Post Headquarters CAMP EARLE, ALASKA 1 November 1944

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Forewordi

The preparation of the "Short History of the Battle of ATTU" resulted from requests to this headquarters for the story of the only battle with the Japanese Military forces on North American Soil written so that the layman could understand it and in such form that it could be carried "outside".

The material for the story was gathered from a number of authentic sources as will be seen by referring to the bibiography at the end of the book. Many actual participants in the battle were also interviewed. The compilation was guided by the desire to give a complete picture of the entire battle, including background, Attu terrain and weather, American and Japanese forces engaged and all their battle operations.

This "Short History of the Battle of Attu" was compiled and edited by the Post Executive, with the able assistance of the Intelligence and Operations Sections, Post Headquarters, Camp Earle, Attu, Alaska.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

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/s/ B W BOYES B W BOYES Colonel, CAC Executive

Third Edition July 1945

#### CHAPTER I, BACKGROUND FOR OCCUPATION

The offensive move of the Japanese in June 1942, in the North and Central Pacific was frustrated at Midway Island and in the area of Dutch Harbor. The unexpected aerial strength in the Alaska Defense Command sent the Japanese reeling back westward along the Aleutian Chain to the Rat and Near Islands. Part of the Jap troops landed on Kiska Island on 7 June; the rest of the transports unloaded on Attu Island 8 June 1942. The Attu garrison immediately prepared positions chiefely in the Holtz-chichagof area, with beach positions, chiefly in Sarana and Massacre Bays. Outposts were also located at Austin Cove, Steller Cove and Temnac Bay.

In September, 1942, most of the enemy's Attu Force was shifted to Kiska, leaving only a comparatively small group as a houskeeping unit at Attu. However, the Japs did not intend to abandon the Near Islands, but were planning to occupy Shenya and Agattu in addition to Attu. An Independent Infantry Battalion Under It Colonel Yonegawa was staged at Paramushiru in company with the 303rd Independent Infantry Battalion under Major Watanabo. In October this expedition sailed for the Near Islands, the Yonegawa Battalion landing at Holtz Bay, while the Watanabo Battalion with its attached troops and Landing Strip Construction Crew was turned back from Shenya because of the suspected presence of U.S. Naval Units, and was forced back to Paramushiro.

On 4 November 1942, the 24th Independent AA Company, the 302nd Independent Engineers and an Amphibious Engineer Platoon landed on Attu. These units were followed on November 12 by the 35th Independent AA Company and the 6th Mountain Artillery Unit. Then in January 1943, the Watanabo Battalion returned, this time on Warships including the cruiser "KISO", and took up positions for the defense of Chichagof Harbor.

Additions were made to this force until, in early May 1943, the following units formed the garrison of approximately 2400 men under Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki:

Yonegawa Independent Infantry Battalion (83rd Inf Bn). Watanabo Independent Infantry Battalion (303rd Inf Bn). Antiaircraft Battaalion (4 companies under Major AOTO). Engineer Unit (1 company plus 2 independent platoons). 6th Mountain Gun Company. Anchorage Unit, Naval Reconnaissance Unit, Airfield. Construction Unit, Field Hospital and Field Post Office.

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#### CHAPTER II - JAPANESE DEFENSE PIAN

On 11 May, the date of the landing of the U.S. Forces, the Japs were dispersed so as to put the main strength in the Holtz and Chichagof Harbor area. The defense plan was to deny the use of the Chichagof Harbor and Holtz Bay area to the U.S. Forces by strong positions prepared against attack from seaward and by holding the vital Massacre-Holtz (Jarmin) Pass and the Massacre-Sarana (Clevesy) Pass\*. The 303rd Infantry Battalion was charged with the defense of the Chichagof and Massacre area and was disposed as follows: In the Massacre-Sarana (Clevesy) Pass and on the ridge between the Massacre and Sarana Valleys (Gilbert Ridge) was the 2nd Company under It. Honna, supported by the 4th Company under Lt. Goto. The Massacre-Holtz (Jarmin) Pass was held by the 1st Company under Captain Hayashi, in an

\* Current official map names are shown in parentheses.

excellently prepared position. One platoon of the 1st company was in the Massacre Valley to act as a delaying force. Also in that area, was the Amphibious Engineer Platoon, which was constructing trenches and trails and was prepared to unload the Jap ships expected about the 19th with reinforcements.

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1 • : The Japs knew that a U.S. Forces was in the area but did not expect an attack until late in May, so the landing was a surprise, the biggest surprise was the landing made at Red Beach, on the northwest flank of Holtz Bay. In the Massacre area, the defense was conducted according to plan, the U.S. troops being stopped completely in front of the Massacre-Holtz (Jarmin) Pass and subjected to harrasing fire from the Sarana (Clevesy) Pass and Massacre-Sarana (Gilbert) Ridge. In the Holtz Sector, the Yonegawa (83rd) Infantry Battalion was stationed with other units, including AA Aritillery. The partiallycompleted small airstrip was located in Each Beach (O'Donnell) Valley, but was not serviceable. In the Shichagof area, one Infantry company was disposed to defend the beach, supported by artillery and other troops.

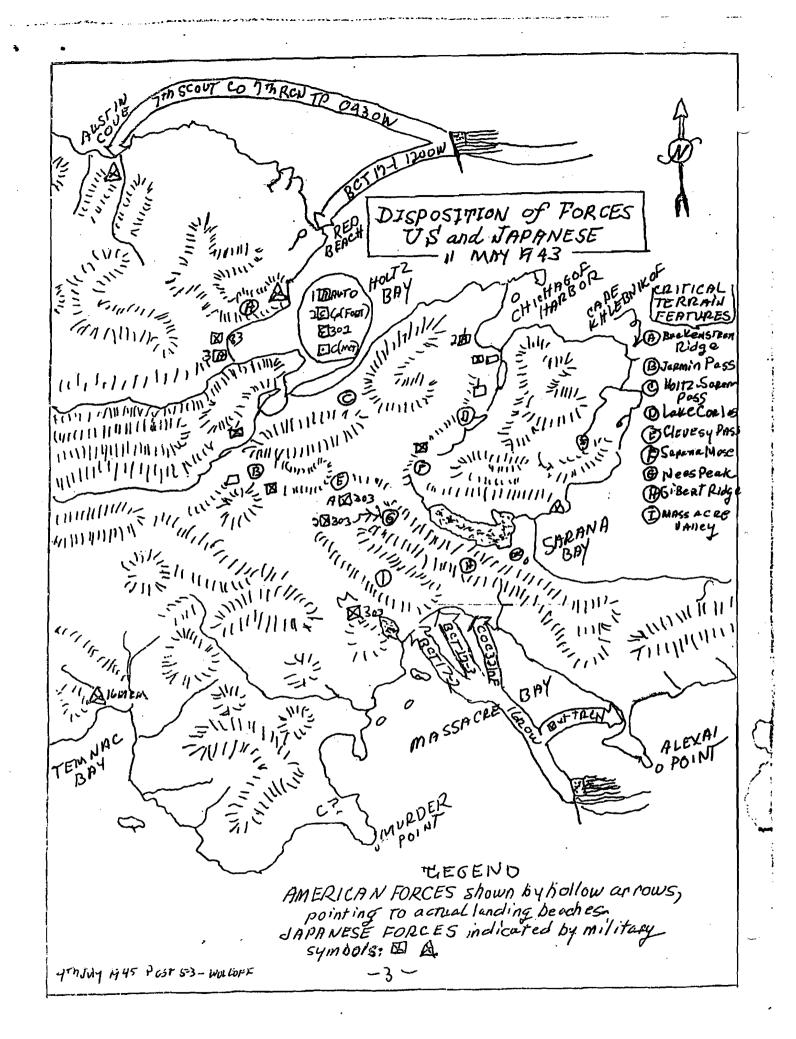
## CHAPTER III \*\* AMERICAN PLAN OF ATTACK

American Forces had not been idle throughout the many months following the Jap occupation of Attu, Agattu and Kiska. The Eleventh Air Force, operating from bases in the Aleutians at first remote from Attu but gradually moving further westward braved the worst flying weather in the world and repeatedly bombed Japanese positions. Elements of the U.S. Fleet bombarded Chichagof Harbor and Holtz Bay beginning weeks before the launching of the actual amphibious attack, and supported our landings there and at Massacre Bay.

The task force for the capture of Attu was organized around the 7th Infantry Division in the winter of 1942-43 at Fort Ord, California. In April 1943, this well trained amphibious force departed in serials from San Francisco in ships bound for various ports in Alaska. Every effort was made to deceive the Japanese as to the destination and objective of these forces, but it is believed that the enemy obtained fairly accurate information concerning the movement, even to the approximate date of attack.

D-Day was set tentatively as 7 May 1943. Several basic plans for the operation, with variants, had been painstakingly drawn up in order to be prepared for all possible contingencies. Stormy Aleutian weather, unpredictable and frequently violent, forced a change of D-Day first to 9 May, then to 10 and finally 11 May. The Navy task force convoyed and transported the Army 7th Division Task Force to the vicinity of Attu Island, arriving during the night of 10-11 May. There, the sea-going forces were divided. The smaller, consisting of the 1st Battalion, 17th Infantry reinforced and a provisional battalion including the 7th Scout Company and a detachment of Alaskan Scouts, proceeded to the north side of Attu, while the larger force, comprising the balance of the task force, moved in toward Massacre Bay from the southeast.

The details of Attu's terrain weren't known to the United States forces at that time. Accurate topographical maps had not been prepared although a crude relief map had been constructed at Fort Ord. USG and GS charts roughly showed the shore-lines, but knowledge of the beaches useable for landings, of the traversable mountain passes and of the elevations of mountain peaks and ridges was extremely limited.



Attu Island is the westernmost of the Aleutian Islands and the westernmost of the Possessions of the United States in the Northern Pacific. It is about 17 (N-S) by 40 (E-W) miles in extent and is indented by many bays and long inlets. It has 3,000 foot high rocky mountains, on whose cold summits lie patches of snow and ice the year round. There are many rocks and reefs off its shores. Beaches exist at the heads of bays and inlets, but aout 95% of its shore-line consists of rocky, precipitous cliffs. The off-shore approaches are habitually foul ground, filled with reefs and pinnacles requiring extreme caution of navigators. The valleys are very wet, with water usually only a foot or so below the surface of the tundra, which is frequently so swampy as to be in many places. a true muskeg. The spongy water-soaked tundra extends up hillsides to considerable elevations, giving away at last to rock precipitous slopes and craggy crests. No trees exist on Attu, and only small scattered patches of dwarf alder, willow and elderberry shrubs grow on the lower ground. Many of the innumerable deep crevices and gorges are filled with snow, great patches lay on the steep slopes down to comparatively low elevations while most of the summits were snowcovered on 11 May 1943.

The master plan called for scout detachments to go ashore at Austen Cove and Red Beach on the north and Casco Cove on the south and conduct reconnaissance prior to the landing of combat troops; Massacre Beach was evidently considered to be well enough known not to require special reconnaissance.

The U.S. Force landing at Austin Cove and Red Beach was to drive southward, exerting pressure on the Japanese Holtz Bay-forces.

The U.S. Forces landing on the beaches of Massacre Bay from Casco Cove around to Alexai Point was to be the main striking force. It was to press northward quickly by employing its overwhelming superiority in men and material, join with the small North Force, somewhere west of Holtz Bay and then drive norteastward down the valley corridors leading to Holtz Bay and Shichagof Harobr, where practically all the enemy forces were established.

Comparing this attack plan with the Japanese defense plan, it is obvious that the enemy had well estimated the situation and that Massacre Valley might again have lived up to its name. This vital factor of Japanese well-conceived defenses, plus the virtually unknown terrain and poorly understood weather conditions, was to disrupt and delay the plans of the U.S. Forces in a serious and costly manner.

## CHAPTER IV ---- INVASION DAY ----- 11 May

D-Day begain auspiciously enough with the troop carriers, both on the north and south, reaching the rendezvous areas about 0430W (local time). Sunrise was still two hours away but the morning twilight, which began at 0339W, was already under way. Surface visibility was twelve miles and the sea had calmed. The estimated ceiling was one thousand feet.

Suddenly at about 0515 hours, the fog (the typical Aleutian fog) began to roll in. It soon became obvious to all that H-hour would have to be postponed, or else the support of the Naval bombardment would be sacrificed and the danger of the small landing craft being lost would assum proportions of a very real problem. H-hour was postponed indefinitely.

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Ean milled around in the transports with arms and equipment, with bandoleers and grenades, fretting at the delay. Some felt that D-Day would again be postponed because of the fog, which had closed in like a dense smoke screen. Everybody, the commanders and the commanded alike, was nervous, tense, irritable. Finally, at about 1200 hours, the word flashed to proceed with landing operations.

In the north at Red Beach, guided by a radar-using destroyer, the detachment of Alaska Scouts debarked into landing craft soon after 1200W. They towed small plastic boats into which they would transfer before reaching the beach so that their approach might not be compromised by the roar of the motors of the LOP's. Behind the Scouts were six landing craft containing the assualt Company of the Battalion Combat Team 17-1. These troops stood off-shore until the beach had been reconnoitered by the Scouts for feasibility as a landing point. The beach was narrow, but feasible, and the landing operation was begun.

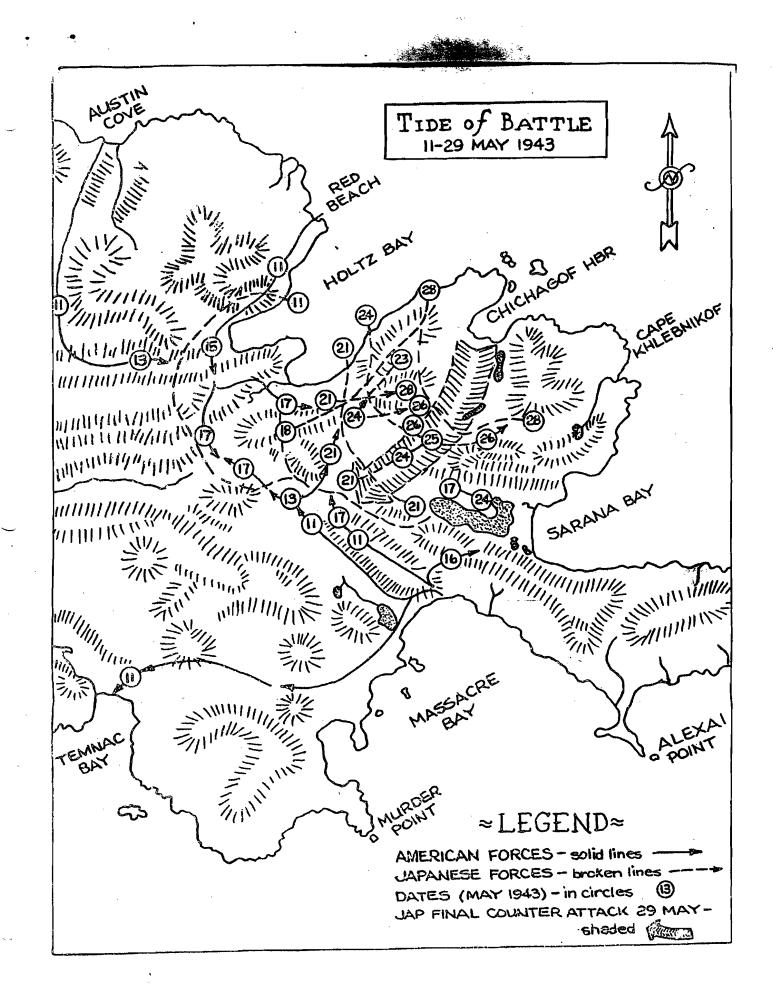
From Red Beach, the First Battalion 17th Infantry climbed the very steep 250-foot escarpment and drove inland rapidly toward its first objective, Hill X, which was on the high ground (Muckenstrum Ridge) immediately overlooking Holtz Bay from the northwest. It was not until about 1900W that the first resistance was encountered when the platoon anchoring the left flank of the battalion flushed a party of four armed Japs. Of these, two were killed and two escaped into the fog. Shortly thereafter, the enemy guns in Holtz Bay opened fire on the beach patrol but no casualties were inflicted. About 200W, the advance on Holtz Bay area was halted, about 800 yeards short of its objective. At this time the fog was so thick that it was impossible to reconcile any terrain features with those noted on existing maps and rather than run the risk of becoming lost, the battalion commander ordered his troops to take the defensive positions with strong outpost guard mounted around the entire perimeter. During the night, Jap forces occupied Hill X (Muckenstrum Ridge). From this position, they pinned down by fire, one company of the 17th Infantry throughout 12 May in a deep ravine. On the morning of 13 May, the capture of the top of Hill X (Upper Muckenstrum Ridge) was completed by close fighting, although there were no cases of actual hand-to-hand combat, and the North Force poured down into Holtz (Addison) Valley.

Supply was a doubly-tough problem on the north side of the island because the entire line of communications passing over Muckenstrum Ridge was vulnerable to fire from the enemy AA guns in Holtz Bay and positions on the high ground (Moore Ridge) overlooking Black (West) Beach, Holtz Bay.

In the southat Massacre Bay, landing difficulty due to heavy fog was also encountered by our assault force. H-hour was postponed from 0740W until 1530W. At about 1630W these forces begain the landing on the sand at Massacre Bay. The fog was so thick that one entire wave of boats landed on the wrong beach. In another case, a destroyer nosed its precarious path into the bay through the fog by means of radar and led a group of landing craft to the beach. Once ashore, the troops moved over the wet tundra-covered low ground to the rocky hills, shrouded in dense clouds above the 300-foot contour lines.

With the landing established, the battalion combat teams (17-2 and 17-3) began their push inland. No enemy resistance was met until about 1900W when, after advancing about twenty-five hundred yeards inland, Japanese rifle, machine

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gun and mortar fire was brought to bear on the forward elements of the U.S. troops from high ground north and east of Massacre Valley. This resistance increased until the two assault battalions were effectively pinned down for the night and the advance stalled. The assault was resumed next morning, but made little progress.

Supplies poured ashore throughout the night. Vehicles could only operate effectively on the beaches and in stream beds; tundra and muskeg bogged them down elsewhere. Most of the supplies and ammunition were man-handled for the first ten days of operations.

The Japs skillfully took advantage in all cases of the high ground overlooking the valley floors, up which American troops first tried to advance. Thus it was found necessary to clear out pockets of resistance on the ridges before attempting concerted drives through the valleys. American blood was spilled to establish this favorable situation. The 32d Infantry Battalion had joined the 17th in the battle on both fronts by this time. In the enemy's efforts to frustrate the American advance, his staunchest ally was the impermeable fog. As patrols attempted to gain access to dominating heights, the Jap would occupy defensive positions at the fog line from which points he could bring sufficient fire to bear on the Americans to pin them down. If a Jap position was located by the searching artillery fire, the Jap would dissapear into the fog only to turn up at some other almost impregnable position from which he could cover all sectors of approach.

Artillery was landed on Red Beach (later at West Beach, Holtz Bay) and at Massacre Bay to support the attack and to afford protection against hostile air attack. Initially, the artillery was set up on the beaches due to difficulties encountered moving overland.

Force artillery consisted of the 48th and 49th Battalions, Field Artillery (105MM Howitzers), and the 78th AA Regiment (one battalion of 90mm guns and two battalions of 40mm guns) reinforced. Added to this were two improvised batteries of six 75mm pack howitzers each taken from the infantry cannon companies. The field artillery battalions furnished officers and gunners to these batteries, so that they could employ the indirect-fire methods of the field artillery.

The filed artillery set-up Fire Direction Centers to control the artillery fire as soon as the artillery was landed. Many reference points were registered on so that concentrations could be brought to bear on targets of opportunity. Due to the low and shifting fog line, enemy machine guns and mortars on the hill sides would be visible only momentarily. It was, therefore, necessary to bring fire on those targets with the least possible delay. Artillery communication was by wire and radio, but the latter was found to be the more reliable due to traffic and gun fire breaking the wire lines. Due to communication between all batteries and between the two Fire Direction Centers, any observer could adjust the fire of any battery. All fire was observed, employing some NCOs as well as officers.

#### CHAPTER V --- HOLTZ-MASSACRE ACTION (22-21 MAY)

During the first four days the Japs held firmly in the Holtz-Massacre (Jarmin) Pass, but continuous pressure on the Holtz Bay sector from the left flank, by the Red Beach (North) force and by the south force up Massacre Valley was making the area untenable. The Japs were forced down from Muckenstrum Ridge into the West Arm, across the middle (Moors) Ridge, and then Eastern (Holtz Eay) was threatened by these American Forces driving in from the North. The Provisional Battalion, which landed at Austin Cove and which had been lost in the mountain for 5 days suffering tremendous hardships, contacted BCT 17-1 on the Holtz (Addison) Valley floor on 15 May.

On 15 May, Colonel Yamasaki issued a withdrawal order that caused an orderly retreat into the Chickagof Harbor area, leaving only rear guard forces to hold in East Arm Holtz Bay and cover the movement. On 16 May, following a heavy pounding from the Artillery and determined assult by U.S. Forces, the 1st Company of the 303rd evacuated the Holtz-Massacre (Jarmin) Pass into the Cold Mountain area and prepared to assist the 2d Company in holding the Sarana (Clevesey) Pass. On the 17th of May, patrol contact between the North and South Forces was effected in the Holtz-Massacre (Jarmin) Pass area.

The heavy fire of the field artillery battalions (reinforced) was responsible to a large degree for many of the gains that were made by the Infantry. Host of the guns were emplaced on the beaches, but during the action, two batteries were moved approximately 1000 yeards up the Hogback in Massacre Valley. During the 21 days of action, 32,270 rounds of 105mm and more than 10,000 rounds of 75mm ammuntion were fired. The 78th AA regiment was landed in increments during the action. Due to almost complete lack of air opposition, little use was made of this AA artillery. Most of the personnel of the AAA were used as ammunition and stretcher carriers. In this work, they did invaluable service.

On 18 May, the U.S. Forces augmented by the 1st Battalion, 4th Infantry which had just landed on Massacre Beach, began the assault on the Sarana (Clevesy) Fass. By the next day, this assault had cleared the high ground (Robinson) Ridge northwest of the pass but was stopped by the Jap forces under Lt Horna at Point "A" (nees Peak) on the west tip of the Massacre-Sarana Ridge (Gilbert) Ridge. Here Honna's unti occupied a strong position that covered the steep slope leading down from the ridge. The first assault was thrown back with losses, and American weapons were promptly fired back into Massacre Valley by the Japanese and produced casualties, though the fire was unaimed. Point "A" (Nees Peak) was finally wrested from Lt Nonna, who died with his unit in its defense on 21 May.

#### CHAFTER VI -- MASSACRE-SARANA ACTION (22-23MAY)

Occupation of Point "A" (Nees Peak) by U.S. Forces opened the Sarana (Clevesy) Pass, and enabled the U.S. battalions to move through it with Chichagof Harobr as the objective. The high ridge (Pendergast) on the left of the Chichagof Valley was promptly climbed and steady pressure forced the Japs back. However, the strongly held Sarana Nose, the junction of Sarana (Siddens) and Chichagof (Jim Fish) Valleys, presented a problem. Here Lt. Gote with his 4th Company, 303d Battalion, with remnants of the 2d Company, defied the crossing of the Sarana (Siddens) Valley floor. In plain sight of his position an infantry company was assembling for what appeard to be a suicide advance. Suddenly, at 0640 on 22 May, the combined fire of all American artillery batteries, infantry cannon, heavy weapons and anti-tank units in the area descended on Sarana Nose. At 0700 the doughboys crossed the valley with few casualties and routed or killed Gote's forces, thus opening up the Sarana (Siddens) Valley.

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At about 1430, 22 May 1943, fifteen Japanese "Nell" bombers attacked two ships off Holtz Bay and dropped supplies to enemy troops in the Chicagof Harbor sector. The planes were engaged by AA units manning machine guns on Red Beach. They caused no observed damage. One enemy plans was shot down by the Destroyer USS KANE.

## CHAPTER VII --- FISHHOOK-CHICHAGOF ACTION (24-28 MAY)

In the afternoon of 24 May, a destroyer in the Navy screen between Attu and the Kuriles observed fifteen Japanese bombers heading for Attu Island. This information was radioed to Amchitka from which base five P-38 planes were dispatched to attempt an interception. An intercept was successfully effected west of Attu. Five of the enemy planes were destroyed and seven more were seen to take cover in cloud formations, all burning and were listed as possibly destroyed. Two P-38's were lost in the engagement, but one pilot was recovered.

Action now shifted to the ridge (Pendergast) on the north side of Chichagof (Jim Fish) Valley, where Yonegawa's Battalion and supporting units were holding the ridge and the Chichagof-Holtz (Holtz\*Sarana) Pass. Bitter fighting forced the Japs back until they stopped the advance at the Fishhook Ridge. On 24 May at 1000 two U.S. Battalions assaulted the Fishook Ridge, supported by air attack and artillery barrage. Some initial successwas made, but the forces were thrown back to their original positions. During the night, an antiaircraft artillery battery moved two pack howitzers from Moore Ridge (Holtz Bay) to Pendergast Ridge with much difficulty these weapons gave very necessary artillery support to the infantry in attacking Fishhook Ridge and gained a Presidential citation for the unit. The attack was not renewed until the next day because of the difficulty in moving ammunition and supplies up to the forces on the Ridge. On 25 May, the attack was renewed along the line until, on 28 May, the Japs had been forced back to a line through lake Cories and the Fishhook Ridge had been taken from the Japs. The enemy was compressed in an untenable pocket on the shore of Chichagof Harbor. The U.S. forces now prepared for the down hill assault on the Chickagof Harbor defenses.

#### CHAPTER VIII -- JAPANESE FINAL COUNTER-ATTACK

Colonel Yamasaki's decimated force was faced with the propect of a lastditch stand on the beach, a complete surrender or a violent ounter attack. He chose the counter-attack. His plan was to assemble his remaining forces, approximately 1000 men, and hit the American line between Lake Cories and Fishhook Ridge. The artillery position across the Sarana (Clevesy) Pass (Upper Hogback and Engineer Hill) was his first objective. Then he hoped to stream down to Massacre Beach, the base of the American Force's supplies, causing the maximum possible damage before being destroyed himself. Colonel Yamaski on the night of 28th issued the following order (Paraphrase) to his forces:

## CHICHAGOF HARBOR ORDER OF SECOND SECTOR UNIT

1 - By the combined attacked of the enemy land, sea and air units the Battalions on the front line have been defeated. However, our morale is excellent and we are holding in some important points. We will attack and annihilate the United States Forces.

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2 - The Yonegawa Battalion will form on the right of Lake Cories and will advance on the right in the direction of Sarana Pass.

3 - The Watanabe Battalion will hold in their present position and cover the assembling forces, then will be prepared to attack on the left in the direction of the Sarana-Massacre Pass.

4 - The Aota Battalion (AA) will cease the defense of the sea frontier and will advance in the center in the direction of Sarana Pass.

(Following paragraphs are devoted to small units, including for example, the following):

8 - It Tsuroka (Navy) will command the attached Naval personnel and will advance as third reserve in the rear of headquarters.

9 - The cryptographic wireless section will destroy all documents and will act under the command of the adjutant.

10 - The Field Hospital, after direct assistance to the patients, will advance as part of the reserve under command of the adjutant.

ll - The time for attack will be announced later. All units will send liason officers to headquarters prior to 2200.

 $12 - I_{2}$  in the advance for the attack, will be in the center rear of the front lines.

YONUYO YAMASAKI Colonel, Infantry, Commanding.

At 0330 on 29 May, the Japs (about 1000 strong) hit and overran the front line units at the head of Iake Cories. They poured up Chichagof (Jim Fish) Valley, overrunning two command posts and medical installations in Sarana (Siddens) Valley, until they hit the U.S. Force reserve position in the Massacre-Sarana (Clevesy) Fass and on Engineer Hill about 0500. A direct attack was made by the Japs with only a slight attempt to bypass the strong position. Their fanatical charges were repulsed again and again mainly by Engineer troops which had promptly organized a very effective defense on Engineer Hill. The remaining Jap forces consisted of scattered groups in the upper Siddens Valley bolow Cold Mountain and the Sarana and Chichagof Valleys and the ocean. To meet this last suicidal counter-attack of the Japs, the AAA troops in the Massacre Eay area were organized as a provisional infantry battalion and aided in clearing the onemy force from Engineer Hill-Clevesy Pass area. By the evening of 29 May the majority of the Japanese force had been annihilated. Colonel Yamasaki was killed, sword in hand, at the base of the Sarana (Clevesy) Pass.

## CHAPTER IX - MOPPING UP

The last two days of May and the first few days of June were devoted to mopping up and reconnaissance activities. Reports that small groups of Japs were operating in various sectors principally in the Cape Klebnikof area were

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Thus ended the battle for control of Attu. Wet and begrimed men at last ware able to wash, shave and bathe. The blue fox again roamed over the terrain which for a few incredible weeks was the site of the bitterest fighting of the war. More than two thousand of the enemy had been slain; a score had been taken prisoner. Faces of many Americans were missing from the ranks--some five hundred of them had paid as dearly as man can pay to free United States<sup>\*</sup> soil from the grasp of the Japanese invader. The first American amphibious action had been a victorious one. The tide of the war had set definitely against the "Empire of the Setting Sun".

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