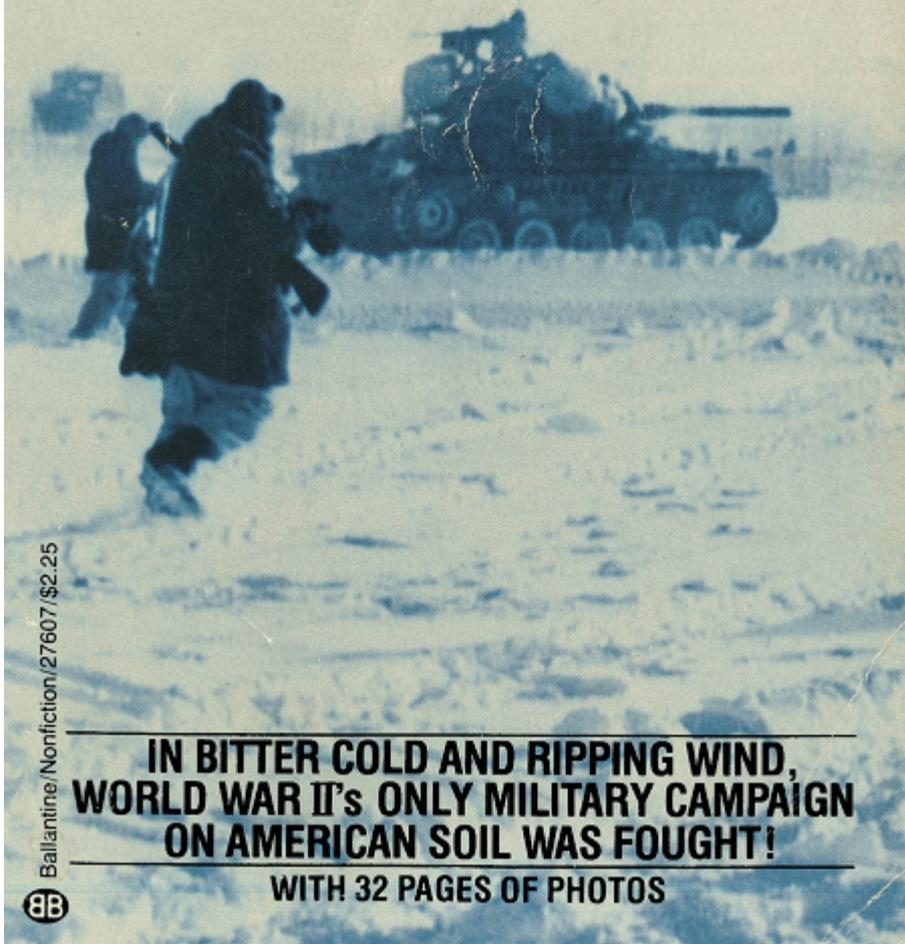


BRIAN GARFIELD

THE

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MILE WAR**

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AND THE ALEUTIANS**



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THE THOUSAND-MILE WAR

World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians

Brian Garfield

BALLANTINE BOOKS • NEW YORK

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Author's Note

It is about a thousand miles from Dutch Harbor, near the Alaska Peninsula, to Attu at the far western tip of the Aleutian Island Chain. They are the most brutal thousand miles in the Pacific Ocean. Here, for fifteen months in 1942—43, was fought one of the toughest campaigns of World War II.

In the context of global war it was relatively small. About 500,000 men took part—Americans, Canadians, Russians, Japanese. Its battles were fought on land, at sea, and in the air. It cost scores of ships, hundreds of airplanes, and perhaps ten thousand lives. It was the only campaign of World War II fought on the United States' own North American soil. And it gave the United States her first theater-wide victory over Japan.

Few Americans recall even its highlights. This is the first history of the Aleutian Campaign to be published.

This is not an authorized history. That is, it has not been directed, commissioned, subsidized, or in any way controlled by any agency, government or private. But I must add that I have received great assistance from many individuals and agencies without whose help I could not have written this book. I owe each of them a great debt of gratitude.

At the same time, I take full responsibility for any errors of fact or interpretation.

PART ONE BUCKNER'S WAR

Chapter One Japan Steams North

Cold fog swept across the pitching flight deck of the Japanese aircraft carrier *Ryujo*; it stung men's exposed faces with brittle needles of wind-driven spray. The Aleutian fog brought midnight close against the ship — and with it, the grave risk of collision with the seven other Japanese ships nearby.

On the bridge of the flagship stood her skipper, Captain Tadao Kato, bundled in a heavy fur coat. Kato scanned the low black sky intently, keyed-up and grim because tonight his ship sailed on a mission of almost personal vengeance. Six weeks before, in Tokyo Harbor, one of Colonel Jimmy Doolittle's American bombs had ripped a hole in *Ryujo*'s flight deck. Now, within a few hours the fifteen-year-old warship would avenge the insult: on deck her bombers were warming up, and soon Captain Kato would have the honor of launching a bomb attack on the U.S. Army and Navy bases at Dutch Harbor, Alaska.

It was the night of June 2, 1942.¹ *Ryujo*'s bomber strike would set in motion a full-scale, fifteen-month war for the Aleutian Islands — the only military campaign of World War II fought on North American soil.

Sailing off *Ryujo's* quarter was the brand-new carrier *Junyo*. Together the two flattops carried an armada of eighty-two attack planes. Close by in the swirling North Pacific fog were the escorts — heavy cruisers *Takao* and *Maya*, three destroyers and an oiler. And supporting the task group not far to the west were the ships of Vice Admiral Boshiro Hoso-gaya's Northern Force: cruisers *Nachi*, *Abukuma*, *Kiso* and *Tama*, nine destroyers, three transports carrying 2500 Japanese Army invasion troops, and a screen of submarines.

A foggy cold-weather front was tracking eastward across the North Pacific at about 20 knots, and the Japanese carrier force stayed just within it, to avoid detection by American patrol planes. On flagship *Ryujo*, Captain Kato and Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, the task force commander, had been alerted earlier in the day by sight of a patrol plane in the soup overhead. It could have been an American PBY Catalina flying boat; then again it might have been a Russian plane—the Soviets, who had pirated the PBY design from the Americans, patrolled regularly off the Siberian coast. There was no way to be certain; but to avoid further discovery, Admiral Kakuta had turned his carriers and escorts into the leading edge of the storm, and had stayed with the front all afternoon and evening. Now, just before midnight, Kakuta stepped onto the open bridge, a thick-bodied man with batwing ears and a small mustache. Captain Kato noticed him look at his watch: the success of the admiral's impending operation depended on its timing, for the assault on Dutch Harbor—scheduled to take place in a few hours, in the early morning of June 3—was meant to divert massive American naval forces north toward Alaska. On the following day, June 4, the main body of Admiral Isoroku Yama-moto's Combined Imperial Fleet would make its massed attack in the vicinity of Midway Island, 2000 miles to the south of Kakuta.

Kakuta's tough *Ryujo* force was not as large as the fleet that had attacked Pearl Harbor six months before, but all signs pointed toward an equally devastating success. The only possible trouble was the afternoon's reconnaissance by the nebulous patrol plane, if in fact it had really been an American plane, and if it had detected the fleet sliding through the fog below. Captain Kato mentioned the plane once again, and the admiral gave him a reassuring smile; in any event there was nothing they could do about it now. All they could do was keep close track of the time. Kakuta looked at his watch again.

The *Ryujo* fleet was now on the last leg of a fast four-day dash from Ominato in North Honshu, where it had waited a week after outfitting at Hashira anchorage near Hiroshima. There, in mid-May, the Northern Force had loaded heavy Arctic gear in the midst of a harbor filled with virtually the entire Imperial Navy: sixty-eight capital warships and almost uncounted escort vessels and transports, massed for the largest naval operation in Japanese history. Admiral Yamamoto was deploying more than 190 warships and 700 airplanes against the United States Pacific Fleet.

For Japan, which had not lost a naval battle in more than a century, the operation would prove to be one of history's most disastrous strategic mistakes.

Japan's Premier, the stolid and determined General Hideki Tojo, had come to office on a path paved with assassinations, terror politics, and the back-room power of the tough Army establishment. His military shogunate had led the nation into a World War, much against the practical misgivings of officers like Admiral Yamamoto; now Tojo aimed his biggest guns toward Midway — and toward the Aleutian Islands. In so doing, Japan embarked on a new program of expansion and conquest while she had not yet secured her immense victories of the first six months of the war.

The record of conquest was phenomenal. Within days after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Japan had swallowed up Guam, Indochina, Thailand; she had sunk the only major Allied warships west of Midway — the British leviathans *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*. By Christmas she had taken Wake and Hong Kong. Within two months she had occupied Manila, Singapore, Malaya; in February at Java Sea she sank ten Allied ships; in March the Allies lost Java and Burma, and Japanese armies were in the Owen Stanley Mountains of New Guinea, with the coast of Australia almost within sight. Japan had driven the British fleet from the Indian Ocean and the Pacific; she had sunk every American battleship in

the Pacific Fleet; and at the end of April Japan still had lost nothing bigger than a destroyer.

In May 1942, Corregidor surrendered and the Philippines fell; Japan invaded the Solomons. She had swallowed South-east Asia and the islands of the South Pacific; she had crushed all Allied strength in the western ocean.

By the end of May, the Allies were at the low point of the global war. In Africa, Rommel had retaken Benghazi; in the Atlantic, German U-boats had sunk almost five hundred ships off the North American coast, many of them within sight of the U.S. shore. Japanese submarines and planes had bombed and shelled forests, refineries and installations on the U.S. Pacific Coast. American sea power, what was left of it, had been driven back to Hawaii and the West Coast, and the Japanese knew that U.S. strategy had to be restricted to a policy of holding fast on a fragile une of defense that began in New Guinea, extended through Samoa and Midway, and was anchored at its northern end at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians.

There had not been a single setback to muffle Japanese enthusiasm. Heady with conquest, the Imperial General Staff brushed off warnings from junior officers just home from the field, who felt that the newly acquired territories must be secured, even at the expense of further expansion. Even the forceful Yamamoto, Japan's star naval strategist who had masterminded the attack on Pearl Harbor, was convinced that Japan could not hope to win a long war. Yamamoto had spent too much time in the United States to underestimate the massive industrial strength of America. He saw clearly that there was only one hope for Japanese victory, and that was to draw out and destroy the remnants of the U.S. fleet at a time when the Japanese fleet was far superior to it in total strength. The American Navy could be reinforced quickly by new construction; it had to be smashed irrevocably in 1942—or not at all. If Yamamoto could destroy American naval power, and particularly the four American carriers then in the Pacific, he felt Japan could persuade the United States to sign a peace that would insure the security of the expanded Japanese Empire.

By April 1942, Yamamoto's naval strategy had crystallized into an obsession to scuttle the U.S. Navy in one massive stroke. Army commanders disagreed with him; they wanted to press forward in the South Pacific and invade Australia. The staff was at loggerheads, until April 18—the day of the Doolittle raid. That day bombs fell on Tokyo, and the Imperial Staff forgot its infighting in a rush to the wall charts. Officers crowded around the maps, trying to guess where the Doolittle bombers had come from.

Some officers argued that Doolittle's twin-engine Army bombers might have been launched from aircraft carriers. Others pointed to the north: Alaska was the only area from which American land-based planes could reach Japan. The Aleutian Islands, off Alaska, lay only 650 miles from Paramushiro in the Japanese Kuriles. The Doolittle raiders could have taken off from the western Aleutians. One staff colonel recalled that Doolittle himself, identified by Intelligence, had grown up in Nome, the son of an Alaskan gold rush miner.

The mystery was never solved; it was not until after the war that the Japanese learned that Doolittle's raid had been launched from "Bull" Halsey's carriers in the Central Pacific. Meanwhile, during the closing days of April, the Imperial Staff agreed with Yamamoto that American sea power must be destroyed. But, they added, it was also necessary to protect their Aleutian flank against further raids like Doolittle's. Yamamoto moved fast. His first attempt to ambush the U.S. fleet took place in early May with the Battle of the Coral Sea, where he sank the carrier *Lexington* and inflicted crippling damage on the carrier *Yorktown*. Yamamoto was elated; of the four American carriers in the ocean, he had put two out of the war. Two more, and the job would be done. (It was not until later, after Midway, that the Naval Staff stopped to reconsider Coral Sea, and realized that the battle had been a standoff. Despite the victory, Japan had been checked at Coral Sea; the battle had halted her naval expansion so that Japanese troops could never reach Australia.)

Meanwhile Yamamoto's brilliant Senior Operations Officer, Captain Kameto Kuroshima, drew up a far-reaching plan for the "M I Operation"—Midway and the Aleutians. It called for a deployment of the entire Combined Fleet *in* a wide sweep of the Central and North Pacific, to capture the Aleutians and trap

the rest of the U.S. fleet. Twenty admirals and more than 100,000 men would take part. Flagship would be the awesome super-battleship *Yamato*, 64,000 tons of big guns and armor plate.

In the Aleutians, multiple task forces under stolid Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya would strike a paralyzing blow at Dutch Harbor while an occupation group landed troops on the islands of Adak, Kiska, and Attu. The operation would draw the American fleet out of hiding from Pearl Harbor; it would steam north toward Alaska, and Yamamoto would wait for it at Midway. Hosogaya's attack on the Aleutians would give Yamamoto time to conquer Midway, so that when the American fleet arrived he would have the island base secured for use by his own attack planes. Meanwhile the Northern Second Mobile Force — Admiral Kakuta with his carriers — would complete its diversion at Dutch Harbor and swing west to support the occupation of the western Aleutians. Thus Japan would gain both the protection of her northern flank and the eagerly desired annihilation of the U. S. Pacific Fleet.

On May 5, Imperial General Headquarters issued Navy Order Eighteen, formally authorizing the operation by calling in part for "the invasion and occupation of the western Aleutians ... in order to prevent enemy forces from attacking the homeland."

Less than a month later, the intricate plan went into operation.

On the night of June 2, as his carrier force made its final high-speed dash toward Dutch Harbor under cover of the eastward-tracking storm, Admiral Kakuta studied his latest intelligence about the island he was about to attack.

Japanese Intelligence was not so good -as it might have been, because no Japanese spies in Alaska had communicated with Tokyo for months. The eight or ten spies had been interned in the States, along with hundreds of innocent Nisei. But Kakuta still had several sources of information. He had himself launched eight planes during the day, to scout ahead 250 miles; but they had stayed away from Dutch Harbor to avoid alerting the Americans.

Kakuta's principal reconnaissance "eyes" belonged to a handful of Japan's I-class submarines. Bigger than their counterpart American fleet boats, these super-submarines were designed to make the round trip from Tokyo to Los Angeles without refueling—and several of them had already done so. Although their living conditions were cramped and demoralizing, they displaced about 5000 tons and their deck hangar space was big enough to carry as many as three folding-wing seaplane bombers. The unique I-boats were effective weapons of war. Their usefulness was only limited by the nature of the missions assigned to them; for the most part Japan never used her I-boat fleet to best advantage. But the big undersea craft had recorded a few encouraging successes. In early January one of them had torpedoed the American freighter *Absaroka* just outside the harbor of Los Angeles. On February 23 an I-boat fired twenty-five high-explosive shells into a refinery near Santa Barbara, California, destroying an oil well and pump. Planes launched from I-boats periodically reconnoitered Seattle and Canadian West Coast ports; and once an I-boat's plane bombed a National Forest in Oregon, on orders from Admiral Yamamoto, who had been talked into the notion that a few incendiary bombs set off in the great forests would cause a holocaust of flame and destruction that would sweep down the Pacific Coast and wipe out the major cities.

Admiral Kakuta had three I-boats scouting for him, as well as several smaller RO-class submarines. One of the I-boats had launched its scout plane over Dutch Harbor on May 29; the seas were so rough that the plane had cracked up when it tried to land by the I-boat. Now on June 2, the submarine itself ran silently past Dutch Harbor at periscope depth, and that night Kakuta had its radio code report in front of him. Meanwhile two other submarines were patrolling to the east, near Cold Bay, after reconnoitering Kodiak (by periscope) and Kiska (by plane).

Kakuta now learned that some of the Intelligence estimates he had been given in Japan were incorrect. He had believed an entire combat division of American troops was stationed at Dutch Harbor; now he learned there were no more than 5000 troops, most of them service and support personnel. He sent a last-minute

signal to Admiral Yamamoto, requesting permission to divert the invasion force from the western Aleutians and instead invade and capture Dutch Harbor, which was the principal American military base in the Aleutians— indeed, as far as he knew, it was the only one. But Yamamoto vetoed the suggestion; Dutch Harbor was too far from Japan, too difficult to supply. And with the vast commitment at Midway and to the south, there weren't enough ships available to guarantee the security of Dutch Harbor once it had been taken. No; the plan would proceed as originally ordered.

Kakuta put the radiograms away and sent for the captain, Tadao Kato. The two men met on *Ryujo's* bridge; and Kakuta gave Kato the order to proceed with the execution of Plan AO.

Less than 170 miles from Dutch Harbor, *Ryujo* and *Junyo* increased speed to 25 knots to break through the forward edge of the storm into the clear, where they could launch their planes. Shortly after 2:00 A.M. the warmed-up engines of the torpedo-bombers were switched off so that the gas tanks could be topped up with fuel. On *Ryujo's* flight deck, Lieutenant Masayuki Yamaguchi, the flight leader, climbed into his cockpit, and flight crews stood by to spin propellers on the "contact" signal to start engines. Pilots checked their gauges and their radios; there was no banter. Behind them had been cold nights with nothing to do but play cards and sip tea. Ahead was action — what they had come for. Deck crews stood about, envious because they must stay behind.

Ryujo's deck was silent except for the rush of wind. Lieutenant Commander Masatake Okumiya paused at the ship's shrine, then went on up to the bridge. Admiral Kakuta glanced at him and muttered something about the weather. Okumiya looked out at the fog; it seemed as impenetrable Panay and three Standard Oil tankers in the Yangtze River in China in 1937, providing one of the international incidents that led to unavoidable war.

Okumiya suggested they wait a few minutes longer for the fog to lift; that was what delayed the daylight. It was 2:28 A.M.; Kakuta was already an hour behind schedule. He began to pace the bridge.

On the flight deck, the bombers held 1000-pound bombs, the fighters 250-pounders. Pilots laced into their life jackets: life expectancy in these frigid waters was measured in minutes, but a submarine north of Dutch Harbor had orders to pick up downed Japanese pilots.

Watching the flight-deck activity, Kakuta displayed his nervousness; his pacing quickened. His hands were rammed in his pockets against the cold. The loudspeaker ordered all hands to launching stations; then the bullhorn roared again: "Start engines."

From the bridge, the admiral watched the black fog coil around the ship. The bow was barely visible, lighted momentarily by the reflected glow of engine exhaust flames. The deck floodlights came on, bright yellow, punctuated by the nickering red and green wing lights of the motionless planes. Fog blanketed the deck.

At 2:43 in the morning, light carrier *Junyo*, a thousand yards distant, steamed out of the fog into plain sight. Blinker signals flashed from the flagship, and Okumiya swung his green launching lamp overhead in a wide semicircle. *Ryujo* plunged straight ahead into the wind; aircraft engines wound up to full power. Lieutenant Yamaguchi rumbled down the deck and roared off the square bow, banked upward into a spiral and orbited while his flight formed up behind him. Off *Junyo*, Lieutenant Yoshio Shiga completed the same maneuver.

One bomber from *Ryujo* stalled during the moment of take-off and crashed into the sea directly in front of the slicing bow of the flagship. The lives of the three-man crew were saved when a destroyer nudged the wrecked plane out of the carrier's path and dropped scaling nets to the fliers.

Kakuta watched from the bridge while the first wave of thirty-five airplanes formed overhead. The low cloud ceiling, jammed down at 400 feet, prohibited long formation flight. As they flew out of sight of the

fleet, the planes separated to fly independently to Dutch Harbor.

Kakuta turned his ships back into the protective curtain of the storm. Now he had to wait. *Ryujo* moved slowly with the storm front, lashed by heavy rain and chilling wind. Captain Kato and Commander Okumiya told the admiral several times that they had nothing to worry about; Japanese Intelligence was convinced the nearest landbased American planes were at Kodiak, hundreds of miles from Dutch Harbor. Within a few hours Kakuta's pilots would suffer badly from this mistake in intelligence.

Chapter Two "You Will Be Governed By the Principle of Calculated Risk"

As Eastern and Western power converged toward Dutch Harbor, Yamamoto expected to achieve the complete surprise of a second Pearl Harbor. He was wrong.

The flying boat Admiral Kakuta had seen at noon June 2 had indeed been an American patrol plane. It had been dead reckoning for hours through heavy storms; its pilot could not give an exact fix, but he did radio a coded contact report to the Naval Air substation at Dutch Harbor. There the latest intelligence bulletin from Seattle—WAR DEPARTMENT REPORTS INDICATIONS OF ENEMY CARRIERS LESS THAN 400 MILES SOUTH OF KISKA—had just been logged, though it was already twenty-four hours out of date. American radio teams had been monitoring heavy enemy wireless traffic all day; by nightfall, Intelligence placed the Japanese task force somewhere in the waters about 250 miles southeast of Dutch Harbor.

The atmosphere at Dutch Harbor was one of tension, but not surprise. The United States had been tracking Admiral Kakuta ever since Tokyo had issued his initial orders.

On May 15, just three weeks before Kakuta launched his planes toward Dutch Harbor, a team of U. S. Navy crypt-analysts in a Honolulu basement had broken the top-secret Japanese naval code.

From fragmentary interceptions, Lieutenant Commander Joseph J. Rochefort, Jr., pieced together the information that Yamamoto intended to occupy Midway and the Aleutian Islands. Armed with this information, Rochefort went directly to the gentle, accessible Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet (CINCPAC) : Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the scholarly fifty-five-year-old Texan who was to oversee, from afar, all Allied operations in the Aleutian theater.

To Nimitz, the news came at a bad time. The enemy was pounding the Allies on every front. In the Pacific the ultimate outcome of the war appeared alarmingly doubtful. Europe and North Africa had first call on manpower and equipment; on Nimitz's Japanese front, Allied forces were depleted and weak, spread thin across the entire Pacific.

Even in that context, the defenses of Midway and the Aleutians were inadequate. Midway, a tiny pair of flat atolls, was a nightmare to defend; as for the northern outposts, the War Department had assigned defense priorities to Hawaii, the Panama Canal, and Alaska—in that order.

The Alaska Defense Commander, Major General Simon B. Buckner, Jr., had pointed out with no exaggeration: "We're not even the second team up here—we're a sandlot club." Alaska¹ was hopelessly unready for war, in spite of Buckner's strenuous efforts to beef it up with all he could get—tiny Ajrrny garrisons, a scatter of air fields guarded by a few bombers and fighters, and a Navy fleet of ancient World War I destroyers and wooden "Yippee" boats which, in the words of their commander, the colorful Squeaky Anderson, "would sink if they got rammed by a barnacle."

According to Nimitz's codebreakers, the Imperial Combined Fleet would sortie from Japan around May 20; the attack on Midway and the Aleutians could come at any time after May 24. Nimitz had to decide whether to concentrate his outnumbered fleet at Midway, or divide it to meet both threats. He was down to two carriers—*Enterprise* and *Hornet*. (*Yorktown*, crippled at Coral Sea, was not expected to be

repaired before August.) Against these carriers and a handful of cruisers and destroyers, the Japanese arrayed an enormous fleet spearheaded by six aircraft carriers and eleven battleships.

To concentrate the U. S. Fleet at Midway would mean a surrender of the Aleutians, and perhaps all Alaska, by default; yet to split the force offered little chance to halt the enemy either at Midway or Alaska.

High-speed signals flashed from Nimitz's Hawaiian headquarters to Washington, where the Joint Chiefs of Staff met in emergency session to examine Commander Rochefort's *Fleet Intelligence Bulletin 4-42*, the deciphered evidence of enemy plans. In hot arguments, officers who knew Alaska insisted that it would do little harm to let the Japanese have the Aleutians. The climate there was unlivable. To defend them, Japan would need to invest enormous manpower and equipment, and her troops would suffer torture trying to live there. Surely Midway, with its strategic location, was far more important to the Allies than a string of barren volcanoes in the Bering Sea?

But global strategists argued that the best U.S. shipping route to Siberia lay across the narrow strait of Unimak Pass, a tidal slot commanded by the guns of Dutch Harbor. If the Japanese captured Dutch Harbor, they would isolate most of Alaska and leave it open for occupation, and they would cut off the United States' best sea lanes to Siberia when Lend-Lease shipments by that route had just begun.

The Soviet Union might go to war against Japan at any time; the United States was trying (unsuccessfully) to persuade Stalin to join in the Pacific war, to take some of the pressure off China and the Western Allies.² It would be folly to abandon the Lend-Lease route to Russia just when it was becoming vital. America had to do everything possible, the Joint Chiefs concluded, to keep Japan from driving a wedge between Alaska and Siberia. Dutch Harbor, the key to the Bering Sea, had to be kept out of Japanese hands.

The decision flashed from Washington to Hawaii. But by then Nimitz had held his own staff consultations and had decided independently to go ahead and defend Alaska with a small force. He felt he could spare five cruisers and four destroyers; the action at Midway, he was sure, would be like the recent Battle of the Coral Sea—a duel between aircraft carriers, out of sight of each other and far beyond gunnery range. His judgment would soon prove correct.

On May 21, 1942, the nine-ship North Pacific Force⁸ steamed out of Pearl Harbor at 22 knots and headed for Kodiak Island, headquarters of the Alaska Naval Sector. In command was the crusty former Commander of Destroyers, Pacific Fleet: Rear Admiral Robert A. Theobald.

The portly Theobald ran up his flag on cruiser *Nashville* and made the run to Kodiak in five and a half days. En route he received from Nimitz a peppering of dispatches which did nothing to improve his acidulous disposition—they told him that he was to "oppose the advance of the enemy in the Aleutian-Alaskan area, taking advantage of every favorable opportunity to inflict strong attrition," and "be governed by the principle of calculated risk"—which meant to some of Theobald's staffers that their force was to sacrifice itself if that would stop the Japanese.

25 MAY 1942

FROM: CINCPAC

TO: COMNORPACFOR

THE JAPANESE HAVE COMPLETED PLANS FOR AN AMPHIBIOUS OPERATION TO SECURE AN ADVANCED BASE IN THE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS . . . FOLLOWING ESTIMATED JAPANESE TASK FORCE HAS LEFT JAPAN WITH PROBABLE OBJECTIVE ALEUTIAN ISLANDS AND/OR ALASKA 2 AIRCRAFT CARRIERS, 2-3 SEAPLANE TENDERS, 3 HEAVY CRUISERS, 2 LIGHT CRUISERS, 12 DESTROYERS, 8 SUBMARINES, HEAVY BOMBERS, (PROBABLY FLYING BOAT TYPE) AND TRANSPORTS AND CARGO VESSELS . . . ON 25 MAY THE ABOVE FORCES WILL ARRIVE IN NORTHERN JAPAN, FUEL, AND PROCEED TO THE ALEUTIANS.

"Two aircraft carriers" was what caught Theobald's attention. He insisted that to fight the enemy without carriers or strong land-based air forces of his own would be suicide.

PLANES ALONE CAN ASSURE DECISIVE TACTICAL RESULTS, he

pointed out in a terse dispatch to CINCPAC. But Nimitz had no carriers to spare, and there was no time left to send additional air reinforcements into the Aleutians. Theobald would have to make do.

At sea on the way to Kodiak, Theobald made plans for the defense of Alaska. Despite his nickname, Fuzzy Theobald had a quick mind which caused him at times to be caustic and insulting with lesser wits. He had ranked near the top of the Naval Academy class of 1907; he had a wide, square face, and at fifty-four had put on so much weight that his trousers looked baggy, though he wore neatly pressed uniforms—a habit that would set him apart from most officers in the Aleutians, who wore whatever was warm enough for comfort.

His new command included the nine ships with which he steamed north, as well as all Navy, Canadian, and U. S. Air Forces already stationed in Alaska. But his jurisdiction stopped short of the Army—the Alaska Defense Command and its muscular, ebullient Major General Buckner.

Hard, strict, and brilliant, Simon Buckner had spent two years building Alaska's defenses from scratch. In his opinion, CINCPAC had made a mistake by taking the Alaskan Air Force away from him and assigning it to a new admiral who was bound to make the costly mistakes of a stranger to the area's unique character.

Buckner and Theobald first met—and clashed—when Theobald arrived at Kodiak on May 27. At the first meeting, papers kept spilling off the crowded desk until Buckner asked Theobald to "nail those damned maps up on the wall." Theobald ordered a yeoman to "batten the charts to the bulkhead," thus emphasizing that it was a Navy base, and in Theobald's view a Navy war.

Buckner refused to back down. Theobald quickly sent a request to Nimitz for clarification of the command roles. He received a distinctly unhelpful reply:

THE COMMAND RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN . . . ALASKA DEFENSE COMMAND UNDER GENERAL BUCKNER AND THE NORTH PACIFIC FORCE IS TO BE BY MUTUAL COOPERATION.

Judged by its results, that decision was one of Admiral Nimitz's few important mistakes. Buckner and Theobald would never achieve anything like mutual cooperation. In the months ahead, their bristling rivalry became such a vital issue that it all but superseded the conflict between American and Japanese forces in the Aleutians. The clash of powerful personalities reinforced the natural intramural jealousy between Army and Navy; officers immediately chose sides, so that there was a quick shutdown of the usual informal channels of interservice communication. It all added a great deal, in time and effort and even lives, to the cost of the campaign.

While the Japanese attack fleet made its final battle preparations at Ominato in northern Japan, Theobald and Buckner sat down at Kodiak and tried to agree on plans to meet the enemy threat. Theobald's first task was to picture the battleground where he would have to fight. This was not easy; most of darkest Africa had been charted more accurately. Much of Alaska, and all the Aleutian Islands, had never been mapped in any detail.

Air Force pilots still used Rand McNally road maps. Naval charts of Aleutian waters, "based on the Russian survey of 1864," were so inaccurate that a sailor passing over the charted location of mountainous Bogoslof Island could see no island within the visible horizons, not even on a clear day (if one could be found). Alaska's 34,000-mile coastline, longer than the combined coasts of the entire continental United States, was largely unexplored, and vulnerable to attack almost anywhere.

Theobald did not share Buckner's faith in the accuracy of CINCPAC's Intelligence predictions that the enemy's most likely target for attack would be Dutch Harbor, on Unalaska Island not far from the Alaska mainland. Buckner proposed that they concentrate all their defenses around Dutch Harbor and wait for the Japanese to come. Theobald disagreed. He found it unthinkable to base his entire plan on unconfirmed guesswork; all he really knew was that the Japanese planned to attack, as CINCPAC had advised, with "probable objective Aleutian Islands and/or Alaska." If Theobald committed everything to the defense of Dutch Harbor, what would happen if the enemy by-passed it and struck elsewhere?

If the Japanese took Hawaii, they would still be 2400 miles from the nearest targets on the U.S. mainland. But if they took Alaska, they would be within three hours' bombing distance of the great Boeing bomber plant and Bremerton Navy Yard at Seattle. In the other direction, they would be within point-blank striking distance of the Soviet Union: at the Bering Strait, Alaska and Siberia were separated by a scant 57 miles of ocean.

The geography of it was alarming. Japan could take Alaska without straining her supply lines; indeed, Alaska was closer to Tokyo than to New York; yet a Japanese beachhead on the Alaskan mainland would threaten the entire United States and Canada.

With all that at stake, Theobald could not risk all his defenses at Dutch Harbor. He proposed, instead, that the Alaskan Navy station a picket line of patrol boats and submarines in a wide arc across the Aleutian Chain, where it could provide advance warning of enemy movements. The pickets, and sector-patrolling Catalina flying boats, would alert headquarters when the enemy fleet approached, and U.S. bombers could then engage the Japanese carriers before they came within striking distance of the Alaskan mainland.

It was a logical plan; but in voicing it, Theobald fell into an armchair strategist's trap, as General Buckner pointed out bluntly.

Buckner had traveled the length of the Aleutian Chain several times. On a map it looked like the Florida Keys, but there was an important difference. Arching along the 55th Parallel, the Aleutians made a 1200-mile line from the tip of the unsettled Alaska Peninsula. From Anchorage to the far end of the Chain was almost 2000 miles. There were more than a hundred islands; even the fifteen islands of strategically important size, where the enemy might seek a toehold, were scattered along the length of the Chain. Theobald's plan, Buckner observed, did not take into account the sheer vastness of the area he would have to patrol.

Besides, Theobald's submarines and picket boats had no radar, nor did many of his planes. He would have to rely on visual contact to find the enemy carriers in a huge ocean where even in clear weather his tiny group of ships and planes would need luck. But the weather would not be clear. On May 29, while the Japanese fleet sortied out of Ominato and the American commanders continued their meeting at Kodiak, a series of fast-moving fog fronts and rainstorms moved in from the west. They socked in the entire Chain and would continue to do so for two weeks without a break. Weather reports from Siberia and the western Aleutians confirmed Buckner's moist-finger estimate that Theobald's sailors would be lucky to see as far as the bows of their own ships. The picket-line operation, Buckner said, had no chance at all.

Theobald replied flatly that he had no choice. The picket line would be thrown up.

The forces deployed fast. First to move out, Captain Oswald Colclough's squadron of six antique S-boat submarines fanned out on patrols so grueling that officers and men on surface watch had to be lashed to the bridge to keep from being swept off the conning tower by icy high seas. Inside, condensation dripped from the cold hulls and drenched the crewmen.

Following the submarines, a litter of commercial fishing boats put their prows into the heavy westward seas. They had been painted Navy grey and designated "patrol craft," but there was little military character to the Yippee boats. Their crews had been trained by Dutch Harbor's captain-of-the-port, Commander Carl "Squeaky" Anderson, a Swede whose nickname described his loud, piercing voice. Squeaky was said to be the only sailor alive who really knew Aleutian waters.

The Alaskan Navy, in the person of Captain Ralph C. Parker, had a squadron of eight destroyers—tin cans of the First World War four-stack type. The biggest weapons they had were torpedoes and old three-inch guns. These tin ships, commanded by Commander Wyatt Craig, accompanied the Yippee boats out from Kodiak, but they only went as far as Dutch Harbor. Here they turned into nearby Makushin Bay and dropped anchor; Admiral Theobald wanted them to stand by, to defend Dutch Harbor against any enemy landing attempts.

The rest of Theobald's Navy—the five cruisers and four destroyers he had brought from Pearl Harbor—would deploy in the gulf south of Kodiak Island. When Theobald announced this, General Buckner observed loudly that the waters where Theobald planned to cruise were a full 500 miles east of Dutch Harbor. Theobald retorted that he had no intention of taking his cruisers near the enemy's carriers. The Japanese force was bigger, stronger and more concentrated than any task group Theobald could possibly put together—the enemy, now fast approaching from Honshu, had twelve destroyers, six cruisers, and a variety of other vessels in addition to the two deadly aircraft carriers. Theobald's only chance, he felt, was to wait until his land-based bombers could take those carriers out of the fight; only then would he commit his surface ships. In the meantime, he would keep his cruisers within range of Kodiak's land-based air support, where they would have some defense against the Japanese carriers.

Everything narrowed down to those enemy carriers. It was the carriers that gave the overwhelming advantage to the Japanese; it was the carriers Theobald would have to stop. For that job, he called on Alaska's Eleventh Air Force. The fledgling Eleventh, America's smallest and youngest overseas Air Force, had only four heavy four-engine bombers with enough range and payload to hit the enemy at any real distance from base. It also had thirty-one medium-range twin-engine bombers (B-26 Marauders, never tried in combat, and obsolete B-18 gooneybirds that had been hastily redesigned from DC-3 cargo planes), and several squadrons of short-range P-40 Warhawk fighters. None of Brigadier General William O. Butler's pilots had ever flown in combat; virtually none of his planes was equipped to fight an enemy task force bristling with anti-aircraft guns, screening vessels and deadly Zero fighters; but it was the only Air Force Theobald had, and he proposed to use it.

Theobald wanted to move the Eleventh Air Force's fighters and bombers to forward bases in the Aleutians. From there, they could attack the carriers far out at sea, as soon as the picket boats or patrolling PBV flying boats located the enemy. But Theobald met immediate resistance from General Butler of the Air Force. Butler, an earnest slow-moving walrus of a man, told Theobald that the two forward bases where Theobald wanted to post the planes were "in an unfinished condition," not ready for combat use.

The air fields in question were at Cold Bay, on the peninsula 180 miles east of Dutch Harbor, and at Umnak Island, 40 miles west of Dutch (there was no runway at Dutch Harbor itself; the rugged terrain would have made it too expensive, the War Department had ruled). The new air fields had been built in secret, and were still secret—to the enemy, and to most of Butler's pilots as well.⁴

Butler had kept most of his planes off the new fields for a sensible reason. The runways, made of perforated steel matting and not yet paved, were so unstable that fighter planes bounced thirty feet in the air on impact when they landed. When heavy bombers landed, the flexible steel mats rippled up ahead of them in waves. The same thing happened on takeoff, making the operation hazardous if not deadly. Captain Russell Cone, commander of the 36th Bombardment Squadron, had been flying his B-17 Flying Fortress in and out of the Umnak base for a week, and gave graphic testimony to the trampoline-like springing and buckling of the mats. "It felt like landing on an innerspring mattress."

General Butler told Theobald flatly that he would not order his combat squadrons forward until the Army Engineers laid concrete pavement over the steel mats. But there was no time, and no concrete, to do that overnight. The Air Force could not do Admiral Theobald much good if it had to base at its present headquarters, Elmendorf Field at Anchorage—that was nearly 800 miles from Dutch Harbor. Therefore, Theobald ruled, the pilots would just have to take their chances. He overruled Butler and ordered the planes forward to Cold Bay and Umnak.⁵

The Air Force began to move its squadrons on May 28— at the expense of rear-guard air bases. Thinking of such vulnerable targets as the forty-three 50,000-gallon steel gasoline storage tanks at Anchorage, Generals Butler and Buckner pressed for immediate reinforcements to defend the mainland. They were assured by the Western Defense Command in California that planes were on the way—an assurance of doubtful value, based on past experience—and the Royal Canadian Air Force responded by placing several combat squadrons at Theobald's disposal. The RCAF 115th Fighter Squadron was already stationed at Alaska's Annette Island⁶: now the 8th Bomber Recon Squadron (Bolingbroke) and the 11th Fighter Squadron (P-40 Warhawks) roared in from the Yukon, flown by war-hardened veterans of the Battle of Britain.

The Canadians deployed along a string of mainland bases to replace the rapidly disappearing American planes; by June 2, the eve of the Battle of Dutch Harbor, more than half of Alaska's combat air force had roared into the Aleutians— much against General Butler's misgivings: planes had to make their way into Umnak through steel-colored fog and icy rain that fell sideways and sometimes upside-down, driven by freak gale-force air currents called "williwaws" that swept through and around the volcanic gorges of the Aleutian Islands. Thick damp air plugged up carburetors; ice coated wings; engines became so sluggish that pilots complained about "airplanes that can do everything but fly."⁷

At Dutch Harbor, Cold Bay and Umnak, williwaws sucked planes out of their revetments and blew them away or flipped them over. One bomber pilot, Frederick R. Ramputi, recalls, "The initial moves to Cold Bay and Umnak found us sleeping in or under the aircraft. ... It got real sporting when aircraft taxied by."

For most of the pilots it was their first glimpse of the Aleutians, described as such "a desolate spot that even Mrs. Roosevelt has not visited." Lieutenant William S. M. Johnson, keeper of the unit log of the 11th Fighter Squadron, wrote:

We lived in tents which were always blowing down. The kitchen was housed in a wall tent which always blew over at mealtime; the food was mostly chili or corned beef or powdered eggs. A plane chose our flour supply as a landing spot, and there was no bread for days; the cooks could be seen running out and begging for help, shouting that the kitchen was blowing away. . . . The only transportation in the entire squadron was one jeep, which we had acquired illegally, so that the usual way of going places was by foot. . . . There was a small tent-exchange store, but it had little or nothing to sell. It seemed to deal mostly in shoestrings. One day, however, the store got in a large supply of white civilian shirts, which were as useful as tits on a boar hog. . . . The Navy men who flew over to Dutch Harbor tried to bring back cigarettes, but the little they brought could not reach around. . . . The hospital was in tents, and every time aircraft took off or landed, the hospital blew down. Patients used gas masks to survive the fumes of the coal stoves. Only the periodic collapse of the tents relieved the monotony.

Major Jack Chennault, son of China Flying Tigers General Claire L. Chennault, commanded the 11th Fighter Squadron (and he also painted snarling tiger jaws on the snouts of his Warhawks); he noted that "We fueled our own planes from drums, slept in rude huts and bedrolls, and froze all the time." Temperatures were in the thirties, but dampness and wind-effect drove them down another twenty degrees or more. Visibility in the Aleutians was measured not in miles but in feet. The ceiling varied, at five-minute intervals, from 500 feet to zero.

The primitive airplane revetments had not yet been floored; hardstands belied their name, for the heavier planes mired in whenever the ground was wet, which was all the time. Captain Russell Cone, commanding the 36th Bombardment Squadron, had his Flying Fortress parked on the only paved space; the other planes were scattered along the mud shoulders of the mile-long runway at Umnak. Every day from May 28 on, Cone flew the old prototype B-17 ("Old Seventy") the length of the Chain, and saw nothing but endless miasmatic mists, with an occasional 6000-foot volcano poking up through the clouds. The picket search patrols were flown every day, ordered by Bomber Command's Colonel William O. Eareck-son, who did not want to be "caught with my planes down."

Eareckson's bomber patrols augmented the sector sweeps of big Captain Leslie E. Genres' patrol wing of twenty-three PBY flying boats. The huge twin-engine Catalinas operated from four seaplane tenders anchored at Dutch Harbor and nearby bays. The PBYs flew search patterns through howling storms in which even seagulls were grounded; williwaws smashed one of them to fragments at Dutch Harbor (and scattered the lashed-down lumber yard across three islands). Some of the PBYs, and two of the Army bombers, were equipped with British-type radar, primitive and unreliable but vital in the constant fog of the Aleutians. To Admiral Theobald, airborne radar seemed to offer the only real hope of finding the Japanese fleet in time; he ordered the radar planes in the air virtually twenty-four hours a day.

The PBYs were big and capacious; they could stay aloft around the clock and carry heavy bomb loads. But their cruising speed of 95 knots did not encourage their use in combat; they were primarily search craft. Theobald's only real battle strength lay in his thirty-one medium bombers and four heavies—two of them obsolete prototype B-17 models, the other two LB-30s (B-24 Liberators converted for export to the English R.A.F.). It made for something less than an armada, so that an eager enthusiasm swept the Kodiak command when word came down that seven brand-new B-17E bombers had reached Fairbanks from the States and were on their way to Kodiak. But the frenzy of keen hope died quickly: fog grounded five of them at Anchorage on June 2, a sixth was held at Fairbanks for a compulsory 100-hour inspection, and only one plane reached Kodiak.

The delay of the new bombers by a vital twenty-four hours crushed the Allies' last hope of reinforcement before the Japanese attack. But Theobald himself was not aware that the promised Fortresses had not reached the front, and that he would have to fight with no more than what he had on hand. On June 1 he had departed in cruiser *Nashville* for a rendezvous with his cruisers and destroyers about 400 miles south of Kodiak. The rendezvous would take place on the morning of June 3, at just about the moment when Dutch Harbor opened fire on the first wave of Japanese bombers from *Ryu jo*. From here on, Theobald was isolated completely by the rule of radio silence.

He was not the only incommunicado commander. Generals Buckner and Butler had gone back to Anchorage headquarters, almost 800 miles from Dutch Harbor. Navy Air commander Gehres, and Air Force tactical commander Colonel Everett S. Davis, were at Kodiak, still hundreds of miles from the impending battle. And their communications with the front were anything but dependable. The various services used different radio frequencies and codes; the equipment itself was primitive, more so as it approached the front. At Dutch Harbor the Army had a portable radiotelephone set in a deserted Aleut Indian shack. This weak short-range transmitter was beamed toward another set on top of Mount Ballyhoo (fancifully named by Jack London during a stay at Dutch Harbor, locale of *The Sea Wolf*). This set was supposed to relay transmissions through a Rube Goldberg system to a battery radio at the air base 40 miles away at Umnak. The battery set, liberated from a gunboat, weighed 100 pounds but put out such a weak signal that Ballyhoo could only receive it when conditions were ideal. Dutch Harbor could not pick it up at all.

To operate this strange thread between imperiled Dutch Harbor and its only hope of quick defense at Umnak, the Army had no personnel trained in code; all messages had to be broadcast vocally, using the phonetic alphabet instead of a cipher.

The reason communications were so ludicrous was the same reason behind the trouble the American forces had getting aviation fuel and other necessities to the new forward bases. It was, simply, the newness of war for Americans in 1942. They were inexperienced; they were excited; most of the junior officers responsible for details were recent arrivals from civilian life. And their problems were compounded by oversight, top-level interservice rivalries, and the pressures of time. They made mistakes more often than they made excuses; but one of their mistakes left the three forward Aleutian bases — Dutch Harbor, Umnak, and Cold Bay — without reliable radio communications.

Under the circumstances, the weight of combat command fell on small-unit commanders, forced to act independently in a situation that demanded nothing so much as coordination and cooperation. Not surprisingly, a number of them spent the night of June 2 making out their wills.⁸

At Cold Bay, the forward tactical air commanders prepared for the fight: Colonel Norman D. Sillin of Fighter Command; Colonel William O. Eareckson of Bomber Command; Lieutenant Commander James S. Russell of PBY Squadron 42. Eareckson and Russell had their bunks in the radio tent. If an urgent signal came in, the radioman could poke the officers' feet without moving from his headset.

Russell's PBYs were fueled and armed at all times, with crews alerted for immediate take-off from their anchorages in the Aleutians (at and near Dutch Harbor). They flew regular search sweeps on June 1 and 2, in spite of blasting storms; it was one of the Navy's pilots who turned in the first contact report on the enemy fleet at noon June 2. But by evening the weather was so furious that even williwaw-toughened veterans stayed aground. The roaring winds drove stinging rain across the ugly barren flatlands of Cold Bay and the volcanic canyons of Umnak and Dutch Harbor.

Gale warnings were posted—but at Dutch, Ensign Marshall C. Freerks took off anyway, and at Cold Bay, Lieutenant Jack Bingham got airborne just after dark. These two were almost the only American planes to get off the ground on the evening of June 2, while Admiral Kakuta's carriers were lining up to launch their planes against Dutch Harbor. The two PBYs patrolled all night. "We may not have been very far from the Japs," Freerks recalls, "but we never got clear of the storm."

At sea, Admiral Theobald was trying to sleep in *Nashville's* pitching flag-country while the cruiser plowed south toward an impotent rendezvous with the task group. Submarines and picket boats tumbled helplessly on frothy seas, manning a useless picket line—Kakuta, unseen, had already passed through it. Far to the west, on Kiska Island, Navy Aerographer's Mate William C. House and his nine-man crew of weather observers huddled within a flimsy storm-lashed shack; for them it would be a short and bitter war.

Just before dawn, tall, cheerful Ensign Freerks racked his PBY back into Dutch Harbor, tied it down with cables, and rolled up exhausted in a bedroll. The storm began to die down; sunrise filtered weakly through heavy cloud cover, and Dutch Harbor awakened for an air-raid drill.

"After the drill," Freerks recalls, "everybody went back to bed and then the Japs bombed us."

Chapter Three The Battle of Dutch Harbor: The First Day

Heading out from Dutch Harbor at 0540 hours on June 3, 1942, the U.S. seaplane tender *Gillis* picked up more than a dozen fast-moving pips on its radar screen. Coming up from the south above the clouds, they looked like airplanes—range about 10 miles; altitude 10,000 feet. *Gillis* flashed a signal to base, and sounded general quarters.

The captain of the Naval Station, Commander William N. Updegraff, heard the signal come in and spoke tersely to the signalman: "This looks like it." He ordered an air-raid red alert and commanded the six ships in the harbor to get steam up in their boilers.

Air-raid sirens wailed across Unalaska Island from Dutch Harbor to Fort Mears. In the mountain-ringed port six ships —*Gillis*, two Army transports, a CG cutter, a submarine and an old 1917 four-stack destroyer—went to battle stations and started engines; but none was to clear the harbor in time to escape the first attack. The biggest guns they had were the destroyer's old three-inchers; gun crews ripped the tarpaulins off these and every other weapon on the decks.

In the five minutes that followed *Guns'* first contact report, the Americans moved fast. Around Dutch Harbor, antiaircraft muzzles cranked skyward and machine-gunners manned the roofs of Fort Mears. Soldiers swarmed pell-mell into prepared defensive positions. Aircraft spotters in flat tin-hat helmets of First World War vintage trained their binoculars on the southern sky. In the harbor, Lieutenant Jack Litsey was already warming up his Catalina mail plane with two passengers aboard; Litsey gunned his engines to take-off power and began to pick up speed across the bay. Nearby in a cove, Ensign Hildebrand started his PBY moving before the last of his crew had even scrambled aboard.

In the Dutch Harbor radio shack a yeoman tapped a hurried message — ABOUT TO BE BOMBED BY ENEMY PLANES. The plain-English message reached out to wireless sets at Cold Bay, Kodiak, Anchorage, and Admiral Theobald's *Nashville*. At Cold Bay, P-40 fighters were airborne within four minutes of the radio flash, heading out across the 180 miles of volcanoes and choppy seas that separated them from Dutch Harbor.

At nearby Umnak, the air field was serene and untroubled. The Rube Goldberg communications system had failed. Pilots on alert waited by the radio tent for a message that never came. A poker game in the operations shack proceeded without interruption.

At 10,000 feet it was damp and icy cold; but by the whim of fate, the eye of the storm was just passing over Dutch Harbor. At 0545 hours fifteen of *Ryujo's* Japanese attack planes broke out of the clouds and found visibility unchecked across a panorama from Mount Ballyhoo to Fort Mears.

Flight leader Lieutenant Masayuki Yamaguchi lowered the dive brakes of his bomber and peeled off to attack. His bombs and bullets were the opening rounds of what history would record as an "incident" — yet it was powerful enough to influence the course of the war. Dutch Harbor was only a diversionary attack; but because of it, Japan would lose the balance of power at Midway: she would lose a major battle within forty-eight hours, if not the war, because Yamaguchi and his comrades were at Dutch Harbor instead of Midway.

On the ground at Dutch Harbor, an American chief petty officer recognized the diving planes and bellowed the order to fire. His guns puffed dark chunks of flak into the sky. Battery commanders all over the harbor found his aiming point and started shooting. Flak bursts walked up toward the enemy dive-bombers, seeking the range; machinegun tracers crisscrossed in arcs of flame as the Japanese planes thundered across the harbor.

Jack Litsey's Catalina was almost airborne at the end of its take-off run when tracers from two Zeroes drummed into the PBV, killed both passengers instantly and set the plane afire. Litsey skidded the burning wreck to a wild crash stop on the beach and scrambled for his life. He reached the rocks and ducked for cover just an instant before the plane blew up.

It was first blood.¹ The Japanese planes slid through heavy flak to beat up several Catalinas moored in the bays, but Ensign Hildebrand was already off the water and climbing when the Zeroes found him. Hildebrand rumbled under a Zero's belly and his waist gunners blazed away murderously. Hit simultaneously by plane and ground fire, the Zero spiraled into the harbor in a spectacular dive. Hildebrand wheeled up a mountain draw where the fast Zeroes could not follow, and climbed for the nearest cloud cover as fast as the waddling PBV could take him.

Japanese bullets ricocheted off the steel plating of the ships in harbor. The diving Zeroes pulled out and zoomed over the Naval Station toward Fort Mears as anti-aircraft gun barrels wheeled to follow them. Four of the bombers rumbled steadily through flak at 9000 feet, took careful aim and released their thousand-pounders with lethal accuracy: they smashed the tank farm and a truck to rubble, and blew up an Army barracks, killing twenty-five men and badly injuring as many more. Choking on smoke, men crawled coughing from the debris.

For twenty minutes the enemy pounded Dutch Harbor, planes slaloming through a fury of anti-aircraft bursts to flatten several shore installations and batteries. A thousand-pound bomb tumbled end-over-end to a direct hit on the old Russian Orthodox Church of Unalaska. By chance, or the will of God, no one was inside. To the Japanese pilots and observers, Dutch Harbor was a maelstrom of racket and smoke and flying rubble; it looked half-destroyed from the air.

But things on the ground were not so bad as they looked from overhead. Under the rolling smoke, most of the base was untouched. Bombs from the wing racks of Lieutenant Samajima's "Kate" bombers bracketed

the radio shack, half-burying it in mud and rocks (the U. S. Navy radio operator signaled, "That one knocked me off my chair") but the shack and its equipment were not damaged. Except for the mangled bodies in the smashed Fort Mears barracks, hardly anyone was hurt.

The American fighters from Cold Bay, halfway to Dutch Harbor with throttles wide open, hoped they would reach the scene before the fighters from Umnak finished the fight. They did not know that Umnak had never been alerted.

The Japanese pilots held the sky uncontested. They returned to the attack until all their bombs dropped; then, with deliberate efficiency, Lieutenant Yamaguchi herded his air group south into a driving rain squall, dissolving from sight less than ten minutes before the Cold Bay fighters swept over Dutch Harbor. The short-range P-40 Warhawks found nothing to fight but fog, and in angry frustration returned to base without firing a shot.

Smoke settled at Dutch Harbor; damage-control officers came out of their revetments and sent shore parties to inspect the base. In the harbor, ships took stock of their injuries, and found they had virtually none. The American base had weathered the opening skirmish of the Aleutian Campaign without much physical damage; Dutch Harbor's defenses had not been impaired. About fifty-two Americans—one percent of the Dutch Harbor force—had been killed or injured. Before the first attack ended, Dutch was ready to take on another; but it would have to wait until the next day for a chance to hit back.

The first attack in the Aleutians had given Japan a minor tactical success but no real victory. Kakuta's pilots had been hampered by their lack of air-recon photos and intelligence; they had known almost nothing about the layout of the American base until the actual bombardment. They had picked targets of opportunity and let fly almost at random. Strategically, in terms of the power contest between East and West, the importance of the attack was that it had taken place at Dutch Harbor and not at Midway, where at this hour—early on the morning of June 3, 1942—a PB Y pilot had just sighted part of Admiral Yamamoto's fleet steaming eastward toward the great battle that would soon erupt.

Unpursued, the Japanese carrier planes droned south from Dutch Harbor. Their course took them into steadily worsening weather until Lieutenant Yamaguchi found it impossible to maintain formation. He broke the flying group into smaller flights and told the pilots to find their way home independently by staying close to the ocean, where they could judge wind-blown drift by the direction of the wave crests.

It was not the first time the weather had turned against them; earlier, the planes launched by carrier *Junyo* had lost their bearings in the fog and turned back. Yamaguchi's *Ryujo* planes had faced Dutch Harbor's guns alone.

Yamaguchi had been, surprised by the enemy response; it was as if the Americans had been expecting the attack. He had been amazed by how fast the American antiaircraft had opened up, and by the lethal concentrations of flak. It had been nothing like Pearl Harbor.

Still, he felt pleased. Dutch Harbor, he was sure from the noise and smoke, was a shambles. All it would take to destroy the base would be one more bombing attack. He would advise Admiral Kakuta of that as soon as he got back to *Ryujo*—if he made it. For the storm, as bad as any he had ever flown, kept getting worse.

It was an experience that would be shared by every pilot in the Aleutians, American and Japanese alike, in the years to come. Despite all human courage and mechanical genius, the forces of nature in the Aleutians could always call the turns. No general or admiral was as powerful as the weather. From this point on, men would expend most of their bravery and strength in search, not in battle. Everyone had to look for everyone else, and no one was ever easy to find.

Junyo's pilots had already learned that; they had not been able to find Dutch Harbor. Now Lieutenant

Yamaguchi learned it too. Down on the ocean surface, Yamaguchi crawled along with his plane's engine half-choked by cold salt spray; he shivered in the unheated cockpit while he peered through his mist-crusted windshield at the desolate ocean. For a long time he saw nothing but ugly greenish swells, lashed into froth. The thought of crashing down in that white foam, out of fuel, ran through his mind; he knew a man could last only moments in that churned-up sub-freezing water.

He checked navigation again and glanced bleakly at the unwinding fuel gauge. He was only 50 feet off the water—to the eye it seemed much closer—and he had no safety margin of glide if the engine should quit.

Then, abruptly, he sighted a ship slicing through the waves —*Ryujo*, her flight deck into the wind. He was home.

Admiral Kakuta kept count as his planes slammed onto the carrier deck, hooked the arresting cables and caromed to a precipitous halt. He knew of only one plane lost over Dutch Harbor. Now a last Zero bounced to a stop on deck, and he stopped counting. There would be no more arrivals: thanks to good luck and skillful pilots, he had recovered all his planes.

He sat in on the pilots' debriefing, listening with care to their description of the raid. One of the pilots, passing Maku-shin Bay, had sighted a squadron of four-stack destroyers waiting in obvious ambush; the pilot had counted the ships and radioed ahead to the fleet, and Admiral Kakuta had already launched a second air strike to bomb the discovered American ships. He had used *Junyo's* air group, which had returned one-by-one after getting lost in the fog earlier. Just before 9:00 Kakuta had sent the planes out again, accompanied by four catapult-launch seaplanes from the escort cruisers.

Somewhere in the course of the next twenty minutes the *Junyo* group had crossed paths with *Ryujo's* homeward-bound planes, unseen in the soup. The second group pressed on, but by now the eye of the storm had passed beyond Dutch Harbor. The weather was terrible. In the swirling squall not a single Japanese pilot found the American destroyers in Makushin Bay. They could not even find Dutch Harbor. When they called for help to find their way back to the carrier, a Japanese-speaking American radioman on the ground gave them instructions, and elated Dutch Harbor with the belief that he had sent an entire enemy air group to oblivion, out of fuel over the empty sea; but in fact the American's accent had not fooled the Japanese pilots. They sorted out real signals from false, and headed home.

The four Japanese float planes, catapulted from cruisers *Takao* and *Maya*, had worse luck. They found themselves off course, lost, and in bad trouble: they emerged from the edge of the storm within sight of Umnak Island.

On the secret air strip, Private George Stanley of the 11th Fighter Squadron was washing hospital bed linen outside the hospital tent. The abrasive, GI soap stung his eyes, and he paused to throw his head back and clear them. When he looked up, he had a perfect view of four enemy planes turning in a tight circle past the distant clouds.

Private Stanley gave the alarm — and went on washing sheets.

Fighter Command responded to Private Stanley's shout by scrambling its twenty-one P-40s. The Warhawks swarmed up after the intruders.

The Japanese, expecting no American planes in these skies, did not see them until it was almost too late. Lieutenants John B. Murphy and Jacob Dixon cut one Japanese plane out of the flight and chased it down over Umnak, where they shot it down in flames in full sight of cheering American airmen on the ground. It plummeted vividly into the churning waters of Umnak Pass. The P-40s slashed into the remaining three enemy ships, thoroughly machine-gunned one of them and drove all three into the clouds.

The crippled Japanese plane crashed at sea on its way home; the other two found their cruisers, but

neither pilot could suggest where the American fighters could have come from so quickly. For the moment, the location of the American air field remained a secret; but it was clear there was a base somewhere in the vicinity.

Near noon, the last stragglers of *Junyo's* strike group appeared, low over the water and almost out of gas. The admiral recovered his planes and retired southwest into the storm; he refueled his aircraft, studied strike reports and the riddle of the American fighters, and called a staff meeting to decide what to do next.

From Dutch Harbor, the emphasis of action now shifted elsewhere. Five hundred miles away, Admiral Theobald was finally linking up with the last of the nine ships in his cruiser-destroyer force in the pea-soup fog. By now Theobald knew that Dutch Harbor had been bombed, but he could do nothing until he could find the Japanese carriers.

To that end, big, blustery Captain Leslie E. Gehres at Kodiak had sent a coded message to his forward operations officer at Dutch Harbor. Misled by fragmentary clues, Gehres believed the enemy carriers were somewhere north, in the Bering Sea; he ordered all available PBVs to concentrate the search in the north.

Only two PBVs went southwest, where the Japanese were. The first of the two, piloted by Lieutenant (jg) Jean Cusick, had been in the air seven hours after leaving Umnak at three in the morning. About 200 miles from Dutch Harbor, Cusick blundered into *Junyo's* combat air patrol.

The Zeroes attacked. Tracers wounded Cusick, knocked out his starboard engine, and set the wing on fire. Cusick fought the burning PBV to a flat landing in the sea. The stricken flying boat quickly filled with water. Three crewmen jumped into an inflated life raft, only to have it sink, full of bullet holes. The icy swell swept all three men under to their deaths. The plane sank with a dismal sucking noise; Cusick and the remaining four crew members crowded into a two-man raft.

Within an hour Cusick and an enlisted man died of exposure and wounds. Drenched and frozen, the co-pilot, Lieutenant (jg) Wylie M. Hunt, drifted in the storm with the two surviving crewmen. There was no radio, no hope of rescue. They waited to die.

At noon the Japanese heavy cruiser *Takao* steamed out of the mist and sighted the three men in the bobbing raft. Soaked and numb, Wylie Hunt and his half-conscious companions were taken aboard the ship and separated in isolation.

Hunt hoped his two fellow crew members had kept silent. He pleaded ignorance to Japanese questions. On the second day, after a second Japanese strike at Dutch Harbor, a pilot slammed into Hunt's cell and cuffed him around. The pilot was enraged: he had been jumped by fighters from the unexpected base at Umnak. He demanded to know where the American planes had come from.

Interrogating officers threatened to kill Hunt if he refused to talk. They blindfolded him and took him up on the weather deck, tied a huge metal weight to his belt and led him out onto an extended platform: walking the plank. The blindfold was whipped off and an officer told Hunt in uncertain English that if he did not answer questions he would be shoved over the side.

Hunt had given himself up for dead twenty-four hours earlier in the plane crash. He refused to answer. He knew all about Umnak — he had come from there — but his act was so consistent that it finally convinced the Japanese. They untied him and took him below.

Hunt remained on the ship three weeks before he was taken to a Prisoner of War camp in Japan, where he and his two companions sat out the rest of the war.
