

NO FLYERS BETTER THAN YANKS IN ALASKA, SAYS CAPT. KEENAN

Mines Graduate, Back From 15-Month Tour of Duty on Amchitka, Tells of Airmen's Bravery and Skill in Far North.

Naval flyers who operate in the Aleutians, braving soupy fog, rain, wind, icy temperatures, visibility that is almost nil, landing in darkness or semi-twilight on rough, rain-soaked terrain, are rated by Capt. Albert M. Keenan of the army corps of engineers as the world's bravest, most skilled and most resourceful pilots.

Captain Keenan, a ruddy-faced, thick set Irishman, who was graduated from the Colorado School of Mines in 1935, is back in Denver after fifteen months on Amchitka, one of the Aleutian group, where the army and navy fought and licked the elements and built a plane runway and quarters for men and machines.

In addition to his memories of the fog-bound island and of Jap raiders dropping bombs, Captain Keenan brought back news of Maj. Dent L. Lay of Rocky Ford, "who used to thrill the grandstanders when he was a member of the Colorado School of Mines football team prior to 1935.

"Dent's a major now and in charge of the engineers building the plane runway at Amchitka," Captain Keenan said. "We went to school together, graduated together, and after the commencement exercises we met again as members of an aviation battalion bound from the states to the Aleutians.

TWO SEASONS AND BOTH ALIKE.

"The Aleutians are a dreary, rainy, fog-bound group of islands where there are two seasons—summer and winter, and you can't tell one from the other.

"The naval flyers on this God-forsaken outpost are to my mind the bravest, most resourceful and most skilled pilots and navigators in the world. They take off from runways fashioned from the natural gravel unearthed on Amchitka when the navy Seabees excavated for the construction of huts to house the personnel of the landing group.

"Once they take off during the brief periods the fog banks open up these flyers are on their own. They rarely get lost over the sea, but if they do navy PBV patrol boats search them out from the water and guide them to the landing field.

"What happens then is up to the flyer. If he has any light at all, it is dim. He has to hit the runway ribbon to prevent a crackup. That's where it takes skill. The naval flyers are doing it as a matter of routine, and they never complain.

YANKS BED DOWN ON BOG IN RAIN.

Helped Build Aleut Bases



CAPT. ALBERT M. KEENAN, Graduate of the Colorado School of Mines, now with the army corps of engineers, who is home on leave after fifteen months of service in the Aleutian islands, where he assisted in constructing the bases which are providing the means of speeding defeat of the Japanese.

YANKS BED DOWN ON BOG IN RAIN.

"When he landed at Amchitka, the terrain was covered with 'muskeg,' a spongy, boggy substance into which you sink six inches, if the season is winter, and better than a foot, if it happens to be summer.

"I saw the men of our battalion sleeping in their blankets, bedded down in the 'muskeg' while the fog enveloped them and the rain beat down. They are the unsung heroes of this war.

"The weather is so bad on Amchitka that the Japs then on adjacent Attu and still on Kiska, didn't know we had landed until ten days afterwards. We went to work immediately—the Seabees with the construction of huts and the aviation battalion on the construction of the runway.

"Once we got the material, which the Seabees unearthed in the excavations for huts, the construction did not take long. On the night before the runway was completed, the Japs came over. They hit four times on the runway—lucky shots during lucky breaks in the cloud banks.

JAPS ARE BLOWN OUT OF CLOUDS.

"The damage was repaired. American planes arrived, and two days later the Japs came back. Our flyers were in the air, and the Japs never knew what hit them. They were blown out of the sky.

"Once they found out the Americans were on Amchitka, the Japs bombed us every other day for fifteen days. They did no damage to speak of, and casualties were almost negligible.

"During the initial stages of the occupation beds were available sometimes, but were never enjoyed. It was a case of much work and little sleep.

"The grub was plentiful and nourishing in the early days of the operation, but not so palatable as the fresh foods which arrived after we had become established. The first food we got was of the evaporated variety.

NOTHING WILL HOLD OUT RAIN.

"The men were warmly dressed and protected against all the elements except the rain. It never ceased—night or day. Rain-proof clothing, with which the men were well supplied, is only theoretically rain-proof on Amchitka.

"The men wore sheepskin-lined parkas and long underwear. They were protected against the temperatures, but they never knew how cold it really got because they never saw a thermometer."

Captain Keenan said his new assignment will be at the training center of the corps of engineers in Louisiana. His wife, he said, would accompany him to his new post. His mother, Mrs. Ernestine Keenan, long a resident of Denver, is at present in California.