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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Attu Battlefield and U.S. Army and Navy Airfields on Attu

and or common

2. Location

street & number Attu Island in the Aleutian Islands ___ not for publication

city, town ___ vicinity of

state Alaska code 02 county Aleutian Islands Div. code 010

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
___ district	X public	X occupied	___ agriculture	___ museum
___ building(s)	___ private	___ unoccupied	___ commercial	___ park
___ structure	___ both	___ work in progress	___ educational	___ private residence
X site	**Public Acquisition**	**Accessible**	___ entertainment	___ religious
___ object	___ in process	X yes: restricted	X government	___ scientific
	___ being considered	___ yes: unrestricted	___ industrial	___ transportation
		___ no	X military	X other: Refuge

4. Owner of Property

name U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dept. of the Interior

street & number 1011 E. Tudor Road

city, town Anchorage ___ vicinity of state Alaska

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

street & number 1011 E. Tudor Road

city, town Anchorage state Alaska

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Attu, Study of Alternatives has this property been determined eligible? X yes ___ no

date 1968 X federal ___ state ___ county ___ local

depository for survey records National Park Service

city, town Washington state D.C.

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
___ excellent	___ deteriorated	___ unaltered	_X_ original site
___ good	_X_ ruins	_X_ altered	___ moved date _____
_X_ fair	___ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Attu Island is the site of the only World War II battle on the North American Continent. Today, evidence of the desperate battle is profuse on its eastern end: thousands of shell and bomb craters in the tundra; Japanese trenches, foxholes, and gun emplacements; American ammunition magazines and dumps; and spent cartridges, shrapnel, and shells are to be found at the scenes of heavy fighting. The steel-matted runways at Alexai Field and the asphalt runways at the U.S. naval air station exist, the latter being still operable. Portions of deteriorating piers still stand at Massacre Bay. The post-battle roads may yet be traced, although only five miles are still maintained. A number of steel, igloo-type magazines for bomb storage remain at the naval station. A coastal radar station, disguised to look like a water tower remains at Murder Point. The only occupants today are 24 U.S. Coast Guard men who operate a long-range navigation station. A small U.S. Air Force seismic transmitter is unmanned.

Attu is at the western end of the Aleutian Chain, 1,500 air-miles (2,000 miles via the chain) southwest of Anchorage, 500 miles east of the USSR mainland, and 750 miles east of the Kurile Islands. Located between the cold Bering Sea and the warm Japanese Current of the North Pacific, Attu's volcanic mountains and tundra valleys are subjected to year-round vicious storms (williwaws) and dense fogs that make it one of the most forbidding regions in the world. The island has no trees and the lower levels are covered with spongy tundra and a variety of plants.

The principal water features of eastern Attu are Holtz Bay, Chichagof Harbor, and Massacre Bay. The Aleut village of Attu stood at the head of Chichagof Harbor. It was destroyed during the battle and no trace remains. Archeological sites of earlier Aleut settlements are also found there. The Japanese forces landed at Holtz Bay in June 1942, constructed defense positions there, and established headquarters eventually at Attu village. In May 1943, U.S. forces landed on the north and south coasts: at Red Beach and Austin Cove on the north, and Massacre Bay on the south, bitter fighting occurring until the two forces joined in Jarmin Pass. The Americans next captured the rugged high country known as Fishhook Ridge, then began a drive through Clevesy Pass towad Chichagof Harbor. The battle ended when the Japanese made a last fanatical charge against the pass which ended in their annihilation. Most sites contain evidence of the battle.

American army engineers and naval seabees quickly constructed airfields, roads, and quonset camps over the eastern end of the island, of which vivid evidence remains today on the slow-to-heal tundra. Besides the runways and ammunition magazines, a remarkable feature that still exists is a 3,133-foot-long, bombproof storage tunnel cut through a ridge near Clevesy Pass. Also noteworthy is a dilapidated post-battle military chapel, standing alone on the Hogback above Massacre Bay. In front are a few pine trees, planted by U.S. troops, that still survive the williwaws. Also near Clevesy Pass, on Engineer Hill, the last goal of the Japanese, are trenches, foxholes, tent pegs, barbed wire, coal piles, and other relics of the war. In recent

times, two memorials have been erected on Engineer Hill in honor of the Japanese commander, Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki. At the Coast Guard station on Massacre Bay is a memorial dedicated to the American naval, air, and ground forces that recaptured Attu.

Many American combat aircraft were lost during the Aleutian Campaign, both to enemy action and to fierce weather conditions. Today, in Temnac Valley west of Massacre Bay, is the wreckage of a P-38 twin-engine fighter plane (Lightning). It has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Because of its isolated location, the terrible weather, and a lack of transportation, few visitors come to Attu's battlefield today. The entire island is a part of the Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. The U.S. Coast Guard station is operated under permit from the Interior Department.

The significant historic features pertaining to the battle for Attu and for the post-battle bombing of Japan's Kurile Islands are:

All the battle sites which indeed cover eastern Attu.

The American invasion beaches at Austin Cove and Red Beach in the north and Massacre Bay in the south.

The countless bomb and shell craters found over all the battlefield on eastern Attu.

Japanese trenches, foxholes, and fortifications, known and unknown, in eastern Attu.

Aleut village site at Chichagof Harbor, which became the Japanese headquarters.

Japanese landing site at West Holtz Bay and defenses there, and the Japanese airfield site at East Holtz Bay.

American ammunition magazines and dump at the head of West Massacre Valley.

Post-battle coastal radar station, disguised to look like a water tower, at Murder Point.

American Army airfield at Alexai Point with steel-matted runways.

The Navy's asphalted runways at its air station (also used by the Army) and steel, igloo-type ammunition magazines northwest of the airfield.

Post-battle American army chapel on the Hogback, including the pine trees planted by soldiers.

Memorials to Col. Yasuyo Yamasaki and the evidence of military occupation on Engineer Hill.

Wreckage of a P-38 twin-engine fighter (Lightning) plane in Temnac Valley.

Excluded from the nomination are all post-1945 structures, developments, and trash pits in the Massacre Bay area, including the U.S. Coast Guard Loran Station, pier ruins, and an abandoned concrete building at Casco Cove.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400–1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500–1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600–1699	___ architecture	___ education	X military	___ social/ humanitarian
___ 1700–1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ theater
___ 1800–1899	___ commerce	___ exploration settlement	___ philosophy	___ transportation
X 1900–	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics government	___ other (specify)
		___ invention		

Specific dates 1942-1945 **Builder Architect**

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The Japanese occupation of Attu and the American recapture of the island are significant in the history of World War II in several ways. The Japanese occupation, coordinated with the June 1942 attack on Midway, marked the peak of Japan's military expansion in the Pacific. The occupation of this remote part of the North American Continent created great alarm among Americans, however briefly, that it was the beginning of an invasion of the United States through Alaska. The invasion also posed a serious threat to United States-Siberian communications (lend-lease to Russia). Significant, too, was the fact that tens of thousands of American military had now to be diverted to the Alaskan Theater who could have been deployed elsewhere in the Pacific. The capture of Attu and neighboring Kiska was important to Japan in that it was the only positive result to come out of the defeat of the Imperial Fleet at the Battle of Midway. Further, the occupation brought about the end of centuries-old history of Aleuts on Attu when the inhabitants were taken to Japan as prisoners.

The recapture of Attu by Americans in 1943 was significant because of its importance to the morale of the American people, who had little to cheer about at that time. The battle was significant in that it illustrated the worthiness of the American soldier against his enemy and it illustrated the loyalty of the Japanese soldier to his cause, when only 29 out of 2,500 survived the battle.[1] Mistakes made and lessons learned in amphibious landings, tactics, and logistical planning made significant contributions to future U.S. Pacific operations. Post-battle bombing raids on Japanese territory from Attu tied up significant numbers of Japanese defense forces and demonstrated that the Home Islands were not safe from air attack and, perhaps, invasion from the north. A military historian has written, "In terms of numbers engaged, Attu ranks as one of the most costly assaults in the Pacific. In terms of Japanese destroyed, the cost of taking Attu was second only to Iwo Jima: for every hundred of the enemy on the island, about seventy-one Americans were killed or wounded.[2]

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1. Japanese strength figures in Japanese and American accounts vary from 2,380 to 2,630.

2. Stetson Conn, Rose C. Engelman, and Byron Fairchild, Guarding the United States and Its Outposts. The Western Hemisphere: United States Army In World War II (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 295.

Japanese Occupation

In May 1942, Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo ordered an attack on the Midway Islands, with the dual mission to occupy those islands and to destroy the remnants of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, and an attack on the Aleutian Islands for the purposes of diverting American naval forces from Midway, protecting the Imperial Navy from an attack from the north, and obstructing communication links between the United States and Russia. Having broken Japanese codes, the United States was alert to the forthcoming attacks and proceeded with defense preparations. At that time, its most westerly bases in the Aleutians were the Dutch Harbor Naval Station and the Army's Fort Mears at Unalaska Island and a still-secret army airfield on neighboring Umnak Island. The Navy had a ten-man weather station on Kiska Island but had not succeeded in establishing a similar detachment on Attu due to foul weather. Kiska had no native population, but Attu village boasted a strength of 45 Aleuts, a Caucasian school teacher, and her husband who radioed weather reports to Dutch Harbor.

Japan's plans for the Aleutians called for a carrier air attack on Dutch Harbor and Fort Mears, a hit-and-run assault on Adak Island, farther out on the chain (which it erroneously believed to be fortified), and, by means of a separate naval task force, the occupation of Kiska and Attu at the end of the Aleutians. The air attacks on Unalaska occurred June 3 and 4, 1942, coinciding with the Battle of Midway. When the magnitude of the Japanese naval defeat became clear, the raid on Adak was cancelled; but the invasions of Kiska and Attu proceeded as scheduled, both being occupied on June 7. On Attu, the Aleuts and their teacher were taken prisoner and eventually removed to Japan, while the teacher's husband lost his life in unclear circumstances.

While Japanese naval troops secured Kiska, the Japanese Army landed on Attu. The 1,140-man force consisted of infantry, engineers, and a service unit, under the command of Major Matsutoshi Hosumi. At first the Japanese planned to hold the islands only until the onslaught of winter, but soon decided to remain in the Aleutians so as to deny the islands to the enemy's use. In mid-August, the commander concluded that the Americans were preparing to invade Kiska and decided to move the Attu garrison to that island.

Attu remained unoccupied until the end of October, when fresh troops, including the 303d Independent Infantry Battalion, came from Japan. In April 1943, Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki arrived by submarine and took command of Attu's growing defenses and partially completed airfield. Despite some increase in American air attacks from newly constructed foward bases (Adak, September 1942; Amchitka, February 1943) and stepped-up American naval activity, Japan succeeded in reinforcing its Aleutian outposts with troops, armament, and supplies until March 1943.

Battle of Komandorski Islands

Determined to interdict Japanese convoys en route to the Aleutians, an American naval task force arrived off the Soviet Union's Komandorski Islands west of

Attu. Led by heavy cruiser Salt Lake City, the ships' radar picked up a column of eight Japanese warships and two transports carrying supplies for the Aleutians on March 26. Both sides opened fire simultaneously and there ensued "an old-fashioned long-range ship-to-ship duel that lasted almost four hours."[3] Both sides scored hits, but the battle ended inconclusively as both forces withdrew. But the Americans could savor one fact: the Japanese transports hurried home and Japan made no further attempt to reinforce or resupply the Aleutians with surface vessels. From then until the American invasion in May, only submarines succeeded in delivering a trickle of matériel to Attu and Kiska.

Recapture

By early 1943, American planning for the recapture of Kiska had begun in earnest. The Army's Seventh Infantry Division was chosen as the landing force and trained in amphibious warfare under U.S. Marine Corps Maj. Gen. H.M. Smith.[4] In March, however, sufficient shipping not being available to assault the more heavily defended Kiska, planners decided to undertake a smaller operation against Attu.

The assault date was set for May 7, 1943, under the command of Rear Admiral Thomas C. Kinkaid, North Pacific Force, with Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell in charge of the amphibious phase, and Maj. Gen. Albert E. Brown, Seventh Division, taking over when the troops were established on shore. Battleships Pennsylvania, Idaho, and Nevada provided fire support.

Bad weather postponed the landings until May 11 when both the Northern and Southern Landing Forces headed for shore. At Austin Cove on Attu's north shore, a Provisional Battalion landed and began a torturous ascent to the passes west of Holtz Bay (a five-day ordeal that caused frostbite). At Red Beach, on the northwest shoulder of Holtz Bay, a battalion of the 17th Infantry Regiment (soon joined by a battalion of the 32d Infantry Regiment) and a party of Alaskan Scouts landed unopposed and drove south toward the Japanese positions at the head of Holtz Bay.

Fog delayed the Southern Force's (two battalions of the 17th Infantry Regiment) landing at Massacre Bay until late afternoon. They too were unopposed, the Japanese having placed their defenses on the ridges surrounding upper Massacre Valley, positions that were hidden by the fog. By evening, however,

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3. Paul S. Dull, A Battle History of the Imperial Japanese Navy (1941-1945) (Annapolis, 1978), p. 261.

4. General Smith witnessed the Seventh's amphibious assault on Attu and wrote, "I have always considered the landing . . . in the dense fog of Attu . . . an amphibious landing without parallel in our military history." Holland M. Smith and Percy Finch, Coral and Brass (Washington, 1979), p. 103.

both the Northern and Southern forces had come under Japanese fire. By May 13, it was apparent that the Southern Force's advance was stalemated by fierce Japanese resistance; the Northern Force, too, was making slow progress against a stubborn foe. The remainder of the 32d Infantry landed that day at Massacre Bay. Later, Alaska's defense force, the 4th Infantry Regiment, also joined the fight. Admiral Kinkaid, convinced that General Brown was bogged down, relieved him and appointed Army Maj. Gen. Eugene M. Landrum to take command on Attu.

The Japanese prevented the Northern and Southern forces from joining, in Jarmin Pass, for a full week, when the Japanese began withdrawing slowly toward Chichagof Harbor and its surrounding ridges. Two more weeks of bitter fighting occurred before the Seventh Division and its reinforcements succeeded in driving the enemy from the snow-covered cliffs of Fishhook Ridge and Clevesy Pass, which opened the way to Chichagof.

On the night of May 29, the 1,000 surviving able-bodied Japanese made a screaming banzai attack out of Chichagof Harbor, up Siddens Valley, and American positions in Clevesy Pass and against Engineer Hill, killing and being killed. Engineer troops, bivouacked on the latter, succeeded in organizing a thin defensive line and, despite the confusion, succeeded in breaking the attack. The next morning, May 30, Japan announced the loss of Attu. For many days thereafter, however, American forces continued mopping-up operations.

Casualties were heavy on both sides. Out of their force of about 2,500, only 29 Japanese were still alive. Of the United States strength of 15,000, 550 were dead and 1,500 wounded. Another 1,200 Americans were casualties to Attu's climate. Inadequate footgear, especially, caused frozen feet and trenchfoot.

Almost immediately, army engineers and naval seabees began constructing airfields on Attu. Rejecting the Japanese runway at East Holtz Bay as unsatisfactory, army engineers completed a fighter field at West Holtz (Addison Valley) and another fighter field on Alexai Point. The latter was soon extended to serve bombers as well. On July 10, 1943, the Eleventh Air Force made its first attack on Japan's Home Islands when eight B-25 bombers flew from Attu to strike Paramushiro in the Kuriles--this being the first air attack on Japan since the famous Doolittle raid of April 18, 1942.

Other attacks followed, usually with some success until September 11, 1943, when a force of 12 B-25 medium bombers and 8 B-24 heavy bombers left Attu for Paramushiro. On this occasion, Japanese fire destroyed three bombers, and another seven were heavily damaged and forced to land in Siberia where the crews were interned. Further raids were postponed for several months but, by the spring of 1944, Attu's bombers were again over the Kuriles.

The Navy constructed both land runways and a seaplane base for patrol bombers and flying boats west of Massacre Bay and at adjacent Casco Cove. For the duration of the war, naval aircraft made their lonely patrols over the North Pacific. As at Alexai Field, the Navy's two land runways were first covered with steel (Marston) mats. By 1944, however, asphalt had been laid and the Navy made the runways available to army planes as well as its own, and the Eleventh Air Force established maintenance facilities there.

As for the Aleuts, about half of them died while in Japan, mostly from tuberculosis. After Japan's surrender, the survivors, along with the teacher, Mrs. Charles Foster Jones, returned to the United States. Too few in number to begin anew on their island, the Attuans resettled on Atka Island in the Aleutians, together with the inhabitants of that place. The Aleuts have not yet forgotten their homeland. Nor have the veterans of "the Forgotten War," Japanese or American, let Attu slip from their memories.

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