, according to Japanese records: "Our losses were 2 dead, seriously wounded 1, two boats damaged and one building destroyed."[48] After the Adak and Amchitka operations, the 50% reduction in distance from airbase to target enabled the air effort to increase in tempo and intensity. The near

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[46]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 78.

[47]Morison, *Aleutians, Gilberts and Marshalls June 1942-April 1944*, 5, 10, 19.

[48]U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 105.

constant bombing and strafing by the Eleventh Air Force began to yield a successful formula for the air effort in the Aleutian Islands.[49]

Ironically, despite the focus of the air effort on Attu first, the continued bombardment not only affected Attu, but also significantly contributed to the Japanese decision to abandon Kiska before the amphibious assault. Returning to this topic in *FM 100-15*, "These operations must be concentrated upon the most immediately vital of such systems of objectives the destruction of which is within the capacity of the air force available, and these operations must be continued to a decision."[50] After the March decision to assault Attu first, any combat sortie flown that could not strike Attu due to weather, instead struck Kiska. In fact in April, of the 1,138 combat sorties flown, only 30 actually dropped on Attu.[51] In February 1943, the Eleventh Air Force dropped 123 tons of bombs in the Aleutian Islands. Analysis shows that with the occupation of Amchitka, the March tonnage increased by 259%. In April, the air effort reached its apogee at 528% of the bomb tonnage delivered in February, and although the total bomb tonnage dropped from May to August, the numbers averaged a 359% increase of bomb tonnage delivered per month over February's numbers. These bombing statistics pale in comparison to the tonnage of bombs dropped in support of other operations in the Pacific and the European Theaters around the same time. However, by measuring the total tonnage of bombs delivered per total combat sorties flown, the air forces achieved a rate of 62% during the Aleutian Islands Campaign. With the same statistic slightly higher at 78%, only the bombing campaign against Germany surpassed the effort expended in the Aleutians. Allied air forces never exceeded 56% in The Mediterranean Theater of Operations or any other operation in the Pacific, with most falling well short of this number.

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[49]AAF Historical Office, *Army Air Forces In the War Against Japan: 1941-1942*, 153, 155.

[50]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 78.

[51]Harry L. Coles, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, ed. Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate (Washington, D.C: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 379.

Table 1. Percentage Increase of Bomb Tonnage Dropped over February

% Increase MAR over FEB	% Increase MAR to APR	AVG % Increase MAY to AUG
259%	528%	349%

Source: Adapted from Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest: World War II* (Washington, D.C: United States Army Air Forces Office of Statistical Control, 1945), Table 140.

Table 2. Combat Sorties Flown, By Theater

Legend	ETO	MTO	POA	FEAF	C & I-B
	European Theater of Operations	Mediterranean Theater of Operations	Pacific Ocean Areas	Far East Air Forces	China & India-Burma

Year and Month	Grand Total	Theaters vs Germany			Theaters vs Japan					
		Total	ETO	MTO	Total	POA	FEAF	C & I-B	Alaska	Twentieth Air Force
1942										
Jun	1,561	70	-	70	1,491	59	1,180	158	94	-
Jul	1,579	166	-	166	1,413	-	1,172	111	130	
Aug	2,041	579	324	255	1,462	-	1,197	115	150	-
Sep	2,679	999	423	576	1,680	-	1,352	171	157	-
Oct	4,020	2,053	534	1,519	1,967	-	1,604	191	172	-
Nov	5,218	3,173	629	2,544	2,045	10	1,663	199	173	-
Dec	4,922	2,709	543	2,166	2,213	55	1,677	286	195	-
1943										
Jan	10,149	5,097	767	4,330	5,052	37	4,315	485	215	-
Feb	8,272	4,338	976	3,362	3,934	9	2,816	797	312	-
Mar	14,171	8,042	1,564	6,478	6,129	-	4,257	1,237	635	-
Apr	21,664	13,952	989	12,963	7,712	29	5,023	1,522	1,138	-
May	24,721	16,639	3,915	12,724	8,082	27	5,517	1,760	778	-
Jun	24,605	17,352	4,104	13,248	7,253	22	5,874	955	402	-
Jul	40,718	29,901	5,531	24,370	10,817	29	8,826	1,454	508	-
Aug	40,787	27,358	5,826	21,532	13,429	-	11,472	1,304	653	-
Total Combat Sorties Flown	207107	132428	26125	106303	74679	277	57945	10745	5712	0

Source: Adapted from Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest: World War II* (Washington, D.C: United States Army Air Forces Office of Statistical Control, 1945), Table 118.

Table 3. Tons of Bombs Dropped Overseas, By Theater

Year and Month	Grand Total	Theaters vs Germany			Theaters vs Japan					
		Total	ETO	MTO	Total	POA	FEAF	C & I-B	Alaska	Twentieth Air Force
1942										
Jun	410	115	-	115	295	18	139	93	45	-
Jul	656	357	-	357	299	-	155	66	78	-
Aug	958	549	135	414	409	-	250	48	111	-
Sep	1,156	697	215	482	459	-	279	63	117	-
Oct	1,669	1,105	334	771	564	-	386	67	111	-
Nov	2,559	1,807	612	1,195	762	-	547	98	107	-
Dec	2,348	1,493	417	1,076	855	17	557	145	135	-
1943										
Jan	3,581	2,722	739	1,983	859	3	755	97	4	-
Feb	3,571	2,424	705	1,719	1,147	12	591	421	123	-
Mar	5,947	4,303	1,530	2,773	1,644	-	647	679	318	-
Apr	8,216	6,183	1,130	5,053	2,033	44	540	800	649	-
May	12,329	9,985	2,688	7,297	2,344	15	710	1,170	449	-
Jun	12,909	11,064	2,468	8,596	1,845	4	1,015	542	284	-
Jul	22,253	18,212	4,366	13,846	4,041	40	2,708	879	414	-
Aug	21,989	17,656	5,072	12,584	4,333	-	2,910	851	572	-
Total Tonnage Dropped	100551	78672	20411	58261	21889	153	12189	6019	3517	0

Source: Adapted from Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest: World War II* (Washington, D.C: United States Army Air Forces Office of Statistical Control, 1945), Table 140.

Table 4. Percentage of Tonnage Dropped Per Combat Sortie, By Theater

Year and Month	Grand Total	Theaters vs Germany			Theaters vs Japan					
		Total	ETO	MTO	Total	POA	FEAF	C & I-B	Alaska	Twentieth Air Force
Total Tonnage Dropped	100,551	78,672	20,411	58,261	21,889	153	12,189	6,019	3,517	0
Total Combat Sorties Flown	207,107	132,428	26,125	106,303	74,679	277	57,945	10,745	5,712	0
Percentage of Tonnage Dropped Per Sortie	49%	59%	78%	55%	29%	55%	21%	56%	62%	0%

Source: Adapted from Office of Statistical Control, *Army Air Forces Statistical Digest: World War II* (Washington, D.C: United States Army Air Forces Office of Statistical Control, 1945), Table 118, 140.

Japanese records confirm the significant effect of the air effort in the Aleutian Islands. One report noted, "In April, the activities of enemy planes became domineering."[52] The Japanese attempted to rectify this situation by employing all available individuals and resources to shore up their air defenses, yet American planes frequently interrupted these efforts. Prior to April, during the days weather allowed the Americans to attack, the Japanese noted the continuous, dawn to dusk nature of the aerial bombardment. Starting in April, the Americans began "conduct[ing] a war of nerves by attacking at night. Attack duration was usually 1 to 4 hours with 30 minutes being the shortest and 24 hours being the longest."[53] Thus, the bleak outlook on Attu, the effectiveness of the American naval blockade, and most importantly the devastation inflicted by the aerial bombardment combined to convince the Japanese that they must abandon the Aleutian Islands. On 21 May, the Imperial General Headquarters ordered the evacuation of the Northern Force from the Aleutian Islands to a similarly strategic position south of Ohishima Island. The Japanese made several attempts to evacuate the Attu garrison, before realizing no one was left to evacuate. As for Kiska, because of weather the Japanese could not complete this evacuation until the evening of 28 July 1943.[54]

Finally, the Eleventh Air Force's air effort provided much needed reconnaissance and close air support during the assault on Attu. As early as July 1942, Eareckson ordered the addition of reconnaissance and patrol missions to bomber sorties in order to take photographs of the Japanese occupied islands. Eareckson's order complied with doctrine, as demonstrated by guidance in *FM 100-15*: "Bombardment aviation may conduct combined reconnaissance bombing missions by developing and attacking targets that impede the advance of the supported unit."[55]

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[52]U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 2.

[53]Ibid., 104.

[54]Ibid., 2, 72, 105, 147.

[55]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 83.

More importantly, throughout the campaign these missions continued, and greatly contributed to the success of the assault on Attu. Even the Japanese were impressed with the Eleventh Air Force's reconnaissance efforts as they noted, "It made daily reconnaissance, even in very bad weather. Its flight performance was excellent."[56] In the first days of May 1943 prior to the assault, photographic missions captured the main beaches at Massacre Bay, the beaches next to enemy locations, and enemy positions, which constituted nearly the only intelligence on troop strength and disposition.[57]

In addition, the Eleventh Air Force significantly contributed to close air support on Attu. As D-day neared, Butler laid out a detailed air plan to intercept Japanese shipping, harass enemy garrisons, destroy key support installations, destroy enemy aircraft, soften up defensive positions near key terrain (beginning on D-5), and provide close air support to ground troops. However, in typical Aleutian style weather prevented direct support to ground troops every single day between D-day and 18 May, other than 12 May. The Southern and Northern Forces had already rendezvoused in Jarmin Pass by the time direct support could once again fly regularly beginning on 19 May. By this time, Landrum perfected his technique of seizing the high ground before sending the main body of his troops through the valleys; a technique learned at a high cost in American lives in Massacre Valley between Henderson and Gilbert Ridges. On 23 May, Landrum attempted this technique on Fish Hook Ridge, but the Japanese repelled the assault. On 24 May, direct air support enabled the capture of this ridge, which allowed the American to push north towards the enemy garrison at Chichagof Harbor. On 26 May, air action increased and included heavier aircraft, with bombing by eight B-24s and two B-25s, and strafing by two P-38s. By 28 May, air and ground forces corralled the Japanese into their garrison at Chichagof Harbor, which

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[56]U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 71.

[57]Harry L. Coles, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, ed. Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate (Washington, D.C: Office of Air Force History, 1983), 365, 379.

ultimately resulted in the kamikaze suicide attack that evening. The Japanese recognized that, "due to continuous bombardment, our personnel and weapons gradually decreased and ammunition and provisions were consumed completely."[58] Overall, despite initial setbacks, the Eleventh Air Force provided effective reconnaissance and direct support throughout the campaign, significantly contributing to the American victory on Attu and the Japanese abandonment of Kiska.[59]

Weaknesses

During the conduct of the Aleutian Islands Campaign, flaws in the intelligence analysis and estimate created several challenges for the Attu and Kiska. These included a lack of accurate maps of Attu, poor assessment of the enemy situation on Attu that led to significant changes to the overall assault plan, and the failure to conduct a reconnaissance on Kiska prior to the assault. This final oversight prevented the Americans from discovering the Japanese had left Kiska, meaning the elaborate American assault amounted merely to an occupation rather than amphibious assault.

The lack of accurate terrain and hydrologic maps for the assault on Attu led to land navigation issues and uncertainty in the amphibious assault. American planners could have anticipated this by referring to *FM 100-15*: "The necessity for rapid production and correction of maps requires that photographic aviation be assigned to theater and similar headquarters for the air photography required for photogrammetric mapping."[60] Moreover, contemporary doctrine emphasized the significance of military mapping as an element of military intelligence – for example, in *FM 30-20 Military Intelligence: Military Maps*: "The vast extent of unmapped areas

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[58]U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 2.

[59]Coles, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 380, 382-85.

[60]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 76.

which may exist in the theater of operations necessitates that provisions be made for mapping as operations progress."[61] Given this doctrinal guidance, one might wonder why the 17th Infantry Regiment lacked the maps it required during the assault on Attu. At the start of the Aleutian Islands Campaign, Air Force pilots utilized Rand McNally road maps. In early July 1942 Eleventh Bomber Command added photographic missions to their bombardment sorties, but this did not completely solve the problem. According to *FM 30-20*, "Map substitutes from aerial photographs can be provided within 12 to 24 hours from the time the photographs are delivered to the topographic companies."[62] However, bombers could only capture vertical photographs of the perimeter of Attu, meaning they could only produce accurate photogrammetric maps in those areas. Oblique photographs of the island's interior enabled the Western Defense Command engineers to create plaster models, but they did not provide the detail necessary to enable creation of accurate topographical maps. Thus, commanders, planners, and units could study the plaster model prior to execution, but effectively had to remember their details during the assault. They possessed crude topographic maps during the assault, but their inaccuracy led to more difficulties. In demonstration of these difficulties, the Northern Forces' Scout Battalion took a wrong turn, which led it into a cul-de-sac. Eareckson, from his air liaison plane, noticed their error, and he sketched a crude map to reveal their mistake. Unfortunately, as he attempted to drop the map to the Scouts it became lodged in his tail section, and remained there until he returned to base. Such were the difficulties in not possessing accurate topographical maps.[63]

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[61]War Department, *FM 30-20 Military Intelligence: Military Maps* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1940), 2.

[62]Ibid., 10.

[63]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 15; B.W. Boyes, "Short History of the Battle of Attu" (Preliminary Report, Camp Earle, AK: Post Headquarters, 1944), 213-14; Smith, "Preliminary Report on Attu Landing," 2.

Additionally, the lack of hydrographic maps added to the element of uncertainty in the amphibious assault on Attu. Early in the campaign, naval charts of the Aleutian Islands based their information on an inaccurate Russian survey conducted in 1864. In fact, a naval navigator could sail right over the charted Bogoslof Island because the island actually was located so far away from the sited depicted on the map. The United States Government and Geologic Survey produced crude relief maps, but they provided no useful knowledge regarding beach landings. To rectify this problem, the Scouts landed a reconnaissance party at Beach Red, while six transports carrying BCT 17-1 sat off the coast waiting to determine the beach's feasibility to land a battalion. If this beach proved unfeasible, the battalion would land at the nearby Beach Scarlet, and if not feasible there, it would to sail all the way around the island to Massacre Bay. Luckily, the Scouts determined Beach Red suitable to land; if this had not been the case the aborted landing would have put the entire plan in jeopardy while the Southern Force executed the original plan. Execution of early reconnaissance to determine the hydrographic information needed for planning while the task force sailed from Cold Bay would have enabled confirmation or change of plans in route – but no such reconnaissance took place.[64]

Adding to the confusion, a poor assessment of enemy strength and disposition on Attu led to a significant last minute change to the assault plan. As D-day approached, the Americans should have increased pre-mission reconnaissance of the area. This would have conformed to the guidance in contemporary doctrine, which advised, "The nearer the approach to the enemy, the more intensive is the reconnaissance. The most detailed information will be required concerning areas of importance in the contemplated maneuver."[65] While the 7th Division trained at Fort Ord, Kinkaid travelled to California at the end of February to inform DeWitt of the lack of shipping for

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[64]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 15; Boyes, "Short History of the Battle of Attu," 2, 5.

[65]War Department, *FM 100-5 Field Service Regulations - Operations*, 43.

an assault on Kiska, and recommend an assault on Attu instead. On 3 March, with DeWitt's concurrence, Kinkaid explained to Nimitz his rationale for assaulting Attu first: 1) an estimated enemy strength of 500 men on Attu, 2) which would require one infantry regiment and the mountain artillery from the 7th Division, and 3) would require four APAs and two or three AKAs for transport. On 1 April, Kinkaid, Rockwell, Buckner, Brown and associated planning staff met in San Diego for a planning conference where DeWitt relayed these assumptions. As plans developed for the assault, updated aerial reconnaissance photos increased the estimated enemy strength three fold, to 1,600 men. With Rockwell as the task force commander, this new estimate placed him in a difficult situation. He did not believe a regiment of 2,500 men could defeat a Japanese garrison of 1,600 men. On 18 April, only six days before the task force's scheduled departure for San Francisco, and three weeks before D-day, the realization that Kinkaid had so drastically underestimated enemy strength now led Rockwell to decide he must commit the entire division of 10,000 men to the mission. In a resource-constrained environment, Rockwell had to secure very quickly enough additional shipping to transport four times the initially required force. This last-minute chaos could have been avoided, if Kinkaid had worked harder to verify his intelligence estimate before the plan developed to the point of committing resources and planning transport for the invasion force.[66]

In the end, Kinkaid's incomplete intelligence assessment and neglect of what should have been doctrinally standard pre-assault reconnaissance mission resulted in the calamitous assault of an abandoned island. Further reinforcing the planner's direct contravention of contemporary doctrine, according to *FM 100-15*, "Reconnaissance by the air force and mobile ground forces

[66]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 195, 198; Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 282; Office of Naval Intelligence, *The Aleutians Campaign: June 1942-August 1943*, 70.

must be continuous during the concentration and advance."[67] The summer fog of June forced a reduction in the number of sorties and total tonnage of bombs, but in July and August those numbers rebounded in support of the Kiska assault. In preparation for the assault, and based upon aerial photos taken from 27 July to 4 August, the Eleventh Air Force issued a bomb-damage assessment report on 6 August. Conflicting information in the report indicated that the Japanese defenders had attempted to repair the cratered airstrip, move their radio stations, and repair damaged buildings, but showed no evidence of moving trucks. In addition, the report indicated a noticeable lack of barges in the harbor. In fact, pilots returning from a 10 August bomb sortie reported no signs of enemy activity.

Based on this information, Kinkaid surmised the Japanese had fled to the mountains in preparation for the American assault. He based this assessment on several factors: no sightings of a Japanese evacuation fleet, uninterrupted maintenance of an American naval blockade, and minimally weather-restricted air coverage. However, Kinkaid also learned that on 27 July Japanese radio traffic on the island ceased, but he did not adjust his assessment. As D-day neared, ground force commanders recommended a reconnaissance mission to determine the disposition of Japanese forces. Kinkaid denied their request based upon his assumption that a prepared Japanese force could easily overwhelm such a small force. Further, Kinkaid seemed to believe the actual disposition of Japanese troops on the island made little difference, since on D-Day the assault force would either encounter an entrenched enemy, or benefit from the training conducted in what might turn out to be a full-dress rehearsal of a large amphibious assault on a deserted island. The latter of these two possibilities turned out to match the actual situation on the ground, but the assault hardly amounted to a training exercise, as the assault force suffered 21 dead and 121 casualties (fratricide and illness); not to mention 70 dead when the destroyer, *Abner Read*, struck

[67]War Department, *FM 100-15 Field Service Regulations, Larger Units*, 27.

a mine. This loss of life could have been averted if Kinkaid had given his approval of a reconnaissance mission and learned that the island was already deserted.[68]

Finally, the flawed strategic assessment made by political and senior military leaders resulted in an Aleutian Islands Campaign that spent valuable resources for negligible strategic or operational benefit. Initially, senior military leaders misconstrued Japanese intentions surrounding the attack on the Aleutian Islands. Had American decision makers understood that Japan merely sought to secure its northeastern flank, they would have realized that an operation of this magnitude was not warranted. Adding to this miscalculation, a general sense of inactivity in the Pacific appears to have led to the feeling that America must do something; this fed the desire to expel the Japanese from the Aleutian Islands since it gave the appearance of action to regain the initiative. Instead it merely resulted in a hasty and unnecessary assault on Attu.

After the Japanese attack on Dutch Harbor and the discovery of their occupation of Kiska and Attu, senior military leaders inaccurately assessed the enemy's intent. Contemporary doctrine warned of this mistake: "In considering the enemy's possible lines of action, the commander must guard against the unwarranted belief that he has discovered the enemy's intentions, and against ignoring other lines of action open to the enemy."[69] The JCS believed the Japanese attacked and occupied these islands to cover a planned expansion into the Siberian maritime environment and Kamchatka Peninsula. In addition to the lack of any real evidence that these expansion plans existed, DeWitt and Buckner erred somewhat more gravely. They followed the assumption of Japanese intent to what they saw as a logical conclusion: Attu and Kiska served as staging point to capture Dutch Harbor and points east for air bases to project combat power into the North Pacific; perhaps even to enable bombers to reach the American West Coast.

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[68]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United* States *and Its Outposts*, 297; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 297-98; Coles, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 390-92.

[69]War Department, *FM 100-5 Field Service Regulations - Operations*, 26.

While this might have seemed self-evident to DeWitt and Buckner, at least one analyst came to a very different conclusion. Before the Japanese attack, in mid-March 1942, the War Department's G-2 issued an astonishingly correct warning – and one that refuted the eastern expansion hypothesis. He warned that the Japanese might attack to prevent the Americans from using the northern approach towards the Japanese mainland, essentially establishing a forward defensive position.[70] Indeed this warning proved prophetic, as according to Japanese Monograph 46, "Western Aleutians are important areas which may determine the outcome of the war between Japan and THE UNITED STATES in the Northern Pacific. As long as (we) occupy these areas, the enemy is continuously menaced, and we can restrain the U.S. attacks on Japan proper from the North."[71]

As the campaign progressed, the air effort and naval blockade began taking its toll on the men and provisions at the Attu and Kiska garrisons. However, other than the evacuation and re-population of Attu in November 1942, the Japanese occupation of Aleutian Islands did not change. It did not appear the Japanese held a grand design as envisaged by the JCS, DeWitt, and Buckner. The Japanese had intended to occupy Amchitka, as evidenced by the discovery of airfield test holes when the U.S. reconnaissance party landed there on 17 December. However, they only intended to build an airfield there to counter American Air Forces, as they had been unable to do on Attu or Kiska – they did not indicate plans to expand eastward. Thus, with an effective attrition of the Japanese, their intent to deny the northern approach to American forces, and their near static posture in the Aleutians, one must question the need for amphibious assaults of the magnitudes that occurred on Attu and Kiska. One could almost surmise that the U.S. Army

[70]Conn, Engelman, and Fairchild, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 240, 259, 264-65.

[71]U.S. Army, "Japanese Monograph No. 46," 3.

sought to expel the Japanese as nothing more than a means to remedy a perceived wrong, but there was more to the story. [72]

Given the American strategic viewpoint regarding the Aleutians going into the Casablanca Conference, and the resulting strategic approach coming out of the March 1943 Pacific Military Conference, coalition friction might have contributed to the somewhat hasty American decision to conduct the amphibious assault on Attu. At the start of the Casablanca Conference, senior American military leaders believed that Germany should be defeated first, but not at the cost of completely neglecting operations in the Pacific Theater. They believed approaching Japan via the Aleutians and Kuriles to be a feasible approach.[73] British military leaders, on the other hand, countered with a focus on the Mediterranean. Compromise between the two countries resulted in Pacific operations to retake Burma, and Marshall striking the Aleutians from the final report to the President and Prime Ministers, altering the wording to say, "to make the Aleutians as secure as they may be."[74] Marshall probably saw no harm in making this concession since he believed operations in the Aleutians would be pointless without Russia declaring war on Japan. However, not until after the conference did the Americans fully realize the scope of the logistic challenges they would face in their ambitious approach.[75]

The Pacific Military Conference in March 1943 focused on refining the operational approach in the Pacific. At this conference, senior military leaders devised an approach on Japan

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[72]Office of Naval Intelligence, *The Aleutians Campaign: June 1942-August 1943*, 22; Coles, *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, 374; Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare in 1941-1942*, United States Army in World War II 1-3 (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 370; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare in 1943-1944*, 99–100; Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 83-84.

[73]Joint History Office, *World War II Inter-Allied Conferences: Casablanca Conference*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003), 97.

[74]Joint History Office, *World War II Inter-Allied Conferences: Casablanca Conference*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2003), 46.

[75]Coakley and Leighton, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 6–10; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare in 1943-1944*, 101.

via Burma, the Marshalls and Carolines, the Celebes Sea, and the Aleutians. Therefore, any delay in the Aleutian Islands Campaign could disrupt the timetable for an eventual assault on Japan. On 29 March 1943, the JCS issued the resulting directive from the Washington conference. Subsequently, on 1 April, commanders and planners met for the detailed Attu planning conference in San Francisco. From this conference, planners set D-day for 8 May, a mere five weeks away. Given the perceived lull in Pacific operations, based upon the over estimation of shipping availability stemming from estimates developed at the Casablanca Conference, and recognizing that the Aleutians Campaign was the only operation in the Pacific that remained on schedule, and in particular the general view that the assault on Attu, while perhaps strategically significant, remained a second rate operation, one can surmise were the reasons for the somewhat hasty nature of its planning and conduct.[76]

The Events In Current Doctrine

To demonstrate how today's JOPP and Army's Operations Process account for these strengths and weaknesses in the planning and conduct of the Aleutians Campaign, one must understand how doctrine defines these processes. The JOPP, as described in *JP 5-0*, entails "an orderly, analytical process, which consists of a set of logical steps to examine a mission; develop, analyze, and compare alternative [courses of action]; select the best [course of action]; and produce a plan or order." The Operations Process described in *ADRP 5-0* drives "the conceptual and detailed planning necessary to understand, visualize, and describe the operational environment; make and articulate decisions; and direct, lead, and assess military operations."

From the 1940s until modern day, the military has elaborated and refined these processes to accommodate for the strengths and weaknesses of various historical uses of American military

[76]Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 204–05; Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare in 1943-1944*, 7, 97.

power, including the Aleutian Island Campaign. For the JOPP, the island-hopping approach essentially functioned as an example of an operational level sustainment activity – one focused on preparing the operational area so that the commander could bring adequate combat power to bear when conducting successive operations. As for the Army's Operations Process, this approach constituted a sustaining operation, as described in *ADRP 3-0*, "that enable[d] the decisive operation [and] shaping operation by generating and maintaining combat power."[77] The effective aerial bombardment during the campaign serves in today's JOPP as a "use of joint forces capabilities" to set "the conditions for decisive operations."[78] The Army's Operations Process defines such actions as shaping operations, which establish "conditions for the decisive operation through effects on the enemy."[79]

Within JOPP, planners begin intelligence analysis very early in the process by completing the Joint Intelligence Preparation of the Environment, which "help[s] the commander and staff understand the complex and interconnected operational environment—the composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities that bear on the decisions of the commander."[80] Within the Army's Operations Process, members of the staff similarly conduct intelligence analysis in the early stages of planning by completing the Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield, which "is a systematic, continuous process of analyzing the threat and other aspects of an operational environment within a specific geographic area."[81] Finally, the strategic assessment serves as an integral starting point for planning, both in

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[77]Department of the Army Headquarters, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2012), 1-12.

[78]U.S. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2011), V-8.

[79]Headquarters, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations*, 1-12.

[80]Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning*, III-9.

[81]Headquarters, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 5-0, The Operations Process*, 1-11.

the JOPP and the Army's Operations Process, as it provides the basis for the Geographic Combatant Commander to develop theater strategy. This then serves as the foundation for subordinate commanders' operational approaches by assisting them as they seek to understand and visualize the situation, describe this insight to the staff, and directing its efforts to plan, prepare, and execute operations in support of the campaign plan.[82]

Building upon the historical analysis of campaigns and lessons learned from this analysis, military leaders improve upon doctrine to take advantage of strengths and avoid weaknesses of a campaign plan and its execution. An analyst identifies trends and patterns in the execution of the campaign and categorizes those as a strength or weakness. The analyst then develops a hypothesis by which he or she examines other campaigns to confirm or deny. In confirmation of this hypothesis, military leaders modify doctrine in order to codify best practices. The Aleutian Islands Campaign is just one such campaign that helped shaped the effectiveness of our current doctrine.

CONCLUSION

The Aleutian Islands Campaign stands amongst the costliest operations conducted in the Pacific Theater during World War II. Second only to Iwo Jima, the Battle of Attu cost more lives, in terms of soldiers employed relative to the number of Japanese enemy present, than any other battle in the Pacific Theater. Given the fact that more effective planning could have reduced these casualty rates, an analysis of this campaign provides modern day military historians and operational planners with much utility.

Undoubtedly, the island-hopping approach and the support of the Eleventh Air Force drastically reduced the anticipated cost to life, but the poor intelligence analysis and flawed

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[82]Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, Joint Operation Planning*, II-7; Headquarters, *Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 3-0, Unified Land Operations*, 1-2.

strategic assessment resulted in an operation with a high casualty rate for negligible strategic benefit. The development of modern U.S. doctrine accounts for the inadequacies of contemporary World War II doctrine, but commanders and planners must still plan and execute doctrine effectively. Studying history provides military planners and commanders with valuable examples of planning and execution, while it also cautions them against repeating mistakes of the past. Therefore, a case study of the Aleutian Islands Campaign provides an excellent example in the importance of effective planning and execution.

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