

**Attu Virtual Staff Ride (VSR) Walkbook**  
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Administrative note: Yellow highlighted text refers to terrain movements.

Gray highlights refer to visuals.

Text enclosed in a black box is background material and details for the instructor. Instructors should not present this material to students because of the need to keep the field phase of the VSR within a reasonable time limit.

## **Stand 1. Background**

NOTE: As in all staff rides, this Virtual Staff Ride has attempted to make the best use of material available to be historically accurate. Even so, it is important to note:

I. Japanese records are extremely limited. The garrison died nearly to the man, and the Japanese on the island destroyed almost all of the documents before the island fell.

II. On the US side, there are more records, but the lack of maps (before and after the campaign) leave many locations unclear.

A. For example, a report might say that a company “hid in a ravine to the right of the main body.”

B. The actual ravine remains unclear.

III. Thus, there are some assumptions about units and locations that are the best that can be determined by the lack of precise evidence.

### **Visuals.**

*Visual 1-1: Japanese Strategic Plan December 1941.*

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**Directions.** None for this stand.

**Orientation.** None at this time. There will be a map orientation later in this stand. The first terrain orientation will be in Stand 2.

### **Description.**

*Visual 1-1: Japanese Strategic Plan December 1941.*

I. Japanese overall plan and goals in Dec 1941.

A. Japan's key objectives were economic resources in the Netherlands East Indies and Malaya which would relieve them from the effects of the Allied embargo on oil and other materials.

B. It was also decided, based on the belief that the US would inevitably become involved, that Japan would also need to seize the Philippines, Wake, Tarawa (in the Gilberts) and Guam (in the Marianas).

C. Japanese planners felt that they had to seize the Philippines to remove the possibility of US forces interfering with the supply line that would stretch from the East Indies and Malaya to Japan.

D. Another key element of the plan was an attack by carrier-based aircraft of the Japanese Combined Fleet on the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. This would remove the American ability to interfere with the establishment of the Japanese perimeter.

E. In its final form, Japanese operations to secure their objectives would begin on the first day of war when Japanese military forces were to go into action simultaneously on multiple fronts.

1. Navy carrier-based aircraft were to attack the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

2. Immediately after, joint Army and Navy air forces were to strike American air and naval forces in the Philippines, while other Japanese forces hit the British in Malaya.

3. Soon after, there would be large-scale landings in the Philippines and in Malaya and the rapid occupation of those areas.

4. The follow-on operations were to begin with the occupation of Java and Sumatra, while Japanese forces moving down the Malay Peninsula were to seize Singapore.

5. The initial Japanese plan did **not** include taking any of the Aleutian Islands.

F. Once these locations were seized, the Japanese would have a defensive perimeter that would make any Allied counter-offensive too costly and not worth the attempt.

G. In the end, the Japanese believed that the US would accept a peace agreement that allowed the Japanese to keep most, if not all, of their gains.

## II. Allied (mainly US) plans and goals in the Pacific Theater.

A. The Allied plan was defensive in nature.

1. The US hoped to hold the Philippines (although some leaders thought this would be impossible).

2. The British believed they could successfully defend Malaya and Singapore.

B. US preparations in Alaska, pre-war.

1. Until the late 1930s, there were very few US military forces in Alaska.

2. Increased Japanese and German aggression led Congress, in 1939, to allocate money to improve the Army Air Corps' Ladd Airfield near Fairbanks, and three US Navy bases: Sitka (near Juneau), Kodiak Island, and Unalaska Island (Dutch Harbor).

3. In June 1940, the US Army's 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment started to arrive in Alaska.

4. At the same time, some new command structures were created.

a. IX Corps area was responsible for defense of the northern Pacific Coast of the US to include Alaska.

b. Later in 1941, IX Corps was placed under the control of the Western Defense Command, led by Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt.

c. In the meantime, on 26 June 1940, Colonel (soon to be promoted to Brigadier General) Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. took command of the newly created Alaska Defense Command. Buckner was the son of a well-known Confederate general of the Civil War.

C. Buckner's Alaskan Defense Command was poorly equipped and staffed prior to the Japanese offensive.

#### ***Visual 1-2: Initial US Aircraft in Alaska.***

1. Buckner placed a priority on building airpower in Alaska. This included both planes and bases.

a. By July 1941, 20 P-36 Hawk fighters (18<sup>th</sup> Pursuit Squadron) and 18 Bolo (B-18) bombers had arrived in Alaska.

b. In addition, the Navy had PBY Catalina aircraft—long range aircraft that could land on water. These were primarily reconnaissance aircraft, but they were capable of limited bombing.

c. The Alaska Command Air Force was activated on 17 October 1941. It was redesignated US Eleventh Air Force in Feb 1942.

d. In August 1941, Buckner, without permission, had started siphoning government funds to purchase equipment for new airfields in the Aleutians. Soon after, he received permission for his actions.

2. Just prior to Pearl Harbor, the US Alaskan Navy consisted of limited assets:

--180 personnel at Sitka. --300 at Kodiak. --64 at Dutch Harbor. --Six PBY Catalinas, spread throughout three bases.
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3. Between 30 June and 30 Sep 1941, the Alaska Defense Command had grown from 7,263 to 21,565 Army and Army Air Force (USAAF) personnel. This included:

- Four infantry regiments.
- Three and one-half anti-aircraft regiments.
- One 155mm mobile coast artillery regiment.
- One tank company.



C. Soon after the Japanese offensive started, Roosevelt and Churchill met at the Arcadia Conference, and agreed on the "Germany First" strategy.

1. The European Theater was to receive the preponderance of resources and the Pacific Theater became the secondary effort.

2. Thus, Allied counter-offensives in the Pacific would be limited until men and material became available.

3. Within the Pacific Theater, Alaska was one of the lowest priorities for reinforcements and supplies.

III. Japanese Offensive and US build-up in Alaska after Pearl Harbor.

#### ***Visual 1-3: Japanese Attack, December 1941***

A. The initial Japanese offensive in the Pacific was extremely successful.

1. The Japanese seized the Philippines, Malaya, Singapore, and the Netherlands East Indies islands.

2. They also seized other islands (Wake, Tarawa, Guam, and others) that established their defensive perimeter.

3. The raid on Pearl Harbor destroyed the US Pacific Fleet's battleships; however, the carriers—which were at sea at the time—were not harmed.

B. US forces received support after Pearl Harbor.

#### ***Visual 1-4: US Alaskan Navy Reinforcements after Pearl Harbor***

1. In the two months after Pearl Harbor, the Alaskan Navy received some reinforcements—much of which was older material:

- Three WWI-era destroyers.
- Five Coast Guard cutters.
- Six outdated S-boat submarines.
- Several more PBY Catalinas.

#### ***Visual 1-5: Reinforcing Aircraft to Alaska after Pearl Harbor***

2. On 1 January 1942, the USAAF sent 25 P-40 Warhawk fighters and 13 B-26 Marauder bombers from Sacramento to Alaska.

a. However, 11 of those planes crashed on the way.

b. Only eight of the planes had arrived by 25 January.

c. More aircraft arrived over time, but for Buckner, the buildup was painfully slow.

#### ***Visual 1-6: Alaska Defenses, December 1941***

C. Several months after Pearl Harbor, Buckner's Alaska Defense Command and the Navy had expanded to:

- 25,000 Army troops and 2,500 USAAF personnel.
- 14 Army bases.
- 30 operational airfields (7 were USAAF, the rest were civilian).

1. Buckner's headquarters was in Anchorage, located near Elmendorf Airfield and Fort Richardson. Also at these locations were

a. US Eleventh Army Air Force.

b. 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment.

c. 75<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment.

2. The Alaskan Navy was based at Kodiak Island. Additional units there were:

a. 201<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment (minus one BN).

b. 215<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment.

3. Dutch Harbor was the major forward base of US forces in Alaska to include:

a. Naval and air forces (PBYS and Subs)

b. 37<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment (part).

b. 206<sup>th</sup> Anti-aircraft Artillery Regiment.

### ***Visual 1-7: Japanese Midway Plan June 1942***

#### **III. Battle of Midway and the Aleutians.**

##### **A. Reasons for Japanese to launch a new offensive to Midway.**

1. The continued existence of the US carriers, which were not at Pearl Harbor.

2. The Doolittle raid that bombed mainland Japan with planes from a US carrier, also convinced the Japanese leadership that another major offensive was needed to destroy the US carriers and seize Midway (thus expanding the defensive perimeter).

##### **B. Japanese plan for Midway.**

###### **1. Goals:**

a. Capture Midway.

b. In the process, lure the American carriers into trying to defend Midway, and destroy them in a major sea battle with the Japanese fleet.

2. The overall plan was extremely complicated. This was like most Japanese plans, especially those developed by the commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto.

3. Initially, Yamamoto wanted to take action only against Midway.

a. His plan was opposed by the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) leaders who were more focused on the war in China and other operations.

b. As a compromise, Yamamoto was given permission for the Midway operation, but the IJA leadership got Yamamoto to agree to add an attack in the Aleutians to his plan.

4. The main effort directed against Midway involved the actions of 6 different forces.

a. The Guard Force (Number 1 on the visual) was a Navy Task Force to sail to the north of the main forces and protect them from US interference from the north.

b. The Midway Occupation Force (#2) would approach Midway from the south. It consisted of the troops and transports to seize and hold the island.

c. The Occupation Force (#3) was supported by the ships of the Midway Support Force.

d. The Carrier Strike Force (#4) was to provide air support in the attack on Midway, and in the process, draw the American carriers out to battle. This force was expected to attrit the American forces, but the main destruction of the US fleet was to be done by two other Japanese fleets.

e. The Japanese Main Body (First Fleet) (#5), under Yamamoto himself was to destroy the US carriers and other ships. The fleet contained the bulk of Japan's most powerful battleships.

f. The Japanese Second Fleet (#6) was to assist the Main Body in the destruction of the US fleet (if needed) and/or take part in supporting the seizure of Midway.

5. In support of the main effort at Midway, the Japanese plan included several forces that were to take actions in the Aleutian Islands. Note: this is a short overview of the Japanese Aleutian plan; it will be covered in more detail later.

a. The Dutch Harbor Raid Force (#7) would launch airstrikes from Japanese carriers prior to the attacks (occupations) of Attu and Kiska.

b. The Northern Force (#8) were to transport the Japanese Army forces that were to occupy Attu and Kiska from Japan to a port in the northern Kurile Islands. The troopships would then split and link up with their respective Navy Task Forces for the movement to their destinations as outlined below.

b. The Attu Invasion Force (#9).

c. The Kiska Invasion Force (#10).

C. The Battle of Midway, 4-7 June 1942.

1. The Japanese main effort at Midway was defeated.
2. The US held the island and lost only one carrier to the loss of 4 Japanese carriers in the naval engagements.
3. The Japanese had some limited success in the Aleutians, which is covered later.

***Visual 1-8: The Aleutians, Orientation, 1942-1943.***

**Orientation.** Overview of the Aleutians. Done on map (visual) only.

I. The Aleutian Island Campaign's distances are immense.

A. The islands extend for more than 1,200 miles west from the Alaska Peninsula, to Attu, which is about 600 miles from Siberia and about 250 miles from the Komandorski Islands of the Soviet Union.

B. Attu is 650 miles from the Japanese base at Paramushiro in the Kurile Islands, the most northerly stronghold of Japan's main defenses.

II. Climate.

A. The Aleutians' climate is not like most of mainland Alaska, which has great variation in temperatures (particularly cold winters) and often heavy snowfalls.

B. The warm Japanese sea current moderates the temperatures on the islands. In the winter, the temperatures are usually in a range, from a low of 25 to a high of 35 degrees Fahrenheit. In the summers, the range is usually 45 to 55 degrees.

C. Thus the islands have less snow (except at high elevations) and more wet and foggy conditions.

III. Island locations, moving from east to west (use the visual to point out the key islands).

A. The Alaska Peninsula extends from the mainland towards the Aleutians.

B. The first Aleutian Island to the west of the peninsula is Unimak.

C. The next major island is Unalaska. Dutch Harbor, which will become a major US base.

D. Next is Unmak.

E. After Unmak, there are many islands that are not of great importance in the Aleutian Campaign. After this stretch, these are the main islands that are factors in the campaign:

- Adak
- Amchitka
- Kiska
- Semya
- Attu.

F. To the west of Attu are the Komandorski Islands. They are part of the USSR, which was NOT at war with Japan at the time, and only lightly occupied.

***Visual 1-9: The Aleutians, The Japanese Strike, June 1943.***

**Description.**

I. The Japanese seize Attu and Kiska (part of the Midway Operation).

A. On June 3, 1942, Japanese carrier-borne aircraft bombed American installations at Dutch Harbor on the island of Unalaska.

1. Under the command of Rear Admiral Kakuji Kakuta, the carriers *Ryujo* and *Junyo* plus escort ships, launched air strikes at the United States Army and Navy facility.

2. The planes arrived over the harbor at 0400 and attacked the town's radio station and oil storage tanks causing some damage, but not seriously impairing the military value of the base.

3. On 4 June, the Japanese carriers launched a second attack.

a. More targets were damaged including some grounded aircraft, an army barracks, oil storage tanks, aircraft hangar, and a few merchant ships in the port.

b. After hitting the fuel tanks, the enemy dive-bombers and high-level bombers concentrated on the ships in the harbor, *Fillmore* and *Gillis*, but did no damage.

4. In the end, the Japanese had inflicted some damage on US facilities at Dutch Harbor, but it did not take long for the Americans to fix the damage and make Dutch Harbor a major base for future operations in the Aleutians.

***Visual 1-9: Click on the Visual to bring up an animation that shows three Buildings on Fire After Japanese Bombardment on Dutch Harbor,***

***Click again to remove the picture.***

B. A few days after the raid, Japanese troops landed on the islands of Kiska and Attu.

1. On Kiska, they fought a small American naval weather detachment: a lieutenant and nine men.

a. The Japanese killed two Americans and captured seven. The prisoners were sent to Japan.

b. Chief Petty Officer William C. House escaped, and finally surrendered 50 days later. After 50 days of eating only plants and worms, he weighed just 80 pounds.

2. The Japanese brought in a small number of planes in the small harbor area.

a. Most were of A6M2-N floatplanes (known as Rufe planes).

b. A few larger float planes known as H6K Mavis were also positioned in the harbor.

**Visual 1-9:** Click on the Visual to bring up an animation that shows the planes.

3. The Japanese also quickly occupied the Attu, which did not have any American armed forces.

a. At the time of the Japanese occupation, the island's one village consisted of forty-five native Aleuts, a branch of the Eskimos, and two Americans: Foster Jones, a sixty-year-old schoolteacher, and his wife.

b. They lived in a little hamlet of houses around Chichagof Harbor.

c. When the Japanese landed, the elderly husband tried to escape, but he was caught and imprisoned in a hut. He died in captivity, possibly by suicide.

d. The wife survived, and together with the Aleut natives, was transported for internment to Hokkaido, Japan.

C. The seizure of Attu and Kiska had a three-fold objective.

1. To break up any offensive action the Americans might contemplate against Japan by way of the Aleutians.

2. To set up a barrier between the United States and the USSR in case the Soviets joined the United States in the war against Japan.

3. To construct advance airbases and make preparations for future offensive action (to where was never specified, perhaps Alaska).

II. The Japanese force which initially seized Attu consisted of the 301<sup>st</sup> Independent Infantry Battalion which landed at Chichagof Harbor.

A. The harbor, though well protected, was small, with a narrow, rockbound entrance studded with reefs which made it unsuitable for the landing of supplies in any quantity.

B. The Japanese established their principal base at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay, a wider and better harbor, leaving Chichagof merely as a subsidiary base held by a skeleton force.

C. No important installations were established in the Sarana Bay area or at Massacre Bay, where the main American forces later landed.

D. Naming of Massacre Bay.

1. The bay's name is not related to the WWII fight.

2. It is named after a Russian massacre of local Aleuts in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century before the US acquired Alaska and Attu.

III. The Japanese leave and return to Attu.

A. In the latter part of September, for reasons which are unknown, the garrison of Attu was transferred to Kiska and for about a month after that the island was unoccupied.

B. The Americans found out but could not do anything; the Alaskan defenses at this period were not yet complete, and troops and naval units were too small.

C. On October 29, 1942, a Japanese mixed force from Paramushiro, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Yanekawa, landed on Attu and reestablished the base at Holtz Bay.

1. They installed defenses of dual-purpose antiaircraft guns, mountain howitzers, and infantry positions. (More details on Japanese positions will be covered later).

2. Initially, these were not first-line troops but were composed mostly of older men and recruits who, after a short training period, had been sent on active duty under officers and noncommissioned officers drawn from the regular army.

3. Later reinforcements would be of a higher caliber.

4. The principal duty of this Attu force was apparently to build an airfield to supplement the one already under construction on Kiska, but the work went slowly.

5. Because of the harsh weather, on many days work was impossible, and it does not appear that living conditions in the Aleutians were any better suited to the Japanese soldier than to the American.

6. Though the survey for the airfield was completed in December, construction did not start until two months later. The airfield had not been finished when American troops landed in May.

***Visual 1-10: The Aleutians, US Preliminary Operations 1942--Air.***

IV. Preliminary U.S. Operations Against Kiska and Attu.

A. The American High Command began early to lay plans to retake both Kiska and Attu.

B. The first steps were air attacks.

1. Initial strikes on 11 June known as the Kiska Blitz.

a. Part of the effort was from the PBV Catalinas; however they were not suited for bombing, and the weather minimized their effectiveness.

2. However, also on 11 June, 11<sup>th</sup> US Army Air Force contributed to the bombing efforts with 5 B-24 Liberators. This effort also had little effect. ***Click for animation on visual 1-10 to bring up picture of B-24 plane. Then click to remove picture.***

3. Also on 11 June, while PBV Catalinas and B-24s attempted to damage the Japanese, Colonel "Eric" Eareckson led five B-17s from the 36<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron in raids on Kiska. ***Click for animation on visual 1-10 to bring up picture of B-17 plane. Then click to remove picture.***

4. Although the damage from the American attacks was minimal, Japanese Captain Sukemitsu Ito, commander of the planes on Kiska, later recalled that the 11 June attacks "came as a surprise and worried us considerably." (Herder, Osprey, 41).

C. US air elements attempted to apply more sustained pressure on the Japanese, particularly at Kiska.

1. For the next several days in June, Eareckson personally led B-17s and B-24s on bombing runs at Kiska (Attu was not a target at this time). Bad weather and long distances of travel for the planes led to little results.



2. In late June, Eareckson's bombing runs sunk a Japanese supply ship and disrupted Japanese operations to a limited extent. Other bombardments had similar limited success but still kept the Japanese under pressure.

***Visual 1-11: The Aleutians, US Preliminary Operations 1942--Navy.***

D. US Naval efforts.

1. US Naval support in the Aleutians was hindered by command conflicts.
2. This was a common problem in the Pacific, especially early in the war. Note that the Japanese also had extensive conflicts between the service commanders.
3. Buckner, the Army commander of the Alaskan Defense command, clashed with Rear Admiral Robert Theobold, commander of North Pacific Force.
  - a. Buckner wanted more aggressive action from the cautious Theobold.
  - b. Admiral Nimitz smoothed over relations between the two.
  - c. Theobold remained in overall command, but on 3 August 1942, Rear Admiral William "Poco" Smith took over tactical command of the Navy's task force in Alaska.
  - d. Buckner dealt mostly with Smith and avoided Theobold as much as he could.
4. On 7 Aug, a US task force of heavy and light cruisers, destroyers, and other craft bombarded Kiska.
  - a. Once again, the weather conditions (fog and wind) forced the ships to bombard from a distance.
  - b. The ships fired 6700 shells, but almost all of them missed the main Japanese camp. . ***Click for animations on visual 1-10 to bring up pictures of USS Nashville and Indianapolis.***
  - c. Some US Army Air Force (USAAF) personnel dubbed this action as the "Navy's Spring Plowing," because of its heavy, but misplaced shooting (Osprey, 47).
  - d. Even so, the Japanese realized that US forces were gathering strength and threatened both Kiska and Attu with substantial force.
5. Continued bombardments and naval efforts from US forces harassed the Japanese up until the landings on Attu.

E. US command relationships (again).

1. On 4 January 1943, Rear Admiral Tomas C. Kinkaid became Commander of the North Pacific Force, replacing Theobald, who continued to clash with the Army leaders.

2. Command relationships in the North Pacific were complicated.

a. Kinkaid's Naval forces came under Vice Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher's Northwestern Sea Frontier.

b. The Army troops in Alaska, including Brigadier General William O. Butler's 11<sup>th</sup> Air Force, were commanded by Buckner, who was answerable to the head of the Western Defense Command, Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt.

c. Kinkaid cooperated well with Buckner, but the Army commander encountered more difficulty with Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell, the commander of the Amphibious Force, Pacific Fleet, and later IX Amphibious Force.

d. Rockwell was an Academy classmate of Kinkaid's, who was senior to him in rank, and convinced that he would both plan and command the amphibious phase of the operation rather than Kinkaid.

***Visual 1-12: The Aleutians, US Preliminary Operations 1942-43 Getting Closer.***

F. On 30 August 1942, a task force occupied the island of Adak and the neighboring island of Atka.

1. The US Force was about regiment in size consisting of a mixed force of the Alaska Defense Command under BG Eugene Landrum.

2. Although Adak was un-occupied, the US landing suffered casualties.

a. A recon party landed early and reported that severe weather would be a problem for any landing.

b. Despite the warning, the landing went in as scheduled. The high wind, rain, and stormy seas wrecked most of the landing craft and many soldiers drowned (numbers were never reported).

c. These losses were a lesson for the US forces in the Aleutians—even if it means losing surprise, be prepared to delay a landing if the weather demands it, rather than stick to a timetable.

3. Situated some 275 miles east of Kiska and 450 miles east of Attu, Adak was an excellent station from which activities on Attu and Kiska could be kept under air observation.

4. US Army engineers took only two weeks to put into operation an airstrip for operations and a barrier against both Attu and Kiska.

5. Colonel Eareckson's 36<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron moved forward to Adak and focused its efforts on Kiska and Attu.

G. On January 13, 1943, American forces seized Amchitka, approximately 75 miles southeast of Kiska and 275 miles southeast of Attu.

1. The US force was another mixed group of regimental size from the Alaska Defense Command, this time led by BG Lloyd E. Jones.

2. As at Adak and, the Army engineers rapidly constructed an airfield at Amchitka.

3. With such bases established within bomber range of Attu and Kiska, it became possible for planes of 11<sup>th</sup> Air Force to better harass the enemy and bomb Japanese installations on both islands.

4. However, the weather conditions still limited the ability of the American air forces to hit targets on Kiska and Attu.

F. Isolation of Attu (Battle of Komandorski Islands) by the Navy.

1. The Japanese had been running supplies to Attu with surface ships with some success immediately after occupying Attu and Kiska.

2. On 26 March 1943, a United States naval force operating west of Attu encountered a Japanese convoy—two transports escorted by cruisers and destroyers—apparently bringing reinforcements and supplies to the Attu garrison.

a. Rear Admiral Chales H. "Soc" McMorris led the US Navy Task Group. He had taken over command of US Navy surface forces from Rear Admiral "Poco" Smith in late 1942.

b. The Imperial Japanese Navy Fifth Fleet was led by Vice Admiral Boshiro Hosogaya.

3. The resulting engagement was characterized by confusion on both sides. Although outgunned, McMorris managed to fight off the Japanese forces.

***Click for animation on Visual 1-12: Image of USS Salt Lake City appears.***

4. The Japanese turned back toward their bases in the Kurile Islands, partly fearing American land-based bombers, while the American vessels broke off the pursuit and retired to the east.

5. From then on, the Japanese made no further effort to support their troops on Attu by surface ships and convoys.

6. Japanese submarines brought limited supplies to Attu, but this was so small that the garrison was on minimal rations in the months before the American landings.

G. As the date approached for the Attu landings, Butler's 11<sup>th</sup> Air Force increased its bombings on both Attu and Kiska.

1. In Apr 1943, the 11<sup>th</sup> Air Force flew 1175 sorties. (*The 1000 Mile War*, by Garfield, 262).

2. On 15 Apr in a 12-hour period, 112 sorties dropped 184,000 pounds of bombs. But the vast majority of these fell on Kiska because of bad weather on Attu.

V. It is important to note that both Adak and Amchitka were not occupied/defended by the Japanese.

A. The Alaska Defense Command was able to seize them with their own assets at about a regiment in size for each.

B. Because Attu and Kiska had determined Japanese defenders, the Alaska Defense Command lacked the forces to take these islands.

C. Thus, a full division outside of the Alaska Command (7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division) was needed for an assault on Attu or Kiska (at this point, the US command was undecided on which island to attack first).

### **Analysis.**

I. Discuss the Japanese decision to seize Attu and Kiska.

A. Taking US territory has political benefit—is it worth it?

B. Does it support the Midway plan in addition to the political aspects?

1. Although the Aleutians were not an original part of the plan, the addition of these objectives may have had benefits:

2. Perhaps a diversion to draw off US forces from Midway.

3. Bases for further advance on US territory?

4. Other considerations?

II. How much effort should the US devote to retaking Attu and Kiska?

A. Are these islands of military importance?

B. Political Importance?

III. How does this campaign reflect DIME considerations?

A. Diplomacy (possibly getting the US to a negotiated settlement).

B. Information (who really benefits more in the IO campaign for the Japanese to hold US territory)?

C. Military—probably already covered in questions above.

D. Economic. Do the Aleutians have any economic significance?

IV, Analyze the effects of the Arctic weather on the air and naval operations in the Aleutians leading up to the landings on Attu.

A. Clearly air and naval forces are more restricted, but in what ways, and by what particular conditions (is it the cold, the wind, the fog—and how does each restrict operations)?

B. Our technology, planes, and ships have better capabilities today. Even so, do Arctic conditions still effect operations today and to what extent?

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## Stand 2. Preparations for Attu

### Visuals.

*Visual 2-1: Attu Orientation Overall.*

*Visual 2-2: Attu Northern Force Area.*

*Visual 2-3: Attu Southern Force Area.*

*Visual 2-4: Attu Japanese Counterattack Area.*

*Visual 2-5: Attu Japanese Defenses, May 1943.*

*Visual 2-6: Attu Japanese Order of Battle, May 1943.*

*Visual 2-7: 7<sup>th</sup> Division Preparations and Order of Battle.*

*Visual 2-8: Invasion Options.*

*Visual 2-9: Attu Final Invasion Plan.*



**Directions.** Take a view of the bulk of the Attu terrain box from the air. You will probably not get the entire terrain box into view (the view will fade out when you get too high). Try to match the view below.

**Visual 2-1: Attu Orientation Overall.**

**Orientation.** Use the visual and air view for the initial orientation.

I. Attu. One writer has called Attu “*the lonesome spot this side of hell.*” From *The Capture of Attu: A World War II Battle as Told by the Men Who Fought There*. April 1, 2000 by Robert J. Mitchell (Compiler), Gregory J. W. Urwin (Introduction).

II. Climate.

A. The temperature on the island rarely gets severely cold, but Attu is covered through most of the year by a cold, damp fog, often accompanied by snow or icy rain.

B. Even the high winds, which can reach a velocity of more than 100 miles per hour, are not able to dispel the nearly continuous fog. There are many days when the weather prevents any possibility of outside work on the island.

C. This weather greatly limited the use of air power.

D. Although not severely cold in general, the higher elevations on Attu were cold enough to have snow and ice most of the year.

E. A particularly severe storm was known as the williwaw: a sudden, violent and frigid windstorm.

### III. Terrain.

A. The island topography is characterized by mountains with steep jagged crags, knifelike ridges, and boggy tundra (known as muskeg).

B. Only a short distance from the shoreline and throughout the interior of the island, steep mountains rise abruptly to a height of 3000 feet—rugged peaks and narrow ridges without growth, covered with snow at the higher elevations.

C. The valleys and the lower slopes are covered by a layer of tundra, the muskeg. It is like frozen moss and coarse grass, which gives an elastic quality to the ground.

1. Water seeps under this layer. A man on foot may readily break through the tundra, sinking in watery mud up to his knees.

2. Motor vehicles, even those with caterpillar treads, quickly churn the tundra into a muddy mass in which sunken wheels and treads spin uselessly.

3. There are almost no trees on Attu.

IV. The fight for Attu took place in three general areas (the orientation will look at each area in more detail). Note that many location names were acquired during and after the battle, often named after soldiers that fought and died on Attu (for example, Henderson Ridge).

A. Northern Force Area.

B. Southern Force Area.

C. Japanese Counter-attack Area.

***Visual 2-2: Attu Northern Force Area.***



**Directions.** Zoom down to the Northern Force area to match the visual from the air view of the terrain. Point out the features listed below on the map and terrain from the aerial view.



V. Northern Force Area.

A. The US forces landed at Scarlett Beach (Austin Cove) and Red Beach.

1. Austin Cove is the source of Ballentine Creek, which leads down a valley to the south.
2. Red beach is a spit of land on the north side of Holtz Bay.
3. Holtz Bay has two branches called “Arms.”
4. The West Arm connects to two creeks: Scout Creek and Addison Creek.
5. The East Army connects to O’Donnell Creek.

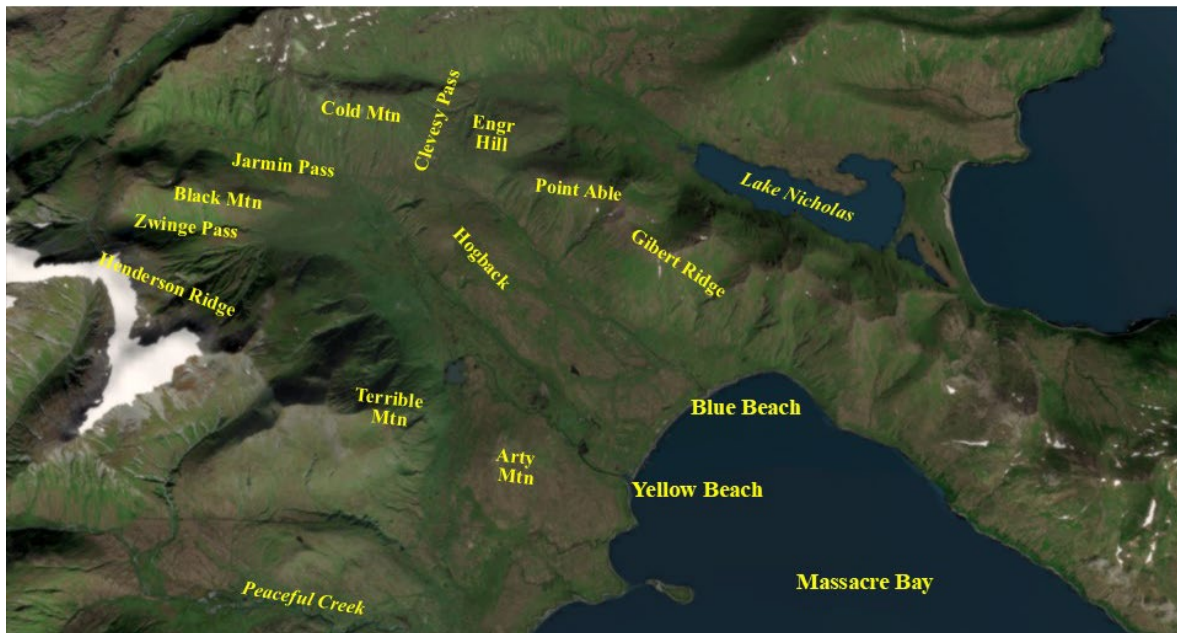
B. High ground in the area.

- Vieth Ridge
- Cupp’s Hill

- Brannon Ridge
- Young Hill
- Buchanan Ridge
- Hill X
- Moore Ridge
- Prendergat Ridge

***Visual 2-3: Attu Southern Force Area.***

**Directions.** Zoom down to the Southern Force area to match the visual from the air view of the terrain. Point out the features listed below on the map and terrain from the aerial view.



VI. Southern Force Area.

A. The US landing areas came to be known as Massacre Beach on Massacre Bay. The two landing beaches had code names:

- Yellow Beach
- Blue Beach

1. An un-named intermittent stream empties into Blue Beach.

2. Another un-named intermittent stream—that split into two parts—empties into Yellow Beach.

B. Massacre Beach area is rimmed with high ground on 3 sides,

1. To the north are Gilbert Ridge, Able point, and Engineer Hill.

2. Towards the west and northwest are Cold Mountain, Robinson Ridge, and Black Mountain.

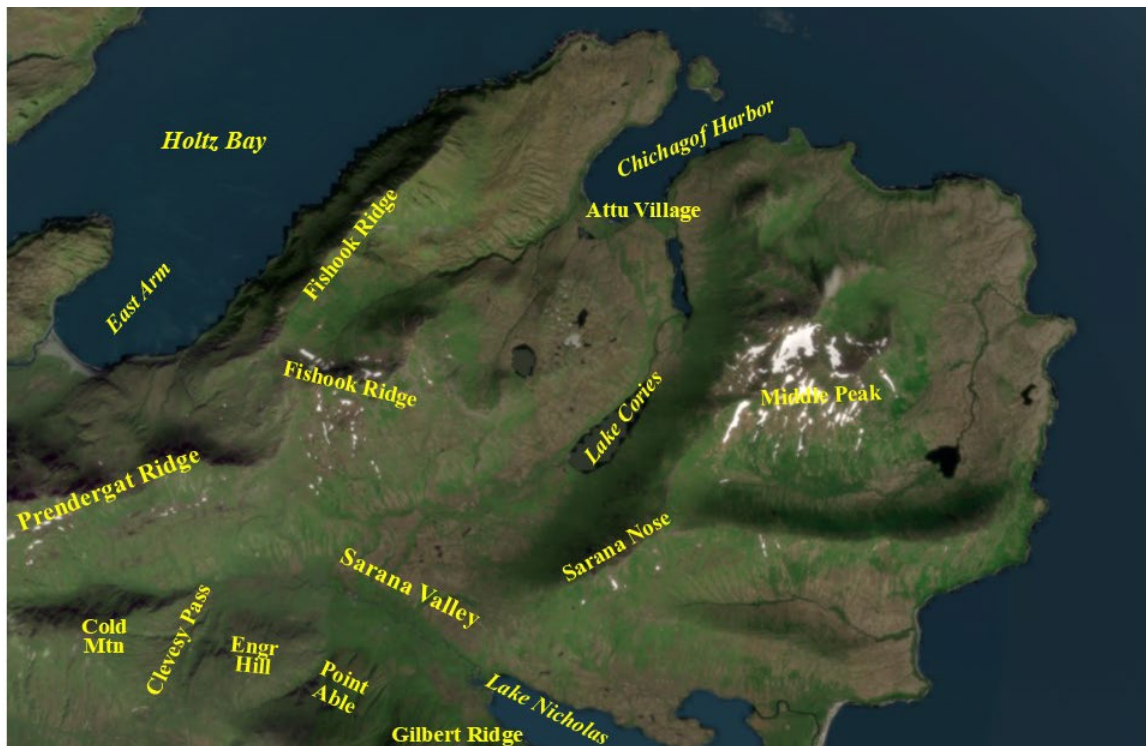
3. To the south and southwest are Henderson Ridge and Terrible Mountain.

4. Also to the south is a somewhat detached and lower-level hill called Artillery Mountain.

5. Finally, a lower-level ridge—called the Hogback—split the valley coming out of Massacre Beach.

***Visual 2-4: Attu Japanese Counterattack Area.***

**Directions.** Zoom down to the Japanese Counterattack area to match the visual from the air view of the terrain. Point out the features listed below on the map and terrain from the aerial view.



VII. Japanese Counterattack Area. (Parts of this area overlaps the Northern and Southern Areas).

A. Coastline and water courses.

1. Hotz Bay and its arms are to the west.

2. Chichagof Harbor is just to the east. The harbor connects to a stream and lake complex that ends in Lake Cories.

3. To the south is Lake Nicholas.

B. The water features and high ground form a valley bounded on three sides.

1. On the west, the high ground is Fishhook Ridge and Prendergat Ridge.

2. To the south is Cold Mountain, Engineer Hill, Able Point and Gilbert Ridge.

3. Between Cold Mountain and Engineer Hill is Clevesy Pass.

4. On the east side of the valley are Sarana Nose.

C. At the time of the American attack in the spring of 1943, only the shoreline was accurately mapped. No worthwhile maps existed of the mountains and passes over which the American forces had to fight.

***Visual 2-5: Attu Japanese Defenses, May 1943.***

**Directions.** Go back to an aerial view of the terrain box that matches the visual. From this view point out the Japanese positions on the terrain and the map.



### Description.

#### I. Japanese limitations.

A. The Attu garrison, which started at about 500 men, received a series of reinforcements until it was about 2,300 strong when the last transport arrived on 10 March

B. From that time on, owing to the activity of the United States Navy (helped by the battle at Komandorski) and the 11<sup>th</sup> Army Air Force, only submarines carrying limited quantities of supplies and a few reinforcements were able to reach Attu.

#### II. Japanese defenses.

A. When the American landing force arrived on 11 May 1943, the Japanese had established strong defensive positions at key points throughout the area they occupied.

B. Because the Japanese garrison died nearly to a man and left few documents, it is difficult to give specifics of the Japanese defensive positions and plans. Also, the Japanese shifted to different locations as the fighting progressed.

C. Below are some Japanese locations that are fairly well-known for the start of the battle.

##### 1. Near Hill X.

a. The headquarters of Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki, the overall commander on Attu (IJA 2<sup>nd</sup> District, North Seas Garrison). Plus a company of infantry.

b. Elements of Lieutenant Colonel Isamu Yonegawa's 83<sup>rd</sup> IN BN.

##### 2. West Arm of Hotz Bay.

a. Anti-aircraft Battery. Four 75mm guns; two type 93, 13.2mm machine cannons.

b. Mountain Gun Battery. Two type 94, 75mm pack howitzers.

##### 3. Chichagof Harbor.

a. 303<sup>rd</sup> IN BN HQs with infantry support.

b. Anti-aircraft Battery. Four 75mm guns; two type 93, 13.2mm machine cannons.

##### 4. West side of Massacre Bay (Henderson Ridge).



a. 1<sup>st</sup> Company 303<sup>rd</sup> IN BN (-). With one platoon forward on the ridge.

b. Mountain Gun Battery. Two type 94, 75mm pack howitzers.

5. East side of Massacre Bay (Gilbert Ridge and Able Point).

a. 4<sup>th</sup> Company 303<sup>rd</sup> IN BN.

b. 2<sup>nd</sup> Company 303<sup>rd</sup> IN BN.

6. There was an anti-aircraft battery on Artillery Hill with two twin 20mm pom-pom guns.

D. The Japanese units were de-centralized.

1. There were other small Japanese positions scattered over the island.

2. Most Japanese units had weapons, munitions, equipment and food close to or within the defensive positions.

3. These small units operated independently and avoided the need to establish and keep up a continuous supply line from a central base.

***Visual 2-6: Japanese Order of Battle.***

E. The Japanese forces on the island were formally designated as Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) 2<sup>nd</sup> District, North Seas Garrison under Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki.

1. Because of the decentralized nature of the Japanese defense, the lack of communication assets, and the compartmentalized terrain, it was difficult for the commander (Yamasaki) and his commanders to fight as a battalion level command.

2. Most Japanese defensive fights were at company or battery level.

3. Yamasaki had 2650 men, some coastal artillery and anti-aircraft guns. His most effective weapons were mortars.

4. The Japanese had warnings of an American invasion of Attu, and they had been on alert from 4 to 10 May.

5. After a week on alert—and no invasion—Yamasaki sent his troops back to their regular duties.

6. However, Yamasaki's decision was not as significant as might appear. The Japanese did not plan to defend on the beaches, and therefore had time to man their defenses on the high ground away from the beaches when the Americans landed.

***Visual 2-7: 7<sup>th</sup> Division Preparations: Order of Battle.***

III. American Preparations for the Attu Invasion.

A. In the latter part of December, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, commanded by Major General Albert E. Brown, was selected to seize Attu.

1. The division's main force consisted of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry regiments, two battalions of Field Artillery (105mm), and the 50<sup>th</sup> Engineers, with medical units and other supporting and service troops.

2. In addition, the Alaska Defense Command arranged to organize a reserve on the island of Adak, consisting of one battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment and additional troops.

B. The actual task organization for the landing (as shown on the visual aid) evolved later when the US leadership agree upon the landing beaches. It consisted of :

Provisional Scout BN: Captain William H. Willoughby

7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company

7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop (-)

Northern Force: Colonel Frank L. Culin

1<sup>st</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC Albert V. Hartl

Southern Force: Colonel Edward Palmer Earle

2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): MAJ Edward P. Smith

3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): MAJ James R. Montague

2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT: MAJ Charles G. Fredericks (but only F Company in the initial landing)

One Platoon of 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop

Reinforcing forces

1<sup>st</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC Earnest H. Bearss

3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC John M. Finn

1<sup>st</sup> BN, 4<sup>th</sup> RCT (at Adak): MAJ John D. O'Reilly

78<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (Anti-aircraft) Regiment

50<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer BN

C. Selection of 7<sup>th</sup> Division for seizing Attu.

1. The division had not seen action, and it had been training as a motorized unit in the desert at Camp San Luis Obispo, California, in preparation for fighting in the North African theater.

2. However, by December 1942, Rommel was already facing defeat in Africa, and the 7<sup>th</sup> Division mission was changed to the Aleutians.

C. This change was not a flippant, irrational decision (as is sometimes portrayed in some historians' views):

1. No other division was training for Attu's conditions at the time, so the 7<sup>th</sup> was as eligible as any other.

2. The 7<sup>th</sup> Division's old mission was no longer necessary because of Allied victories in North Africa.

3. The forces already in Alaska were too small and spread out in garrisons to do the mission.

D. Even so, the 7<sup>th</sup>'s selection for duty in the Aleutians, where the use of mechanized equipment was almost non-existent, represented a big change from its previous training.

1. Early in January 1943, the division was transferred to Fort Ord, near Monterey, where it had about three months of additional instruction.

2. This included amphibious training under the direction of the Marine commander of the amphibious force of the Pacific Fleet (Maj Gen Holland M. "Howling Mad" Smith).

3. This training laid emphasis upon dismounted infantry tactics and amphibious operations

a. The division gave up its mechanized equipment.

b. A number of practice landings were made, although of necessity, it was on terrain very different from the tundra-covered, muskeg valleys of Attu.

4. A group of officers from the Alaska Defense Command were temporarily assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division to advise and instruct its officers and men about the special conditions and problems it would meet in the Aleutians.

5. One weakness in the landing tests executed by the 7<sup>th</sup> Division was that only the men themselves were sent ashore in actual landing.

a. Only simulated unloading was carried out for the logistic assets.

b. The simulated supplies were far less than actual battle required.



E. The clothing issued to the 7<sup>th</sup> Division for the Attu campaign proved unsatisfactory for the rigorous conditions of Aleutian warfare.

1. Again, this was not from carelessness, but a result of the lack of any knowledge of the particular conditions of the Aleutians.

2. The clothing was neither warm enough to withstand the biting Attu winds nor waterproof enough to keep out the icy rain and the water that seeped into every foxhole.

3. The boots supplied were the all-leather, high-laced blucher type of the sort often worn by loggers and hunters in the northern woods of the United States.

a. They were good for tramping through damp underbrush when facilities for drying them existed. But they were unsuitable for men who had to stand for hours in deep pools of almost freezing water.

b. The troops were not initially provided with the rubber-bottomed, leather-topped shoepac, sometimes called lumbermen's rubbers, which have proved well-suited to Attu conditions.

4. On the arrival of the division in Alaska, these defects in equipment were recognized.

a. A hasty effort was made to remedy the problems, but though some progress was made, there was not enough time to eliminate them entirely.

b. As a result, the Attu landing force suffered heavily from exposure, particularly trench foot resulting from immersion in the muskeg.

F. On April 24, 1943, the landing force sailed from San Francisco, and they arrived at Cold Bay on the southwest Alaskan peninsula, on April 30.

***Visual 2-8: Invasion Options.***

**Directions.** Stay on the same aerial view of the terrain box that matches the visual as best as possible. See next page for screenshot.



#### IV. Making the plan.

A. Until the latter part of March, the American Command had considered Kiska as the primary objective, and they only switched to Attu at a later date.

1. Seizing Attu first might make Kiska untenable and compel the Japanese to abandon it. This was, in fact, what happened.

2. This decision to bypass Kiska was mainly Kinkaid's idea, and it actually pre-dates the similar "island hopping" technique used in the Central and South Pacific.

B. Having decided on Attu, American planners struggled with several possible plans for the landing.

1. The planners knew (from aerial photos) that the Japanese base and troops were all on the northeast corner of the island, and thus did not consider landings on the more remote southwest, west, and northwest coasts of Attu.

2. The Americans had to choose between multiple viable landing sites in the northeast corner. (The visual aid corresponds to the letters of the locations below).

- a. Austin Cove, the area later designated as Scarlett Red.

- b. The north end of Holtz Bay, later designated as Red Beach.

- c. The two branches of water known as the West and East Arms of Holtz Bay.

- d. Chichagof Harbor.
- e. Sarana Bay.
- f. Massacre Bay (which included two adjoining coves).
- g. Temnac Bay.

C. The planners and commanders argued over the landing choices:

1. MG Brown wanted major landings in two locations (somewhere on the north and another to the east), which would allow the U.S. Forces to trap the Japanese in the northeast corner of the island (vic Chichagof Harbor) and keep them from retreating to the island interior.

2. LTG. Gen John L. DeWitt (commander of U.S. Army Forces in the Western U.S. and Brown's Army boss) wanted a single, concentrated landing.

3. Rear Admiral Francis W. "Skinny" Rockwell (the Navy commander of the Attu invasion force) believed that the Navy did not have the transport capacity for more than one landing.

4. Despite the objections, Brown got his plan adopted.

a. However, the exact beaches were not decided upon until just days before the invasion.

b. The planners wanted to wait to get the latest possible aerial photos to help them pick the best locations within Brown's overall concept. Details of the final plan are covered below.

V. Delays in the invasion.

A. The landing on Attu had been fixed for May 7, but bad weather compelled the convoy to stay at Cold Bay until the 4<sup>th</sup>, with the result that the landing date had to be postponed until the 8<sup>th</sup>.

1. Supported by a naval force, including battleships, cruisers, and destroyers under command of Rear Admiral Francis W. Rockwell, the convoy put to sea and arrived off Attu after an uneventful trip.

2. A Japanese radio station with the garrison on Kiska warned the garrison on Attu of the US approach.

a. For a week, from May 3 to May 9, inclusive, the Japanese on Attu stayed on the alert, occupying their combat positions.

b. But when the attack did not materialize, they apparently decided that the expedition was headed somewhere else and returned to their routine duties.

B. When the convoy first arrived off Attu on May 7, it became evident that the strong unfavorable winds then blowing would make an immediate landing extremely hazardous, especially an opposed landing.

1. It was accordingly decided to postpone the attack until the 10<sup>th</sup>.

2. The convoy steamed northward into the Bering Sea in order to avoid detection while it killed time.

3. On its return, a dense fog caused a further postponement until the 11<sup>th</sup>.

4. The delay, though irritating at the time, proved a piece of luck for the American force. The Japanese did not discover the convoy's return, and by 9 May, they had given up all expectation of an attack.

#### ***Visual 2-9: Attu Final Invasion Plan.***

VI. The plan, as finally approved, called for multiple landings.

A. The main body, known as the Southern Force, was to land on the beach of Massacre Bay.

1. It consisted of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalions of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment; the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Regiment; and three batteries of field artillery (105mm.) with auxiliary troops, all under command of Colonel Edward P. Earle, commanding officer of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry.

a. The regiments were designated as regimental combat teams (RCT), which is how they will be referred to in this workbook (instructor notes).

b. This was because the regiments and battalions were task organized with other assets: engineers and other specialized troops.

2. The mission of this force was to advance rapidly up Massacre Valley.

a. They were to seize Jarmin Pass (Massacre-Holtz Pass) and Clevesy Pass (Massacre-Sarana Pass). Then they were to move into the Holtz Bay area to join up with the Northern Force.

b. The combined forces were then to destroy the enemy in the Chichagof Harbor area.

B. The Northern Force was to land on Red Beach, some three miles north of the main Japanese camp at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay.

1. The initial landing force, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Albert V. Hartl, consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry (RCT) and a battery of field artillery, together with auxiliary troops.

2. After landing, the Northern Force was to attack and clear the west arm of Holtz Bay, securing the high ground, later known as Moore Ridge, between the west and east arms of the Bay.

3. After effecting a junction with the Southern Force moving north over Jarmin Pass, the Northern Force was to complete the capture of the Holtz Bay area and the valley to the southwest.

4. Two battalions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>, with two batteries of field artillery, were initially to stay on shipboard in reserve.

5. Colonel Frank L. Culin, commanding officer of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, was the overall commander of Northern Force, which included his regiment and Hartl's BN of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, and would eventually include Captain William Willoughby's Provisional BN (this BN's role is described below).

C. A supporting landing was to be made at Austin Cove by a provisional battalion.

1. It consisted of the 7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company and the 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop (minus one platoon) with Willoughby in command.

2. This force sailed from Dutch Harbor in a destroyer and two submarines and arrived at Attu independent of the main convoy.

3. It had the mission of moving into the west end of the valley opposite the west arm of Holtz Bay and compelling the Japanese to fight facing to the west.

4. The Provisional Battalion was to assist the attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup>, and to join it as part of the Northern Force as soon as Moore Ridge could be seized and held.

D. Another subsidiary landing was to be made by one platoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop on Alexei Point, east of Massacre Bay.

1. Its mission was to cover the rear of the forces landing at Massacre Bay by establishing an outpost across the peninsula to the north, to reconnoiter to the west and

north in the area between Lake Nicholas and Massacre Bay, and thereafter to reconnoiter the peninsula itself, destroying any enemy detachments and installations.

2. It was expected that this platoon would promptly pass on any information it obtained to the Landing Force Command Post, and that it would eventually make contact with the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry (RCT) in Clevesy Pass.

E, The assault on Attu was designated as Operation Landcrab.

### *Analysis*

I. Recent writing on the Army's focus on Arctic warfare has noted:

"The Arctic, however, is not challenging solely due to extreme cold temperatures. In many instances, mobility is actually at its highest state in the winter. Summer poses significant challenges for many wheeled vehicles, while the most challenging period is the spring thaw when ground movement becomes impossible across considerable swaths of territory. Regardless of season, mobility by air is critical to Army operations. Today and for the foreseeable future, the Arctic presents a harsh and demanding environment for Army operations and activities." ([2021\\_army\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](#)).

A. This passage seems to apply well to Attu, where the weather was not always as cold as other arctic areas.

B. Discuss other challenges from Arctic environments besides the cold.

C. How might the different seasons change the arctic conditions, and thus effect military operations?

D. What are the effects on joint operations, as well as the Army elements? How do you plan and prepare for these Arctic conditions?

1. Try to get the students to go deeper than just "the Arctic conditions in Attu make operations difficult."

2. Army considerations: mobility, survivability (health), weapons effectiveness, others?

3. Navy: fire support, landing the troops, enemy threats, naval air support, others?

4. Airpower: best aircraft for the conditions, close air support vice preparatory bombardments, how to overcome visibility difficulties, others?

II. Critique the US plan for taking Attu. Some possible considerations:

- A. Were the landing areas the best possible? Why or why not?
- B. Were the allocated forces appropriate?
- C. How well were the efforts at joint coordination? Other Command and Control considerations?
- D. Other aspects of the plan to consider?

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### Stand 3. Naval and Air Operations for Attu Landings

#### Visuals.

*Visual 3-1: Attu: Naval Support, May 1943.*

*Visual 3-2: Attu: Air Support, May 1943.*

Directions. Keep the aerial view from the last stand; but note that there is no terrain for this stand.



*Visual 3-1: Attu: Naval Support, May 1943.*

#### Description.

I. On 24 April, Admiral Rockwell's naval force with transports and 7<sup>th</sup> Division departed from San Francisco for Cold Harbor in Alaska.

A. Rockwell's naval forces consisted of two Task Forces (TF)

1. TF-16 (from the Alaska-based North Pacific Force). This force was divided into two task groups and supporting elements:

- a. Rear Admiral Robert Giffen's Northern Covering Group.
  - Three heavy cruisers.  
(USS *Wichita*, *Louisville*, and *San Francisco*).
  - Four destroyers.

- b. “Soc” McMorris’ Southern Covering Group.
  - Three light cruisers.  
(USS *Detroit*, *Richmond*, and *Santa Fe*).
  - Five destroyers.
- c. The landing support groups included of TF-16:
  - One destroyer.
  - One gunboat.
  - Two Canadian corvettes.
  - Three submarines.
  - Several tankers, LSTs, LCTs, and PT boats.

2. TF-51, directly under Rockwell’s command.

- a. TF-51 included:
  - three of the pre-WWII battleships that avoided or were rescued from Pearl Harbor: USS *Nevada*, *Pennsylvania*, and *Idaho*. **Visual 3-1: Click for animation to see USS *Idaho*. Click again to remove.**
  - ten destroyers.
  - the escort carrier (CVE) USS *Nassau*. **Visual 3-1: Click for animation to see USS *Nassau*. Click again to remove.**
  - six transport craft, to include the two largest transports, USS *J. Franklin Bell* and USS *Harris*. These attack transports carried over 1700 troops each with equipment. **Visual 3-1: Click for animation to see USS *J. Franklin Bell*. Click again to remove.**
- b. The *Nassau* provided close air support to the landings at all beaches. Its air component was designated Composite Squadron VC-21 and consisted of:
  - 26 F4F-F Wildcat Fighters.
  - three F4F-3P Wildcat photo reconnaissance planes (these retained their machine guns and could be used in ground support).
  - one Curtis SOC-3A scout observation biplane.

B. After arriving at Cold Bay, storms continued to postpone the landings.

- 1. On 1 May, with a short break in the weather, McMorris’ group bombarded Attu, but to little effect.
- 2. On 4 May, TF-51 departed Cold Harbor for Attu.
- 3. On 7 May, despite the bad weather, Rockwell sent his battleships, designated Task Group (TG)-51.1 to join with McMorris’ Southern Covering Force to oppose a suspected Japanese intervention.
- 4. The US ships did not detect any Japanese naval threat (the Japanese had given up on bringing surface ships to Attu).

5. On the night of the 7<sup>th</sup>, TG-51.1 (the battleships) returned to TF-51 and took up a position about 115 miles north of Attu, continuing to wait for the weather to improve.

***Visual 3-2: Attu: Air Support, May 1943.***

II. Forward elements of 11<sup>th</sup> USAAF supported Operation Landcrab.

A. The two main airbases were on Adak and Amchitka.

1. COL Butler was the overall commander of 11<sup>th</sup> USAAF.

2. Colonel Eareckson's 36<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Squadron at Adak was the organization most directly committed to supporting the attack on Attu.

B. The initial planes available were:

--80 P-40 Warhawk Fighters.

--26 P-38 Lightning Fighters. ***Visual 3-2: Click for animation to see P-38***

***Lightning Fighter. Click again to remove.***

--3 F-5A Recon Planes.

--28 B-24 Liberator Bombers.

--31 B-25 Mitchell Bombers. ***Visual 3-2: Click for animation to see B-25***

***Mitchell Bomber.***

***Click again to remove.***

C. As described earlier, the USAAF bombardments in April were limited (as always) by the weather.

1. In addition, many of the bombing runs were directed to Kiska.

2. This was partly due to weather, but it was also to deceive the Japanese into thinking that Kiska was the primary target for invasion and not Attu.

3. ***Vignette.*** Attu was so bleak and unsuited for military operations that Eareckson wrote a short ditty that, while humorous, did not endear him to higher command:

***Visual 3-2: Click for animation to see Eareckson picture.***

In viewing Attu's rocky shores

While planning how to take it,

This thought impresses more and more:

The Nips should first forsake it.

Since Attu ain't worth a hoot

For raising crops or cattle,

Let's load with booze and take a cruise  
And just call off the battle.  
(Garfield, *The Thousand-Mile War*, 269)

***Click again to remove picture.***

D. On 1 May, the US air efforts were shifted to focus on Attu.

1. For the next week, 200,000 pounds of bombs were dropped on Attu.

2. Still, the fog only allowed glimpses of the island, and the US forces lacked detailed knowledge of Japanese positions. In sum, the bombing had minimal impact on the Japanese defenses.

E. As per the joint doctrine, Rear Admiral Rockwell commanded the invasion forces until the troops were on the ground. Then Major General Brown would have control of the ground forces.

III. On the day of the invasion, US naval and air forces attempted to support the landing forces, despite facing difficult weather conditions of freezing rain, fog, and high winds.

A. In the early morning, the *Pennsylvania* and *Idaho* bombarded Chichagof Harbor by radar, but without much effect.

B. Planes from the *Nassau* also bombed the harbor and dropped leaflets calling for the Japanese to surrender.

C. Eareckson led planes from Adak to Attu in the morning, but the weather was so bad that they circled for several hours and could not see through the fog. They soon returned to Adak.

### **Analysis.**

I. The air and naval preparations for Attu had limited success. What aspects of those air and naval actions are still applicable to amphibious operations today? Perhaps consider:

A. Command arrangements and joint cooperation.

B. Personality in joint operations. How much does personality affect joint cooperation today, as compared to WWII?

C. Ways of maximizing the capabilities of each service.

D. Overcoming service biases and understanding the differences in the services' cultures (to include doctrine and terminology).

F. Other areas?

II. What might we do differently today to even better enhance the effectiveness of joint cooperation in a forced entry situation?

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**Stand 4. Northern Force, Red Beach: 1<sup>st</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT and  
Landings at Scarlett Beach, 11 May**

**Visuals.**

***Visual 4-1: Initial Landings/First Day's Advance, 11 May 1943.***

***Visual 4-2: Attu, Northern Force Area, 11 May 1943.***

***Visual 4-3: Attu, Northern Force, Landing and Advance, May 1943.***

**Directions.** Keep the aerial view from the last stand.



**Orientation.**

***Visual 4-1: Initial Landings/First Day's Advance, 11 May 1943.***

I. Do a map orientation of all of the landings on 11 May.

A. Northern Force.

1. US Provisional Battalion landed at Scarlet Beach.
2. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT landed at Red Beach.

B. Southern Force.

1. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT Regiment at Yellow Beach.
2. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT Regiment at Blue Beach.

***Visual 4-2: Attu, Northern Force Area, 11 May 1943.***

**Directions.** Zoom in to an aerial view of the Northern Force area. Re-orient from the air very briefly (you did this in detail in the last stand).



## II. Overview of Northern Force landing areas.

A. Scarlet Beach (Austin Cove) is the source of Ballentine Creek, which leads down a valley to the south.

B. Red beach is on the far west side of the land north of Holtz Bay.

C. Holtz Bay has two branches called "Arms."

## III. High ground in this area.

- Vieth Ridge
- Cupp's Hill
- Brannon Ridge
- Young Hill
- Buchanan Ridge
- Hill X
- Moore Ridge
- Prendergat Ridge



III. In the early morning of 11 May, the US Provisional Battalion landed at Scarlet Beach in Austin Cove. ***Directions.*** Move down to slightly above sea (ground) level, facing Austin Cove, with the beach and rubber boats visible.



A. The battalion mission was to move down Ballentine Creek valley and then move over the mountains (Brannon Ridge) to the rear of the left (west) flank Japanese positions that opposed the US forces landing at Red Beach.

B. They were led by Captain William H. Willoughby and consisted of the 7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company (the Alaska Scouts) and the 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop.

1. Willoughby's 244 men and the naval craft travelled separately from Rockwell's main convoy force.
2. The Alaska Scouts were unique troops recruited from Alaskan residents to include native Aleuts, hunters, and various men accustomed to living in Alaska and the Aleutians.
3. The landing was done in a unique fashion from two submarines, with a supporting destroyer. ***Vignette***, First Sergeant Fenton Hamlin, a member of the scouts recalled:

"The company got aboard the submarines...at Dutch Harbor on April 28 and started rehearsing our debarkation. The crews of the two submarines had worked with the Marine Corps raider battalions and they completely revised our methods, cutting the time required right in two. Their system consisted of inflating the rubber boats and shoving

them onto the after-deck. Then, with the men sitting in them, the submarines were partially submerged, leaving the rubber boats floating free.

It was bitter cold at 0100 on May 11. We were about 4000 yards off Attu as the black water gurgled around the submarines, and the rubber boats floated free. The men began to paddle, and the little boats moved silently through the foggy night toward Scarlett Beach.

It was a long way in, and the men were tired when they hit the beach. There was no resistance. The two sections made contact and moved inland, as a signal light blinked out to the submarines that the landing was complete.” (Michael G. Walling, *Bloodstained Sands*, 235-236).

**Visual 4-3: Click for animation to see USS Nautilus.**

**Click again to remove**

4. The men reached the beach sometime after 0300. There was no opposition.

C. As the fog lifted slightly, Willoughby advanced his force up the ravine of Ballentine Creek.

D. The battalion had to overcome many obstacles.

1. The terrain (they would eventually have to cross Brannon and Buchanan Ridges) and the weather.

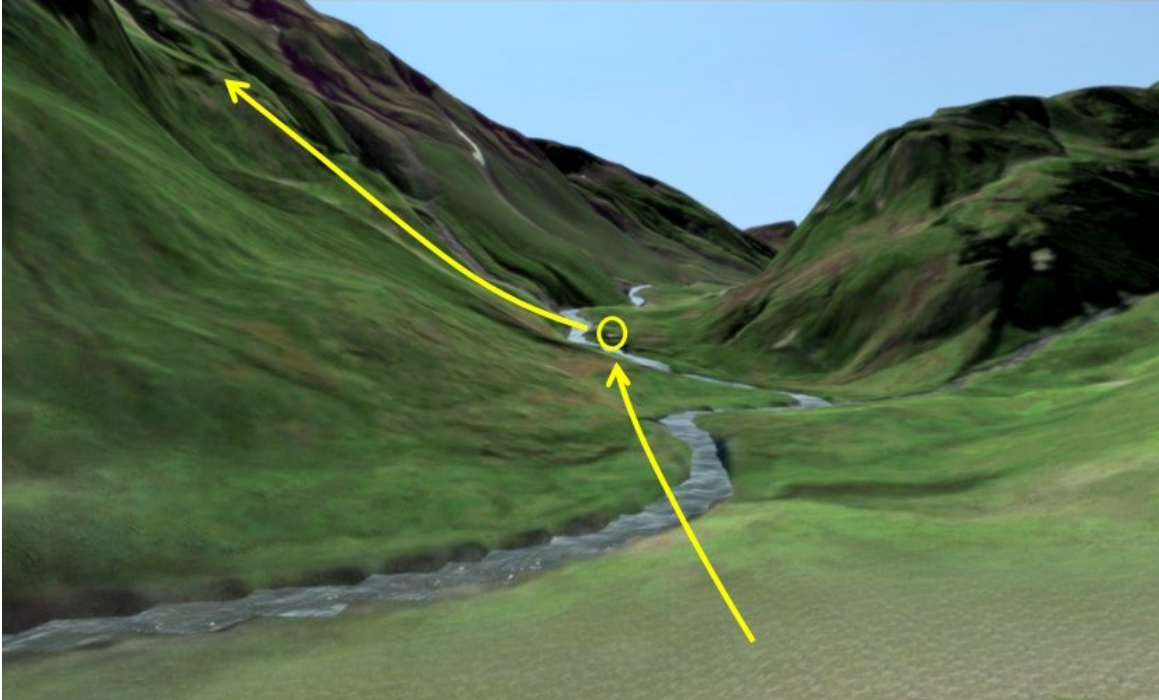
2. They could only communicate with the rest of the landing force by a portable radio that operated only intermittently.

3. They were short of food and ammunition due to the limited space on the subs and rubber boats.

4. Soon after leaving their rubber boats in the Cove, aircraft from the *Nassau*, intending to provide close air support to Willoughby’s men, could not see adequately in the fog and they destroyed the rubber boats on the beach.

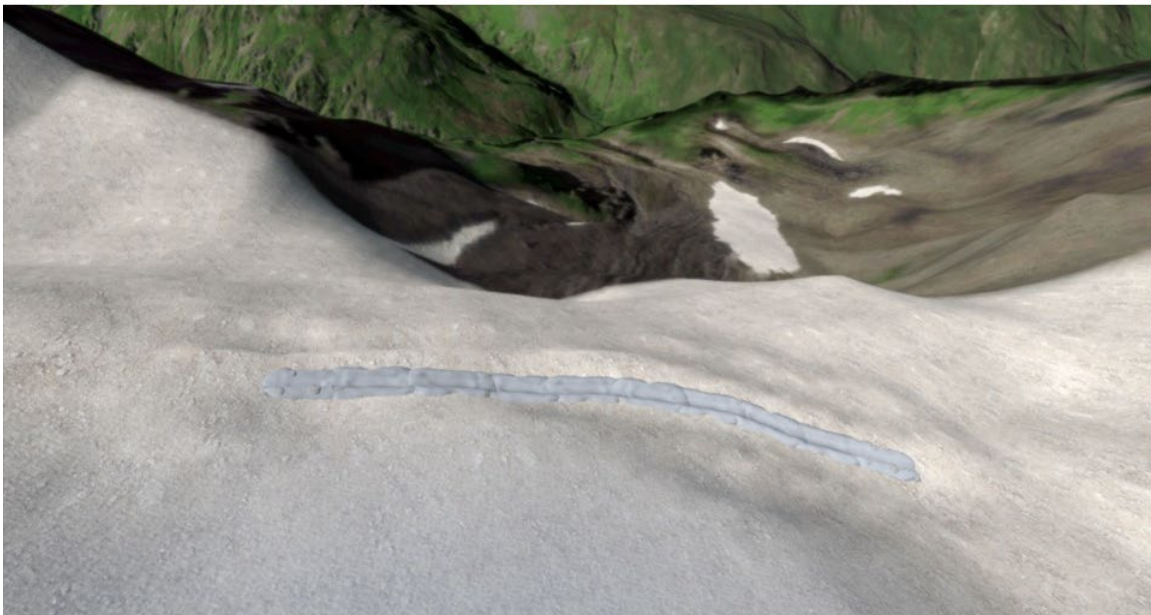
E. Led by the scouts, the Provisional Battalion advanced down the valley.

**Directions.** Near ground level, move down the valley to a position on the valley floor just west and downhill from the entrenchments on the southern part of Vieth Ridge. There is a rock (circled in the screen shot, next page) can help you find the position where to stop, and then turn left and go up the ridge. Move up to the Japanese ice entrenchments on the southern part of Vieth Ridge.



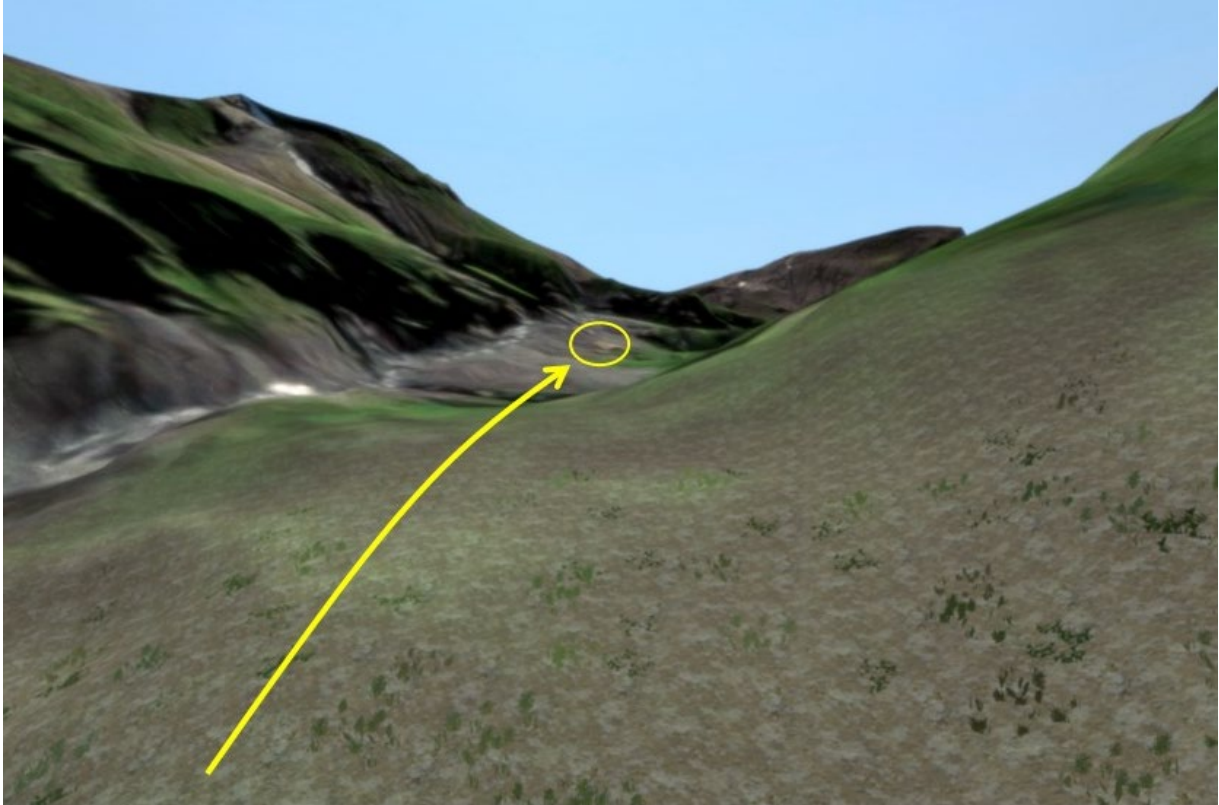
1. The Japanese had not expected the landing at Scarlet Beach, and the US forces did not face opposition on 11 May.

2. The Japanese had dug entrenchments directly into the ice on the mountains, but it is not sure if they were occupied, or properly oriented. **Directions.** Once on top of the ridge, at the ice trenches, turn and look down to Ballentine Valley/Creek. If any Japanese were here, they could not engage the US Provisional Battalion due to the poor positioning of the trenches.



3. The Alaska Scouts led the advance further down valley, with the main forces following. Late in the day, they reached a position about 4 miles down the valley.

**Directions.** Go from the ice trenches back down to the valley and move further south to a location at the base of Brannan Ridge (another rock will help locate this).



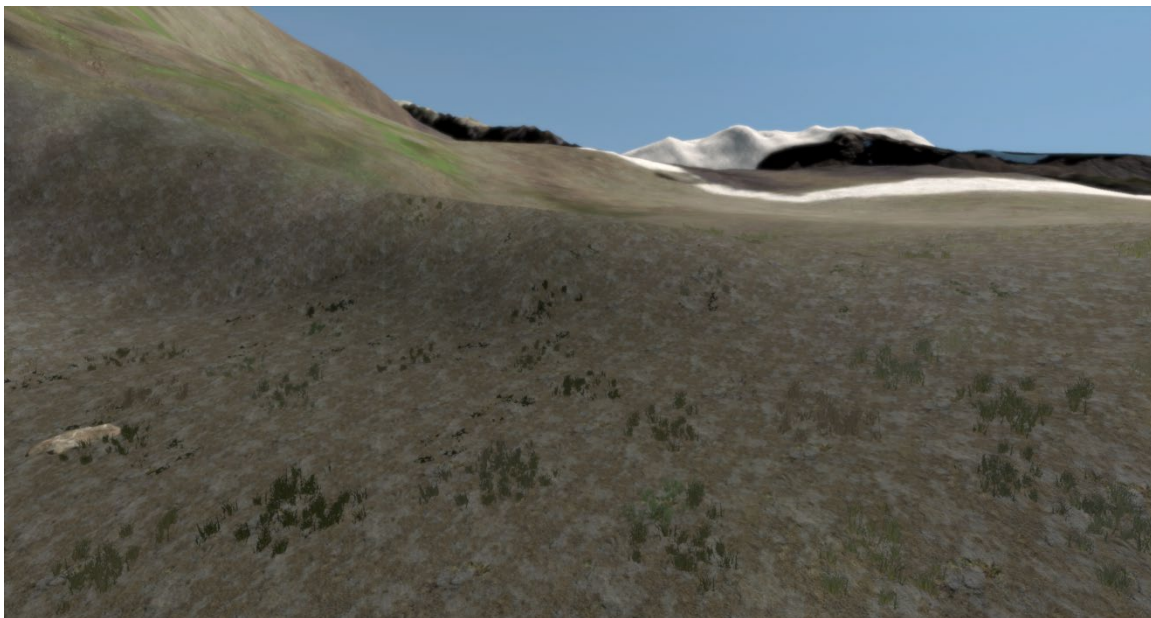
4. The scouts then turned left and moved up Brannon Ridge. They stopped short of the peak, where they bivouacked for the night on the wind-swept mountainside in an icy fog. They had not encountered any Japanese, but they were exhausted by the terrain and weather.

**Directions.** Move up the slope until just short of where the snow come into view. The next view shows the movement from above (next page). You should make the move closer to the ground, just slightly in the air.





**Directions.** Below is the view from where you will stop.



6. The Recon Troop was about 1 mile behind the scouts and bivouacked in the valley.

7. The troops had suffered greatly from cold and exposure.

F. Although the Army Air Forces made great efforts to drop food and supplies to Willoughby's command, the attempts were only partly successful because of the bad weather.

II. Later on 11 May, Northern Force landed on Red Beach some three miles from the Japanese camp at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay. **Directions.** Go to an aerial view that matches the visual 3-2.

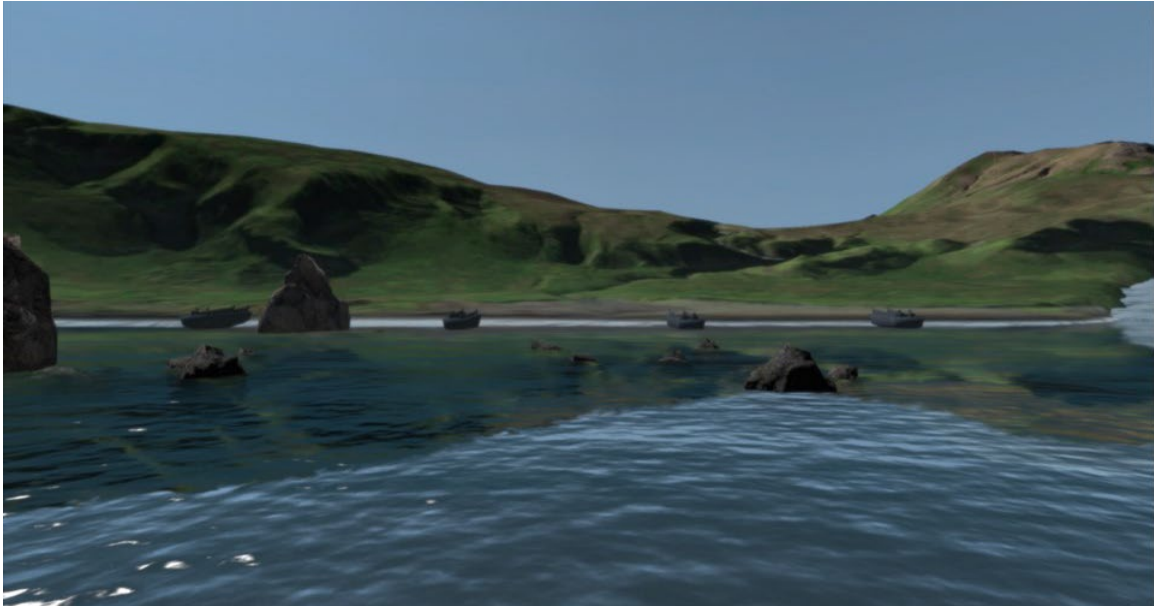


A. The force consisted of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT under the overall command of Colonel Frank L. Culin, a battery of field artillery, and supporting troops.

B. The selection of Red Beach as a landing site was a key decision to supporting the Southern landings and trapping the Japanese in Chichagof harbor.

2. It must have seemed to the Japanese an unlikely place for a landing, and thus they did not establish any defenses there.

1. The beach itself is not more than a hundred yards long, and though fairly level for some seventy-five yards inland, is surrounded by steep hills that rise abruptly 250 feet above the sea. **Directions.** Go down close to ground (sea) level. Take a position in the sea with the rocks and landing craft in view (see next page for the view).



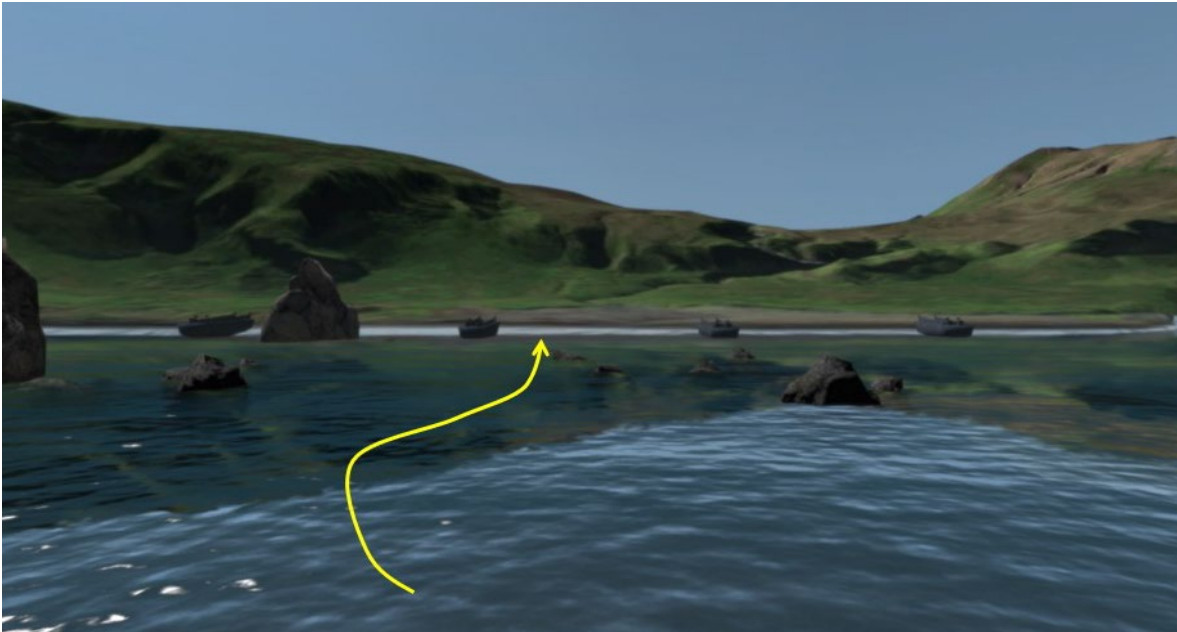
C. Before the principal landing, it was determined to make a thorough reconnaissance to find whether the beach was suitable for a landing and whether opposition would be encountered.

1. COL Culin led the recon group.
2. A detachment of Alaskan Scouts accompanied Culin.
3. Also with Culin was the Navy beachmaster, Commander Carl “Squeaky” Anderson.
4. A destroyer protected the party to a point some eight hundred yards offshore after which the smaller craft proceeded alone.

D. On the transport craft, the main body waited for news from the recon.

1. Shortly after 1100, Culin reported by radio from the shore that the beach seemed adequate for landing and that the advance party had seen no signs of the enemy.
2. LTC Albert V. Hartl (Culin’s XO) was in charge of the troops on board the landing ships, and he ordered the forces to board the landing craft and head to shore.
3. The first wave reached the beach at 1530.
4. Half-submerged rocks at the approaches to the beach forced the landing craft to take a winding course to reach the shore, and only two could be landed side by side at any one place.

**Directions.** Move to the shore and stop on the beach—look at the rocks as you move. The arrow on the screen shot below is just a suggestion; you can move in any path that works best to simulate the problems with the rocks.



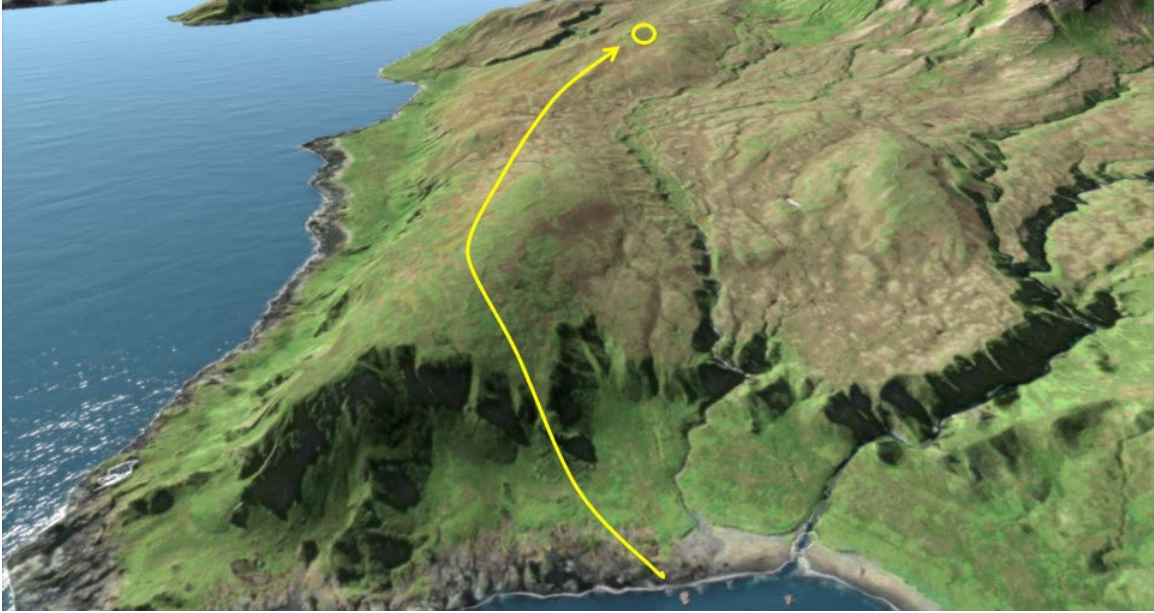
E. Owing to the difficulty of the terrain the landing proceeded slowly.

1. At 1800 hours the battalion was ready to begin its advance in the direction of the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay, with the main body moving over the high ground back of the beach and one platoon going along the beach as a left-flank guard.

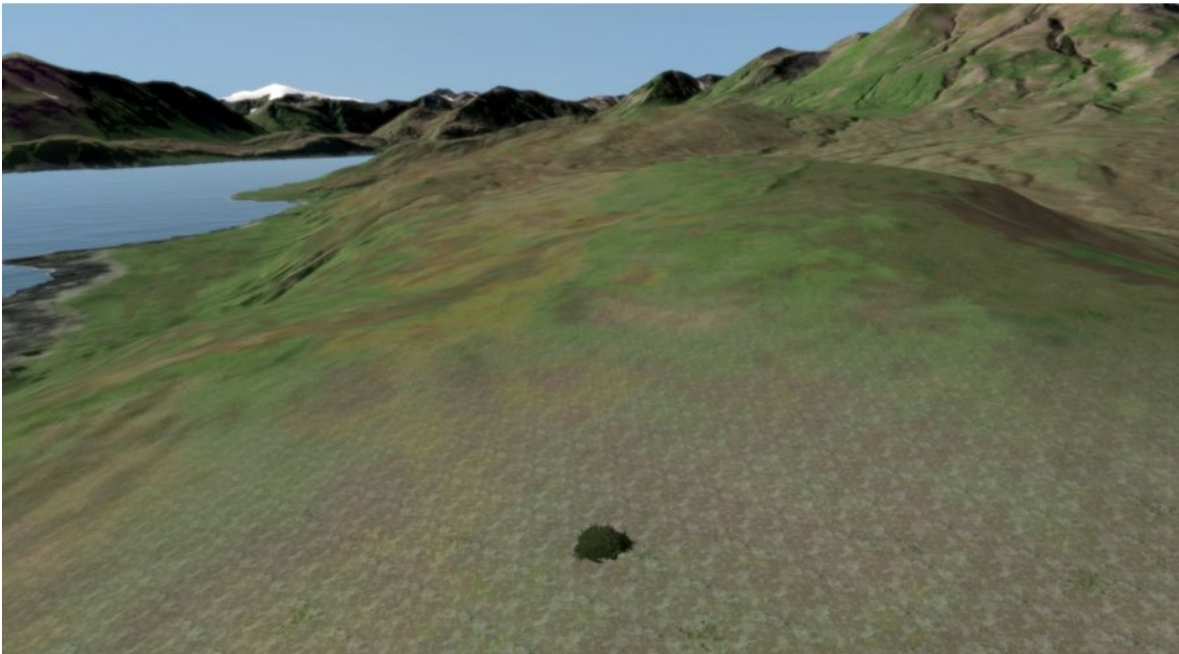
2. The main body of 1/17<sup>th</sup> RCT stayed on the high ground. They advanced about halfway to Hill X as they came under fire from the Japanese guns in the West Arm of Holtz Bay.

**Directions.** Move from the beach towards the left and to the high ground. You will imitate the main body going over the high ground and stop about halfway to Hill X. Below (next page) is an aerial view, but you need to move closer to the ground to give a feel of the movement.

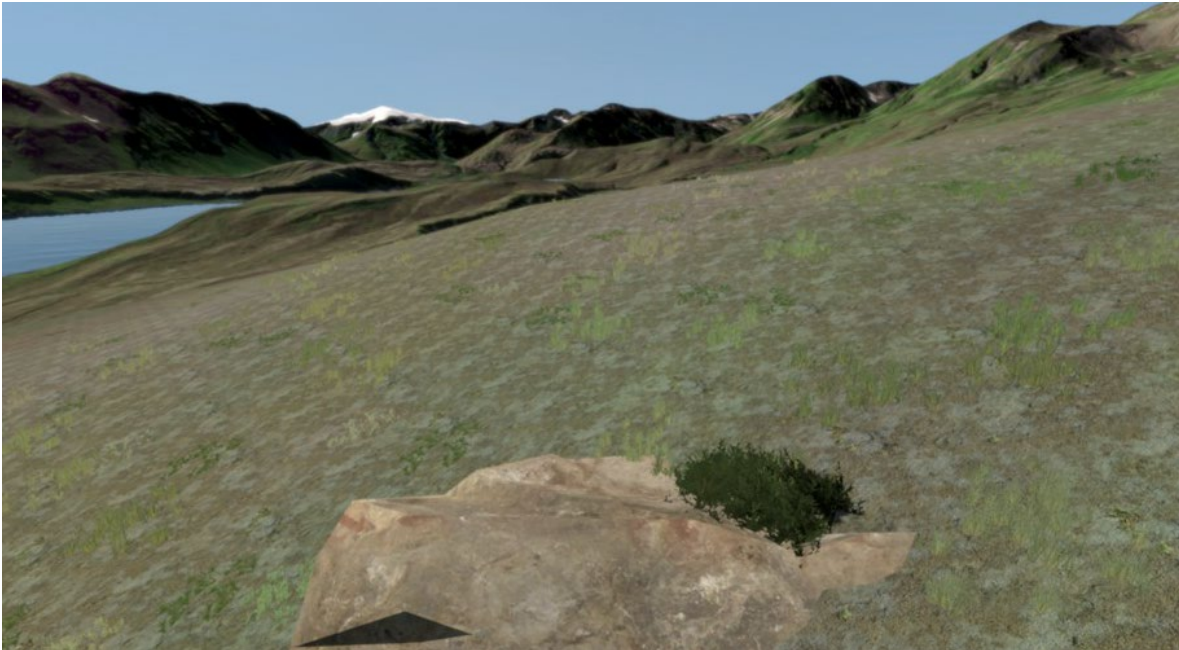




**Directions.** Follow the bushes as a guide to keep on the path. Below is a screen shot of one of the bushes.

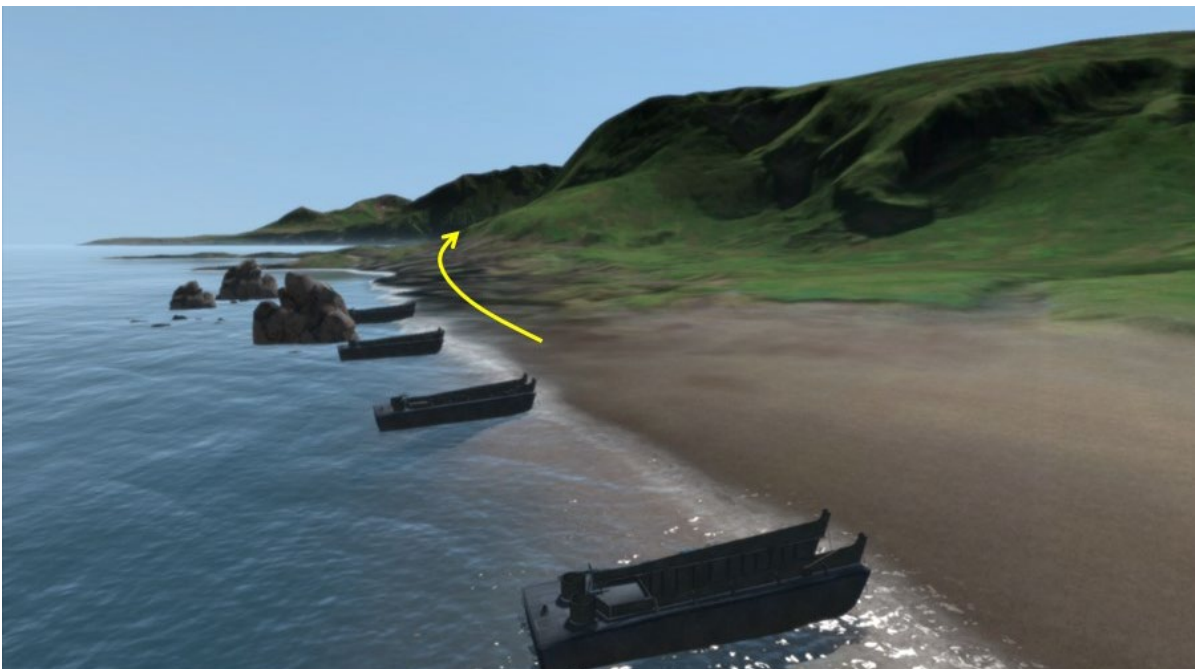


**Directions.** Stop at a rock with a bush that marks the initial halt in the advance.



3. The platoon moving along the beach set out from the landing site.

**Directions.** Go back to Red Beach at the landing site and show the platoon moving along the beach.



4. As it advanced the platoon on the beach first made contact with the Japanese about an hour later after moving from the landing beach.



a. Four Japanese infantrymen were observed approaching along the beach apparently unaware of the American landing.

b. The American platoon took cover, let the four Japanese come within 150 yards, and then opened fire. Two of the enemy were killed, but the other two escaped.

**Directions.** Stop about halfway short of Hill X to simulate the encounter with the Japanese infantry. Below shows the movement from the air. But you should make the moves closer to the ground.



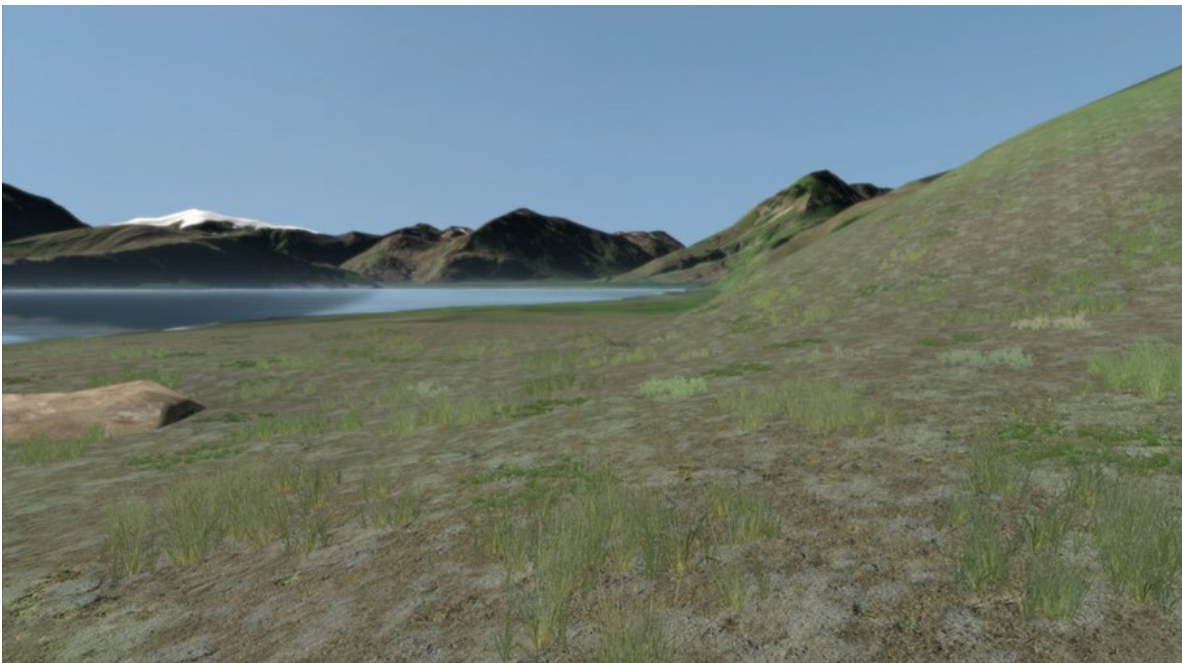
3. The US platoon then continued its advance along the beach.

4. Within half an hour the Japanese dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns at Holtz Bay opened fire on the beach platoon, but the main force, back of the defilade offered by the high ground above the beach, remained undiscovered and undisturbed by the Japanese.

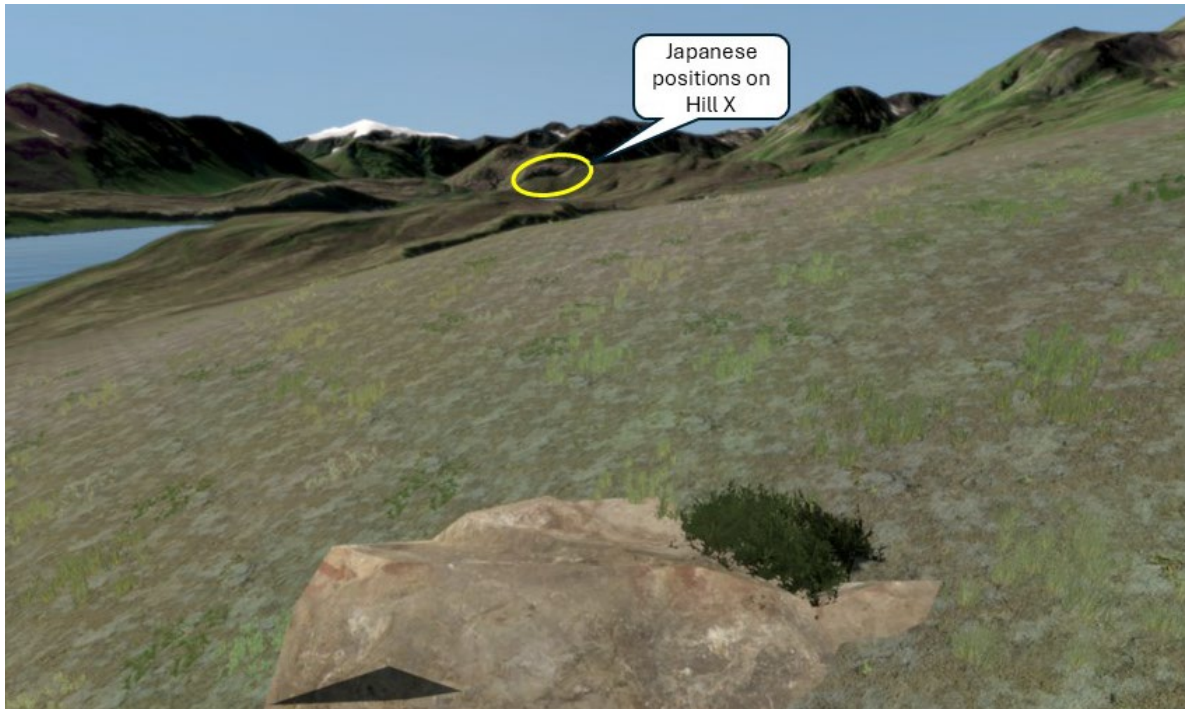
**Directions.** Move further forward on the beach and stopped at the bend in the shore where you become visible to the Japanese guns at the West Arm of Holtz Bay. Below, on the next page is an aerial view of the move, but you should move closer to the ground. There is a rock to help you know when to stop.



**Directions.** Below is a view from the ground of where the platoon halted on the beach, looking towards the Japanese guns in the West Arm of Holtz Bay. Note the rock to the left to help you know when to stop.



F. In the meantime, the main body of 1/17<sup>th</sup> RCT moved ahead towards the group of heights at Hill X. **Directions.** Go back the where the main body of the battalion had stopped.



1. The battalion leadership assumed that unseen Japanese units might open fire at any moment, and the battalion moved forward cautiously

2. However, the US forces did not encounter opposition. In fact, the Japanese had not yet occupied positions on Hill X.

3. By 2200, 1/17<sup>th</sup> RCT had advanced some two miles inland from Red Beach but was still 800 yards short of Hill X. **Directions.** Move forward slightly towards Hill X, but stop well short of the Hill.

4. In the heavy fog and gathering darkness visibility had become extremely restricted. The outline of the terrain did not seem to agree with the map. Also, the US forces did not have any intelligence on Japanese positions (other than the batteries in Holtz Bay).

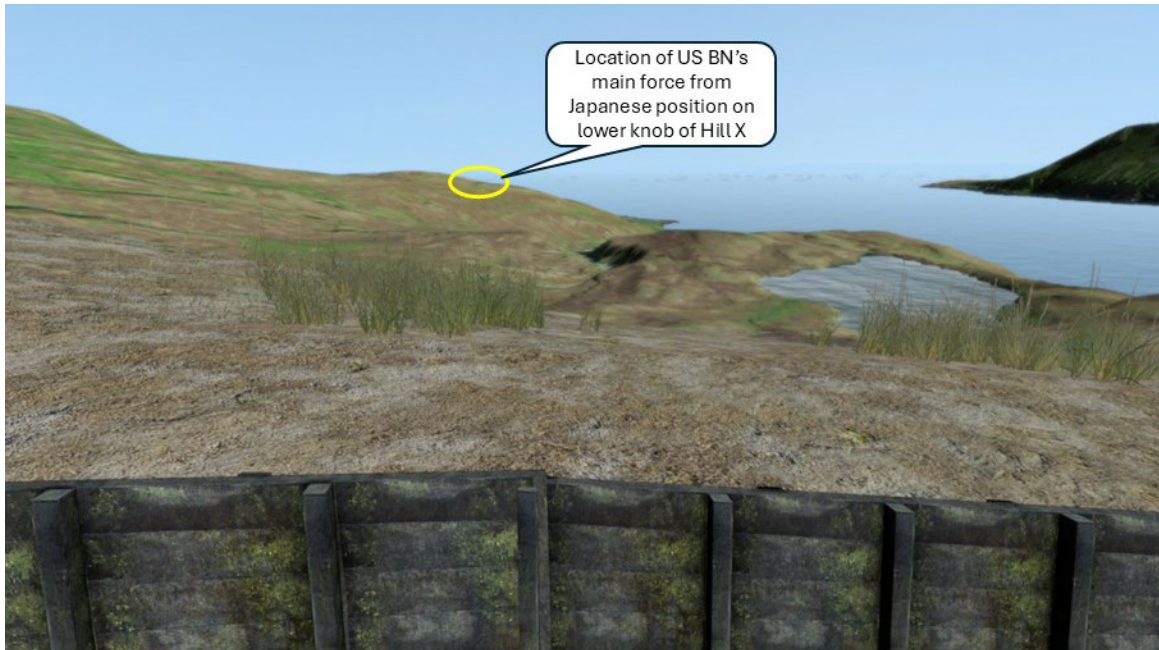
5. Colonel Hartl (who took command from Colonel Culin who was ill and had to return to the ship for treatment) ordered a halt, and the battalion took up defensive positions where it remained until daylight.

6. In the circumstances this seemed a prudent decision.

G. But the Japanese in Holtz Bay had become aware of the American force, and during the night, they occupied positions on Hill X which they had already prepared but



had not previously occupied. **Directions.** Fly to Hill X and show the Japanese positions on the upper and lower knobs of the Hill looking back at the US forces.



H. Consequently, in the morning the battalion was faced by enemy units strongly entrenched on ground that dominated its own positions.

### *Analysis*

I. US Army Field Manual (FM) 3-0, Operations (October 2022) states the following:

Forcible entry operations by ground, sea, or air all use the same phasing model to facilitate coordination and synchronization. These phases are preparation and deployment, assault, stabilization of the lodgment, introduction of follow-on forces, and termination or transition operations. Planning for forcible entry also includes planning for:

- Movement planning over extended lines of communications over water.
  - Information collection against an enemy with layered and integrated early warning.
  - Management of transitions when lines of communications and networks are extended over water.
  - Insertion of special operations forces.
  - Ensuring air superiority over the joint landing area.
  - Coordination for initial and reinforcing entry forces for the initial assault and main assault.
  - Establishment and operation of any potential intermediate staging bases.
  - Lodgment security, organization, and expansion from shore to an island interior.
- (page 7-14)

II. Using the framework from FM 3-0 above, what planning elements were done well and which not so well? Why or why not?

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**Stand 5. Massacre Bay, Yellow Beach and Blue Beach: 3<sup>rd</sup> BN and 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT**  
**Landings, 11 May**

**Visuals.**

*Visual 5-1: Initial Landings/First Day's Advance, 11 May 1943.*

*Visual 5-2: Attu Southern Force Landing and Advance 11 May 1943.*

*Visual 5-3: Attu Southern Force: 3/17 RCT and Supporting Elements, 11 May.*

*Visual 5-4: Attu Southern Force: 2/17 RCT and Supporting Elements 11 May.*

*Visual 5-5: Attu: Initial Landings/Alexai Point, 11 May 1943.*

*Visual 5-6: Attu Southern Force: 2/17 RCT and Supporting Elements 11 May.*

**Directions.** Initially, take an aerial view of the entire terrain box, matching the visual (as before, do the best that VBS3 will allow).



*Visual 5-1: Initial Landings/First Day's Advance, 11 May 1943.*

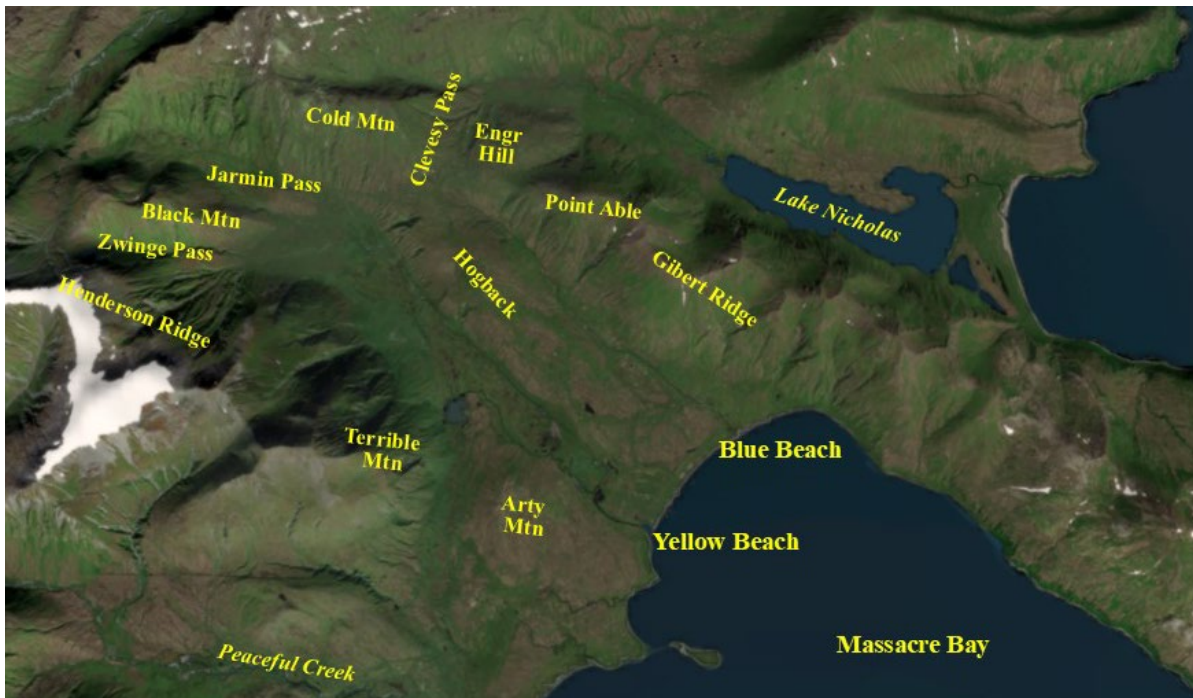
**Orientation.**

- I. Do an overall brief orientation.
- II. Point out the landing areas of all US forces.
  - A. Northern Force.
    1. Scarlett Beach. Provisional Battalion.
    2. Red Beach. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.

B. Southern Force.

1. Alexai Point. 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Platoon.
2. Blue Beach.
  - a. One platoon of F Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT on a separate mission.
  - b. The remainder of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.
3. Yellow Beach.
  - a. 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT. (One platoon of I Company was on a supporting mission to provide flank protection)
  - b. F Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT. This unit was supposed to land at Casco Cove, but due to weather landed at Yellow Beach.

**Directions.** Zoom down to an aerial view of Yellow and Blue Beaches that matches the visual.



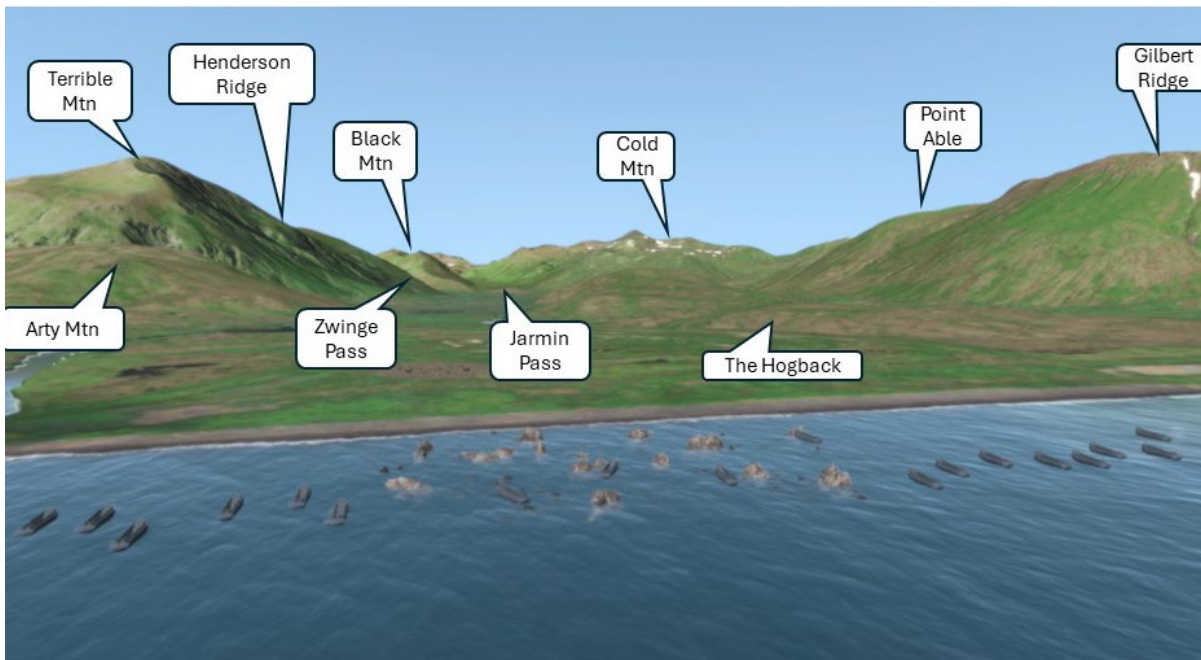
***Visual 5-2: Attu Southern Force Landing and Advance 11 May 1943.***

III. Do a quick aerial view of key terrain.

- The beaches at Massacre Bay (Yellow and Blue).
- Artillery Hill.
- Terrible Mountain.
- Henderson Ridge.
- Black Mountain.

- Jarmin and Zwinge Passes.
- Cold Mountain.
- Engineer Hill.
- Clevesy Pass.
- Point Able.
- Gilbert Ridge.
- The Hogback.

**Directions.** Come to a near ground view from the sea and move slightly forward to the beach looking west. Point out the key terrain features from the ground, which was the perspective of the landing US forces.



#### IV. Ground view of key terrain.

A. The beach was a strip of shale and small rocks, extending for several hundred yards along the end of Massacre Bay. There were large rocks jutting out of the water in several locations off of the beach.

B. Point out the high ground on both sides and at the far end of the valley. Start from left to right.

- Artillery Hill
- Terrible Mountain.
- Henderson Ridge.
- Black Mountain (and the passes on both sides—Zwinge and Jarmin).
- Cold Mountain.
- Point Able.
- Gilbert Ridge.

**Description.**

I. The transports carrying the Southern Force with their naval escort approached Massacre Bay through a dense fog. **Directions.** Have the VSR Tech put fog in your current terrain view. Tell the students that quite often this was the condition that the US invasion forces faced. Then have the VSR Tech remove the fog. Tell the students that this VSR will leave out the fog so that we can see the ground better.

A. The time of landing—H-hour—was originally fixed for 0740, but the time schedule followed the pattern familiar to the weather in the Aleutians, a series of hour-to-hour postponements.

B. The fog, which had caused a collision between two destroyers, compelled the time to be delayed to 1040, and continued fog caused another postponement to 1530.

C. The first troops finally landed on Yellow and Blue Beaches at 1620.

1. The main forces were preceded by a group of the Alaskan Scouts to help gain information about the landing areas and Japanese positions.

2. The Japanese did not oppose the initial landing, based on their plan to defend on the high ground further inland.

II. Yellow Beach Initial Landings.

A. The landings were difficult because of the fog and choppy seas (Note that 2<sup>nd</sup> BN 17<sup>th</sup> RCT had the same landing problems at Blue Beach, which will be covered at the next stand).

1. The troops transferred from the larger troop transports to the LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle and Personnel) out of site of the shore (visibility was 500 yards or less in the fog).

2. The minelayer USS *Pruitt* used its radar to guide the LCVPs towards the shore.

B. There were 100 landing craft organized in 3 waves for both Yellow and Blue Beaches.

1. However, by the time the LCVPs were 100 yards from shore, they had mingled into a confused mass.

2. The majority of the second wave actually landed first. The intermingled first and third waves arrived next,

3. Eleven LCVPs collided with rocks or capsized causing casualties before coming under Japanese fire. **Directions.** Use the quotation below and mirror the approach



to Yellow Beach. Come from behind the LCVs on the right of the rocks (the rocks on Yellow Beach).



**Directions.** Come down to the water and go the beach. Look at the rocks on the way, and point out the damaged LCV on a rock. The view below circles the LCV on the rock. Note that you don't have to follow an exact path, just as long as you see the damaged LCV.



4. *Vignette*. Major William Jones recalled the landing:

“Radar was then in its infancy, and few ships had it.... After circling the area in our Higgins boats [LCVPs] for hours, finally located a small frigate that had basic radar, which was able to identify the direction of the beach. The directions were duly pointed out...and off we went.

Approximately at the center of Yellow Beach on]Massacre Bay...is a large rock formation...[each] about the size of two conventional automobiles, protruding above the water about five or six feet.... About eight to the left of our craft was another landing craft, which smashed into the rock as we sped past.... Several of the standing soldiers [fell] forward out of the craft [and into the water]—our first casualties of the Battle of Attu.” (*Awaiting the Sun* by Bil Paul, 84-85).

**Visual 5-2: Click for the animation to show the troops moving from the Transport Ships to the LCVPs.**

**Click again to remove the picture.**

II. After a short time on the beach to organize, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 17<sup>th</sup> RCT began its advance on the left along the floor of the valley (West Massacre Valley).

**Visual 5-3: Attu Southern Force: 3/17 RCT and Supporting Elements, 11 May.**

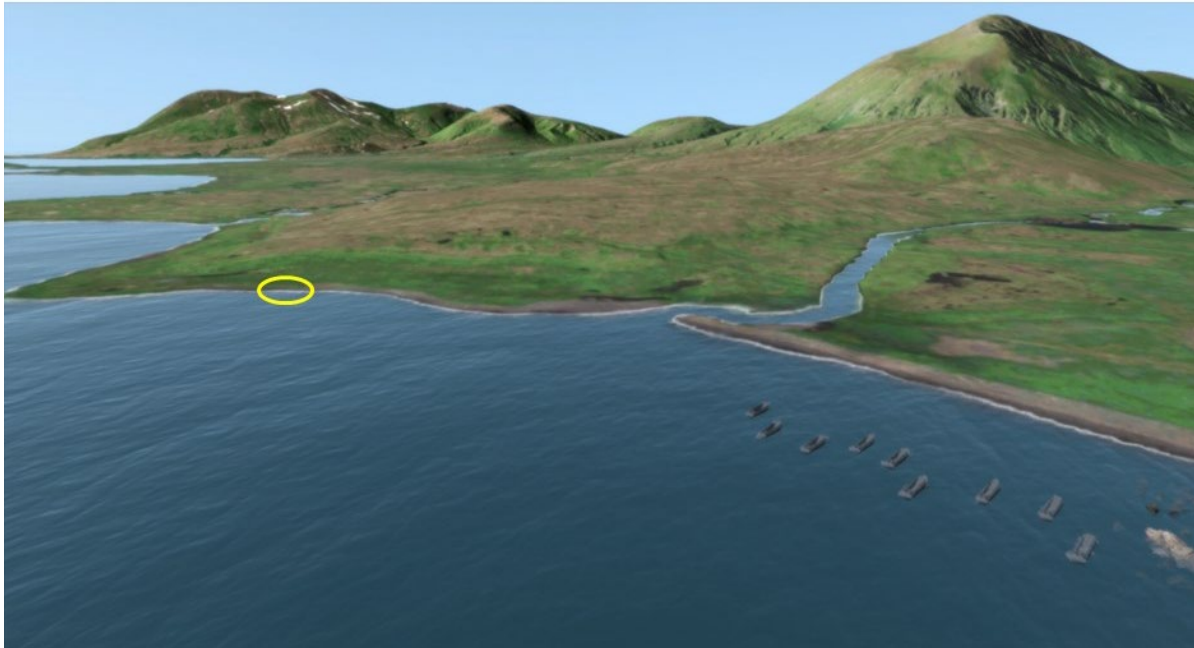
III. To cover the far-left flank of the landing, Company F of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> Infantry (RCT), under the command of Captain Robert E. Goodfellow, was to land at Casco Cove (Purple Beach) south and west of Massacre Bay.

A. Their mission was to move west to Temnac Bay, and after clearing the Bay, move to clear the enemy from the high ground west of Jarmin Pass, and thus to aid the advance of 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> through the pass.

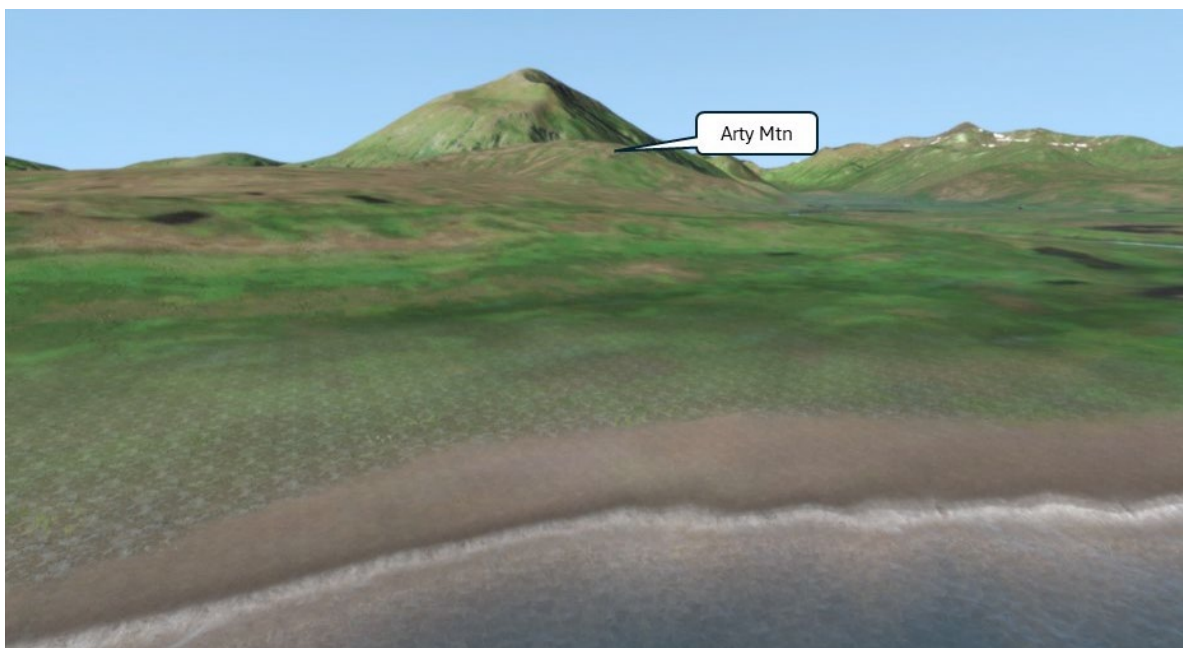
B. In the dense fog, Company F missed Casco Cove, and after some delay, landed intermingled with the first wave of the main body at Massacre beach.

1. It then moved forward with the intent to carry out its original mission.

**Directions.** From the beach (Yellow) where you last landed, slide left to about 400 yards left of the stream to where F Company landed (see screen shot on next page where a circle shows the location of F Company's landing).



**Directions.** Move forward toward and then over Artillery Hill.

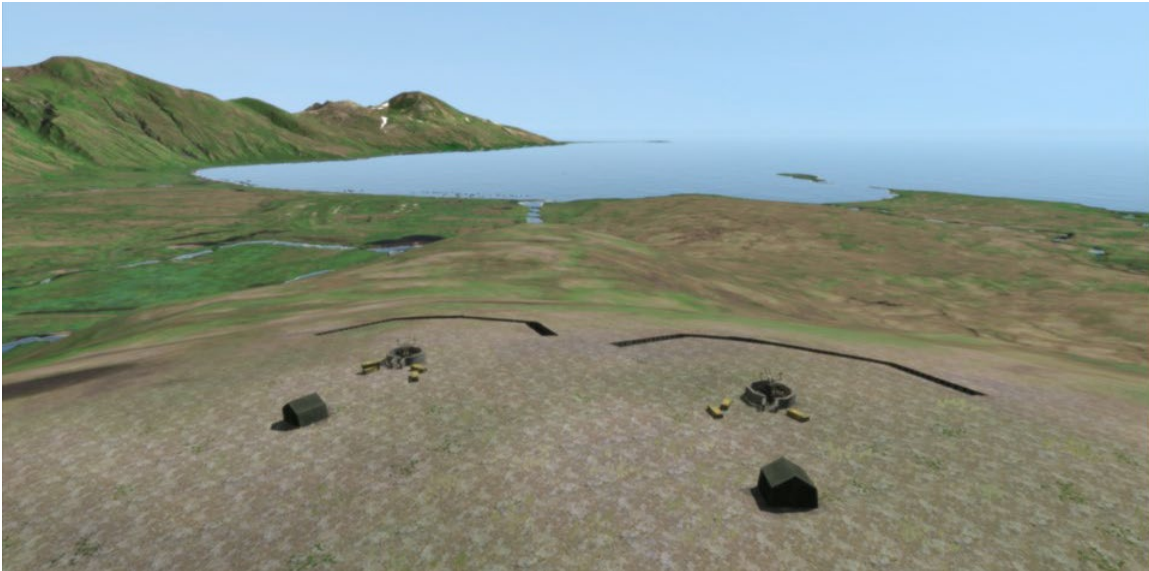


2. As the detachment climbed Artillery Hill, four Japanese were seen hurrying away into the hills to the north.

3. They left behind two undamaged 20mm. antiaircraft “pompom” guns with a large supply of ammunition. **Directions.** Go to the top of the hill and slightly



behind the Japanese positions. Turn and look to the beach to show the field of fire that could have been used by these guns.



4. Why these enemy gunners, who must have been able to watch the landing, never fired these guns is still a mystery.

C. Company F found no other enemy troops or installations except a deserted tent which they destroyed.

D. The company then moved to the southwest to continue their original mission.

IV. The close-in left flank protection for the main body consisted of one platoon of Company I of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT under command of Lieutenant Hubert Long. **Directions.** Go back to the beach just to left of the stream to the landing location of I Company's platoon.

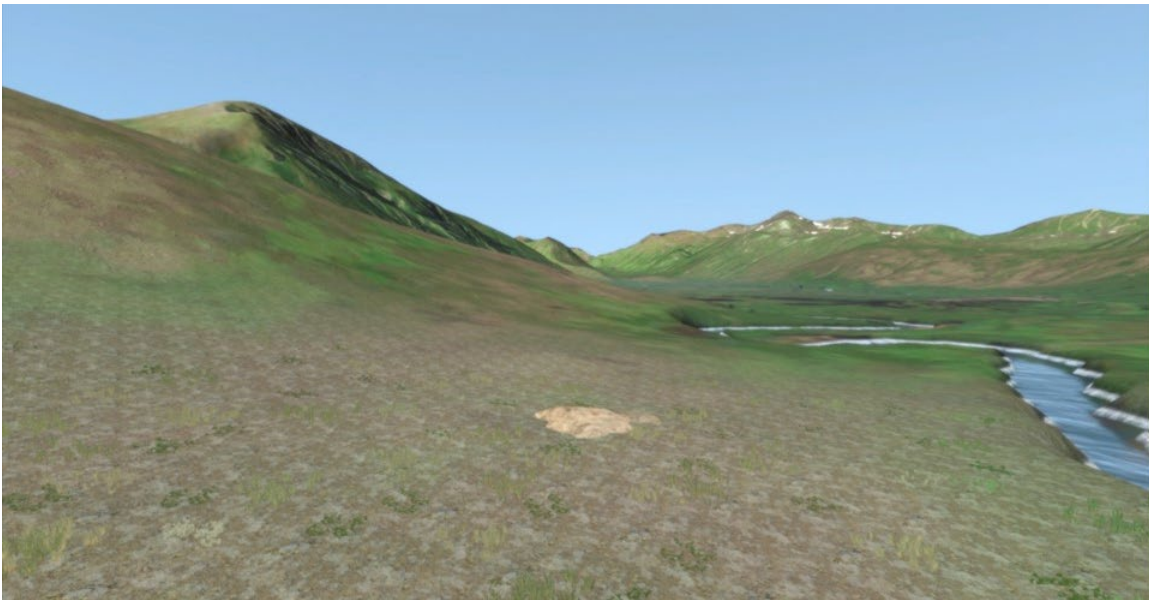




A. His platoon had the mission of clearing the high ground to the left of Massacre beach and continuing on Henderson Ridge, which formed the southwest rim of the valley.

B. They landed to the left of 3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.

**Directions** Then move forward, passing slightly north of Artillery Mountain. Stop just as you pass the mountain to discuss the wrong “capture” discussed below (rock is there).



C. Soon after starting its advance, Long’s platoon “captured” and officer in the fog.

1. It turned out to be COL William Verbeck of the Alaskan Scouts, who had landed earlier.

2. Although the Scouts informed the infantry that the beaches were clear, the fog prevented them from gathering information on the Japanese positions further inland.

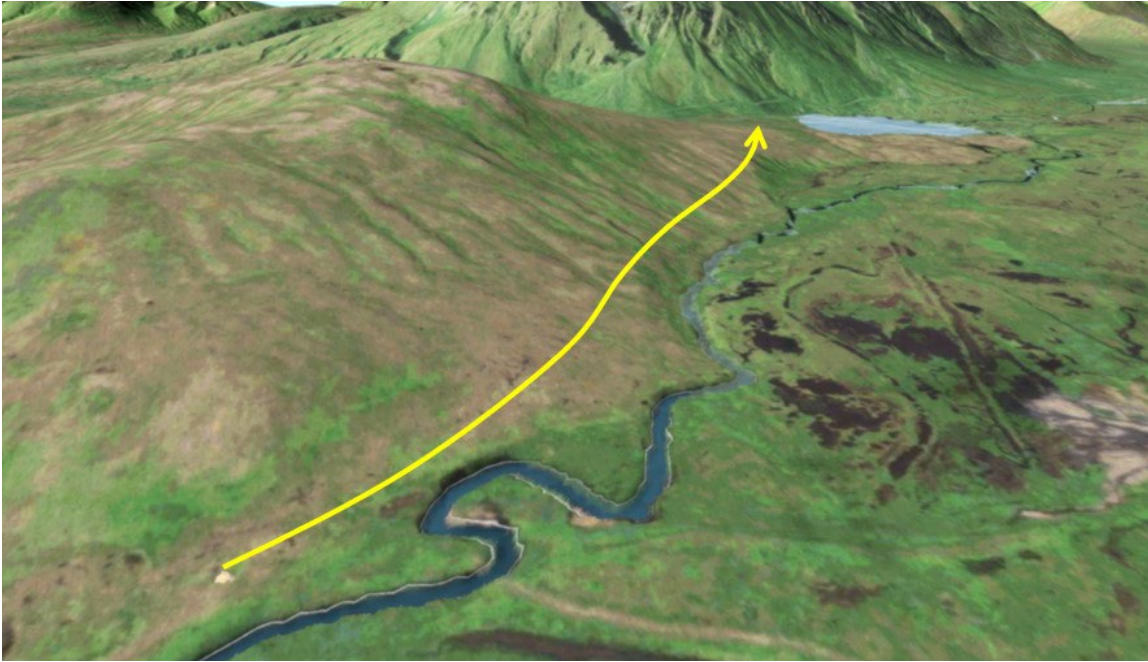
D. The unfamiliar tundra and muskeg as well as growing darkness made progress slow and tedious for the American forces.

1. From time to time the platoon drew fire from invisible enemy snipers who fell back into the fog as the Americans approached.

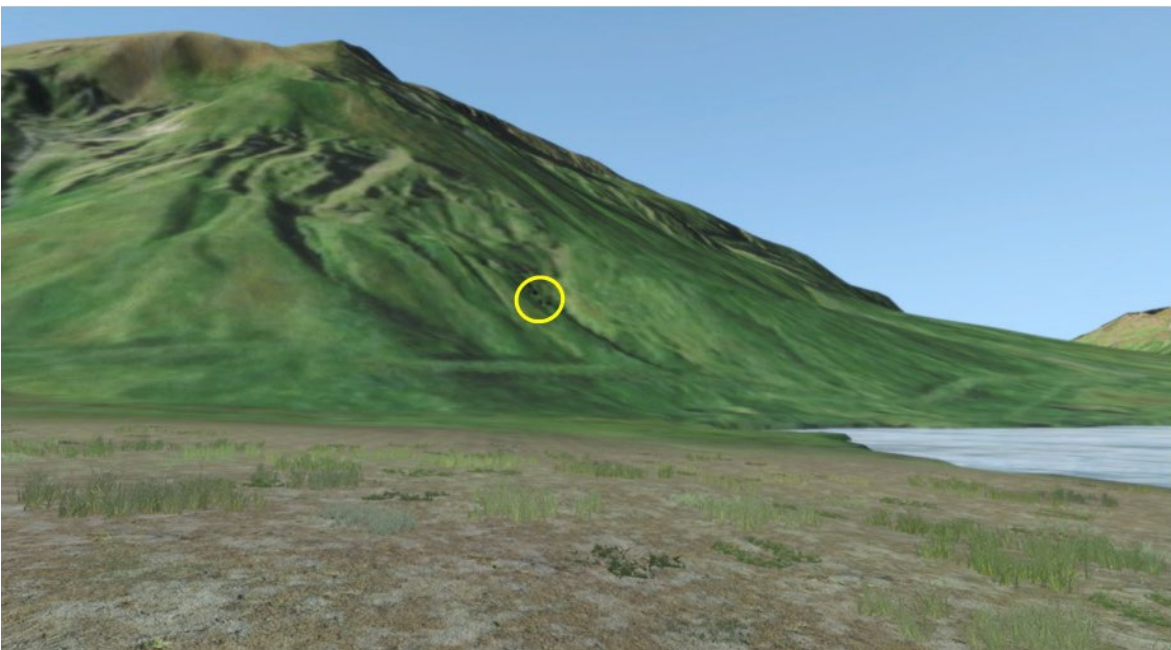
2. In a small ravine they found a smoking Japanese camp, which its occupants had deserted and burned.

E. Darkness had fallen and Lieutenant Long decided to bivouac for the night some 500 yards from the smoldering camp. **Directions.** Move forward towards Terrible

Mountain. Below is an aerial view of the movement, but you should move closer to the ground.



**Directions.** Stop short of a ravine with the Japanese camp (several tents). Point out the camp in the ravine (view from a slight distance—the tents are visible, but the ravine is not sculpted in VBS3). The circle in the screen shot below shows where the Japanese tents (camp) are located.



V. Behind them, tractors and artillery were landing on the beach. **Directions.** Move back to the beach, looking from the sea with the stream at Yellow Beach in view. The circle shows the location of the mud field and stuck vehicles. You will move to these after reading the quotation below.



A. The advance party of artillery observers had already disappeared into the fog when the “cats” (tractors) began to tow the guns in behind the infantry.

B. Slowly they moved for some seventy-five yards from the water’s edge. This *Vignette* explains what happened next (as described by SSG West, SSG Robbins, and CPL Campbell of Battery C, 48<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery Regiment):

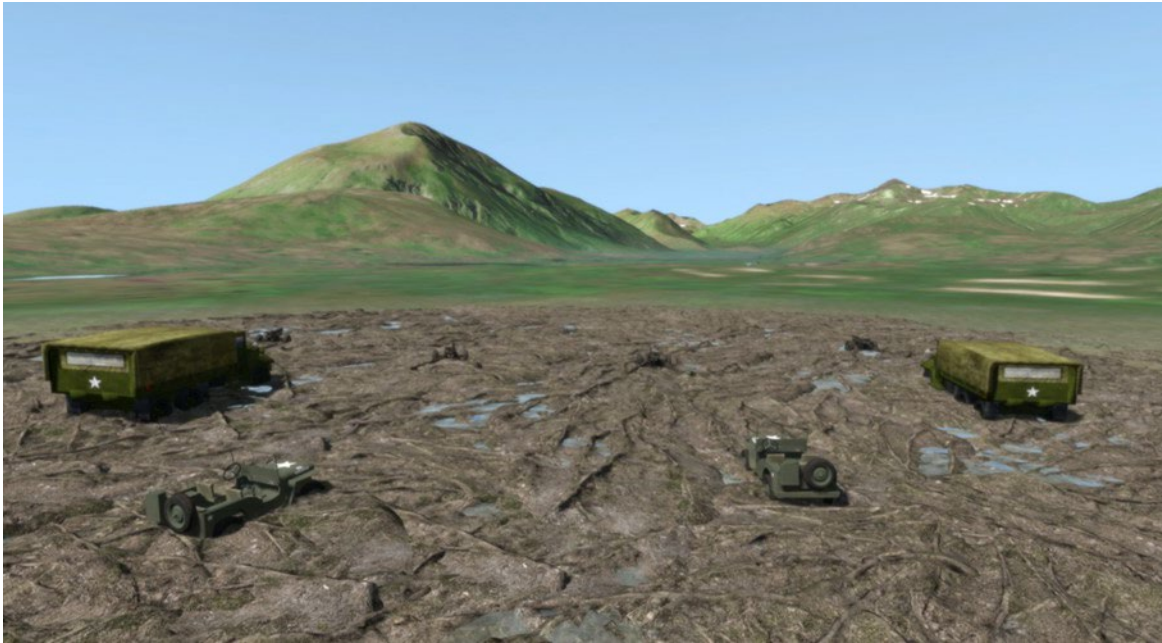
“The advance party with Lieutenant James West were already moving up Massacre Valley into the fog when the barges with the big 105mm rifles and the heavy cats [tractors] crunched against the sand of the beach. The motors roared and the cats backed the big guns out of the barges on to Attu.

In a few minutes they turned around and were struggling over the steep bank from the beach. Three of the guns had landed and one was still coming up from the ship. The battery was busy getting up its own fire-direction center, as the big tractors lumbered into the spongy, tundra dragging the guns slowly behind. About seventy-five yards from the beach the treads of the first car chewed through the tundra and began to slip. In just seconds it was wallowing helplessly in the black oozy mud.

The other two cats soon shared the same fate. When the tundra broke, the big treads turned round and round and only dug the machine deeper into the mud. What the hell, seventy-five yards was far enough initially!” (Walling, 238).



**Directions.** Go forward to a position slightly behind the mud position with the vehicles sunk in.



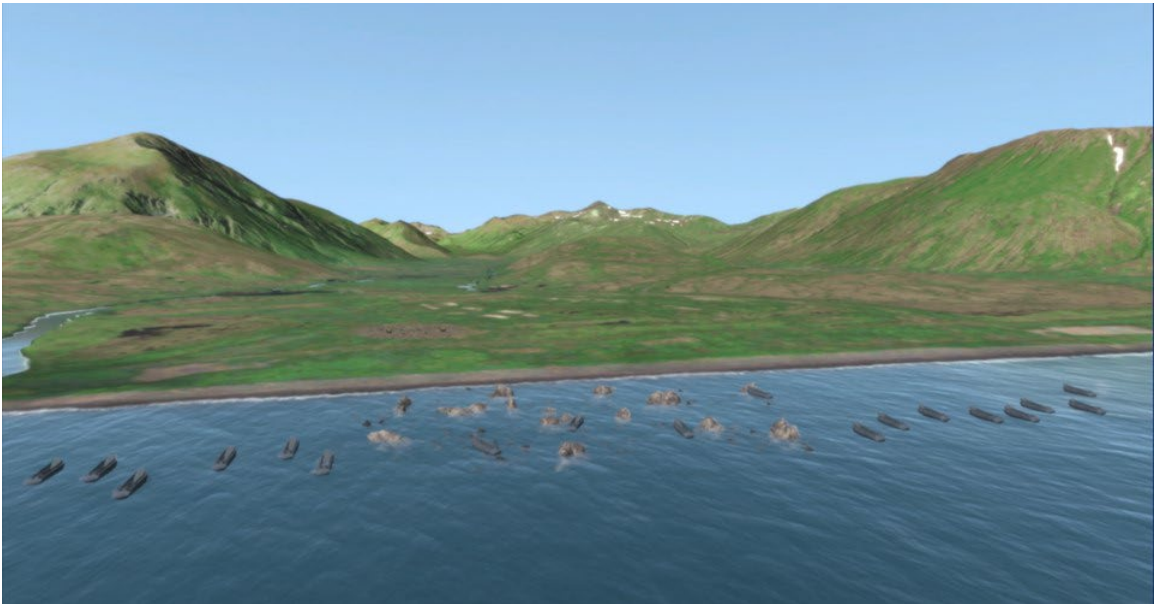
C. For now, any further artillery advance became impossible, but they deployed where they were and prepared to support the infantry advance.

1. The gun crews set up their weapons pointing up the valley in the general direction of the objective.
2. More than half an hour passed before the observer's voice came over a portable radio reporting that he had located the position of a Japanese mortar.
3. The American artillery fired the opening gun of the Attu battle.

VI. On the evening of 11 May, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT moved up the valley towards its objective of Jarmin Pass.

A. They made some progress but came under more and more Japanese fire as they advanced. Soon they had to stop.

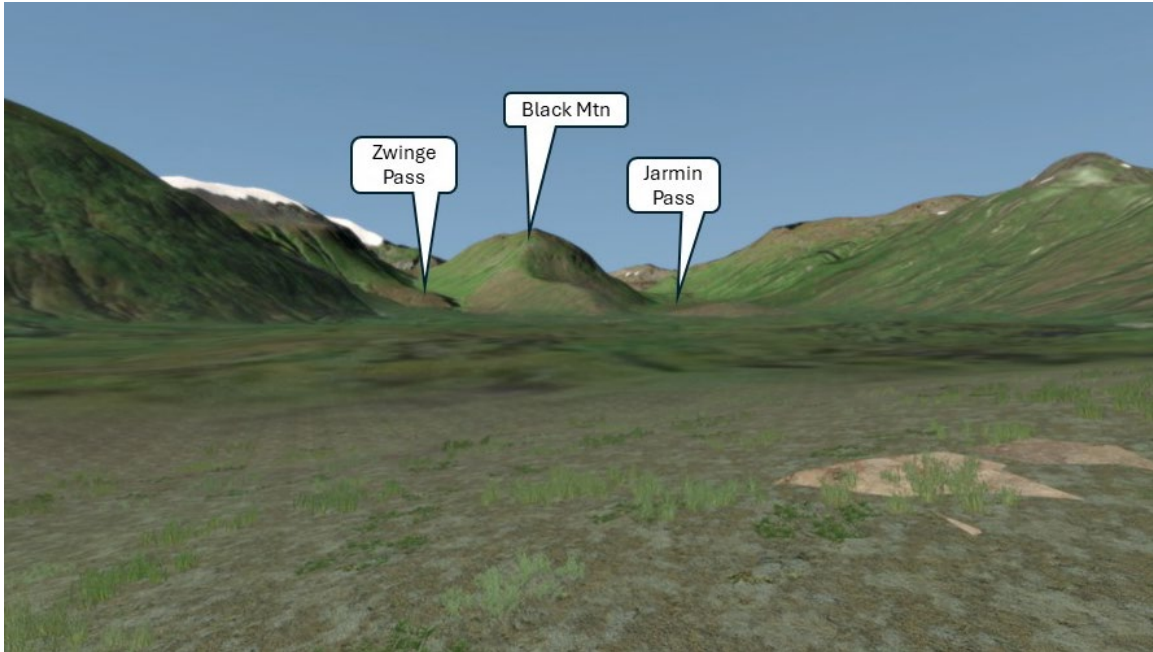
**Directions.** From the mud/artillery position, go back to Yellow beach and take a view midway up in the air from the water about the center of the landing craft, looking towards the shore (screenshot is on next page).



**Directions.** Come down from the air, past the landing craft, and to the beach. From at the beach move forward slightly above the ground. At first the stream will be to your left, and then the stream will split into 2 parts. Keep moving forward between the two streams. The screen shot below shows the path from the air, but you should make the move closer to the ground, and occasionally panning to the left to show this route was dominated by the high ground.



Stop near the place where there is a rock before the two streams of Yellow Beach meet.



B. A bombardment by the American artillery then in position near Massacre beach seemed to make little impression on the Japanese.

C. Another American attempt to advance broke down under heavy fire from the fog-bound peaks surrounding Jarmin Pass.

D. Under cover of darkness the battalion halted and reorganized, establishing an all-round defensive perimeter.

E. By this time, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT was facing north and west on lower ground to the west of the Hogback, still well short of the entrance to Jarmin Pass.

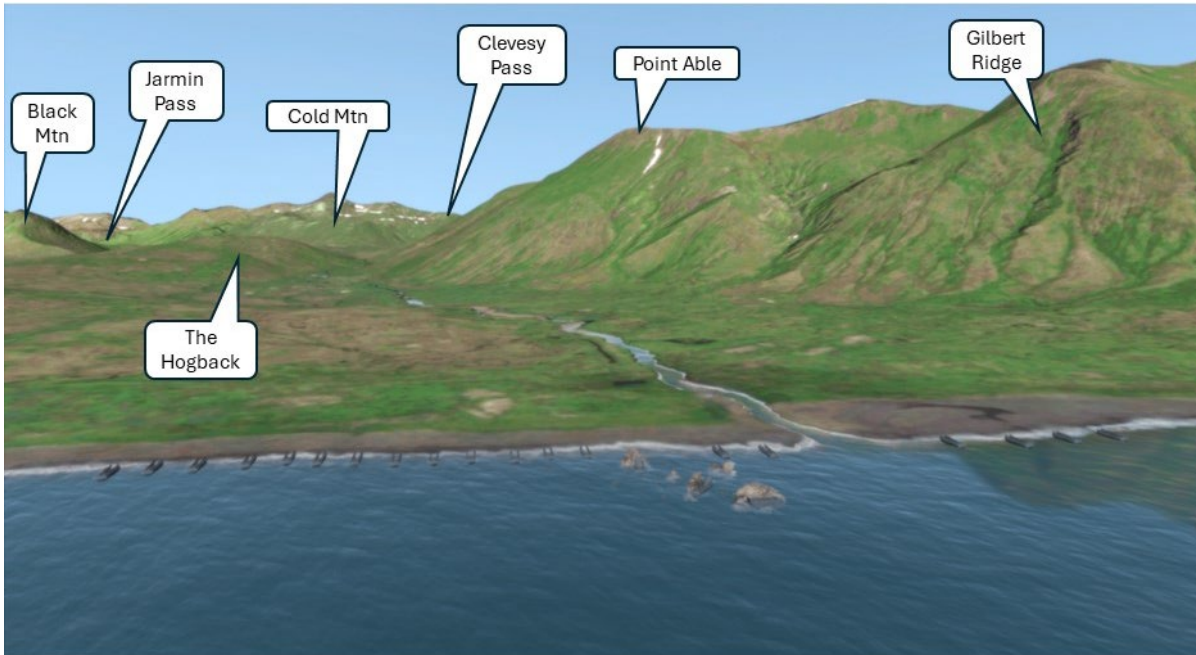
**Orientation (Do a brief new orientation based on Blue Beach).**

**Visual 5-4: Attu Southern Force: 2/17 RCT and Supporting Elements 11 May.**

I. Ground view of key terrain.

a. The beach. Much like Yellow Beach, a strip of shale and small rocks, extending for several hundred yards along the end of Massacre Bay. There were large rocks jutting out of the water in several locations off of the beach. **Directions.** Come to a near ground view from the sea, close to the beach, looking west to Blue Beach. Pan left and right to point out the key terrain features from the ground, which was the perspective of the landing US forces.





b. The Hogback. This small ridge splits the valley of Massacre Bay.

c. The high ground to the front and right of the beach.

--Cold Mountain  
 --Black Mountain.  
 --Point Able.  
 --Gilbert Ridge.

d. The passes: Jarmin and Clevesy.

### **Description.**

I. Remind the students that the approach and landings at Blue Beach faced the same difficulties as at Yellow Beach (3/17<sup>th</sup> RCT).

A. Fog and rough seas.

B. Mixing of the waves of landing craft.

C. Lost landing craft and casualties due to weather and off shore rocks.

### **Visual 5-5: Attu: Initial Landings/Alexai Point, 11 May 1943.**

II. 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Platoon landed at Alexai Point.

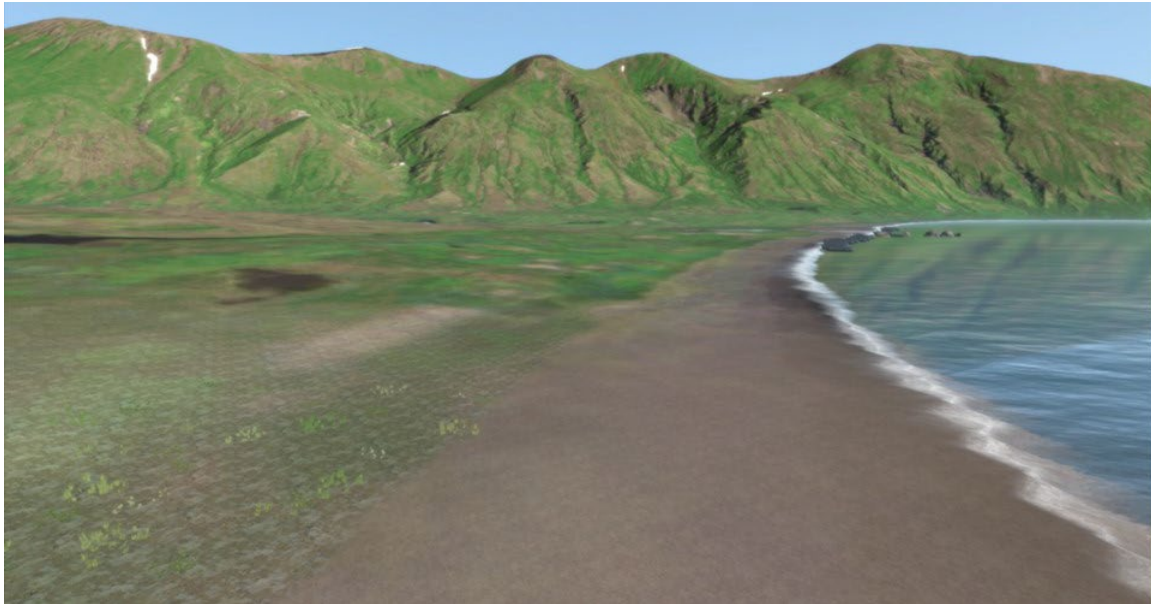
A. The landing was unopposed.

B. They completed their mission of ensuring that there were no Japanese on the Peninsula north of Massacre Bay.

C. After several days they returned to the main forces advancing up from Blue Beach.

**Visual 5-6: Attu Southern Force: 2/17 RCT and Supporting Elements 11 May.**

**Directions.** Come to the ground (beach) on the left side of Blue Beach and turn to the right, looking at Gilbert Ridge. You will be trying to mimic the photo that you will bring up with a click for the animation as described below after the screenshot.



**Visual 5-6: Click for the animation to show Massacre Bay/Beach, looking north at Gilbert Ridge.**

**Click again to remove the picture.**

III. A platoon of Company F of 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn, 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry commanded by Lieutenant Charles K. Paulson deployed on the right flank of the main body.

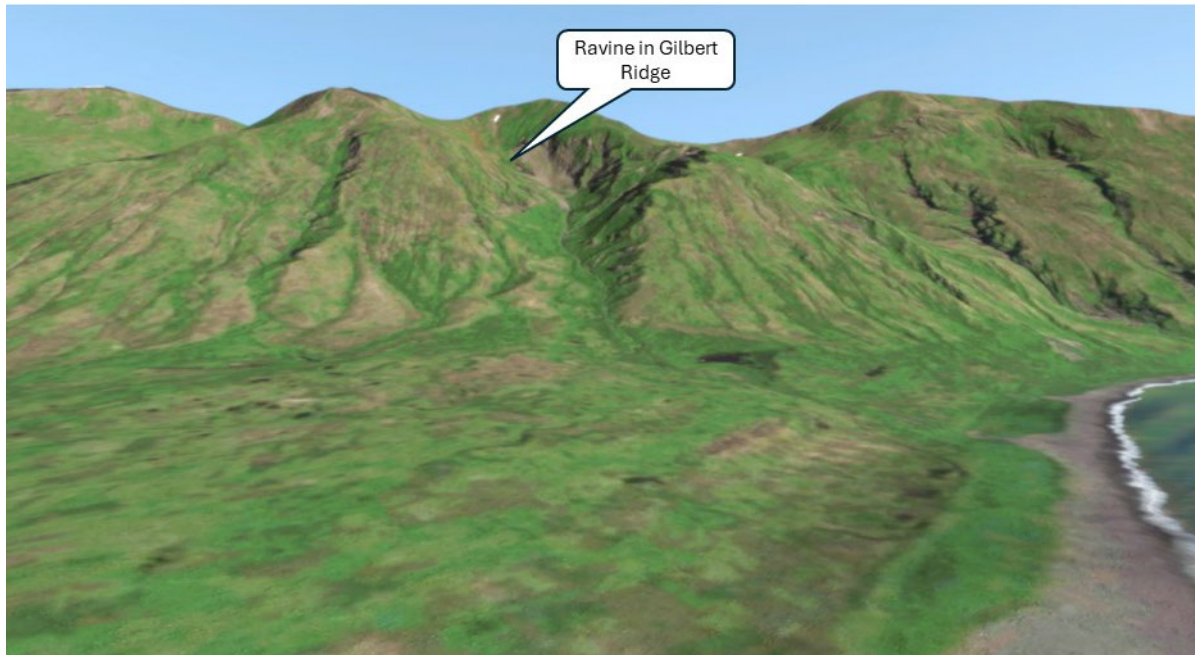
A. It had the mission to protect the right flank of the battalion, block the pass through the mountains from Sarana Bay, move up Sarana Valley, and join the main body at a point near Clevesy Pass.

B. This platoon, reinforced by a section of light machine guns and a 60mm. mortar squad, set out shortly after 1600 on the afternoon of May 11.

C. The steep climb and weather made the advance difficult. They would not get over Gilbert Ridge until the next day.

**Directions.** Move closer to the ridge and point out the path up the ridge and where the platoon stopped (about 2/3rds up Gilbert Ridge). See screen shot on the next page.





Ravine in Gilbert  
Ridge

IV. After a short delay for organization on the beach, the main body of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT started its advance up the valley in the direction of Jarmin Pass.

A. They were moving along the ridge known as the Hogback. **Directions.** Return to Blue beach and then advance up the Hogback. There is a rock where you should stop. Below is a view from the air, but you should move close to the ground.



B. At about 1900, the battalion had advanced some 2,500 yards inland, received scattered Japanese rifle fire from the high ground on its right which temporarily halted its advance. **Directions.** Move up the Hogback and stop after the 2500-yard advance. Below is the view of the stop point with the rock circled. Pan left and right to point out how the Japanese on the high ground dominated the area.



C. Resuming its forward movement after about an hour's delay, the battalion met increasingly heavy fire from both front and flank.

D. Under cover of darkness 2<sup>nd</sup> BN halted and reorganized, establishing an all-round defensive perimeter.

### ***Analysis***

I. The US advance from both Blue and Yellow Beaches fell short of their objectives on the first day. Why?

A. Were there flaws in the US plan? Was the real problem in the execution?

B. Was it due to a skillful Japanese defense? In what way?

C. Were the US struggles more attributed to luck or friction, rather than mistakes?

II. After Midway and Guadalcanal, the Japanese were often forced on the defense in the Pacific. They were faced with the dilemma of defending their captured islands on the beach, or further inland.

A, At Attu, the Japanese allowed unopposed landings and defended further inland. Was this the best choice?

B. In our current military environment, what are the benefits and disadvantages of defending on the shoreline or further back?

II. The US forces landing on Attu clearly lacked information about the island and the Japanese defenses (this is not to be overly critical of the American efforts given the limited resources and challenges of the environment).

A. For an amphibious operation (perhaps to be called a large wet gap crossing) in a contemporary environment, what might be some key pieces of information that the landing forces would want to know?

B. Most obvious would be enemy locations strength, etc.

C. Other items could be:

- Weather conditions (to include tides).
- Obstacles in the water (not just man-made, but natural such as reefs and rocks)
- Beach conditions—trafficability.
- Conditions inland, after the beach (muskeg, mountains, hedgerows, other particular terrain features).
- Others?

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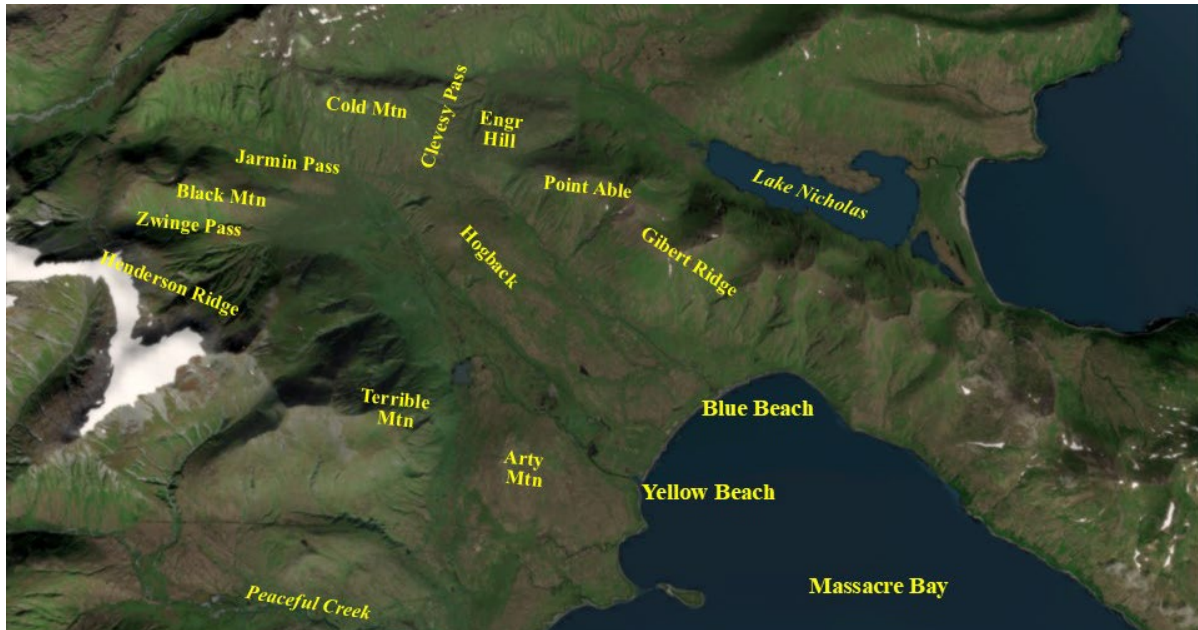
**Stand 6. Stalemate in Massacre Valley and the Hogback: Southern Force Struggles,**  
**12-14 May**

**Visuals.**

***Visual 6-1: Stalemate and Slow Advance, 12-14 May 1943.***

***Visual 6-2: Southern Force Struggles, 12-14 May 1943.***

**Directions.** Take an aerial view of Yellow and Blue Beaches.



***Visual 6-1: Stalemate and Slow Advance, 12-14 May 1943.***

**Orientation.** Note: You have already done a terrain overview, so this can be done much quicker.

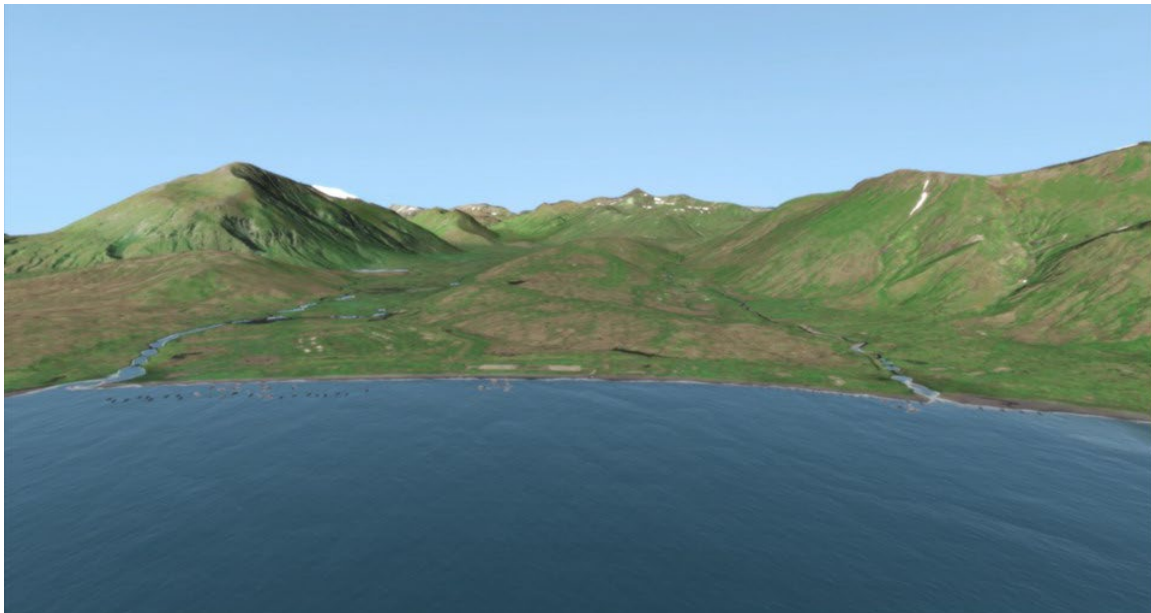
- I. Do an overall orientation using the map only.
- II. Do a quick aerial view of key terrain (on map) to refresh students.
  - A. Terrain in Northern Force area.
    - Holtz Bay (and West and East Arms of the bay).
    - Ballantine Valley.
    - Chichagof Harbor and village.
    - Brannon Ridge
    - Red Beach.
  - B. Terrain in Southern Force area.
    - Massacre Bay.



- Blue and Yellow Beaches
- Terrible Mountain.
- Henderson Ridge.
- Black Mountain.
- Jarmin Pass.
- Cold Mountain.
- Point Able.
- Golbert Ridge.

***Visual 6-2: Southern Force Struggles, 12-14 May 1943.***

**Directions.** Come from the aerial view to a view from the bay looking inland that includes both Yellow and Blue Beaches. You will be doing an overview of the Japanese defenses from the left to the right around the valley.



***Visual 6-2: Click for the animation to show the view from the valley.***

***Click again to remove the picture.***

**Description.**

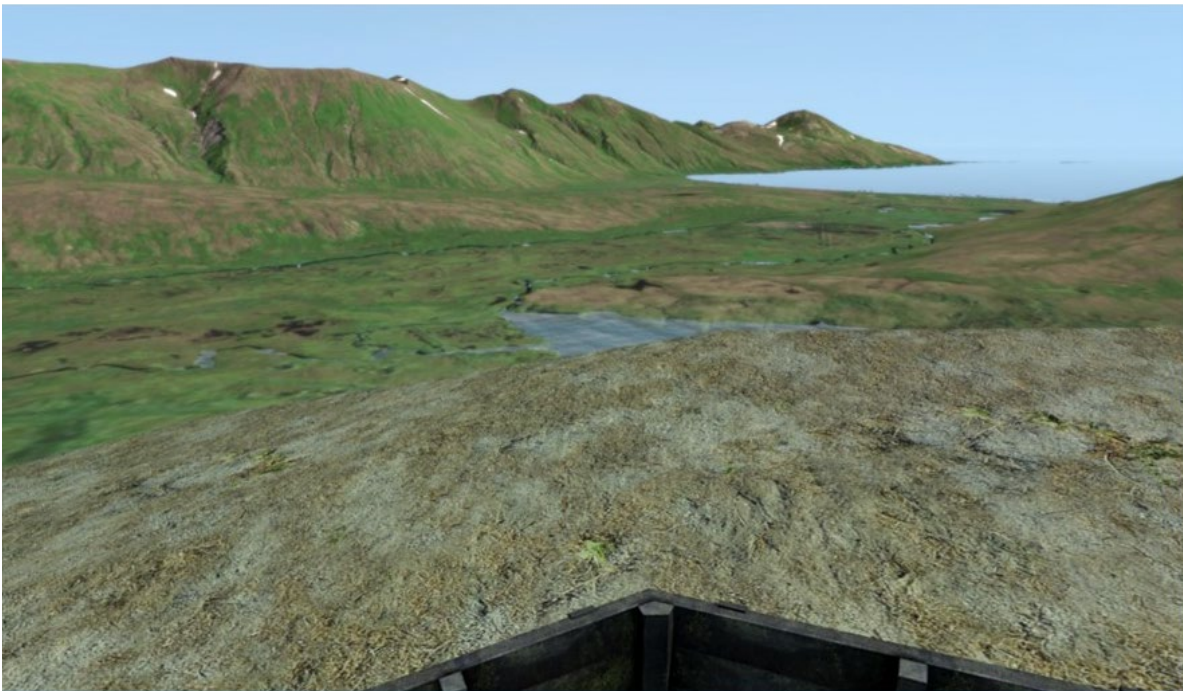
I. Japanese defenses and terrain advantages.

A. Japanese positions that dominate the lower ground.

1. Terrible Mountain. **Directions.** Fly to the trenches on Terrible Mountain just west of the Japanese camp. Look back to the valley. You can move rapidly in the air. The screen shot on the next page has a yellow circle around the trenches.

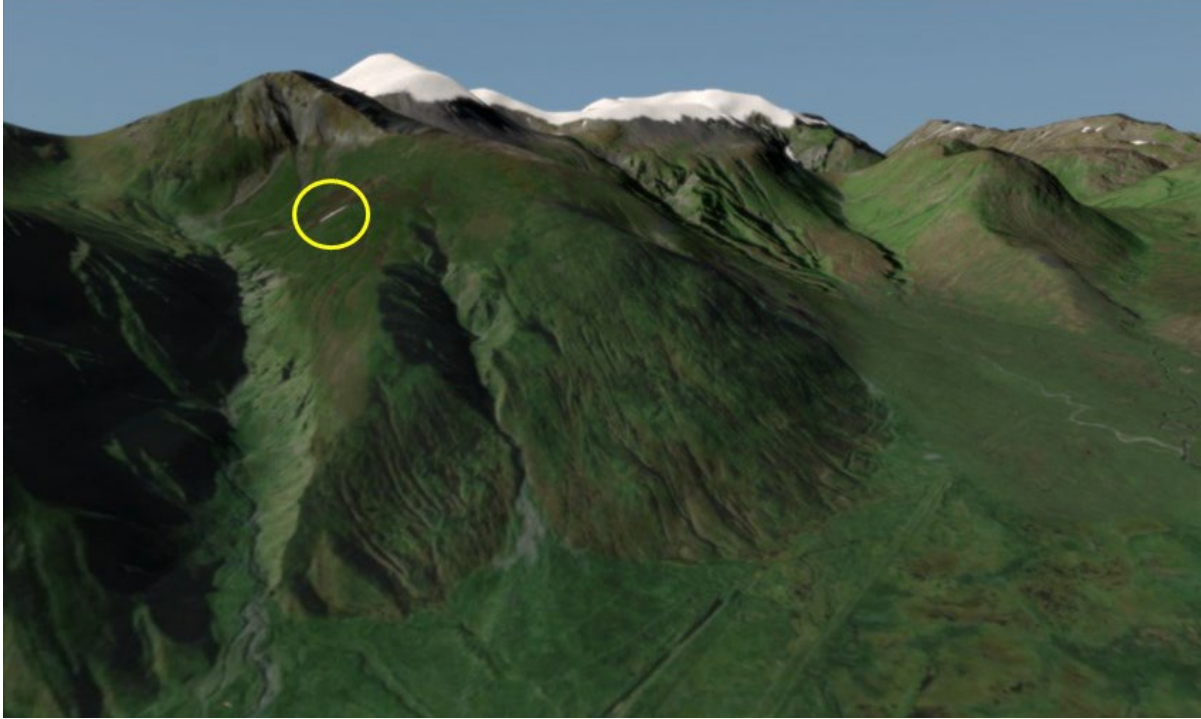


**Directions.** The screen shot below shows the view from the Japanese trenches looking back at the bay.

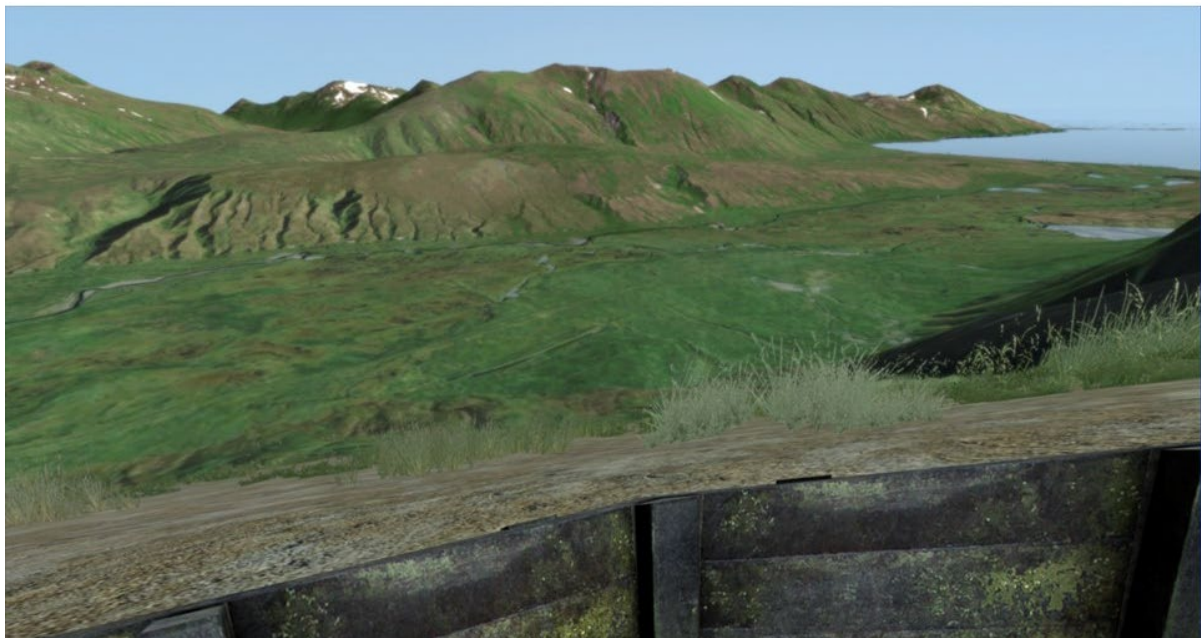


2. Henderson Ridge. **Directions.** Move to the Japanese trenches on Henderson Ridge. There are two sets. Go to the first set (most eastern and closest to the beaches). You can move rapidly in the air. The screen shot on the next page shows the location in relation to the previous position).

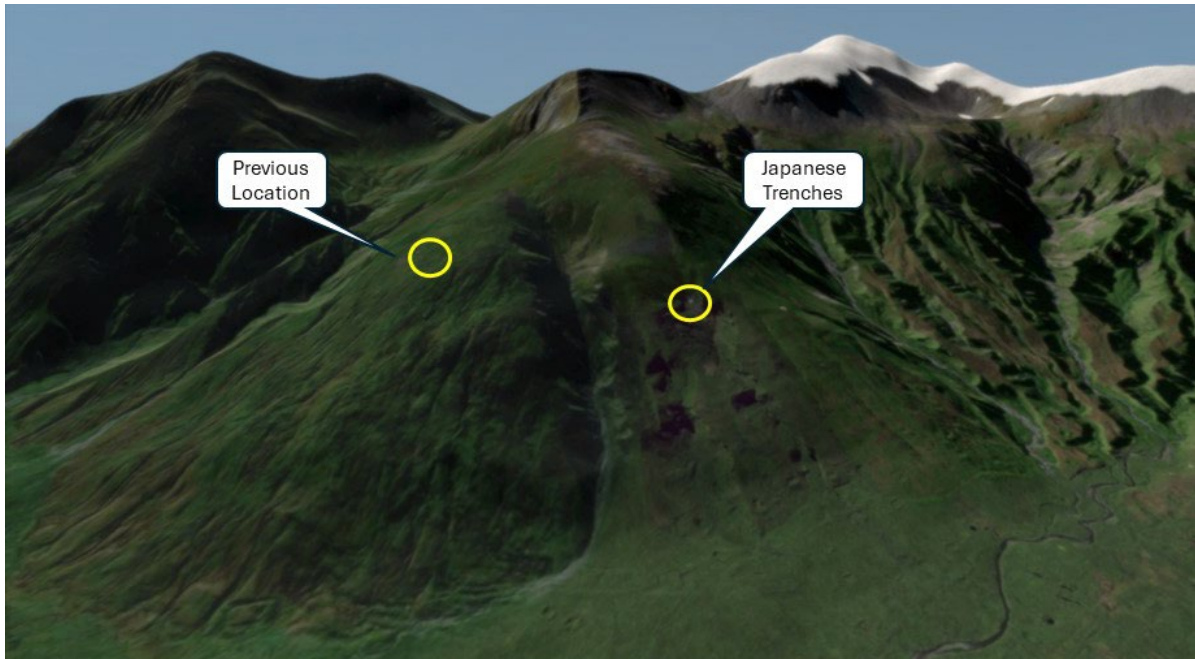




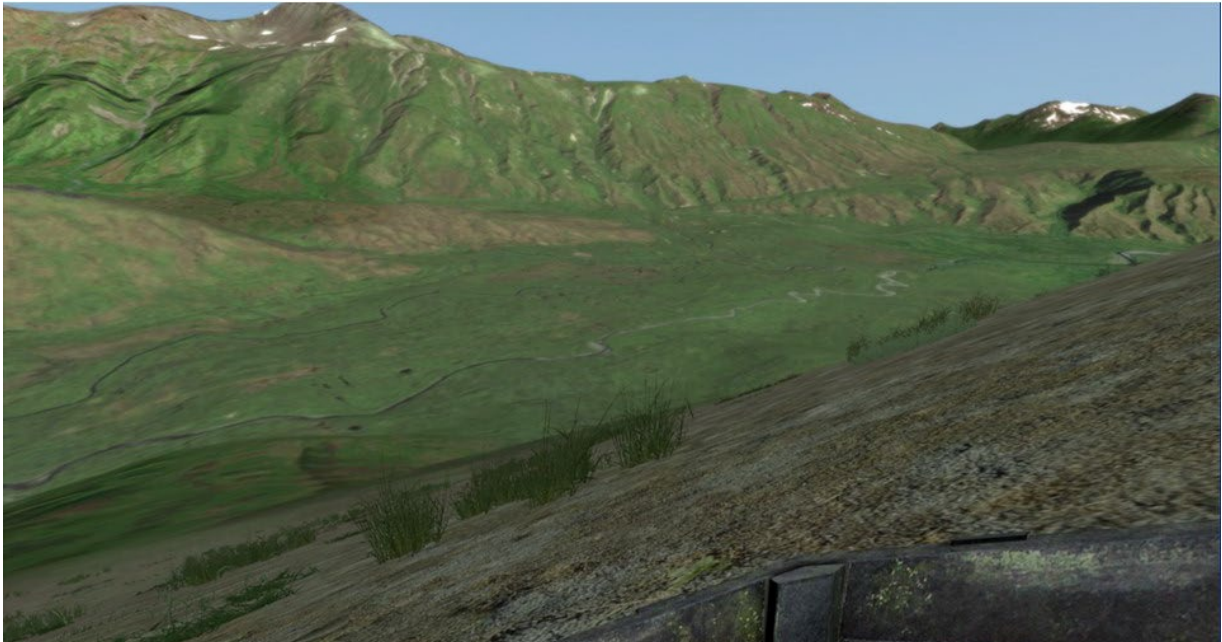
**Directions.** Go into the Japanese trenches, turn and look back down the valley. Again, point out how the position dominates the valley. You can see the Hogback on the valley floor.



**Directions.** Move to the second set of trenches on Henderson Ridge. The screen shot on the next page shows the location of those trenches. You can move rapidly in the air.



**Directions.** Go into the Japanese trenches, turn and look back down the valley. Again, point out how the position dominates the valley. You can see the Hogback and the stream that comes out from Yellow Beach and splits into 2 parts.



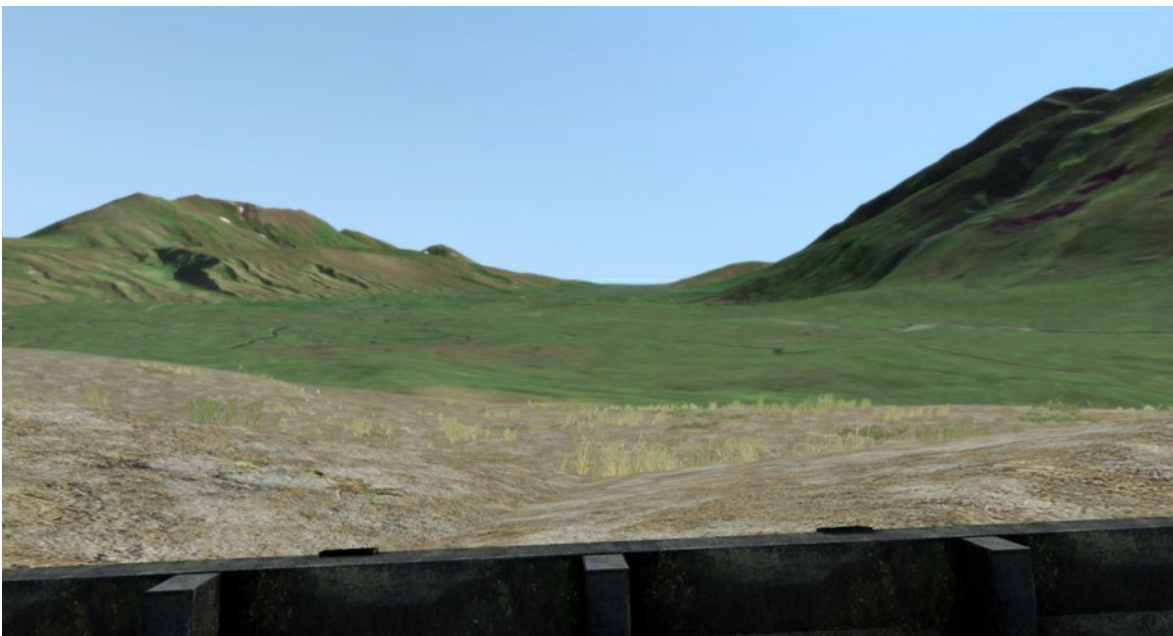
3. Black Mountain. Note that there are Japanese trenches on the lower slope of the mountain and artillery positions further up. You will go to the trenches first.



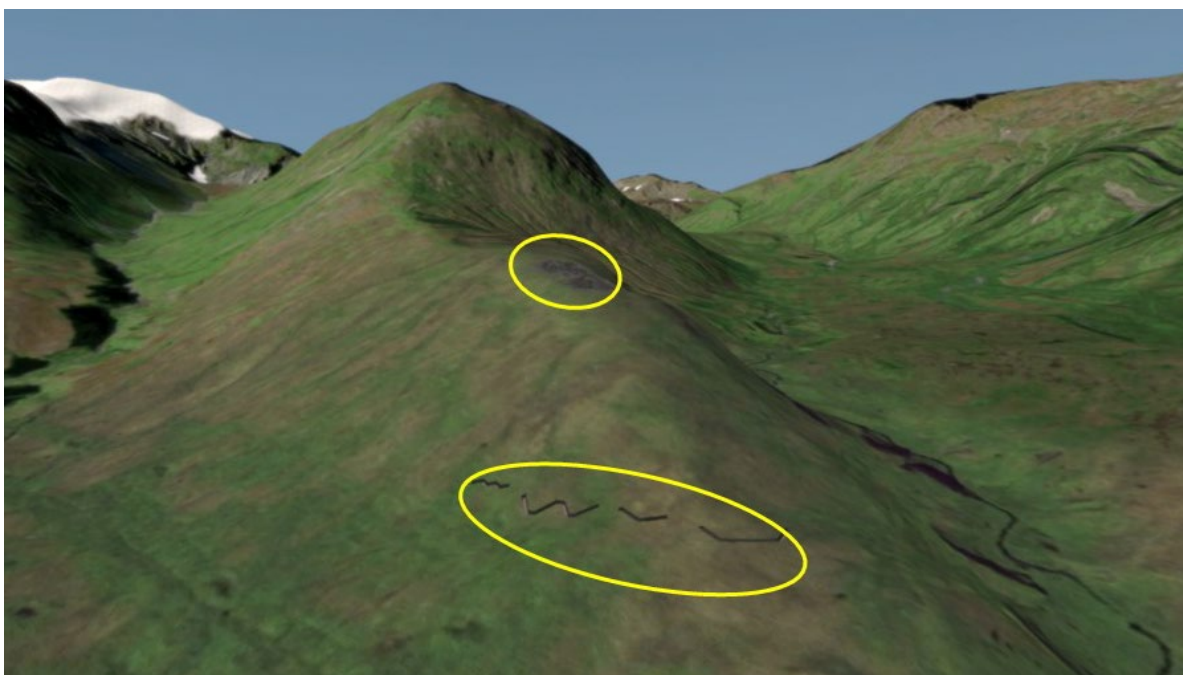
**Directions.** Fly to the trenches at the base of the mountain. The screen shot below shows the location of the trenches on the lower slope.



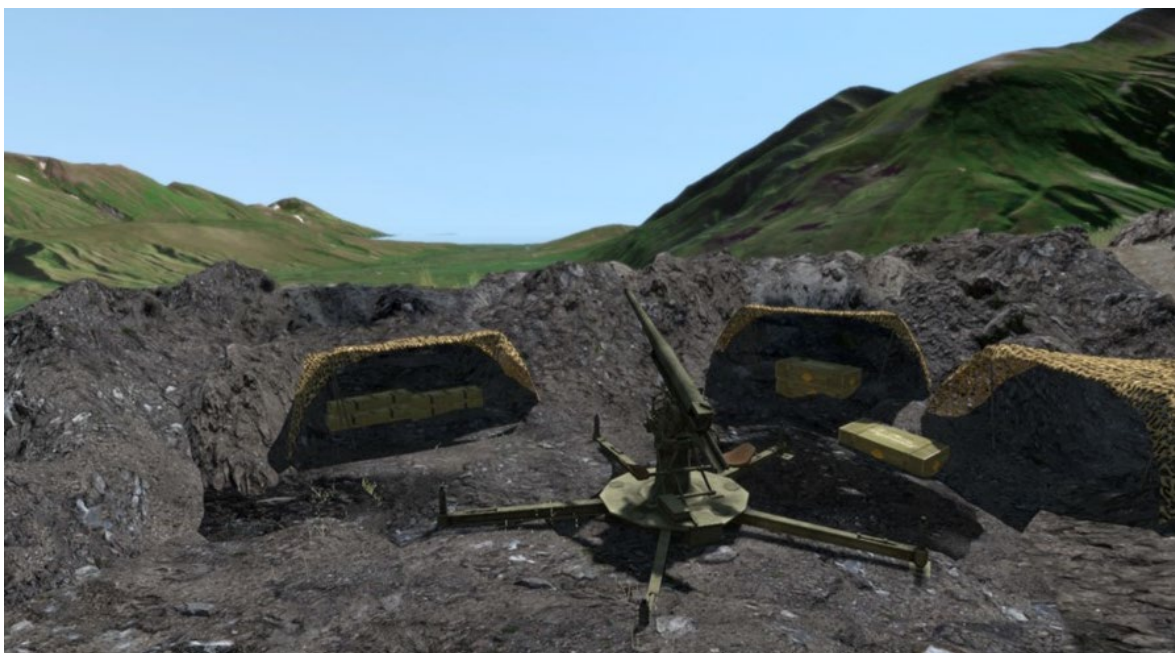
**Directions.** Go into the Japanese trenches and then look back down into the valley. You can go to any of the trenches.



**Directions.** Back up to the artillery positions. Look at the lower one first. The screen shot on the next page shows the artillery positions above the trenches.



**Directions.** Go to the lower of the two artillery positions. Go into the position and look back into the valley.



**Directions.** Go to the higher of the two artillery positions. Go into the position and look back into the valley (screen shot on the next page).





4. Point Able. From Black Mountain, you will now move to the other side of the valley to look at Japanese positions there.

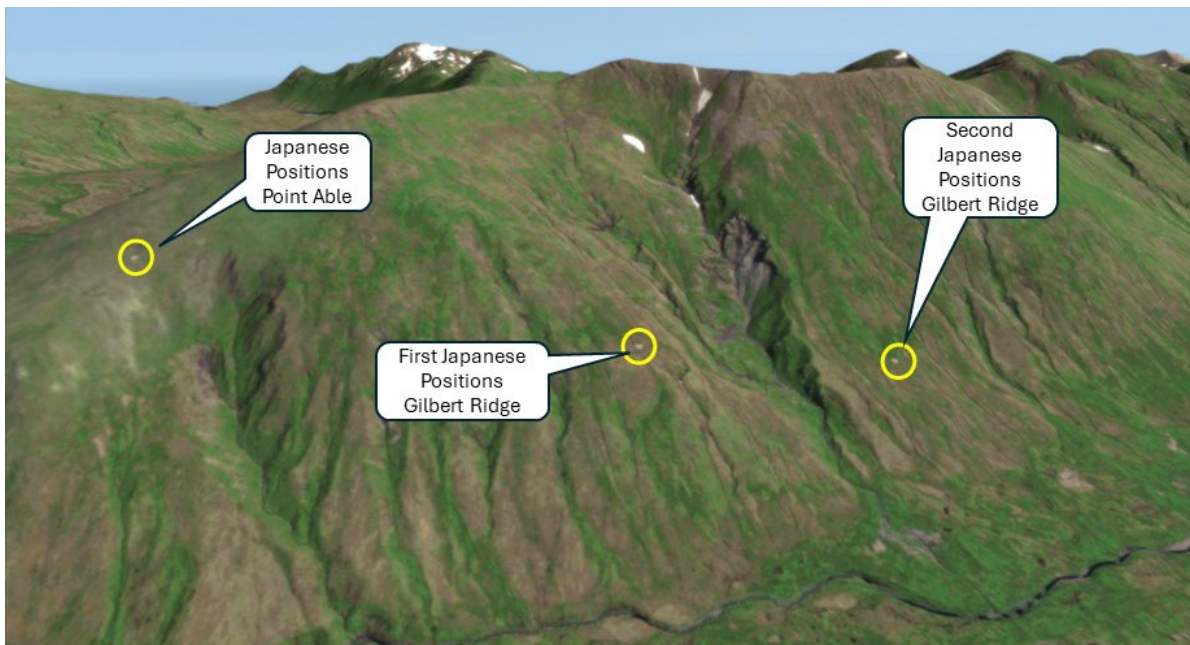
**Directions.** Move from the artillery on Black Mountain to Point Able (go over the Hogback and point this out). The circle on the screen shot below shows the Japanese positions on Point Able.



**Directions.** Go into the Japanese trenches and look at the Valley and the Hogback (near center) and Terrible Mountain in the distance. Again, point out the good positions and fields of fire.



5. Gilbert Ridge. **Directions.** Move from Point Able to the trenches on Gilbert Ridge. There are two sets of the trenches. Go to the closest first (northwest on the ridge).





**Directions.** Move into the trenches and look into the valley as in the screen shot below. As in the last few views, the point is to show the dominance of the Japanese positions.



**Directions.** Move to the second set of entrenchments to the southeast. As before, look at the dominating position of the Japanese.



6. From these positions. The Japanese had excellent points of observation and fire from which they could take the American units under fire from three sides.



B. The fog that hung along the tops and sides of the mountains gave the Japanese concealment, yet the fog usually left the floor of the valley clear.

C. In the area over which 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions had to pass there was no cover except for the twisting stream beds, that were rarely more than three feet below the level of the ground.

***Visual 6-2: Click for the animation to show the tractor in the stream.***

D. Behind the infantry, the logisticians found that the stream beds were the best way to bring limited amounts of supplies forward.

a. The tractors and trucks churned up the muskeg, and then would often be stuck in the mud.

b. The stream beds, while filled with a foot or two of water, had more firm bottoms, often packed with stones, that allowed the vehicles to get traction.

***Click again to remove the picture.***

II. Weather still limited US air support.

A. On 12 May, The Us Army Air Forces delivered 240 100-lb bombs on Attu throughout the day, although many were delivered blindly due to the fog.

B. The most effective bombing seemed to occur on the Japanese batteries in Holtz Bay, which were forced to reduce their fire at the US ground forces.

III. Against these formidable defenses, the Southern Force tried to continue its advance.

A. The left flank platoon from Company I of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, under Lieutenant Long attempted to continue through Terrible Mountain and along Henderson Ridge.

1. This was the force tasked to cover the main advance of 3/17<sup>th</sup> RCT in the valley.

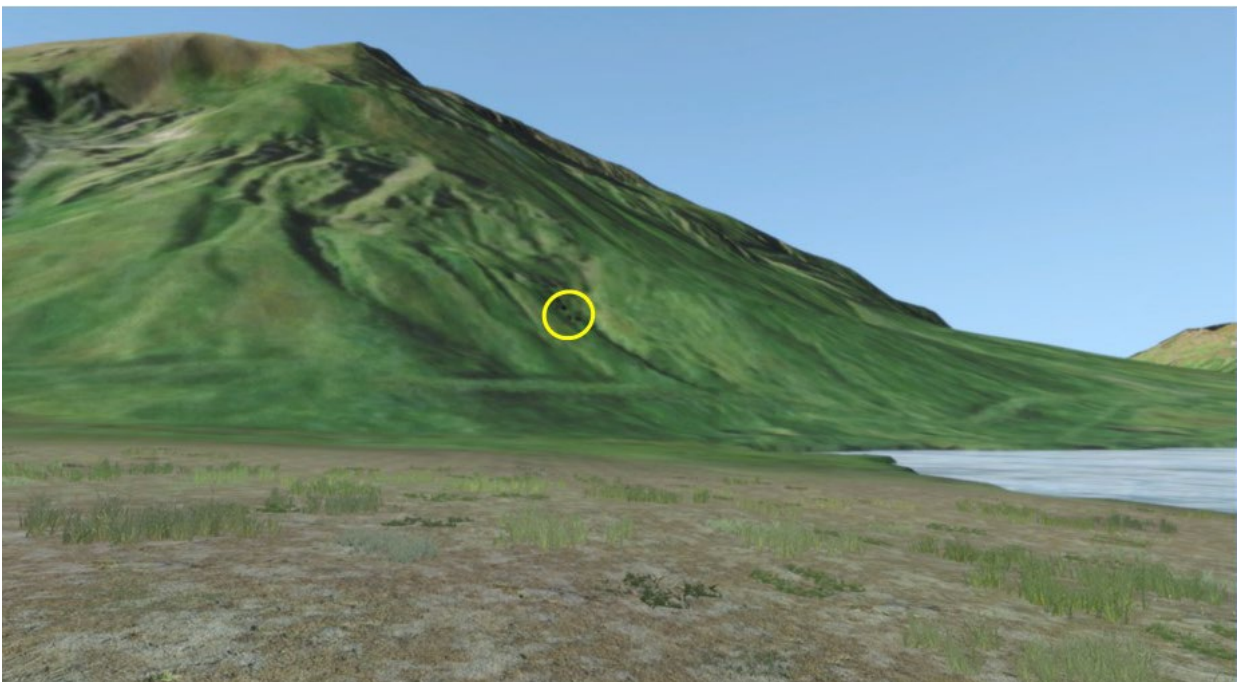
2. Long's platoon was clearly too small for the task, given the Japanese strength on the hills.

3. On 12 May, the platoon occupied the abandoned Japanese camp on the side of Terrible Mountain.

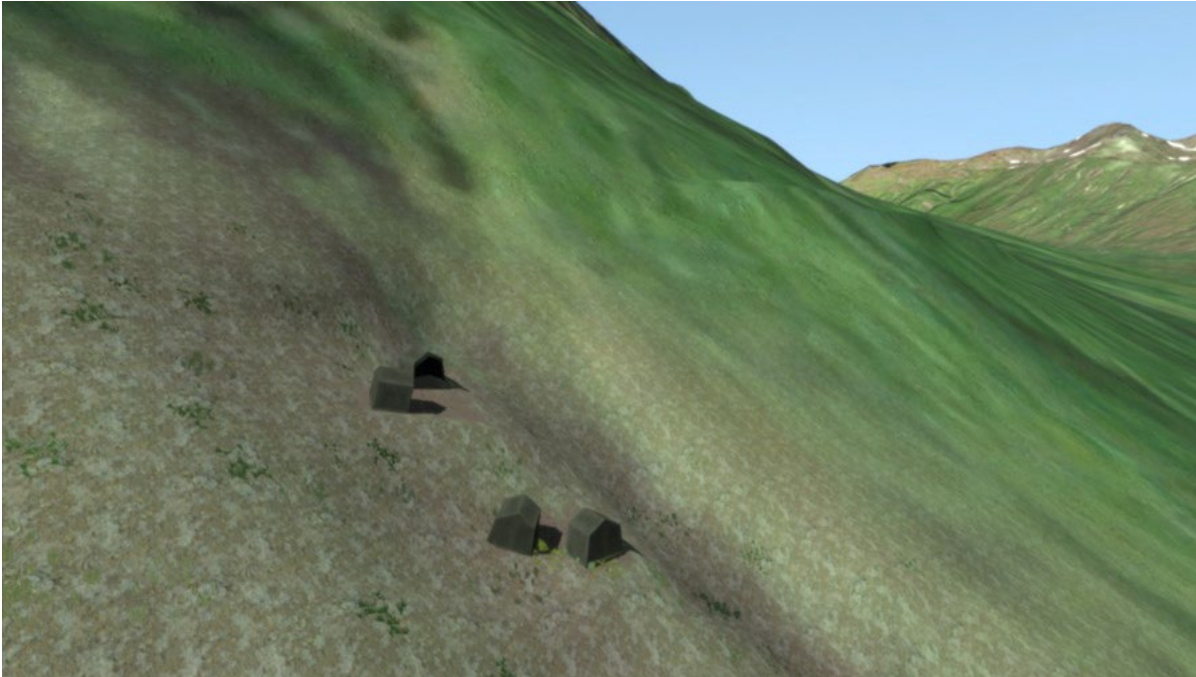
***Directions.*** Go back to the Japanese camp on Terrible Mountain, The screen shot on the next page shows the general route across the valley back to the Japanese camp on Terrible Mountain.



**Directions.** Below is a screen shot of the Japanese camp in the ravine on Terrible Mountain from the bay. This is just meant to help you orient back to the that location.

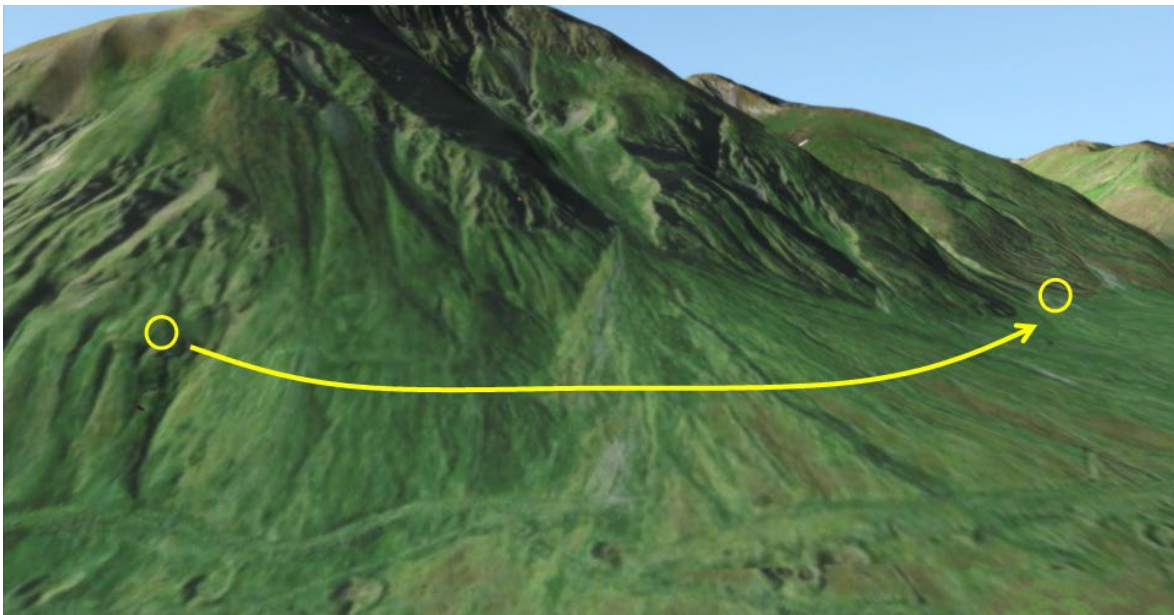


**Directions.** The next screen shot is of the Japanese camp. This is the start point for the next movement that traces Lieutenant Long's advance to Henderson Ridge.



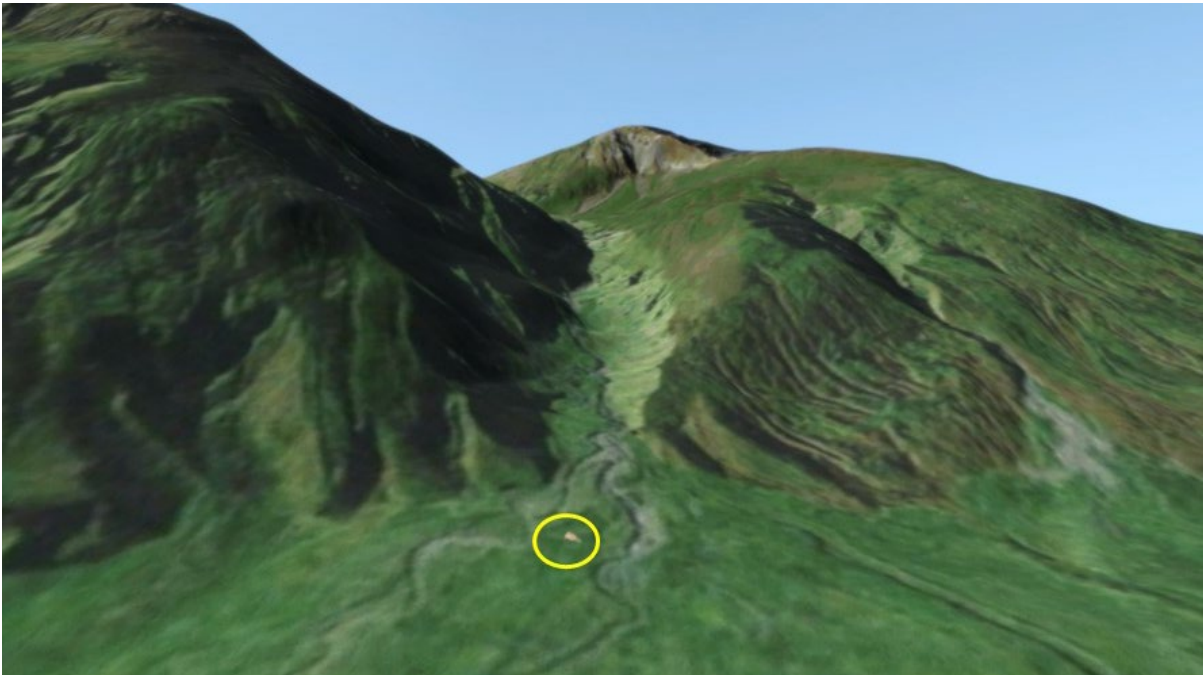
4. Later in the morning of 12 May, Long's platoon moved from the abandoned Japanese camp, past Terrible Mountain to the lower end of Henderson Ridge.

**Directions.** Move northwest slightly over the ground, around the mountain to the base of the lower hill of Henderson looking up (there is a rock to help mark this location).

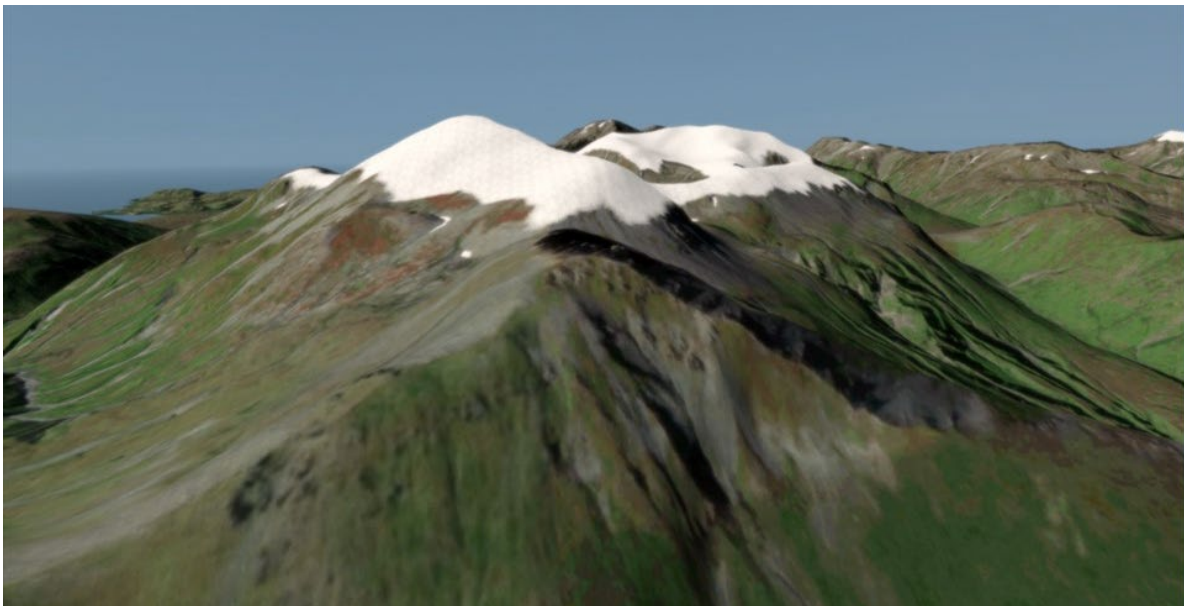




**Directions.** Below is a screen shot that shows where the rock is located. You want to be close to the ground looking up at the smaller hill to the right.



**Directions.** Go to the top of the lower hill looking at rest of Henderson Ridge. Below is the view that Long's platoon had of the rest of Henderson Ridge.



A. At dawn on 12 May the battleship *Nevada* fired on Henderson Ridge.

B. Long observed the fire and wrote "Dead Japanese, hunks of artillery, pieces of guns, and arms and legs rolled down out of the fog on the mountain." (1000 mile war 286).

**Visual 6-2: Click for the animation to show the Nevada.**

**Click again to remove the picture.**

C. The advance squad of the platoon began to advance and ran into a patrol of four Japanese with a light machine gun. After a brief exchange of fire, all four of the enemy were killed without loss to the American platoon.

D. A short further advance along the slopes of Henderson Ridge brought Long's detachment under machine-gun and rifle fire which pinned them down.

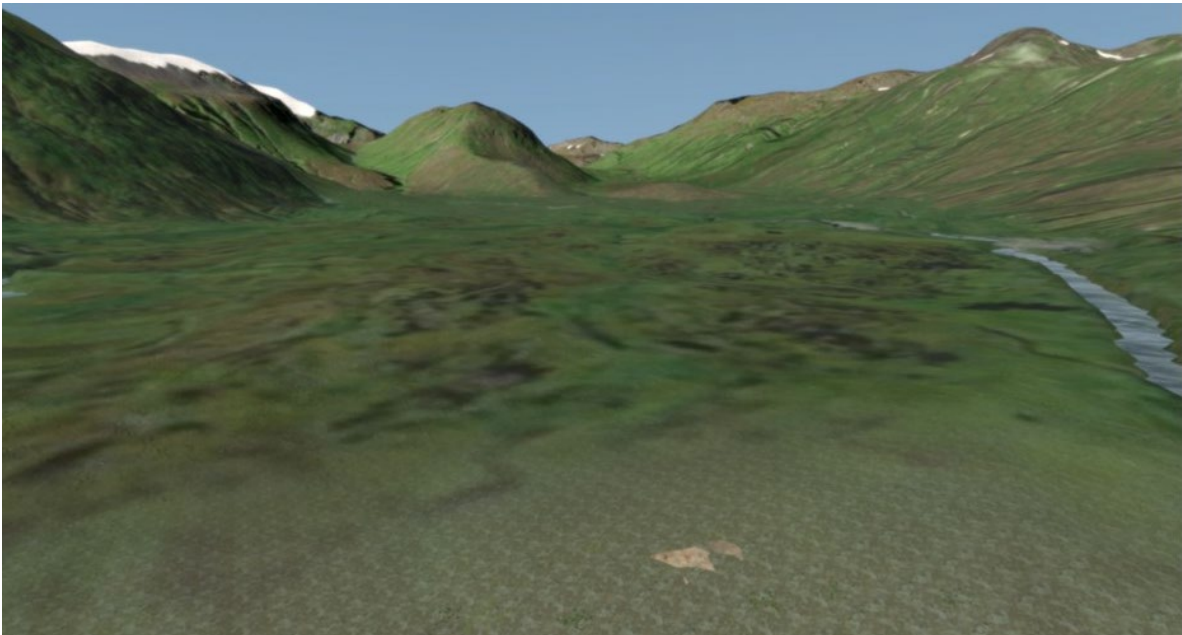
E. Further advance became impossible and, digging in, the platoon defended its position as flank guard along Henderson Ridge.

III. On 12 May, 3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> Inf Bn managed to make a little progress until it was held up by heavy fire from Henderson Ridge.

**Directions.** Go back to last point of advance for 3<sup>rd</sup> BN (a rock) about 2/3rds before the two streams meet from Yellow Beach looking at the stream meeting place.

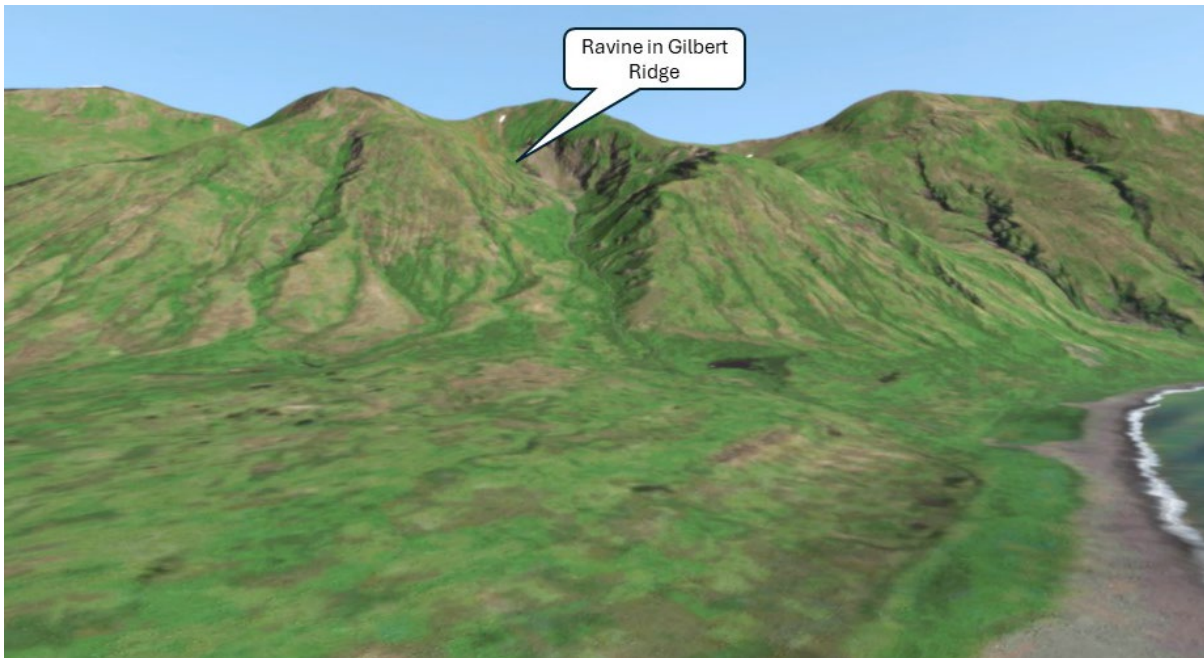


**Directions.** Go forward to near the place where the two streams rejoin. The view below shows Black Mountain in the center distance.



- A. This advance was not deep enough to affect the tactical situation substantially.
  - B. Communications between the front line and regimental headquarters temporarily broke down, and Colonel Earle, regimental commander of the 17<sup>th</sup>, went forward with an Alaskan Scout to check the position of the front-line units.
  - C. Sometime later a searching party found the colonel's dead body with the scout lying nearby, unconscious and severely wounded.
    - 1. Colonel Wayne C. Zimmerman, up to that time General Brown's chief of staff, took over Colonel Earle's duties as commander of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.
    - 2. Colonel Stewart of the Alaska Defense Command took over the post of chief of staff of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division.
  - IV. On the right flank of the US forces (to the right of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT), Lieutenant. Paulson's Company F attempted to complete its mission on Gilbert Ridge.
    - A. The steep slopes made hard going. On the morning of 12 May, they succeeded in crossing Gilbert Ridge and entering into the Sarana Valley.
- Directions.** Go back to Blue beach and take the same view as F Company as earlier looking up at Gilbert Ridge.





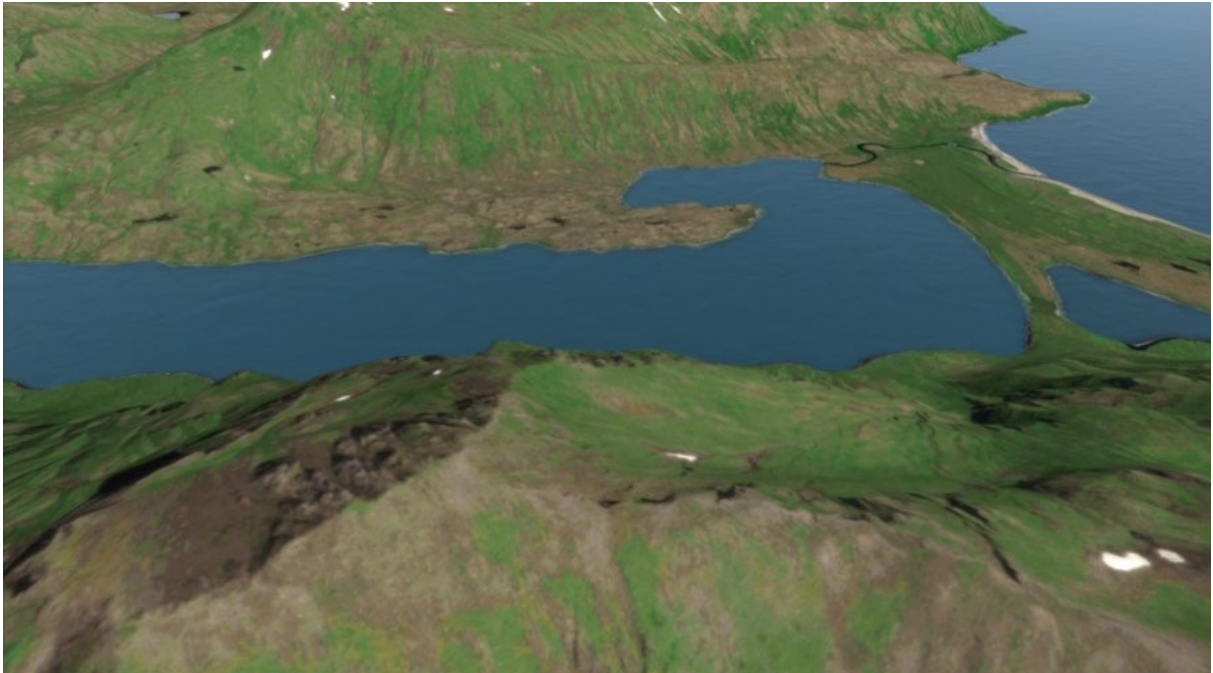
**Directions.** Move over the ridge in the ravine (fairly high in the air) and to the top of the ridge looking at the lake), looking into Sarina Valley.



B. Almost immediately the detachment came under enemy machine-gun fire from the opposite side of Lake Nicholas, beyond the range of the light mortar.



**Directions.** Look across the lake at the location of the fire from the Japanese.



C. Leaving one squad and a machine gun to guard the pass, Paulson led the other two squads along the ridge in the direction of their objective.

1. It soon became evident that the area had extensive Japanese positions and forces. The platoon had to retreat.

2. After a number of casualties, the platoon eventually made its way back to the base on Massacre beach.

3. Lieutenant Paulson found on the body of a dead Japanese officer, a map and accompanying order giving the detailed plan for the defense of Chichagof Harbor. This was a positive result of the mission.

V. A general attack was planned for the morning of the 13<sup>th</sup>, but the dense fog that hid the Japanese mountain positions compelled its postponement until that afternoon.

A. Eareckson, as he did every day, took his bombers and personally attempted to support the forces on Attu, but the fog and cloud cover prevented him from delivering his bombload this day.

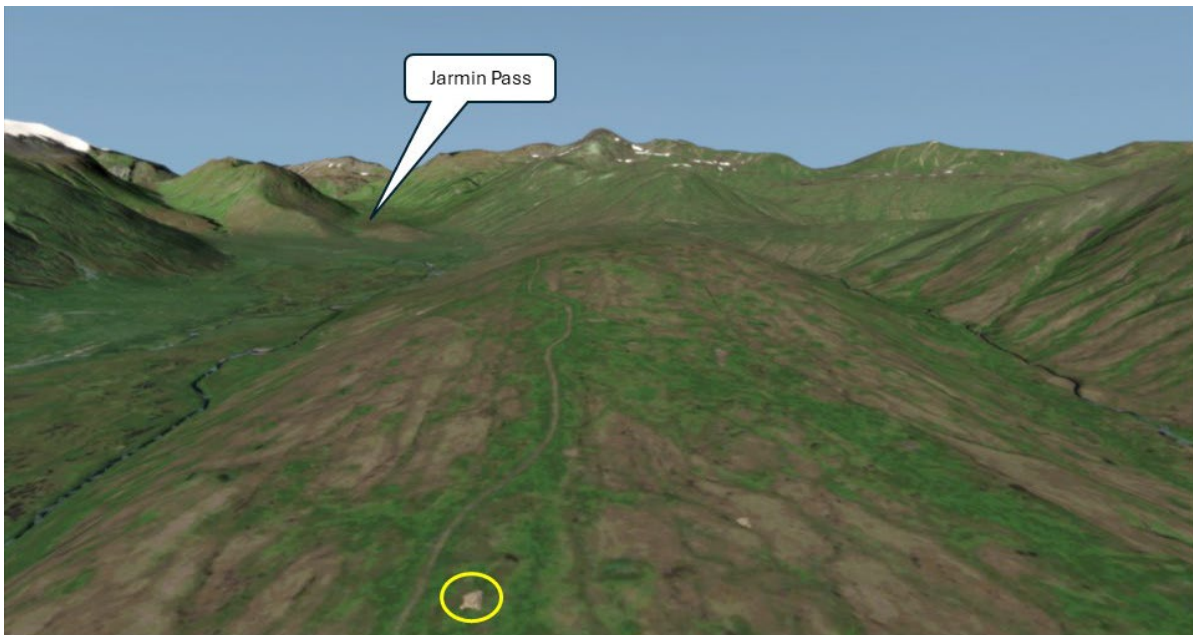
B. Similarly, Japanese bombers from Paramushiro Island attempted to reach Attu. In the only major attempt by Japanese airpower to influence the campaign, these planes turned back due to the bad weather.

C. In the late afternoon of 13 May, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT attacked again.

1. 3<sup>rd</sup> BN made little progress in the face of furious enemy fire from mortars, heavy machine guns, and rifles.

2. 2<sup>nd</sup> BN succeeded in getting some units within 200 yards of the mouth of Jarmin Pass.

3. But the resistance was too stiff. When darkness came the Americans fell back to their starting positions. **Directions.** Go back to the lead location on the Hogback for 2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup>, looking at Jarmin Pass. The circle below is a rock in the area where you should locate. Go closer to the ground and look towards the pass.



IV. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the Americans in Massacre Valley attacked again.

A. The 3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT was the main attacking unit.

B. Elements of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> attacked simultaneously along the lower slopes of Henderson Ridge on the left, while on the right a platoon of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT advanced along the Hogback toward the enemy positions on Cold Mountain.

C. The results were no better than on the day before.

1. All four company commanders were taken out of action (2 killed, 2 wounded).

2. Once again, the Southern Forces dug in and awaited the next day.

V. In the course of the night of 14 May, COL Zimmerman visited the command posts of both battalions of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.

A. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, on the left, which had so far borne the brunt of the attacks, had suffered severely; its casualties had been heavy, including two company commanders killed and two evacuated.

1. To give the battalion an opportunity to rest and reorganize, Colonel Zimmerman withdrew it in the darkness to more sheltered support positions.

2. It was replaced it in the front line with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup>, which had just landed.

### *Analysis*

I. The US forces landing on Attu lacked information about the island and the Japanese defenses (this is not to be overly critical of the American efforts given the limited resources and challenges of the environment).

A. For an amphibious operation (perhaps to be called a large wet gap crossing) in a contemporary environment, what might be some key pieces of information that the landing forces would want to know?

B. Most obvious would be enemy locations strength, etc.

C. Other items could be:

- Weather conditions (to include tides).
- Obstacles in the water (not just man-made, but natural such as reefs and rocks)
- Beach conditions—trafficability.
- Conditions inland, after the beach (muskeg, mountains, hedgerows, other particular terrain features).
- Others?

II. The continued attacks up the valley and the Hogback clearly faced difficulties. Were there better alternatives?

A. Do commanders sometimes have to press attacks even against difficult situations? Why would they do so?

- To attrit the enemy
- to divert Forces
- To maintain the initiative.

B. On the other hand, are the American forces too committed to “fighting the plan” and not changing to fight the enemy and new conditions?

## Stand 7. Northern Force Advances, 12-14 May

### Visuals.

*Visual 7-1: Stalemate and Slow Advance, 12-14 May 1943.*

*Visual 7-2: Northern Force Advance, 12-14 May 1943.*

### Orientation.

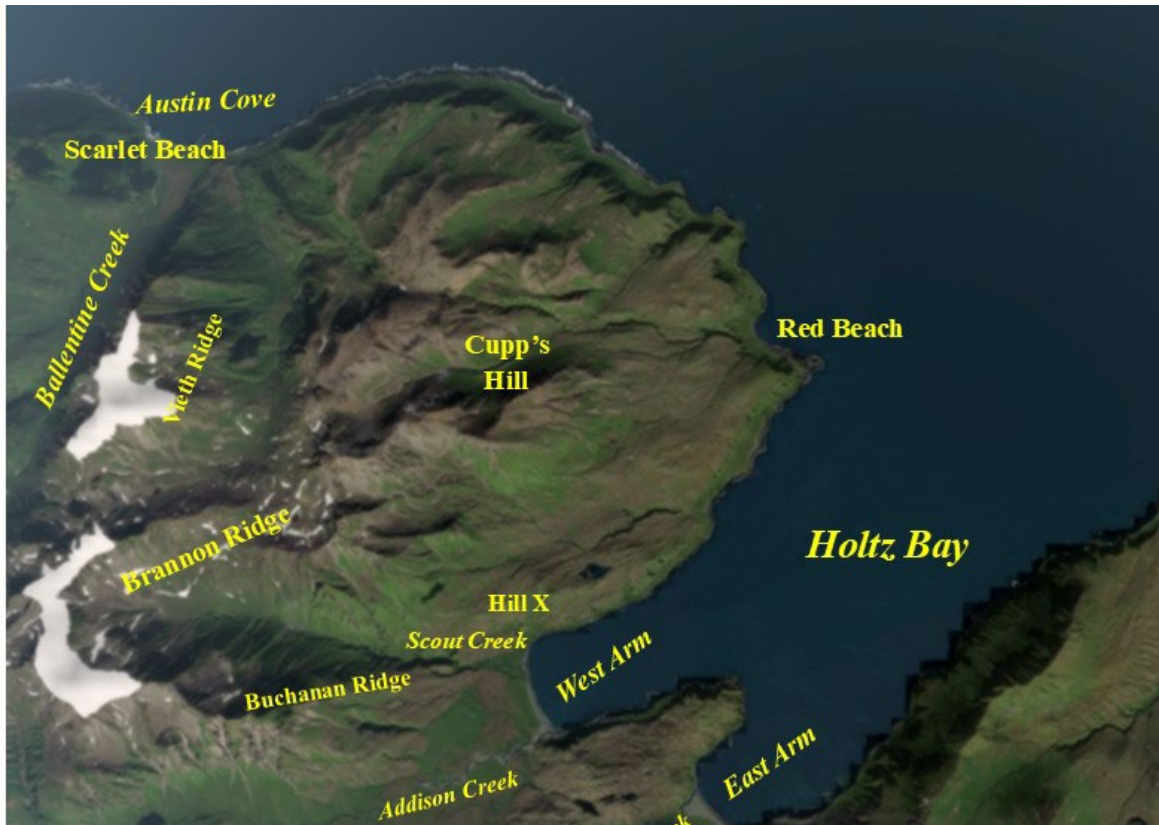
*Visual 7-1: Stalemate and Slow Advance, 12-14 May 1943.*

On map only, show the relationship of the Northern and Southern Forces.

*Visual 7-2: Northern Force Advance, 12-14 May 1943.*

### Orientation.

**Directions.** Go to aerial view of Northern Area that reflects the visual.



Quickly point out the key terrain from the air.

- Veith Ridge
- Brannon Ridge
- Buchanon Ridge
- West Arm (Holtz Bay)
- Hill X



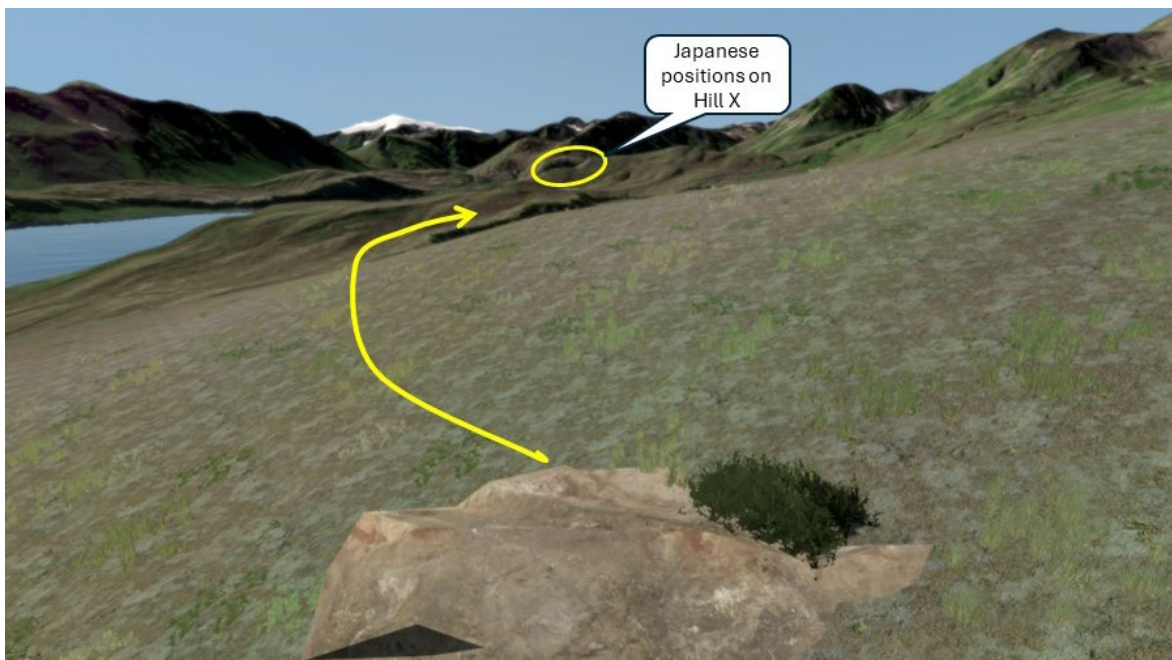
**Description.**

I. From dawn until 0900 on 12 May, the whole area held by Northern Force was covered by almost impenetrable fog and no forward movement was attempted.

A. Shortly after 0900 the fog lifted, and it became evident that the enemy positions on Hill X would have to be seized by assault.

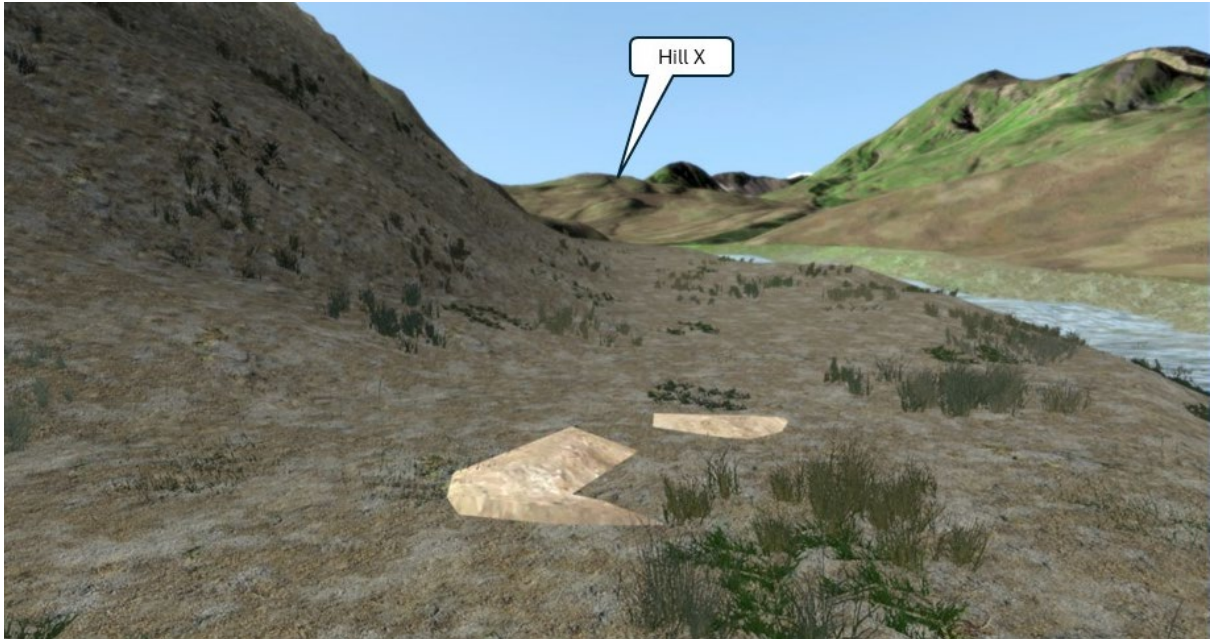
B. Colonel Hartl (now commanding while COL Culin recovered from his illness on ship) ordered an enveloping attack on the Japanese right flank (US left) of Hill X by Company A.

1. In making this attack, with high ground rising above its right flank, the company reached a deep ravine running diagonally across its front. **Directions.** From the last position of the main battalion force, go to the left slightly in the air and follow the ravine.

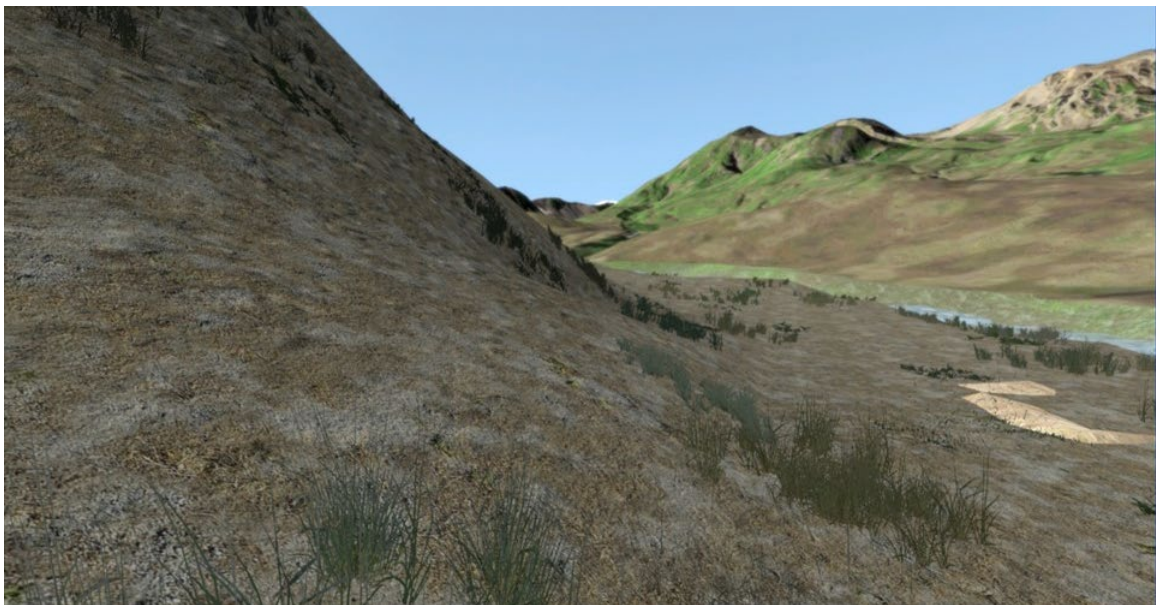


2. Suddenly taken under heavy mortar, machine-gun, and rifle fire, the company sought shelter in the ravine, which helped protect the US troops from the Japanese on the hill, but the position was still partly enfiladed from the heights on the right.

**Directions.** Get to the sculpted part of the ravine where the water starts, walk on left side of creek to where you see Hill X. See the screen shot on the next page.



**Directions.** Once in the ravine, slide left to imitate the company taking cover.

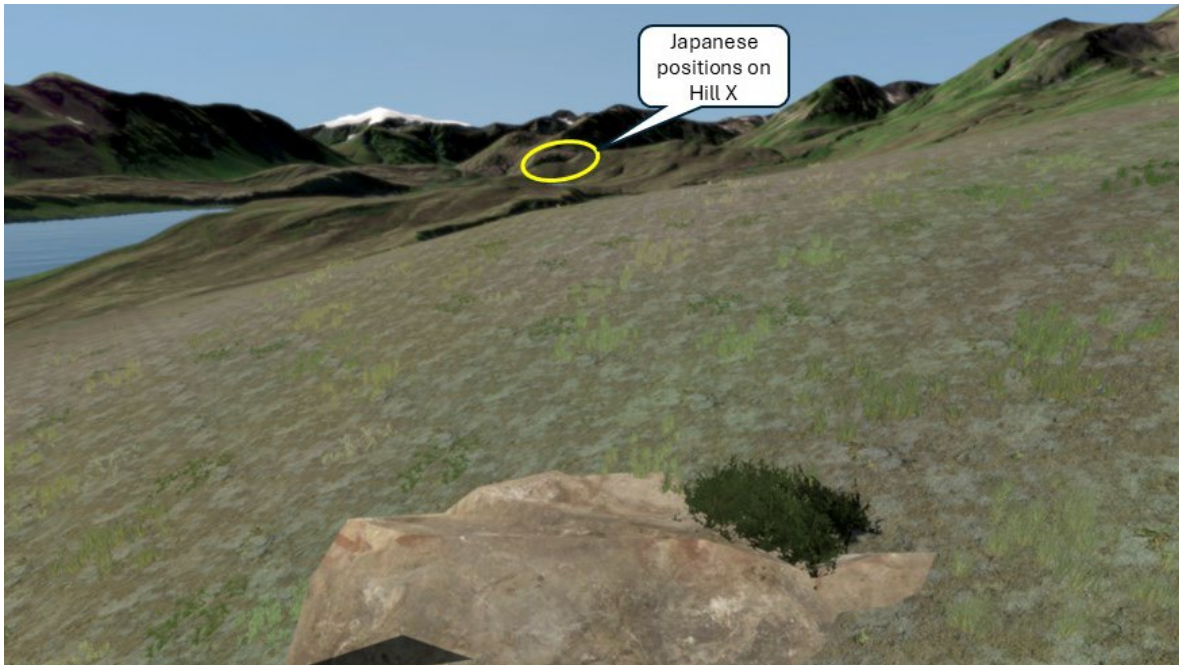


3. Throughout the rest of the day Company A stayed pinned to the ground, unable to advance or withdraw, under an incessant fire that caused numerous casualties.

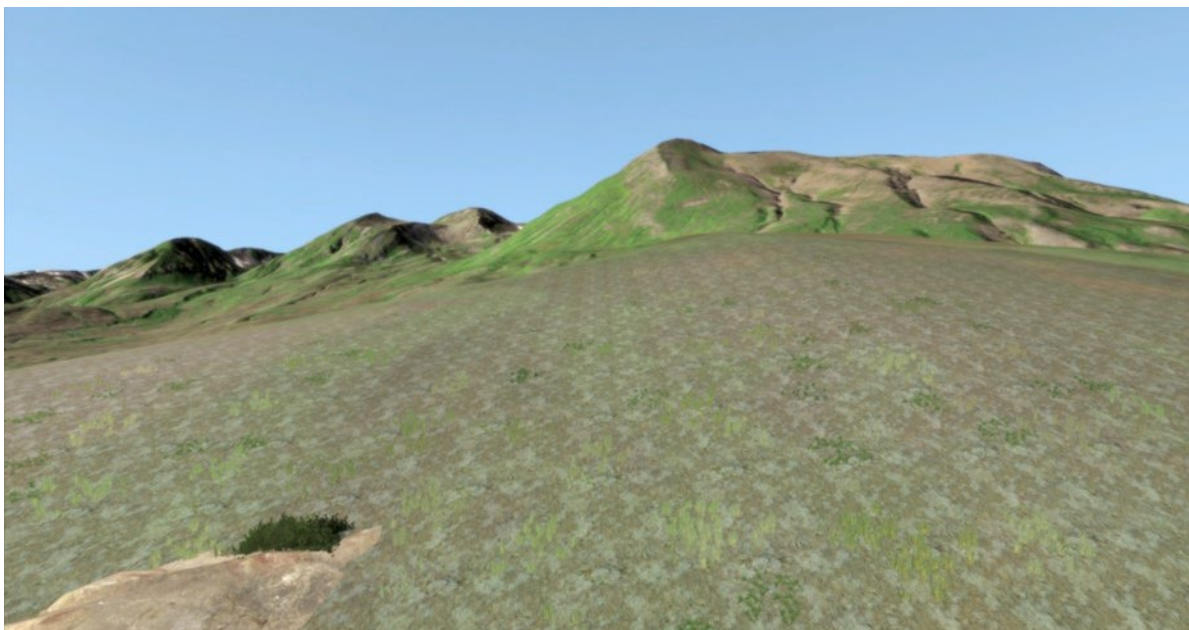


C. While Company A was pinned down, the main body of 1<sup>st</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT received harassing fire from snipers in concealed positions about 300 yards along the high ground to the right, but suffered no casualties.

**Directions.** Go back to the position of the main battalion.



**Directions.** Pan right to look at the high ground from where the Japanese snipers were firing.



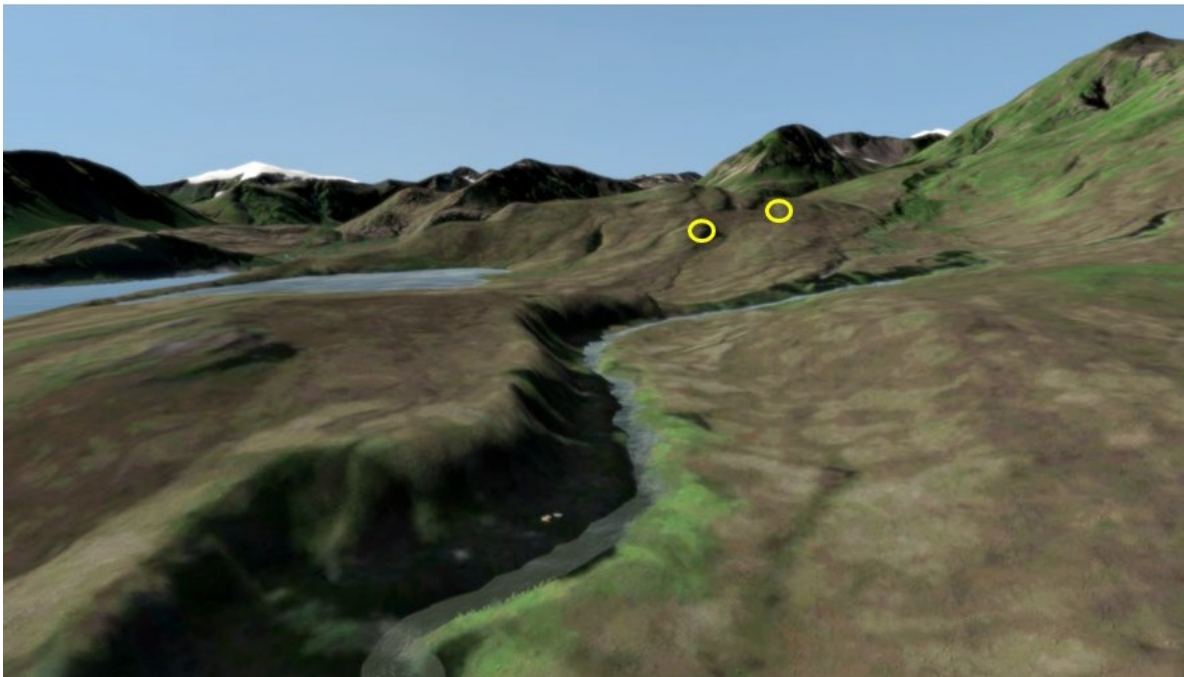
D. In mid-afternoon, with the support from field artillery on Red Beach and from the guns of the warships lying off the island, the battalion prepared a frontal attack on the enemy positions.

1. At 1650, Navy aircraft bombed and strafed the enemy positions on the forward face of Hill X. Ten minutes later, behind a barrage, the battalion advanced.

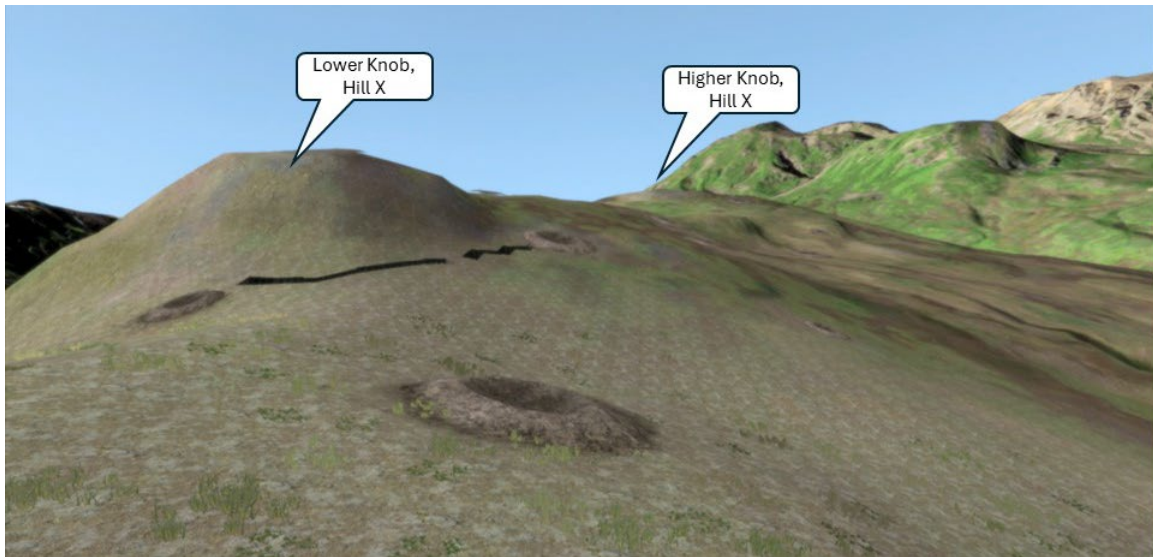
2. In about an hour and a half (1820), 1<sup>st</sup> BN, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT had taken the south side and was the near peak of the group of hills without a single American casualty, though many of the enemy met death in their foxholes.

3. The battalion also repulsed a counterattack from the higher, northern knob still in Japanese hands, and the fighting ended with darkness.

**Directions.** Pan back to the main position looking at Hill X. Then move forward to the small knob of Hill X where there are some trenches. The circle to the left in the screen shot below is the lower (small) knob; the other circle is the higher position.



**Directions.** The view below (next page) shows the two knobs of Hill X. .



E. Thanks to this advance, Company A was able to get out of its bad spot in the ravine.

II. On the morning of 13 May, Northern Force launched another attack to complete seizing Hill X.

A. Admiral Rockwell moved the *Nevada* as close as possible to shore to try and bombard the Japanese positions.

1. **Vignette.** The fog, as usual, prevented locating exact targets. A gunnery control officer wrote in his log:

“Fired on call target .... Visibility nil. Cannot contact spotter on radio. May have hit him instead of target.” (Garfield, *Thousand Mile War*, 291).

2. **Vignette.** Despite the difficulties, Rockwell pressed the effort.

a. The *Nevada* zig-zagged close to shore at risk of Japanese submarines and the treacherous shoals.

b. One of the officers on the bridge warned Rockwell of these risks to which the admiral replied: “Screw the torpedoes. Slow speed ahead.” (Garfield, *Thousand Mile War*, 291).

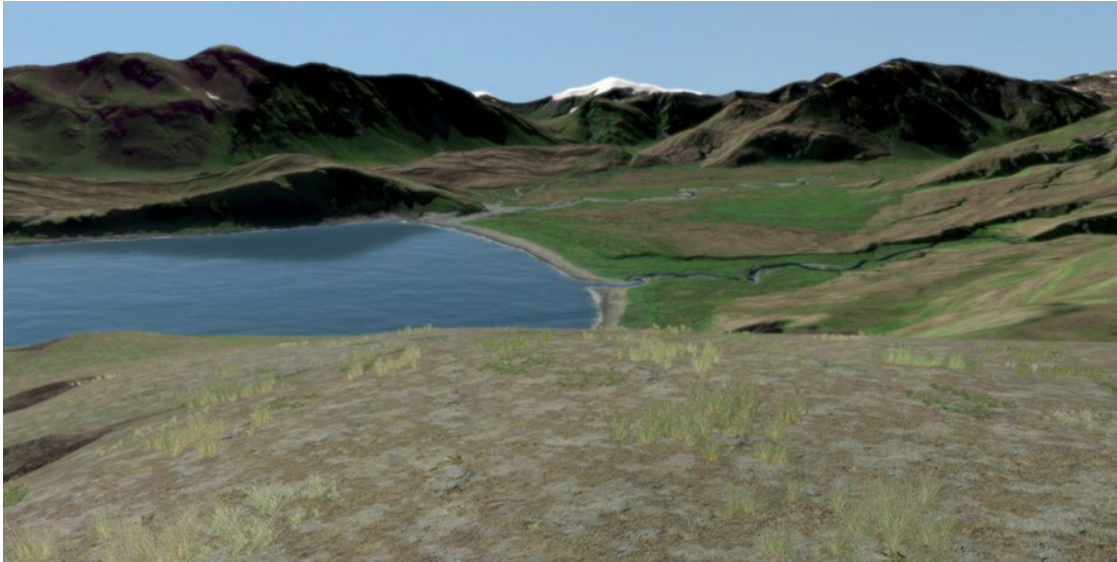
c. This variation on Farragut’s famous quote may not be as well known, but the words showed a determination to do the mission.

B. With the best fire support they could get—given the conditions—Northern Force completed seizing the rest of Hill X.



1. The battalion was now in control of the high ground dominating the ground for 1,000 yards down to the main Japanese camp behind the beach at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay.

**Directions.** Move forward to the higher knob and another set of trenches. Turn left and look down and point out the Japanese positions in the west arm of Holtz Bay.

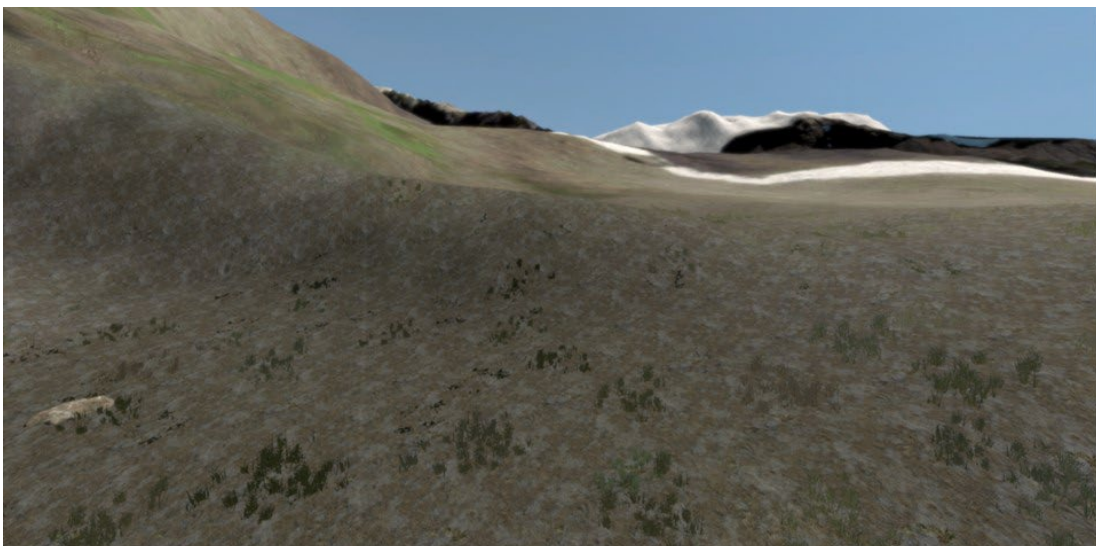


2. The battalion halted to reorganize and consolidate its positions.

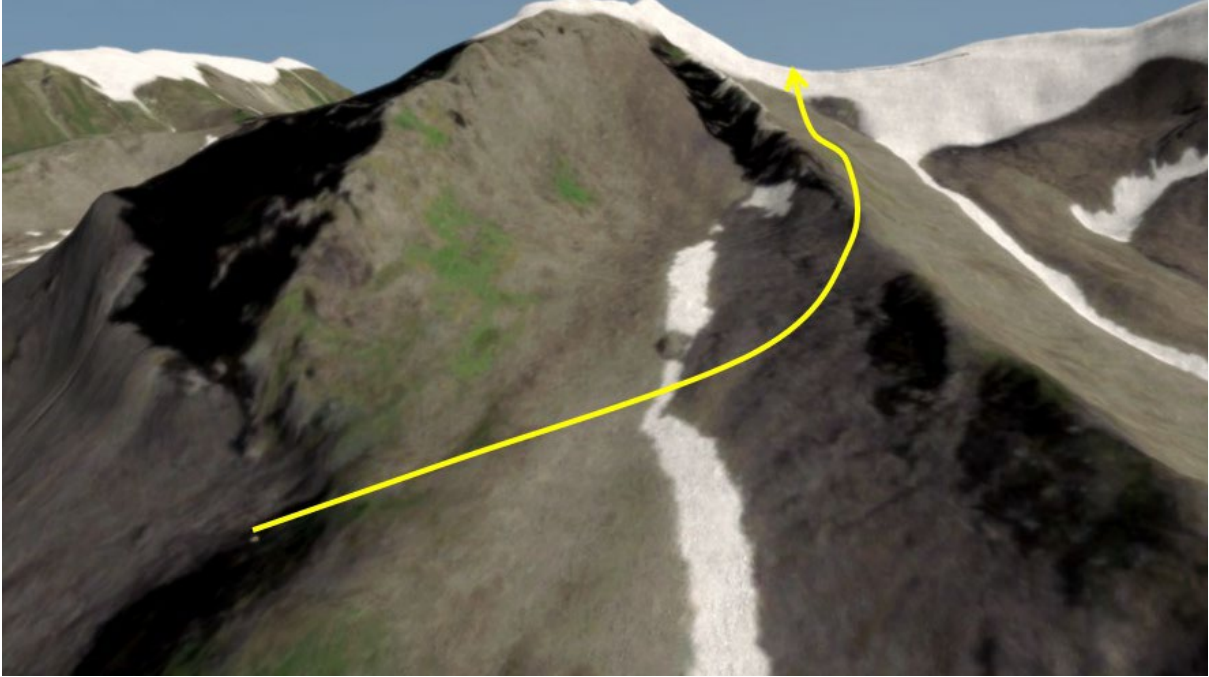
III. In the meantime, the Provisional Battalion advanced in difficult conditions.

A. CPT Willoughby got his men moving at 0400.

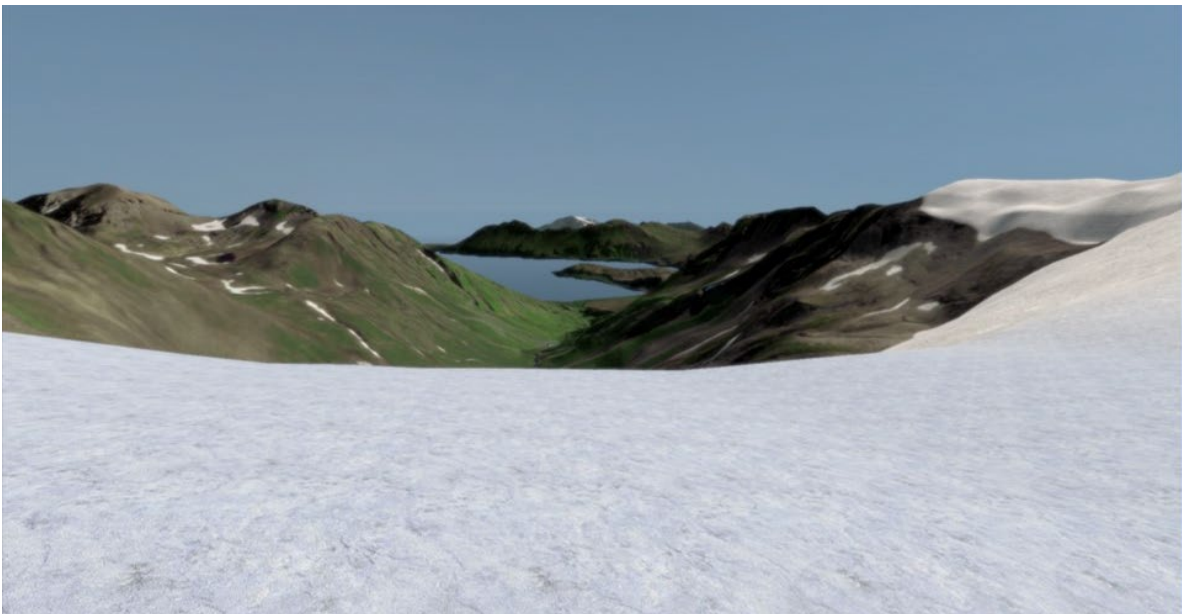
B. The BN crossed the mountaintop later in the morning and could see down to Japanese positions in Holtz Bay. **Directions.** Go back to the last position of the BN (below).



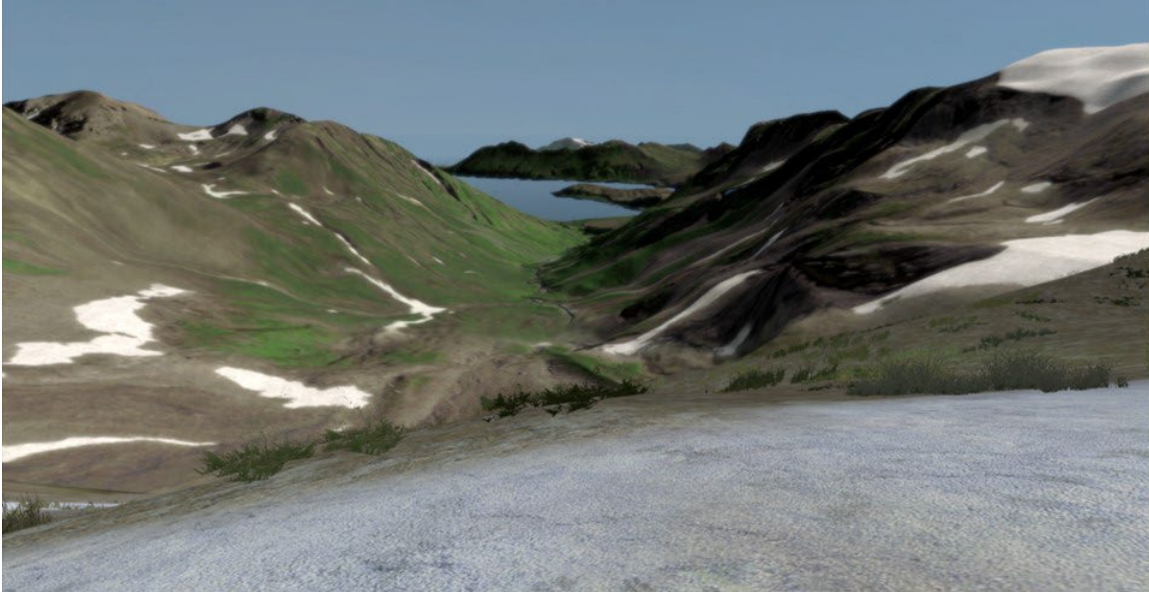
**Directions.** Move over the ridge. The path is shown from in the air in the screen shot below. You should make the move closer to the ground.



**Directions.** Below is a screen shot near the top of the ridge at the place to pause.



C. At about 0800, the men then slid down the slopes on the snow like human sleds. **Directions.** Move down the snow slope to simulate sliding. Stop and look down the valley. The screen shot below shows where the snow ends—stop the “sliding” at the point.



- D. The Japanese finally became aware of the Provisional Battalion’s movements.
1. Some of the Japanese artillery in Holtz Bay started to fire at Willoughby’s men.
  2. Also, some of their infantry turned towards the Americans.
  3. The Provisional BN took up defensive positions on the slope.
  4. Willoughby brought up his 81mm mortar and stopped the Japanese counterattack. However, a stalemate ensued that would last the next 2 days.
- E. The battalion had a naval spotter, Lieutenant Jackie Mann, who tried to contact the battleship *Idaho* for fire support.
1. However, he lost contact with the ship.
  2. Mann contacted air corps instead (perhaps Eareckson), and the bombers were able to suppress the Japanese batteries in Holtz Bay.
- IV. Reinforcing Northern Force.



A. During the afternoon of 13 May, US leaders decided to reinforce 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT with 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT, one of the two infantry battalions which had so far been held in reserve on shipboard.

B. Colonel Culin's Northern Force was now almost doubled in strength.

C. The first units of the reinforcing battalion reached the forward area at 2000, and by noon the next day (14 May) the whole battalion was in position.

D. Colonel Culin conferred with Lieutenant Colonels Hartl and John ('Mickey') Finn, who commanded 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT.

1. They decided to launch a combined attack by both battalions against the main Japanese camp behind the beach at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay, supported by artillery and naval fire.

2. Throughout the afternoon, Japanese snipers harassed the 32<sup>nd</sup>, and the enemy artillery in Holtz Bay kept up a heavy but generally inaccurate fire on the positions on Hill X and the rear areas of both battalions.

3. Once again, the weather intervened, and the American attack, originally planned for the afternoon of the 14 May, was postponed until the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup>.

4. In fact, one of Attu's infamous williwaws struck the island and smashed 3 of the Nassau's Wildcats into the mountains.

***Visual 7-2: Click for Animation to show picture of Squeaky Anderson's Beach.***

***Click to remove picture.***

E. Despite the delay for the attack, US supplies and reinforcements continued to land efficiently at Red Beach.

1. A major reason for this efficiency was the efforts of beachmaster "Squeaky" Anderson.

2. Anderson had broad powers at the beach. He insured that supplies and troops moved off the beach as soon as they arrived.

3. This made the beach clear for new supplies and troops and prevented stockpiles of supplies from gathering at the beach without moving forward.

### ***Analysis.***

I. Evaluate the effectiveness of Willoughby's Battalion.

A. Would we consider this a Special Operation in today's context?

B. What makes a Special Operation and SOF different from infantry doing a “special/different” mission?

C. Today, would we assign traditional infantry, rangers, or some other SOF unit for this mission (and why)?

II. What is the role of the beachmaster?

A. That position is not an Army duty, but why is it important?

B. Does the Army understand how important that is in today’s operations?

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## **Stand 8. Hard Fighting: Northern and Southern Forces Finally Link-up, 15-17 May**

### **Visuals.**

*Visual 8-1: Hard Fighting: North and South Forces Link, 15-17 May.*

*Visual 8-2: Southern Force Struggles, 15-16 May.*

*Visual 8-3: Northern Force Advances Slowly, 15-17 May.*

*Visual 8-4: US Forces Meet, 17 May.*

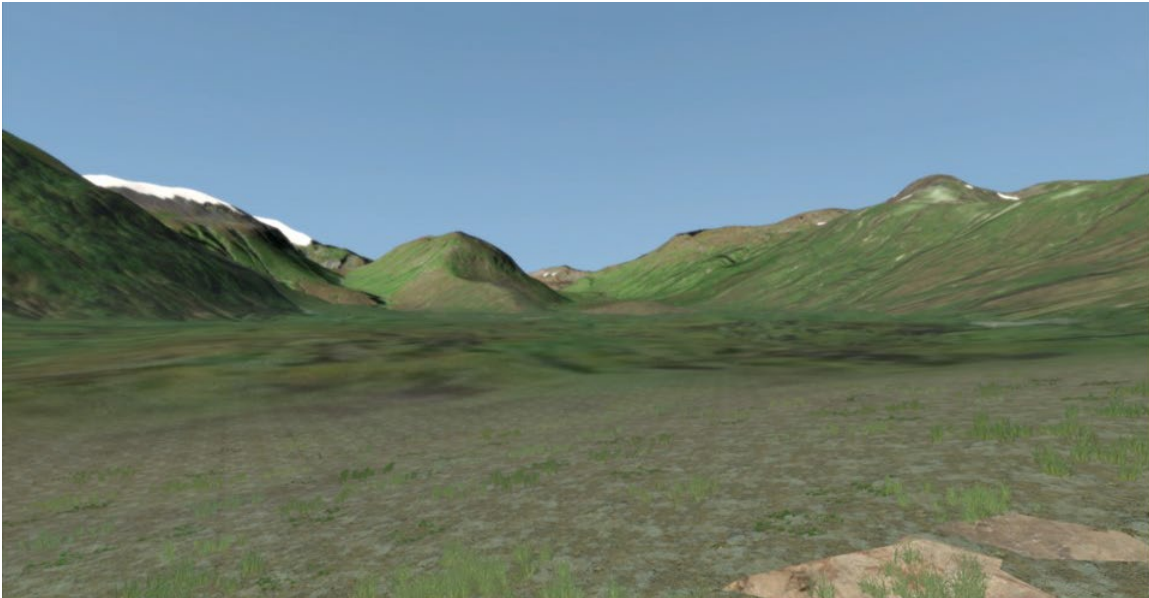
**Directions.** Aerial View of the terrain that matches the visual.



### **Orientation.**

- I. Do a brief review of the area from the map.
  - A. Holtz Bay, East and West Arms.
  - B. Massacre Bay and the Valley surrounded on three sides by high ground.
  - C. Cold Mountain and Black Mountain—and Jarmin Pass between them.
  - D. Jarmin Pass is the main way for the Northern and Southern Forces to link-up.

**Directions.** Move down to the ground level and take a view from valley near the end of the Hogback (a rock marks the location), looking at Jarmin Pass. The screen shot on the next page shows the view.



***Visual 8-2: Southern Force Struggles, 15-16 May***

**Description.**

I. Southern Force still struggled to advance.

A. At noon on 15 May, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT, supported by Company M of 3/17<sup>th</sup> RCT, tried to advance but was forced back under heavy fire.

B. On 16 May, another attack, again supported by Company M of 3/17<sup>th</sup>, had the same discouraging result.

B. Between May 11 and May 16 the Southern Force had made five distinct attempts to capture Jarmin Pass by frontal attack and failed.

1. US forces had not breached the Japanese main line of defense.

2. The American units had suffered heavily, not only at the hands of the enemy but also from exposure and lack of supplies.

***Visual 8-2: Click for the animation to show the supplies stacked in Massacre Bay.***

C. There were massive problems of moving and organizing supplies in Massacre Bay.

1. The vehicles collapsed the muskeg and turned the ground to mud—impassable for supply (and other) vehicles.

***Click again to remove the picture.***



2. The Americans had to use manpower to haul supplies. Taking several companies at a time out of the front lines.

3. As a quick fix, the soldiers devised an improvised rope-sled-tractor device to help get supplies over mountains (Hogback and others).

a. Once on higher ground (such as the Hogback), the soldiers drove and dragged a jeep to the higher ground.

b. They then took off the wheels on the rear (drive) axle. They then rigged ropes around the axle to connect to a position on the lower ground.

c. Then the jeep could turn the axle and pull up supplies attached to the rope.

4. Note—as shown earlier—there was a better supply organization at Red Beach, led by the Navy beachmaster, Squeaky Anderson. He ran the beach with absolute authority and did not allow delays at getting off the beach.

II. Realizing the difficult situation, General Brown ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> (less Companies A and B), thus far held on shipboard as a reserve, to be moved by sea to Massacre Bay to strengthen the Southern Force.

A. He also requested on May 14 the transfer of part of the Alaska Defense Command reserve from the island of Adak—the 1st Battalion of the 4th Infantry.

B. This request, seconded by Admiral Rockwell, was approved, and on May 17 the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry units left Adak for Massacre Bay and arrived the next day.

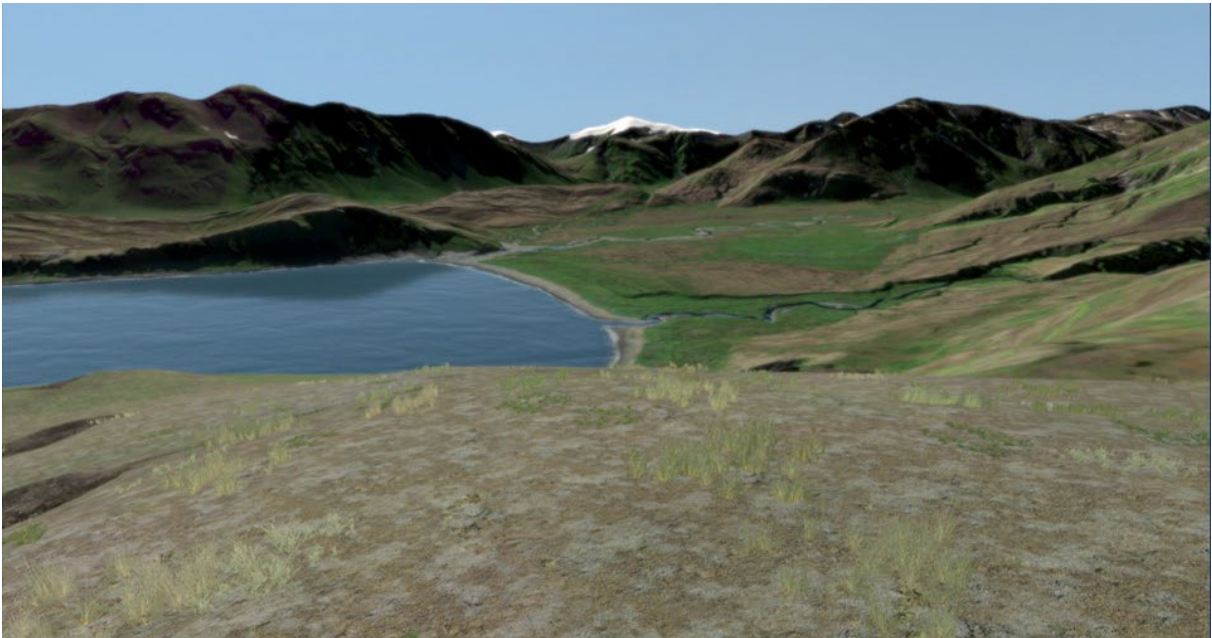
C. Thus the Southern Force was increased from its original three battalions to five.

II. Northern forces advanced slowly.

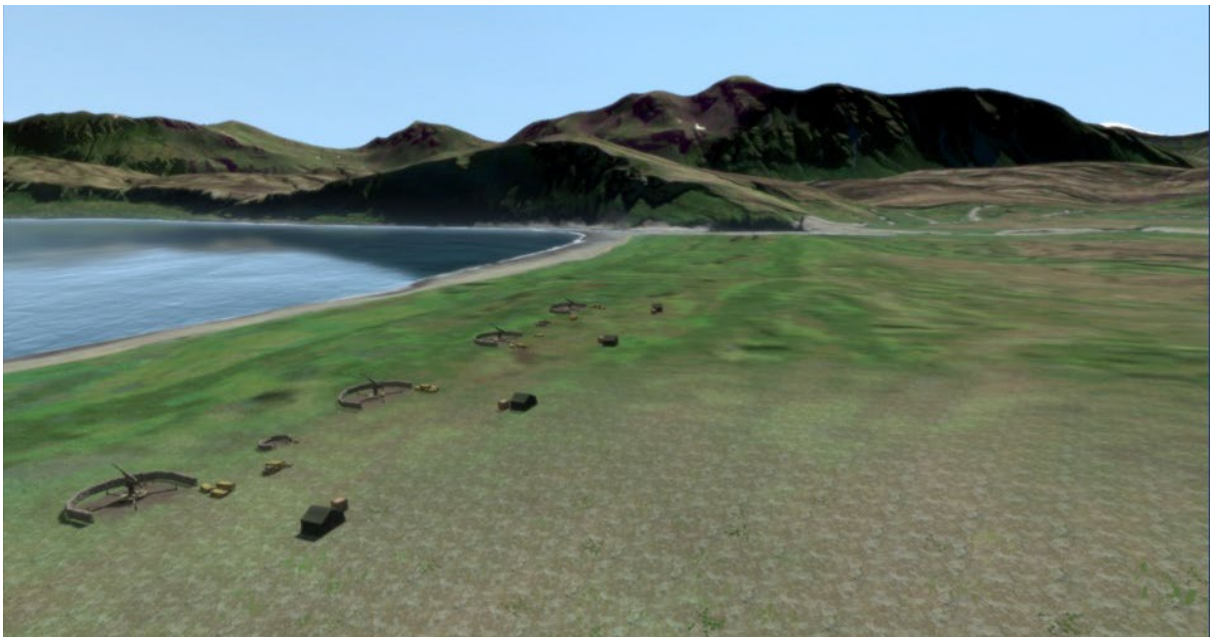
A. On the morning of 15 May, fog limited visibility to a hundred yards and forced a postponement of the attack of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT until shortly after 1100.

B. When the two battalions advanced down the slope they found that the enemy had pulled out of the camp and withdrawn to Moore Ridge, which separates the west arm from the east arm of Holtz Bay.

**Directions.** Go back to Hill X, looking down at the West Arm of Holtz Bay.



**Directions.** and then move down to the valley and to the Japanese positions in the West Arm of Holtz Bay. Look towards Moore Ridge.



C. The Japanese had left behind them large stores of food, ammunition, and miscellaneous supplies, including a battery of six 70mm. dual-purpose guns and some machine guns and mortars.

***Visual 8-3: Northern Force Advances Slowly, 15-17 May.***

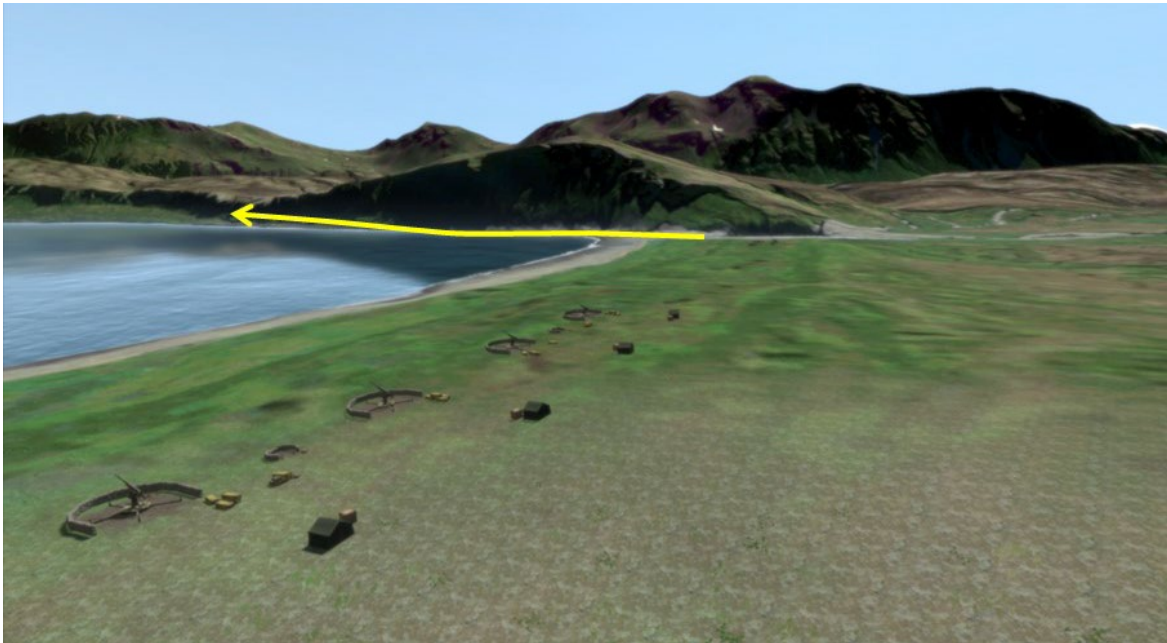
III. During the night of 15-16 May, the Northern Force pushed its lines forward for an attack on Moore Ridge.

A. With the coming of daylight, heavy Japanese machine-gun fire from the ridge pinned the leading elements of both battalions to the floor of the valley.

B. But detachments of Companies B and C of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT found a covered approach to the ridge along the beach, and they stealthily made their way up the slopes on the Japanese right flank to a point which dominated the main enemy positions.

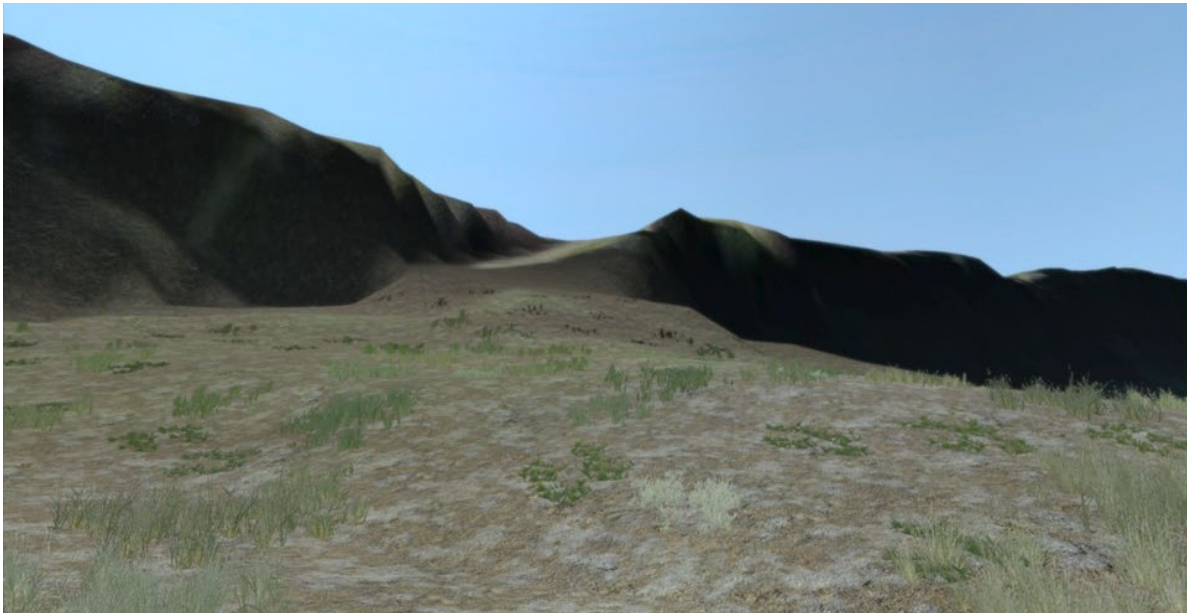
C. For this exploit Company B, which took the lead, received a Presidential unit citation.

**Directions.** Move along the beach edge and then to the bottom of the carved ravine that leads up to Moore Ridge. You should make the move close to the ground. Below shows the path along the beach.

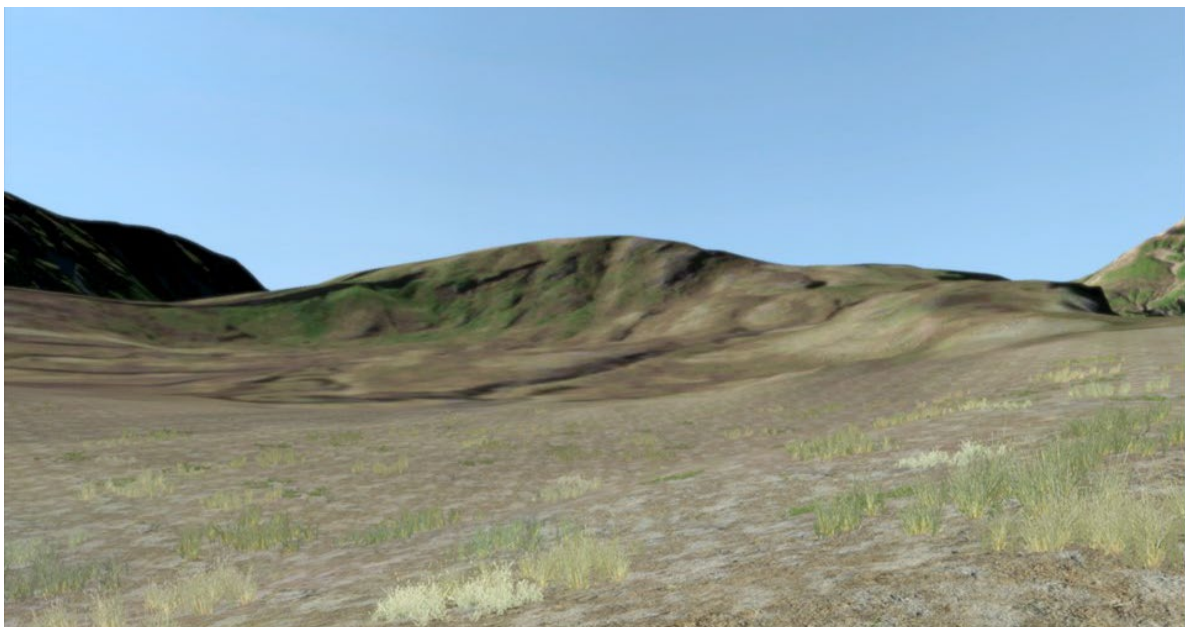


**Directions.** The screen shot on the next page is the view from the bottom of the ravine.





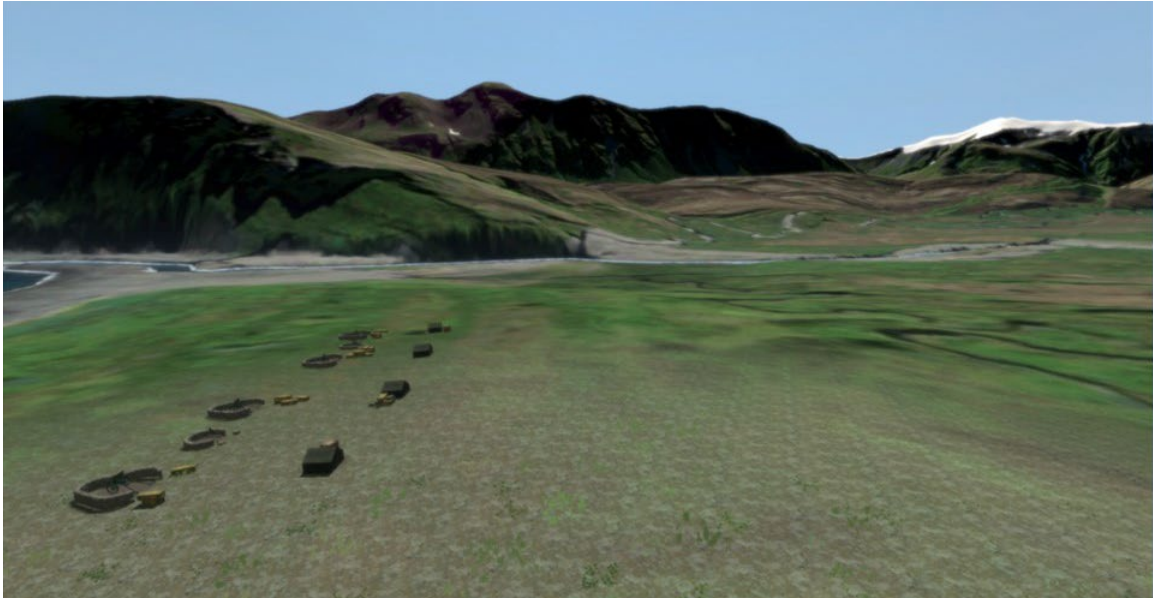
**Directions.** Move up the ravine to the top of the ridge, turning slightly looking at a high point of Moore Ridge.



IV. Colonel Culin (returning to command on the ground after his illness) ordered both battalions to make a coordinated night attack, which was launched at 0010 on May 17.

A. By 0300, the attack had reached the crest of the ridge without a casualty only to find that the Japanese had withdrawn in the darkness into the east-arm valley.

**Directions.** Return to the valley floor looking at Moore ridge further south at the second set of Japanese positions.



**Directions.** Then go in the air to show the attack look at the Japanese area in the East Arm (airfield is there).



B. The American force spent the rest of the night in consolidating its new positions.

C. In the morning, patrols sent into the east-arm valley met only slight resistance and it became evident that the enemy had moved back still farther to the heights in the direction of Chichagof Harbor, leaving the whole Holtz Bay area in American hands.



D. The loss of Moore Ridge and withdrawal from East Arm left the Japanese forces opposing the American Southern Force in a precarious position and in imminent danger of being taken from the rear by the American Northern Force's advance.

1. The Japanese commander, Yamasaki, decided to break off the battle against the Southern Force.

2. This meant a withdraw from the positions on Henderson Ridge and immediately surrounding Jarmin Pass in the direction of Chichagof.

3. During the night of May 16-17 the Japanese successfully executed this movement, undisturbed and unobserved by the Americans in Massacre Valley. On the morning of May 17 the Jarmin Pass lay open and undefended.

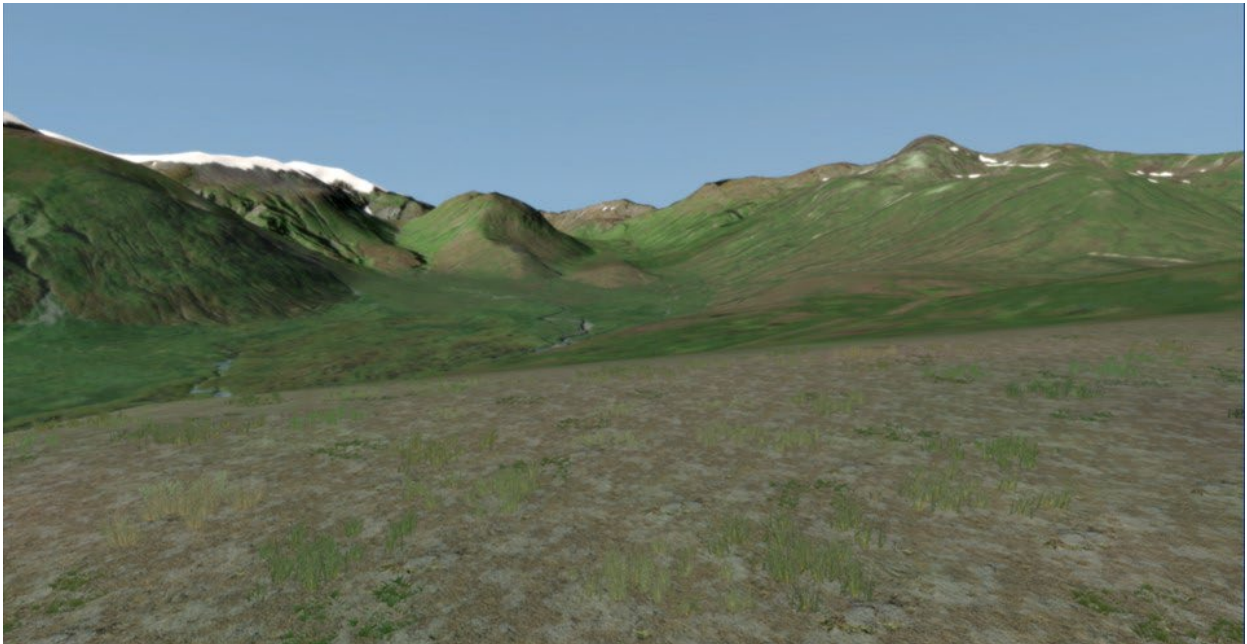
V. The day of May 17 passed quietly for the American Southern Force, a welcome respite after five hard days of combat.

A. Colonel Zimmerman, commander of the Southern Forces, spent the day in an advance observation post watching intently for activity in and around the pass.

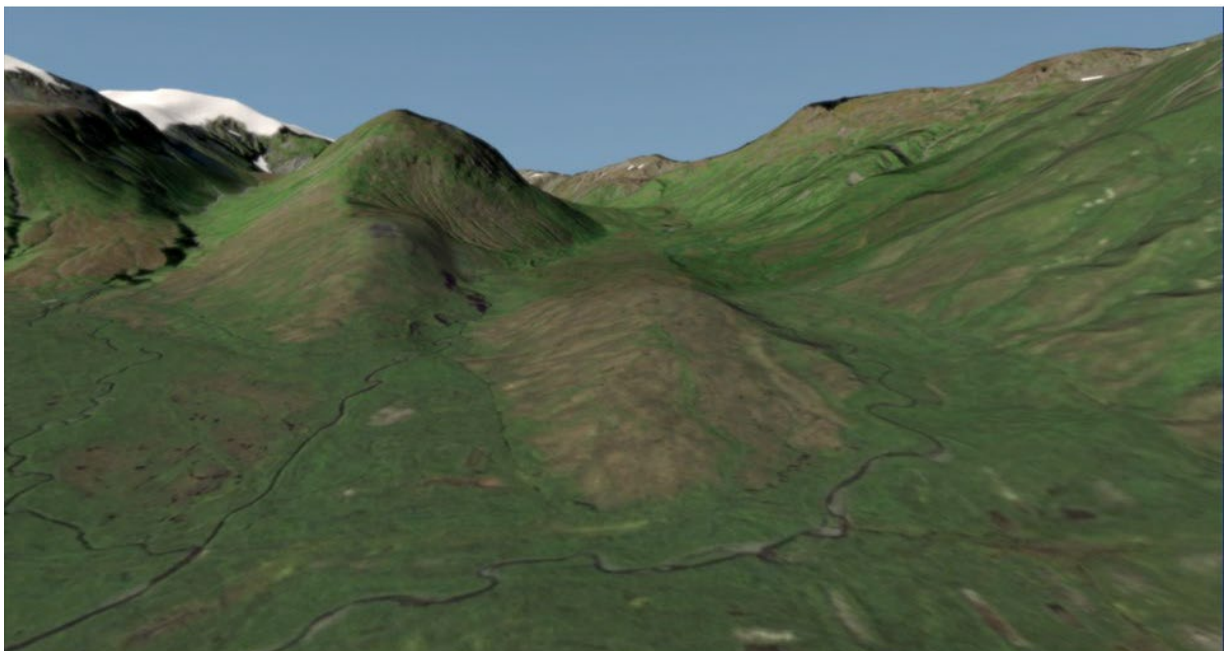
B. He concluded that the Japanese might have withdrawn and ordered forward a patrol of Company K of the 17th to reconnoiter. The patrol reported no signs of the enemy and Colonel Zimmerman joined it in person to assure himself that the pass was in fact abandoned. **Directions.** Go back to the Hogback at the rock showing the last position of US forces.



**Directions.** Then move forward to the end of Hogback.



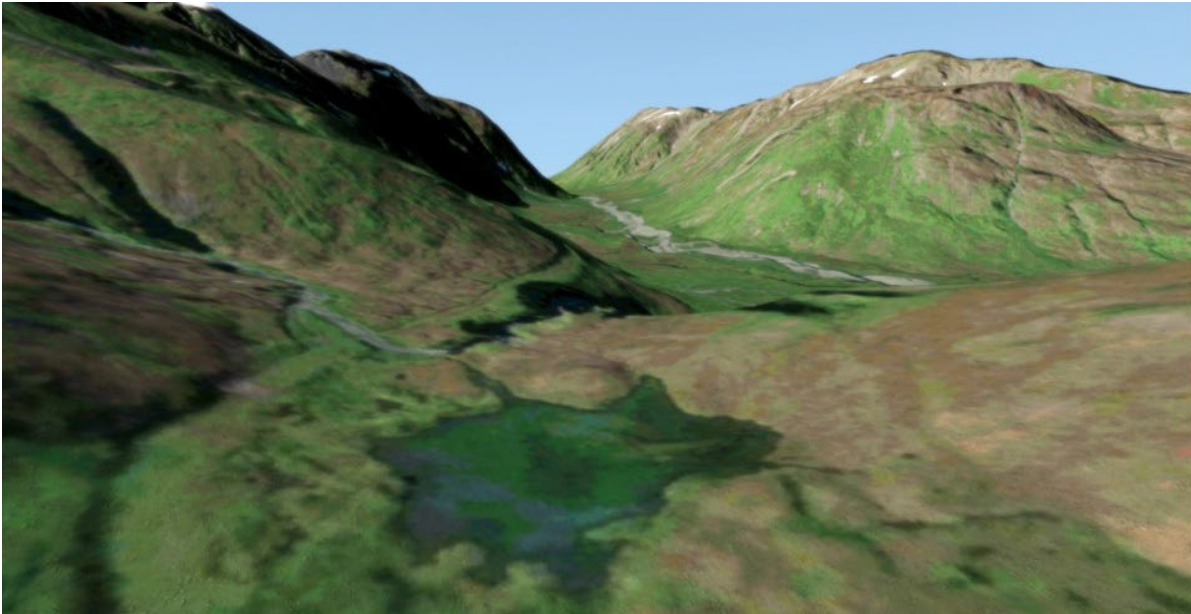
**Directions.** Then move forward to the beginning of the pass.



C. Satisfied of the enemy's withdrawal, he directed Company I to advance and occupy the pass.

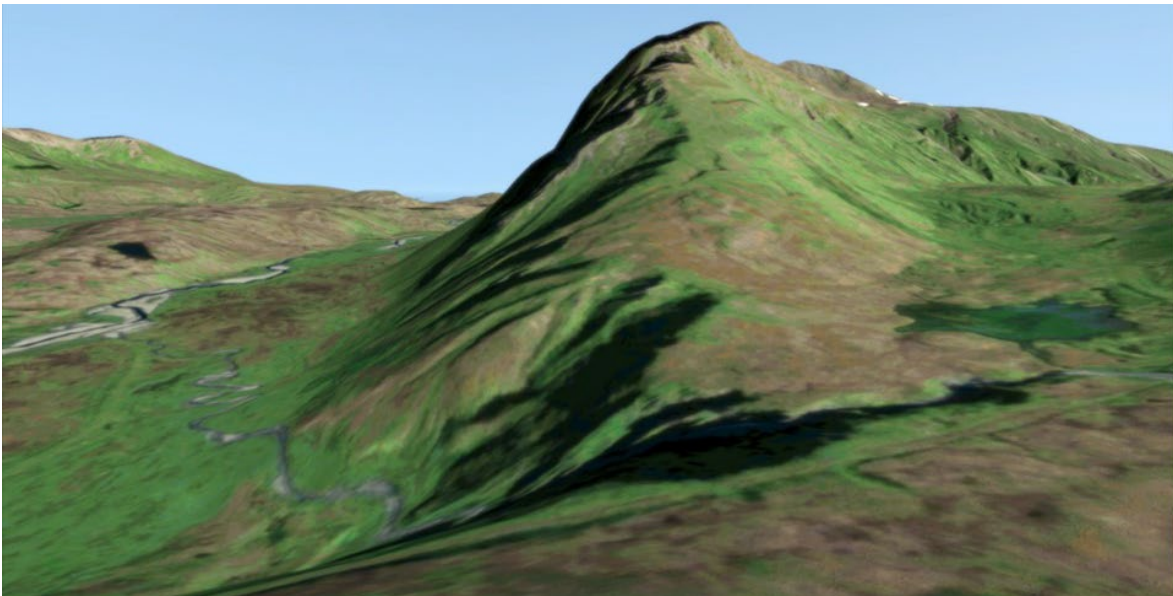
1. Once in the pass, Company I pushed forward another patrol under command of Lieutenant Morris C. Wiberg to investigate the other side of the pass.

**Directions.** Move through the pass.



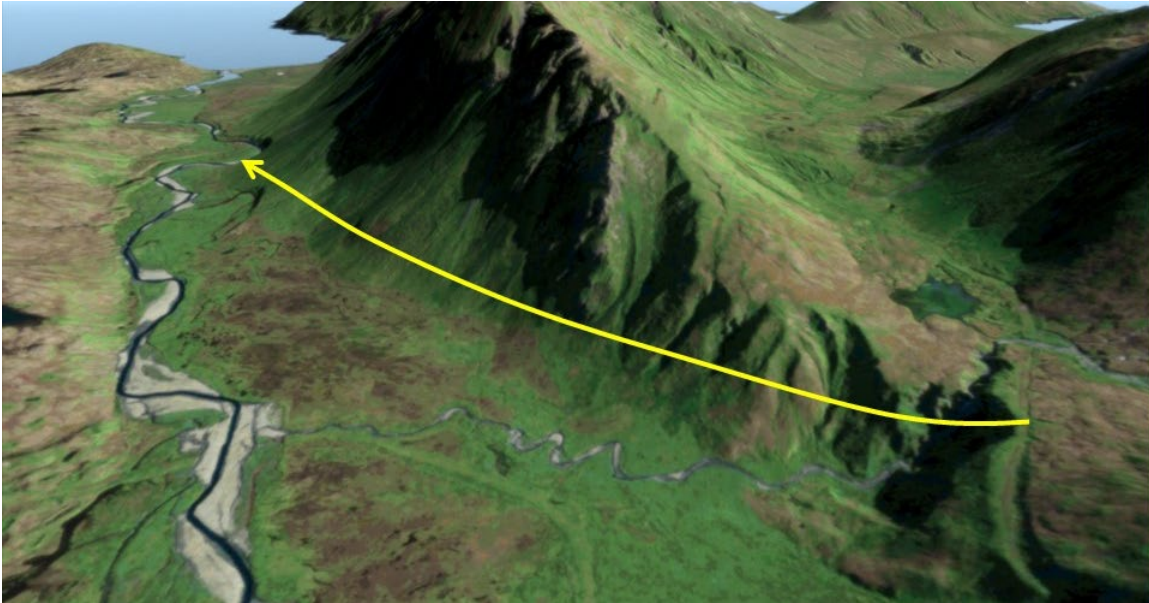
2. Advancing cautiously along the lower slope of the heights that dominated the east arm of Holtz Bay, the patrol encountered no enemy and at last dropped down to the valley floor.

**Directions.** Once through the pass, turn right. You will be looking down Prendergat Ridge.





**Directions.** Move along the lower slope (left side) of the ridge, and at stop briefly at the rock.



**Directions.** Turn left to go to the stream bed.



3. There at 0230 on May 18 Wiberg's patrol met a platoon of the 7<sup>th</sup> Reconnaissance Troop. Northern and Southern Forces had finally linked-up.

VI. On May 17, just as US forces had joined and isolated the Japanese in Chichagof Harbor area, MG was relieved of command of 7<sup>th</sup> Division and the Attu invasion force.

A. The events leading to Brown's relief had started earlier, not long after the initial landings.

B. The first issue was that Brown's forces did not take Jarmin pass on the first day (11 May) or then day 2.

1. Perhaps Brown may have underestimated the difficulties to be encountered in the initial landings.

2. On the other hand, Brown was in agreement with many others (Buckner, Rockwell, DeWitt) who may have set expectations too high for a soon capture of Jarmin Pass.

C. Communications difficulties also hindered Brown's efforts.

1. On 12 May, Brown sent 3 messages to Rockwell to ask for information about reinforcements (two battalions from 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT), but no message got through thanks the static that often disrupted radios in the Aleutians.

2. Also that day, a ship carrying much needed radio equipment (also with reinforcements), struck a rock on its approach and was towed back for repairs—unable to land its cargo.

3. On 13 May, Brown sent a fourth message through to Rockwell asking for the promised 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT reinforcements.

4. As a back-up to the failed radio communications, Brown had sent written reports by PBV, but the plane was lost and none of the written messages got through.

D. On 14 May, Brown asked Rockwell to send Buckner's Alaskan troops (4<sup>th</sup> RCT) to reinforce his efforts.

1. Brown rightly reported that Japanese strength was greater than anticipated.

2. Both Rockwell and Kincaid, having not received most of Brown's messages, felt that Brown was losing control of the situation.

3. The Navy commanders also feared reports that the Japanese Navy was going to make a major effort in the region.



4. Rockwell and Kincaid radioed to Brown that they would not commit 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment until the transports at Massacre Bay had cleared the beach.

E. Brown felt frustrated, and that the Navy did not understand his difficulties.

1. Similarly, the Navy leadership felt that Brown did not understand Navy's situation.

2. Mutual distrust grew so much that Brown's deputy, BG Archibald Arnold, later wrote "I suspected, the Navy vessels emptied their magazines rapid fire into the thick fog with no targets available so they could go back to Adak to rearm." (Garfield, *Thousand-Mile War*, 296).

F. On 15 May, the intelligence office at Adak, fearing that the Japanese were listening to the few voice radio messages that were available, ordered that they be stopped.

G. For the next two days, Brown was able to get only limited communication to Rockwell.

H. Thus, amid this confused situation, MG Eugene M. Landrum, formerly commanding on Adak, assumed command of all forces on Attu, relieving General Brown.

I. Colonel Lawrence V. Castner, the G-2 of the Alaska Defense Command, became General Landrum's deputy chief of staff.

### ***Analysis***

I. The difficulties with logistics at Massacre Beach were a major problem.

A. What had the planners failed to foresee?

B. What can we do today to avoid the type of supply difficulties we see at Attu's beaches?

II. Discuss Brown's relief. Was it deserved? Why or why not?

A. Relief of any leader is a difficult decision. What factors should be considered when looking to make the decision to relieve a leader?

B. Possible areas:

--Of course, the first issue is how bad is the leader and the unit situation. You would not relieve someone over a trivial matter.

--Is the person to be relieved popular—will it affect morale?

--Who is the replacement? Is he/she really better?

- How well will the new person know the situation, the unit, its SOPs?
- How much risk will the relief have, given the situation on the ground (i.e., a relief in the midst of battle is more risky than during a quiet period)?
- Other factors?

## Stand 9. Clevesy Pass and Prendergat Ridge

### Visuals.

*Visual 9-1: Attu: Advance Towards Chichagof (Part 1) 19-22 May 1943.*

**Directions.** Go to aerial view that matches visual.



**Orientation.** None at this time. There will be a map orientation later in this stand. The first terrain orientation will be in Stand 2.

### **Description.**

I. The Japanese positions around Jarmin Pass had been abandoned; the enemy had not been destroyed.

A. With Jarmin Pass in the hands of the Southern Force and the enemy installations at the end of the west arm of Holtz Bay in the hands of the Northern Force, it was a fair assumption that the Japanese had established a new principal base at Chichagof.

B. It could also be assumed that the rugged heights and valleys leading to it would be tenaciously defended.

C. The American plan of attack was based on these assumptions.

1. Southern Force, pushing out of Massacre Valley by way of Clevesy Pass, would advance on Chichagof from the south side.

2. Northern Force, after cleaning out the area around the east arm of Holtz Bay, would advance toward Chichagof along the northern slope of Prendergat Ridge.

II. The Southern Force spent the day of May 18 in reorganizing and regrouping its forces for an attack on Clevesy Pass and the adjacent heights.

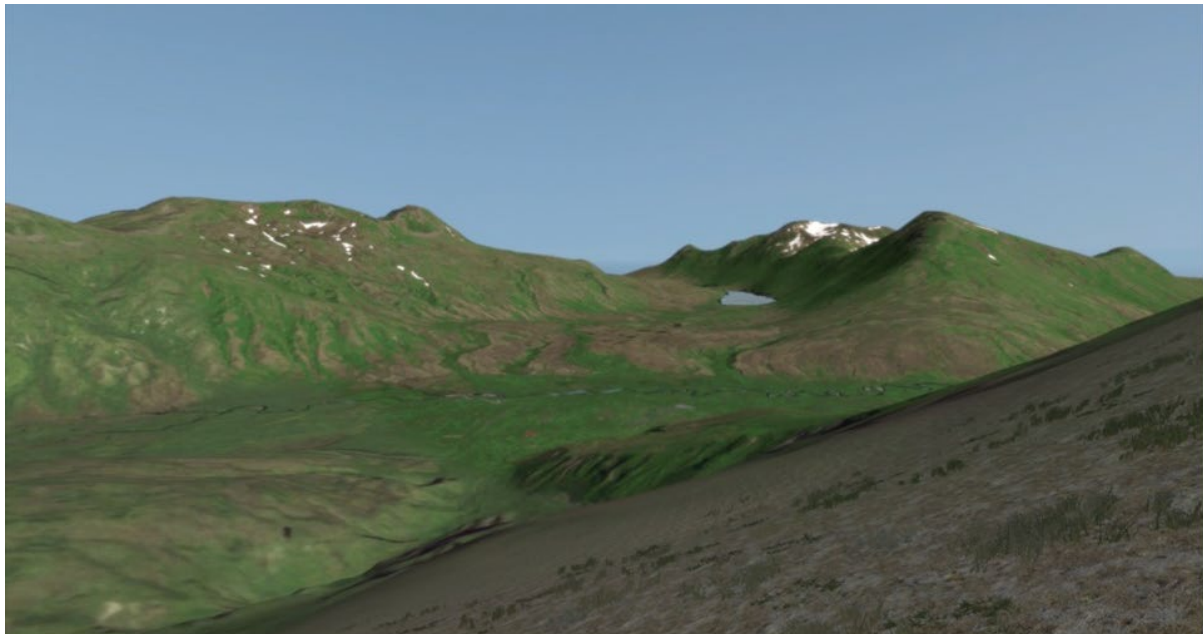
A. The 3d Battalion of the 17th, which had suffered heavily in the fighting for Jarmin Pass, was placed in force reserve, leaving one reinforced company, Company K, to guard the pass.

B. The 2d Battalion of the 32d moved into position near the command post of the 17th, and the 1st Battalion of the 4th moved about a mile up the Hogback, where it bivouacked for the night as the force reserve.

C. The main assault on Clevesy Pass was entrusted to the 2d Battalion of the 17th, with the 2d Battalion of the 32d in support.

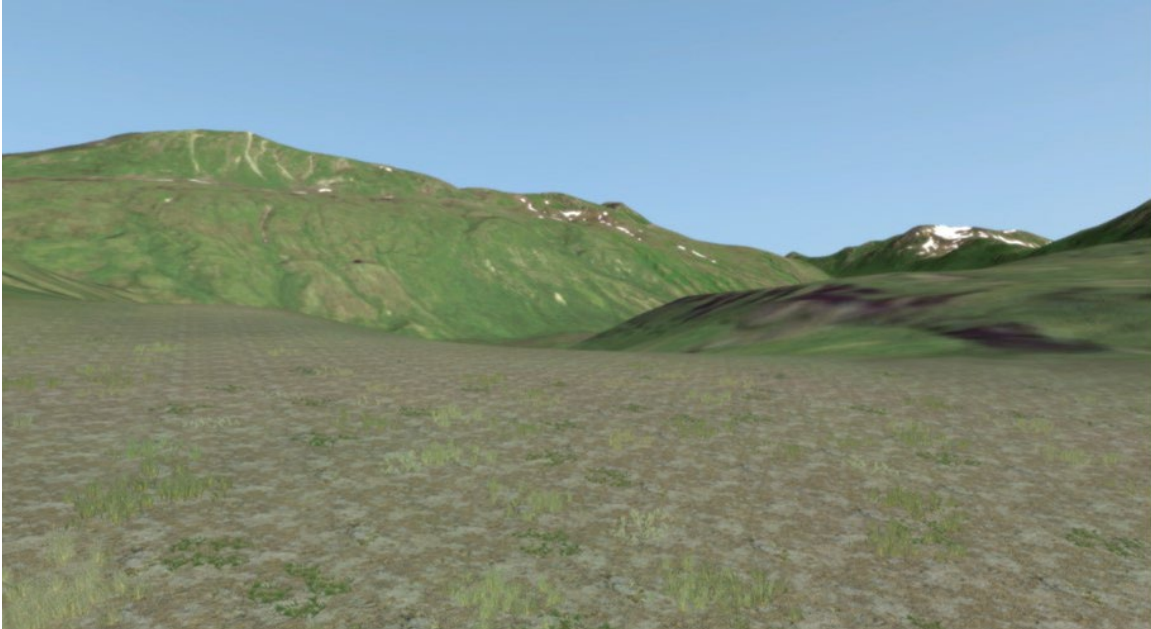
III. During the night of May 18-19, patrols went forward and at 0952 hours on the 19th 2/17<sup>th</sup> Infantry launched its attack supported by artillery fire.

**Directions.** Go to the Hogback and look toward Clevesy Pass.

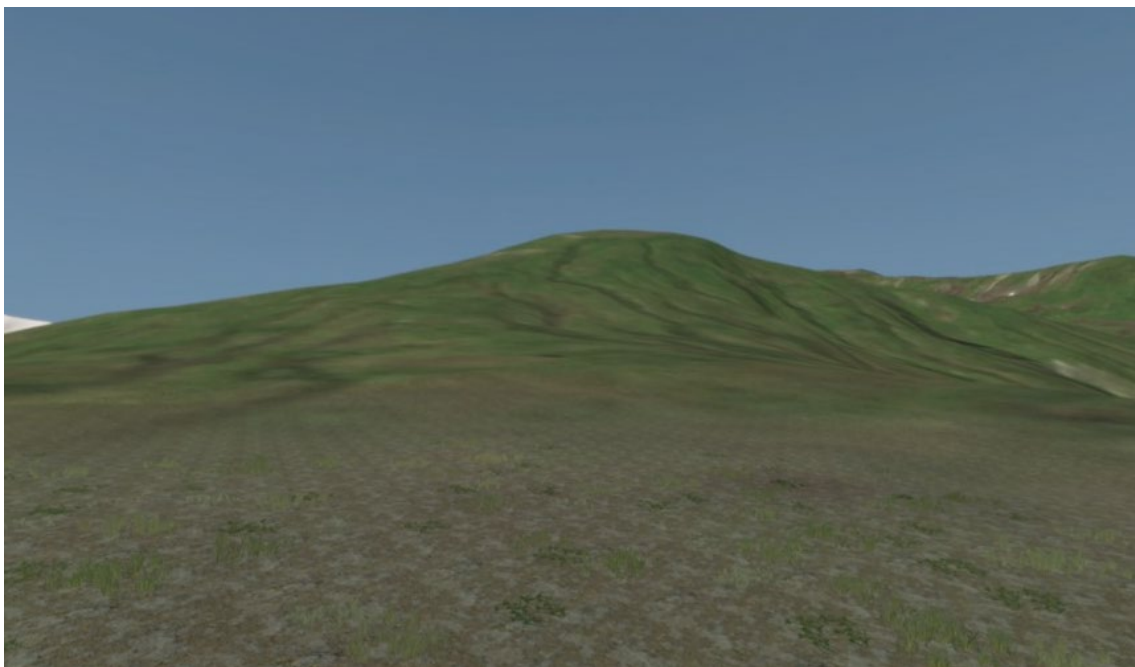


A. By noon it had advanced some 750 yards into the pass and during the afternoon the 2/32<sup>nd</sup> succeeded in clearing part of the high ground northeast of the pass.

**Directions.** Move into the pass, at slightly higher than ground level..

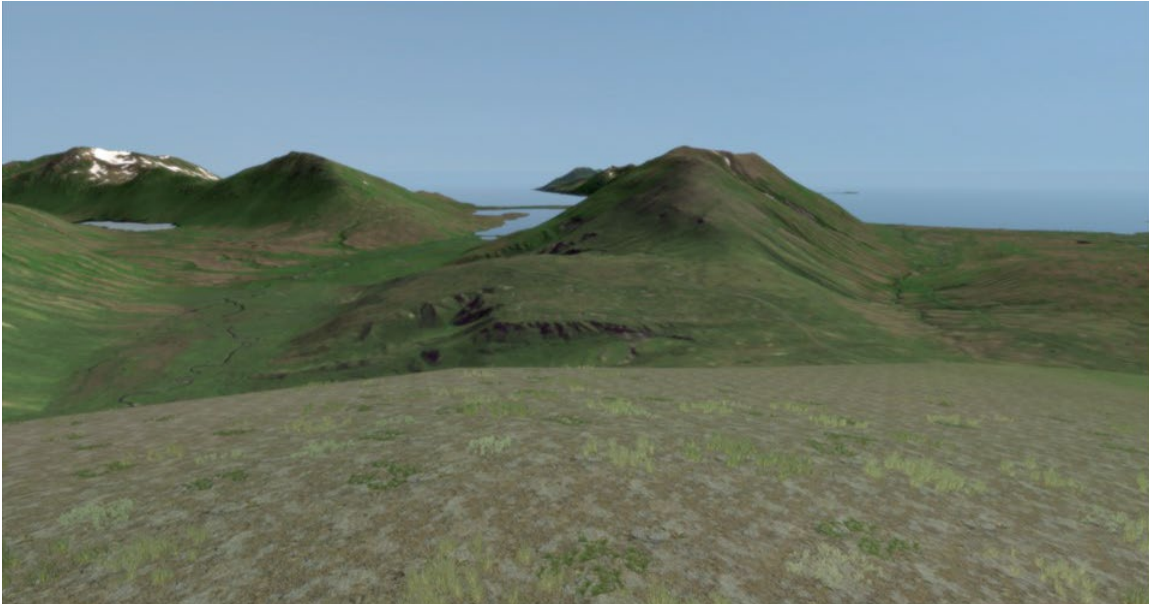


**Directions.** Once in the pass, turn left, facing Cold Mountain.





**Directions.** Go to the top of Cold Mountain, the turn around looking back at Engr Hill and Point Able.



B. The fighting continued, however, on the southeast side of the pass, particularly around Point Able, where a Japanese platoon, resisted all efforts of two companies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT to dislodge them. The Japanese lieutenant in command hurled derisive epithets in excellent English at the attackers.

C. During the night the fighting continued mainly on the high ground on the left side of the pass. In this area, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, released from force reserve, took over from 2<sup>nd</sup> BN of the 17<sup>th</sup> and soon after daylight proceeded through the pass up to Prendergast Ridge.

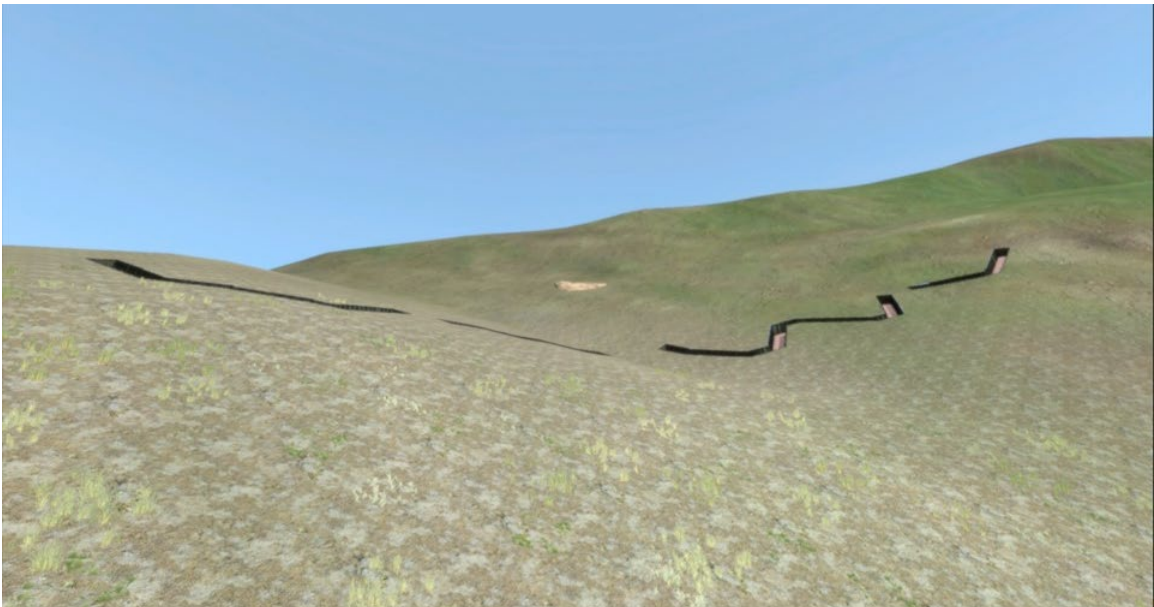
D. Progress continued during the day of May 20, when in the late morning Clevesy Pass was completely cleared of the Japanese.

E. It was not until the early morning of May 21, however, that Company E of the 32d, aided by Company C, finally reduced the enemy strong point at Point Able, wiping out the Japanese garrison in a gallant attack which won official commendation and a unit citation for Company E.

**Directions.** Move back to the Hogback, slightly further to the southeast, and looking at Point Able (Screen shot on next page). The circle is the location of the Japanese trenches.



**Directions.** Move at slightly above ground level and imitate the direct attack on Point Able—ending on the Japanese entrenchments.

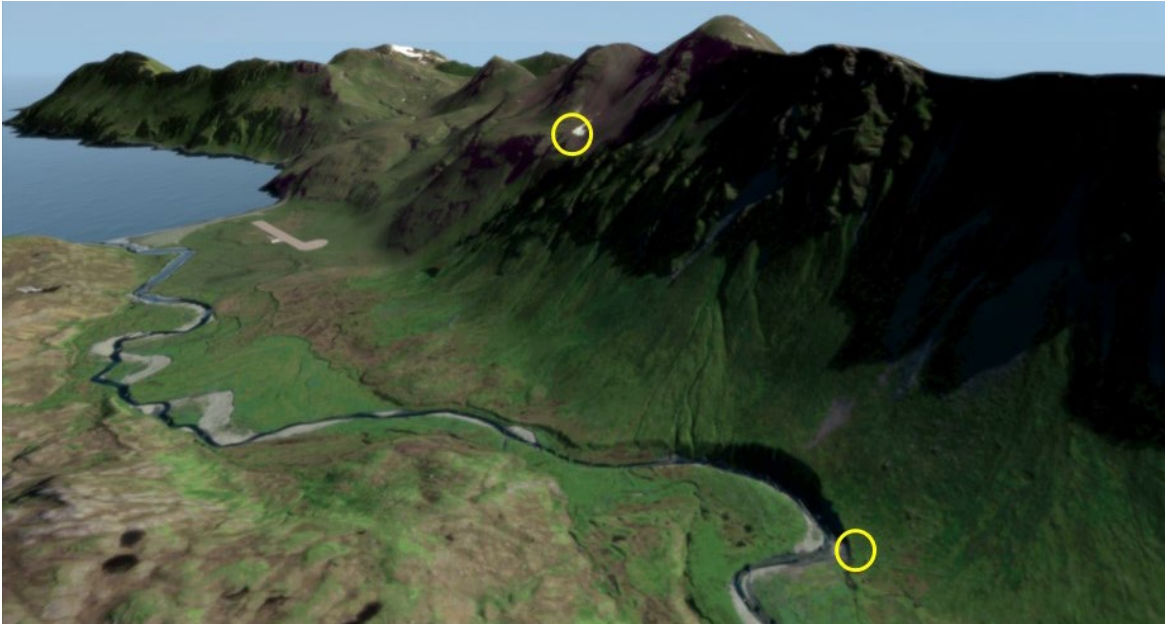


F. On the left of the pass, fighting continued on the upper slopes of Cold Mountain even after the pass itself had been opened, but in the morning of May 20 all enemy positions had been reduced by Company F and Company H of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.

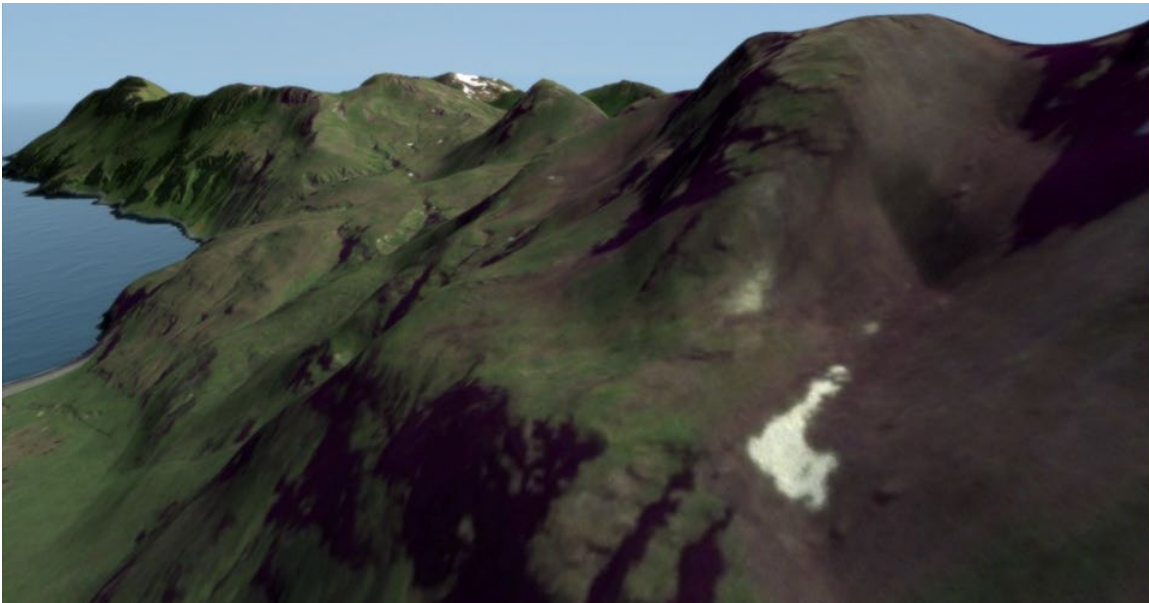
G. By the close of the day of May 21, Clevesy Pass with all its dominating heights, Cold Mountain, Engineer Hill, and Point Able, was in American hands. The Southern Force controlled all of Massacre Valley, and the 4th Infantry, despite strong enemy resistance, had reached a point halfway along the slope of Prendergast Ridge on its way toward Chichagof.

IV. While the Southern Force forced its way through Clevesy Pass, the Northern Force began its advance on the northern slope of Prendergat Ridge.

**Directions.** Move back to position on Prendergat Ridge, looking towards the northeast. First view is aerial that shows old location in valley and the new position on ridge to the upper right.



**Directions.** Below is the view from the ridge.



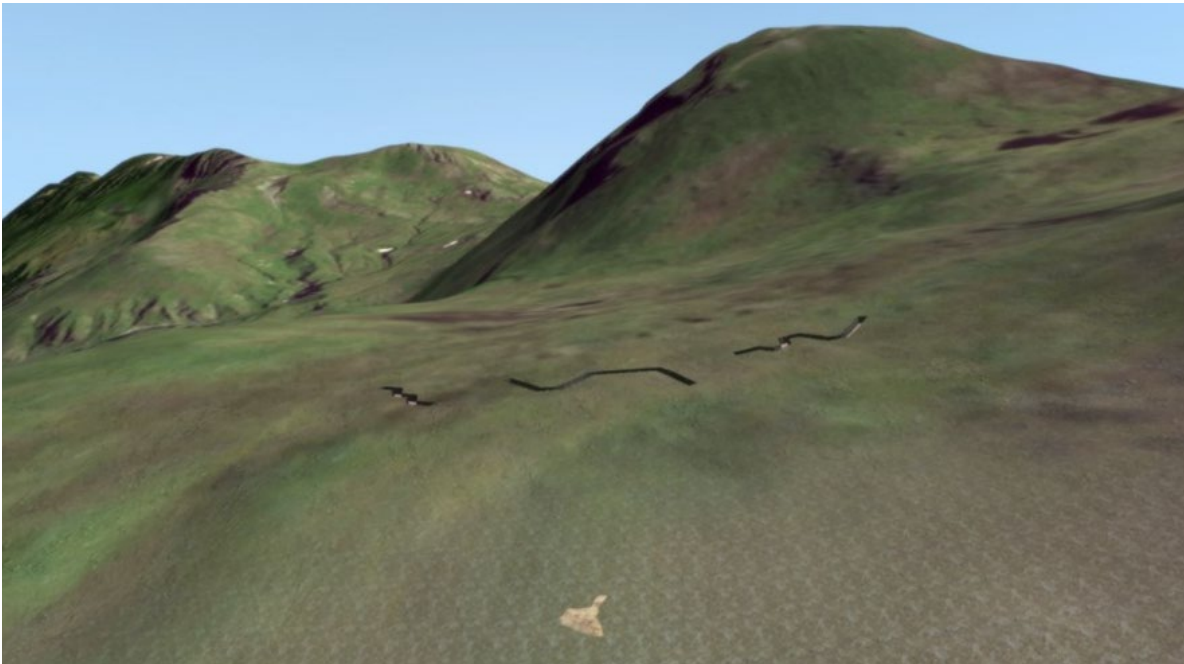


A. First, in order to guard against the possible arrival of Japanese reinforcements at the old base in Holtz Bay, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry organized the area for defense.

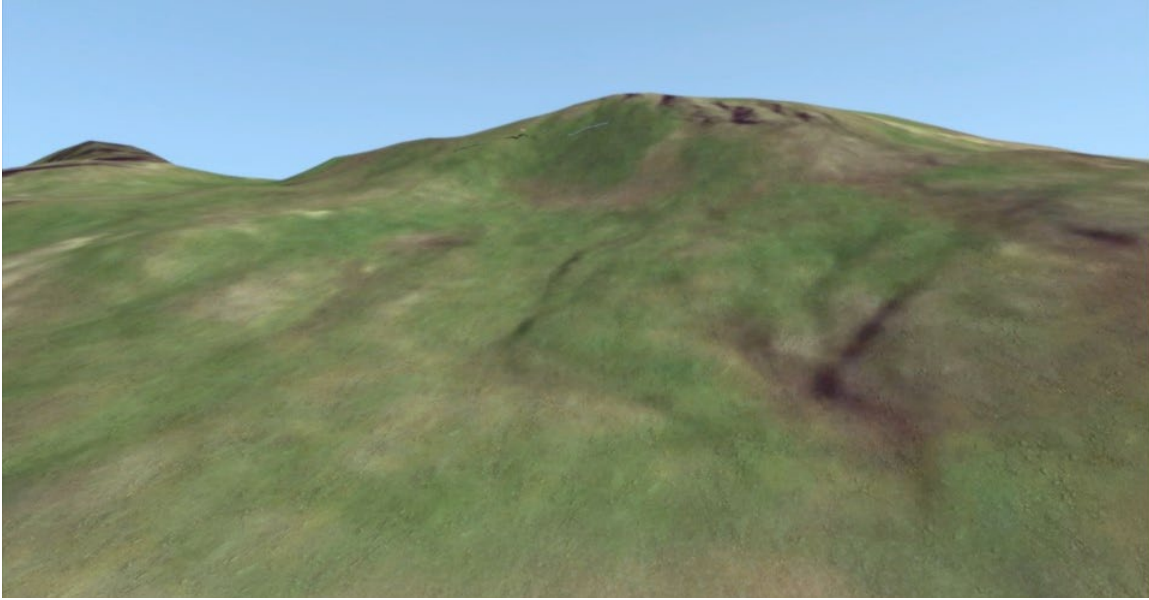
B. Then, one reinforced company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT started on May 19 up the steep trail leading over the mountains to Chichagof, but almost immediately encountered opposition so strong as to make it evident that reinforcements were needed.

C. The other companies of the battalion, plus two companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, were sent forward to reinforce.

1. Very slowly, almost yard by yard, this force made its way along the northern slope of Prendergat Ridge. They had to overcome positions on Prendergat on both side of the ridge. **Directions. Move forward to the Japanese entrenchments on north side of Prendergat.**



2. Finally, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the battalion reached the base of the steep and rugged semicircle of snow-covered mountains known as the Fish Hook., and then stop at base of Fishhook Ridge looking at Japanese trenches (see next page for screen shot).



3. Constantly under fire from good enemy positions on higher ground, the force had to overcome and destroy numerous snipers and machine-gun positions as it went along.

V. Meanwhile, on May 21, the Southern Force that had cleared Massacre Valley and its surrounding heights prepared to move on Chichagof, with the strong enemy positions on Sarana Nose as its first objective.

A. This mission was assigned to 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, with three infantry heavy machine-gun companies, D and H of the 32d and H of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup>, to give supporting fire from Engineer Hill on the opposite side of the valley.

B. At 0640 on the 22 May, the preparation fires started.

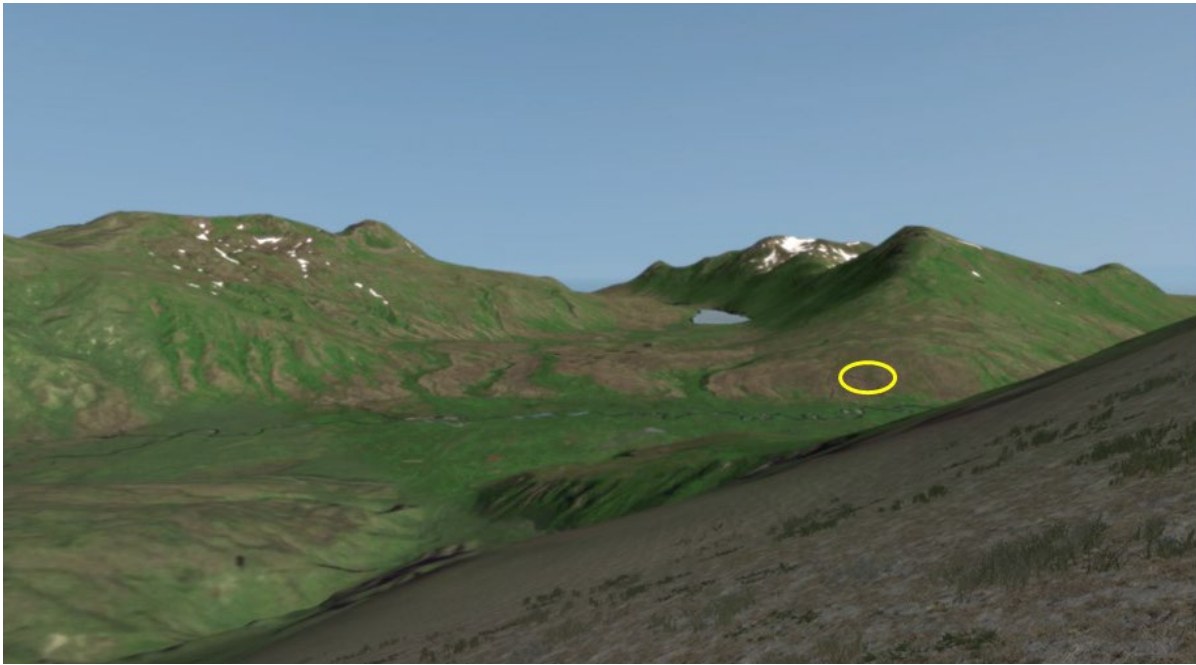
1. Thirty-two heavy machine guns, eight light machine guns, fourteen 37s, twenty-three 81mm. mortars, a section of 75mm. pack howitzers, and four batteries of 105mm howitzers opened fire.

2. The fire disrupted and demoralized the Japanese defenders.

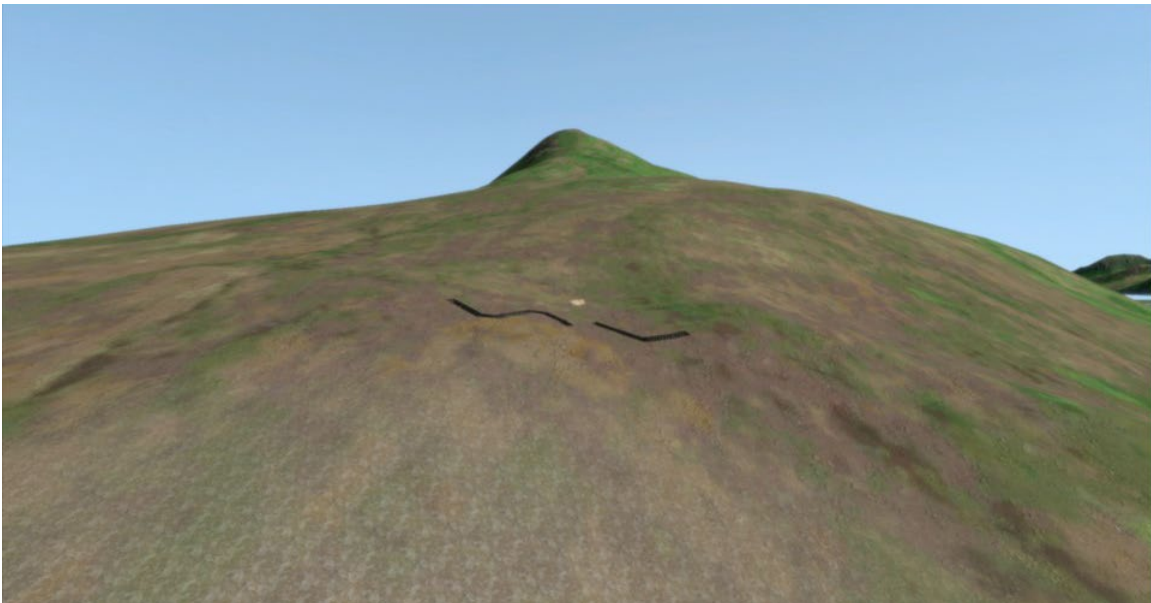
C. At 0700 the American infantry moved forward over the flat, coverless valley. And when Company K reached and stormed up the slope of Sarana Nose, it found the first enemy emplacements entirely deserted.

**Directions.** Move back to Point Able, facing Sarana Nose (see next page for screen shot).



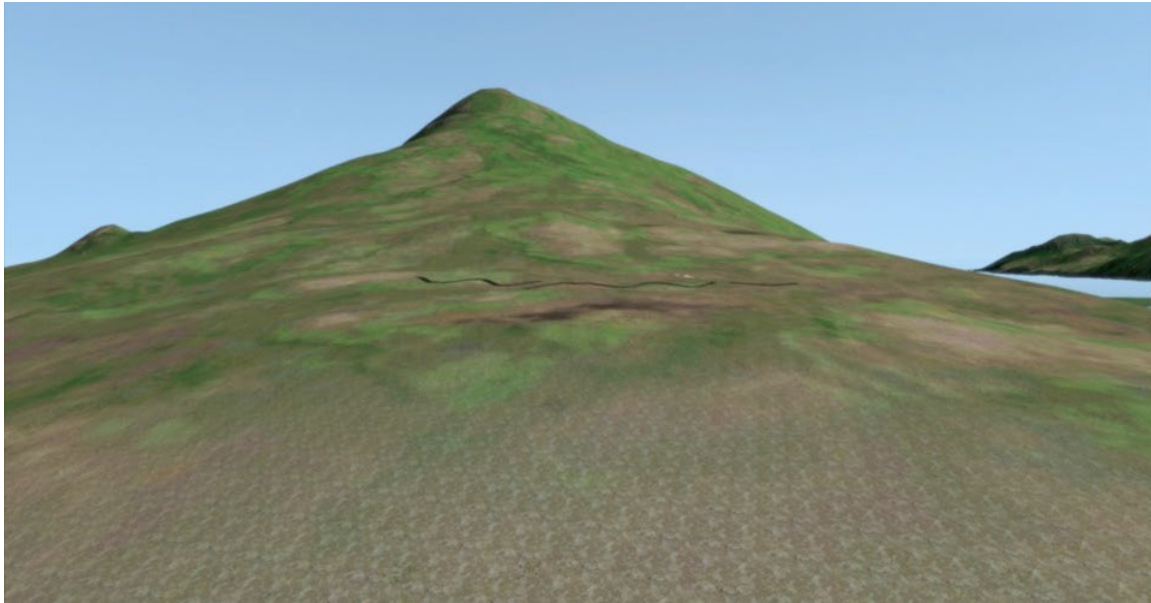


**Directions.** Then move across the valley to the first (lower) set of Japanese trenches going high enough over the stream that is not filled.



D. At the second line, as the company moved farther on up the hill, it found the Japanese defenders unwilling to surrender, but so badly dazed and shaken as to be incapable of serious resistance. Many were killed, and many ran away at top speed.

**Directions.** Move further up the hill closer to the ground and to the second set of Japanese trenches.



E. By early afternoon the whole of Sarana Nose was in American hands and Companies I and L had joined Company K in consolidating defensive positions on the Nose. American casualties were very light. This action is a fine example of the results that can be obtained from carefully coordinated action by infantry and its heavy weapons and Field Artillery support.

VI. While the battle for Sarana Nose drove forward, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry was in action on the slope of Prendergast Ridge.

A. At dawn on 22 May, Company A saw troops coming over the crest of the ridge from the Holtz Bay side.

1. Unable to distinguish in the fog whether they were friendly or Japanese troops, but thinking that they might be elements of the Northern Force, Company A withheld its fire.

2. A quick call to headquarters brought out that the Northern Force had to pull back during the night, and that accordingly the troops encountered must be Japanese.

B. With this information, Company A engaged the enemy along the ridge, but met such strong opposition that it made little progress even though reinforced by a platoon of Company B.

1. At last convinced of his inability to dislodge the Japanese from their rocky position on the crest of the ridge with the weapons at his command, the company commander called for artillery support—this in spite of the poor visibility caused by fog.

2. Within a few minutes shells from the 105mm. howitzers began to crash along the top of the ridge, driving the defenders out from behind the rocks that concealed them and permitting Company A to take them under rifle and machine-gun fire.

3. Painfully, but steadily, the company pushed forward up the precipitous slope, firing as it went, and finally reached the summit of the ridge.

*Analysis*

## Stand 10. Advance on Chichagof

### Visuals.

*Visual 10-1: Attu Advance Towards Chichagof (Part 2) 23-28 May 1943.*

**Directions.** From the last position at Sarana Nose, take a position, looking at Chichagof Harbor towards the sea. The purpose of this view and the next is to show the harbor defenses and why the US did not land here.



**Directions.** Zoom down to the Japanese battery on the peninsula to the left.





**Directions.** From, gun positions go back in the air and take a position in the air, looking north with the Fishhook and Sarana in view. This stand has no further movements, but you will use this view to point out locations as you do the description below.



**Orientation.**

- I. Point out the key terrain from this view.
  - Fishhook Ridge.
  - Sarana Nose
  - Chichagof Harbor
  - Attu Village
  - The battery protecting the harbor

**Description.**

I. The capture of Sarana Nose and Prendergat Ridge made possible a direct attack against the entrance to Jim Fish Valley (Chichagof Valley). The Southern Force had taken a long step on the road to Chichagof.

II. The Japanese now occupied the inner perimeter of defense around their Chichagof Harbor base.

A. Their positions in the south sector ran in a straight line from Fish Hook Ridge down to the Valley short of Lake Cories.

B. Any US effort to push down the valley floor would bring an attacking force under flanking fire from the shelf below Buffalo Ridge as well as from the lower ground between the ridge and Lake Cones.



C. Accordingly, sticking to the general tactics he had followed since assuming command—a policy of taking and dominating high ground before trying to move along the valleys—General Landrum decided to attack Fish Hook Ridge.

D. The mission was initially given to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, which relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> on the morning of 23 May.

1. At 1700, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion launched its attack, but it was able to advance only 200 yards before concentrated machine-gun fire halted it.

2. No further progress was made on that day.

III. On the Holtz Bay side of Prendergast Ridge, 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT advanced.

A. Reinforced by two companies from the 1st Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, after several days of hard fighting, had reached positions from which it could participate in the attack against the Fish Hook to the left of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT.

B. A coordinated attack by both battalions was launched at 1000 on the 24 May.

1. Some initial progress was made along the slopes on opposite sides of the ridge line joining Prendergast Ridge to the Fish Hook.

2. But heavy machine-gun and rifle fire sweeping the narrow approaches to the Japanese positions compelled the attackers to halt.

C. After nightfall they Americans were forced to withdraw substantially to their starting points.

C. In the course of the day the attacking force was reinforced by Companies C and D of 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT, which went into action on the right of the 17<sup>th</sup> and made some progress. In the night the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the 4<sup>th</sup> RCT was moved into supporting positions behind the 17<sup>th</sup> units.

D. The Japanese defense was strong and in places so covered over as to be virtually invisible, and they held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> pinned down.

1. On the morning of 25 May, Company F of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT cleared part the trenches, advancing above it to a narrow ledge on the slopes of the Fish Hook where it held its position under heavy fire until the rest of the battalion came to its support.

2. Company B of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion moved up behind the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of 17<sup>th</sup> RCT, but suffered numerous casualties from enemy snipers who had stayed in position below the 17<sup>th</sup>.

E. At daylight on 26 May, 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the 17th and Company B of the 4<sup>th</sup> RCT firmly held their positions on the base of the Fish Hook.

F. The rest of the trench, which had held up the advance of the Northern Force, was destroyed by two platoons of Company A of the 4<sup>th</sup> RCT.

1. They descended on it from above while the Northern Force, consisting of the 3d Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> and Companies A and C of the 1st Battalion of the 17th, attacked the Holtz Bay side of the Fish Hook known as Bahai.

2. This action, in which Companies I and K of the 32<sup>nd</sup> particularly distinguished themselves and received unit citations, was entirely successful.

3. The Northern Force was now established on Fish Hook Ridge in positions that it held until the final assault on Chichagof on May 30.

G. Meantime, at the eastern end of the Fish Hook, the 1st Battalion of the 4th was finding heavy going among the high peaks and jagged knife-edged ridges.

1. There was an action of platoons, squads, and individuals against enemy machine- gun and sniper positions, well chosen, widely dispersed, and artfully concealed among the rocks and snowdrifts.

2. The principal units in this fight were Companies A, C, and D of the 4th. Company D, which had had the toughest work in the opening phase of the action, was temporarily placed in battalion reserve, only to return to the front on the closing day.

3. It was May 28 before every part of the Fish Hook was in American hands.

H. While the attack against the Fish Hook was in progress, the 1st Battalion (less Companies A and B) and the 2d Battalion of the 32d began a series of attacks to capture Buffalo Ridge, which was lower than the Fish Hook and not so formidable.

I. At the same time that the attack on Buffalo Ridge started, 1830 on 28 May, a force consisting of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion of the 17<sup>th</sup> RCT with Company B of the 32<sup>nd</sup> attached, began an advance, proceeding to a point beyond the southern edge of Lake Cones where it halted for the night, establishing patrol contact with the 32<sup>nd</sup> on Buffalo Ridge to the left.

IV. The US forces had now closed around the Japanese forces gathered at their base at Chichagof Harbor.

A. The situation that existed in Massacre Valley in the early days of the battle was reversed. The Japanese, with the sea at their backs, were now crowded into a small, flat area hardly susceptible of defense.

B. The American forces, in superior numbers, held the dominating heights around them. The Japanese position seemed tactically hopeless. It seemed to the Americans that the bitter struggle—it had been much harder and longer than at first expected— was finally about to come to a victorious conclusion.

C. General Landrum determined to move in for the kill with an attack by his full force the following morning, May 29. In the night of May 28-29, for the first time since the beginning of the battle, no infantry was left in force reserve.

### *Analysis*

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## Stand 11. Engineer Hill: Japanese Attack and Aftermath

### Visuals.

*Visual 11-1: Japanese Counterattack.*

**Directions.** First, keep last view of terrain.



**Directions.** Before orientation, simulate the move of US forces clearing Prendergat and going to Fishhook and then go to Attu Village.



**Directions.** Once at the village, go to the ground, turn and look up the valley (to the left of the village).



**Orientation.**

- I. You are looking at Chichagof village, where the Japanese consolidated their forces before the final attack.
- II. The attack skirted the base of hill that is on the right and then turned to go up the valley.

**Description.**

- I. Lack of Japanese reinforcements.

A. The Japanese commander, Yamasaki, had repeatedly assured his men that help in the form of heavy reinforcements was on the way. Whether this was merely a step taken on his own initiative to bolster the morale of his men, or whether he had in fact received assurances from the Japanese High Command that his force would be strengthened or extricated, may never be known.

B. In any case, the expected reinforcements never arrived and so far as is known they never started. Nor was any effort made to take the Japanese garrison off the island by sea, as was later done at Kiska.

C. The only assistance the Japanese received came in the middle of the afternoon of May 22, the day of the attack on Sarana Nose, when a flight of ten low-flying planes suddenly appeared out of the mist and launched twelve torpedoes against the United States cruiser *Charleston* and the destroyer *Phelps*, which were lying off Massacre Bay.



1. None of the torpedoes hit its mark. The planes circled briefly over Chichagof Harbor, dropping some white packages, and then disappeared westward.

2. A Few minutes later a “large flight of high-flying heavy bombers or many lights” was reported seventy-four miles south of Chichagof Harbor. Six American P-38s from Amchitka immediately took off to intercept them.

3. When contact was made they were found to be sixteen heavy bombers, which jettisoned their bombs and fled. Nine were reported shot down into the sea. Except for these two brief and abortive air attacks, the Japanese forces defending Attu received no help.

## II. Yamasaki’s Decision.

A. In the evening of May 28, Yamasaki found himself in a desperate situation.

1. For eighteen days he had fought a stubborn and skillful delaying action, giving ground only under pressure, but in the process he had lost approximately seventy per cent of his force.

2. He now had some 700 men, battle-weary, undernourished, and despondent over the failure of expected reinforcements to arrive. The loss of the Holtz Bay base had cost him a large proportion of his supplies and most of his artillery.

3. He had abandoned any hope that help might come from Japan, and he had no illusions as to the tactical strength of his position.

4. He knew that he was confronted by a powerful, confident enemy, greatly superior in numbers and tempered by the fire of battle. And he had to assume that this force would strike hard and without delay.

B. Four possible courses of action seemed to lay open to him:

1. To surrender, which was unthinkable under the Japanese military code.

2. To make a suicidal last stand at Chichagof, which would be useless and wholly unprofitable.

3. To attempt a further withdrawal into the hills in the direction of Klebnikoff Point and there carry on the fight; but this would delay matters only a few days at best, for he would eventually be cornered again and he lacked the means of carrying away any substantial quantity of food or ammunition.

4. To counterattack. Only this last course of action seemed to offer any possibility of success.

C. Knowing that the main American forces were occupying the ridges of the Fish Hook, he reasoned that the weakest point in the ring that encircled him would be the floor of the valley.

1. By a sudden, brutal assault, executed by his entire force and under cover of darkness which would neutralize flanking fire, he might be able to cut his way through to the American battery positions behind Engineer Hill.

2. Once he captured the American guns, even if just a few of them, the main American base at Massacre Bay could be captured or destroyed despite the American superiority in numbers. There was a chance that the situation might be reversed or that the invaders might be compelled to re-embark and start over again.

3. It was a desperate gamble, with a bare possibility of brilliant victory if it succeeded—but certain death if it failed. At 0030 on May 29 Yamasaki issued his order for the counterattack.

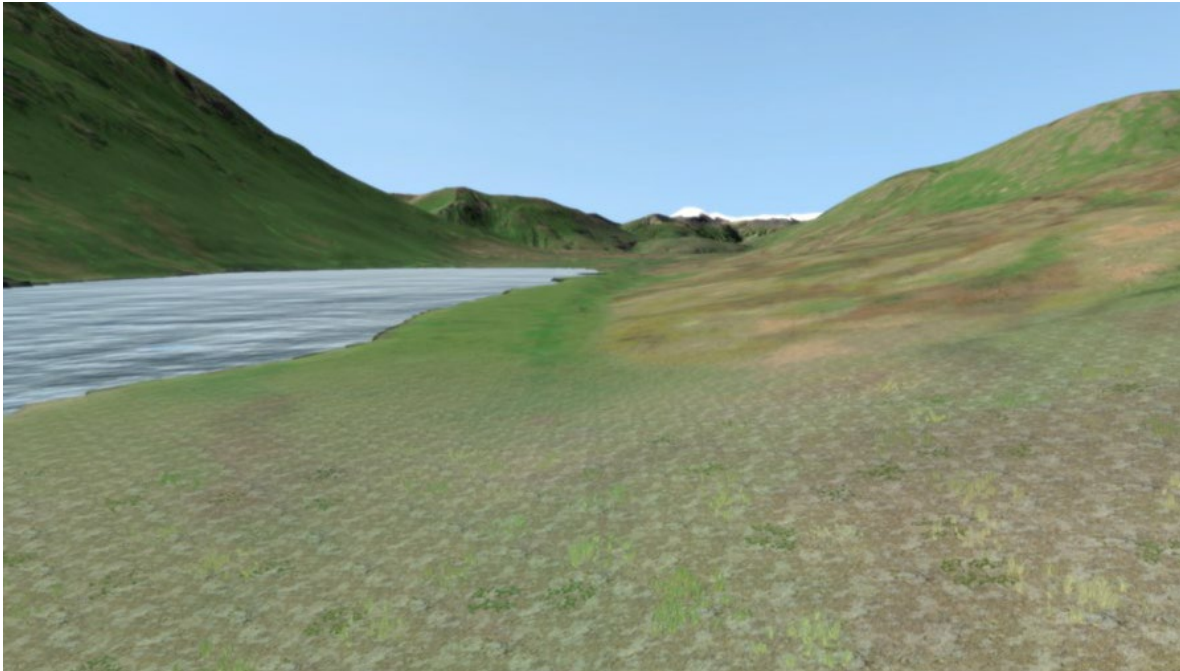
### III. The attack.

A. The attack began sometime between 0200 and 0300. The Japanese moved in a mass and initially met little to no opposition.

**Directions.** From the village move up valley. The screen shot below shows the overall route to Engineer Hill from the air. But you should travel close to the ground to simulate the Japanese attack from the soldiers' perspective.



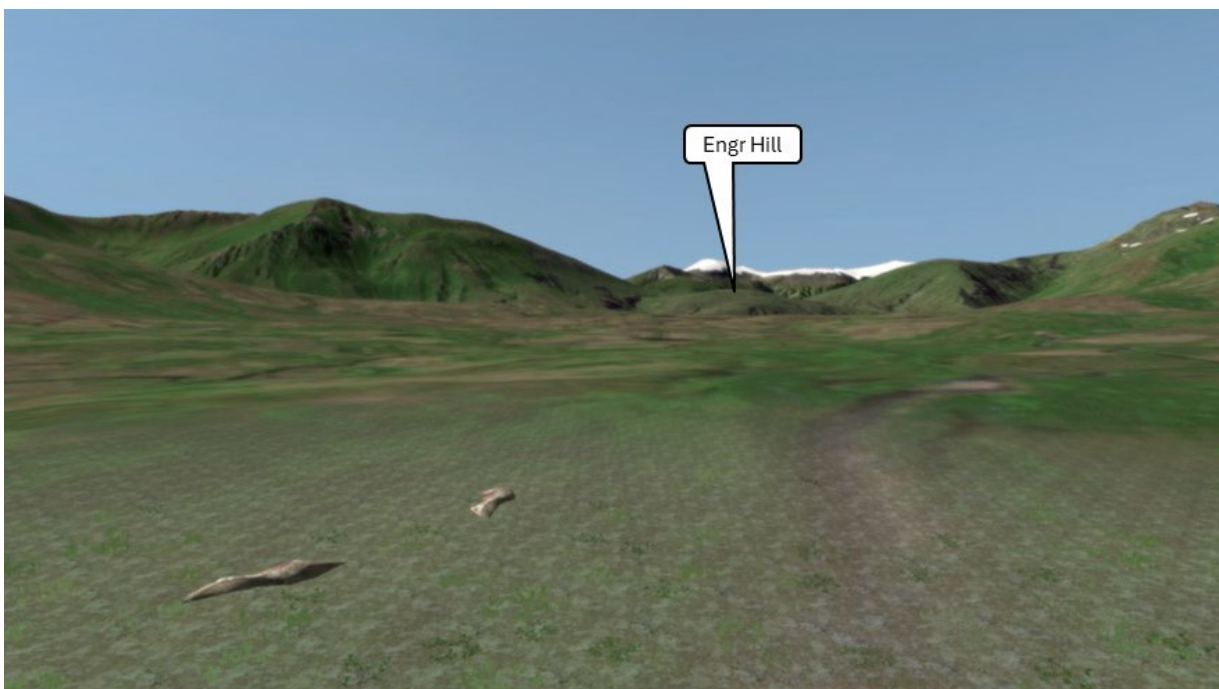
**Directions.** Start up valley until you reach the lake.



**Directions.** Continue on the right side of lake until you pass the lake, and then stop at a set of rocks. Below is a view from the air to show the location of the rocks (but you should move closer to the ground).



**Directions.** On the next page is a view from the ground of the rocks where you stop.



B. Before the Japanese attack began, Company B of the 1/32<sup>nd</sup> took up a position for the night on the floor of the valley near the southern end of Lake Conies (about our current location near the rocks).

1. At 0300 on May 29 Company B received an order to withdraw.
2. The reasons for this order are obscure in the official records so far available, but apparently there was no expectation of enemy action during the night. Possibly the purpose was to permit the men to go back to the battalion kitchen, some distance to the rear, so that they could get a hot breakfast before going into the attack against Chichagof the following morning.

C. At about 0330, while B Company was in the act of withdrawing, the mass of Japanese, bayonets fixed and grenades in hand, struck B Company's rear guard.

1. Taken completely by surprise and greatly outnumbered, the company was thrown into confusion and all hope of organized resistance quickly vanished.
2. The American company poured back down the valley or sought safety on the higher ground, while the Japanese main body pushed swiftly in the direction of Clevesy Pass.

D. Apparently to prevent the possibility of flank attacks, the Japanese main body detached small groups to either side as it advanced.

1. Because of the general surprise and confusion these groups succeeded in causing some casualties at Sarana Nose and other points, but they were thrown back.

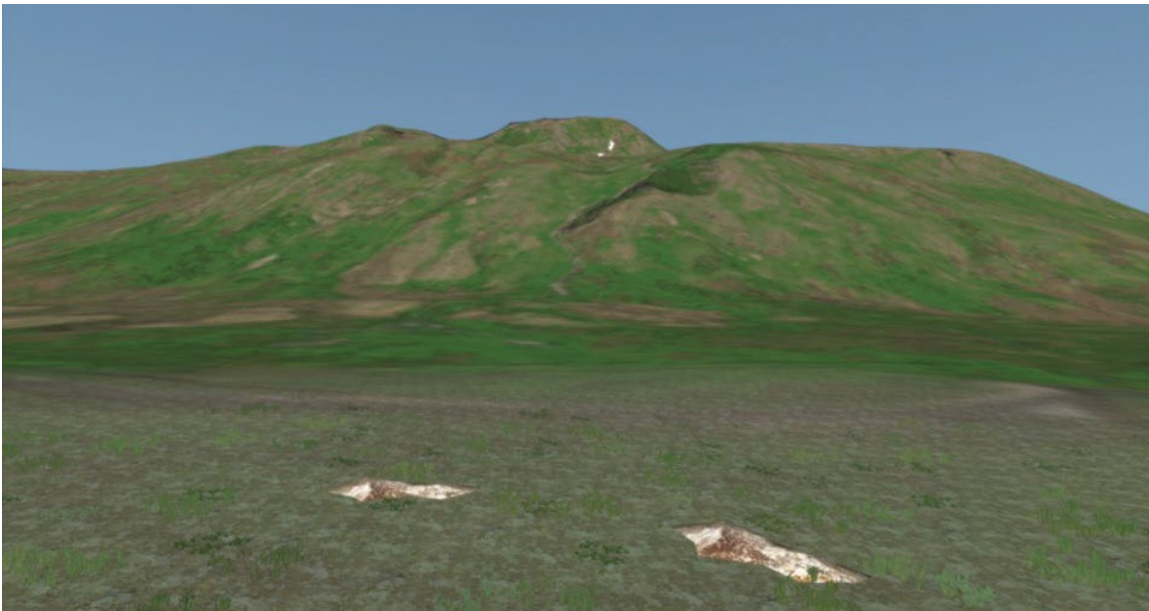


2. The Japanese main body, seriously reduced in strength by this dispersal of force, swept across Sarana Valley toward Clevesy Pass and Engineer Hill. The moves below will help illustrate the Japanese diversions.

**Directions.** Turn left towards Sarana Nose. Move about halfway up the slope.



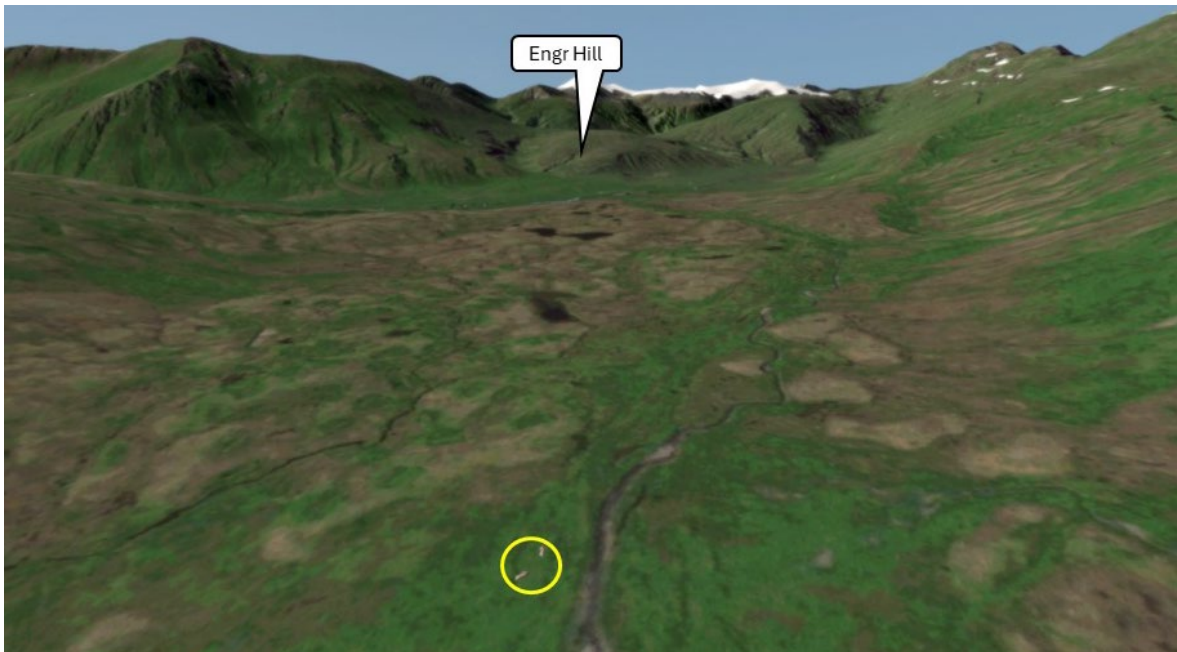
**Directions.** Turn and look back at the valley. Then return to rocks on the valley floor, and go up halfway on the other side of the valley (the Fishhook). Then return back to the rocks.



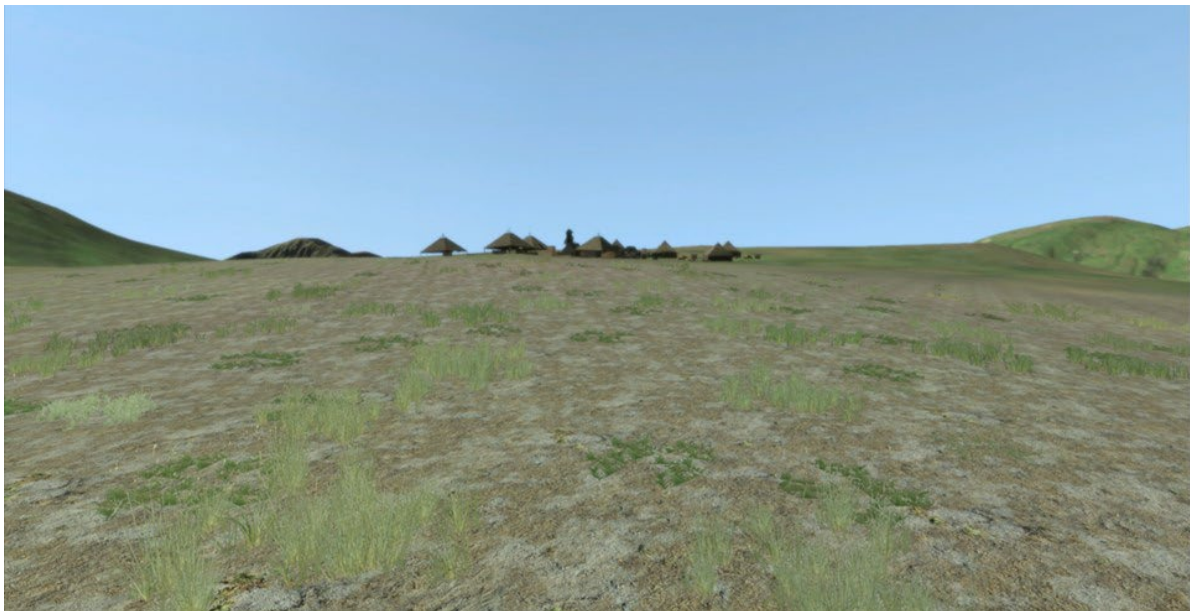


D. In the Clevesy Pass-Engineer Hill area, the bulk of the 50<sup>th</sup> Engineer BN and various service units (cooks and medics) were bivouacked with no anticipation of any combat with the enemy.

**Directions.** You will next move towards Engineer Hill. The screen shot below shows the view from slightly in the air (the circle is over the rocks). Again, your move should be closer to the ground.



**Directions.** Below is a ground view as you approach the US camp on Engineer Hill.



**Directions.** When you get to the hill, circle around the US camp at close to ground level.



1. Although the Americans on Engineer Hill heard the sound of small-arms and shell fire in Jim Fish Valley, they initially had paid no particular attention, for it was not unusual and they were far out of range.

2. Infantry and medical soldiers streaming down the valley shouting that the enemy was coming gave the first intimation that anything was wrong. Hastily springing to arms, the engineers organized an improvised line on the slopes of Engineer Hill leading to Point Able.

3. ***Vignette.*** Interview with 1SG Jessie H. Clonts, CO D, 50<sup>th</sup> EN:

The shell was the first indication we had that the Japs had broken through. We had just gotten up before they hit us and things really began to pop. It was foggy and dark, which made it almost impossible to tell American from Jap during the early part of the fight. Lieutenant John H. Green saw a man walking out ahead of him, and he hollered for the guy to get the hell down in a hole; the fellow replied, “me do, me do,” but he didn’t get down fast enough because Lieutenant Green shot him. They were right in with us. Lieutenant Jack J. Dillon and I were trying to establish a line, and our best protection was to walk up straight. We decided we’d take a chance on stray bullets; both of us being over six feet tall was pretty good identification for us so our boys wouldn’t shoot us. The captain had a loud voice and all morning he shouted directions and pep talks that could be heard, even above the racket of the fight, all over the hill. We put two BARs in, one on each flank of our line, and they got in some good licks with tracer

ammunition which marked our own line for our men, and also pointed out targets. I saw Sergeant Allstead right in the thick of things, and he is not the type of person you'd expect to find in the middle of a good fight. I asked him what he was doing up there, and he said, "Goddammit, I've got as right to be here as you have," just like it was a party or something. (From *The Capture of Attu: A World War II Battle as Told by the Men Who Fought There*. Compiled by Lt. Robert J. Mitchell, et al., 118-119)

4. Within ten minutes of the first warning they were hard at grips with the Japanese. Service troops, cooks, and men of every kind of unit grabbed whatever weapons they could find, and fought together, firing on the frenzied Japanese at point-blank range, gradually building up and consolidating their forces.

E. Several small Japanese detachments penetrated Clevesy Pass and attacked the Hogback in Massacre Valley just short of the emplacements of one battery of our 105mm. howitzers.

1. This was the Japanese objective, and it was nearly attained.

2. Though fighting in this area continued long after daylight and throughout the day of May 29, the Japanese onslaught broke down before the tough-fibered resistance of the 50th Engineers, fighting as infantry in desperate hand-to-hand combat.

IV. The rest of May 29 was a day of confused fighting and the destruction of small groups of Japanese throughout the area of the counterattack, but final victory was never again in doubt. Few of the enemy surrendered; most of them preferred to die from their own grenades as soon as they realized that further resistance was useless.

V. In the late afternoon of May 30, when it had become evident that the situation was again in hand, the 2d and 3d Battalions of the 32d, the 3d Battalion of the 17th and Company A of the 4th occupied Chichagof Harbor virtually without resistance.

VI. A communiqué of the Japanese High Command conceded the loss of Attu on May 30 in the following terms:

"The Japanese garrison on the island of Attu has been conducting a bloody battle with a small number of troops against a numerically far superior enemy under many difficulties, and on the night of May 29 carried out an heroic assault against the main body of enemy invaders with the determination to inflict a final blow on them and display the true spirit of the Imperial Army.

Since then there has been no communication from the Japanese forces on the island and it is now estimated that the entire Japanese force has preferred death to dishonor.

The sick and wounded Japanese soldiers who were unable to participate in the last attack killed themselves beforehand. The actual number of Japanese defenders on the island was 2,000 and odd hundreds and their commander was Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki.

The strength of the enemy, who was very well equipped, was about 20,000 and casualties on the enemy side reached no less than 6,000 up to May 28.

The island of Kiska is definitely maintained by Japanese forces.”

VII. The Japanese communiqué grossly exaggerated American effectives and casualties.

A. In fact, American forces on Attu never exceeded 12,000. U.S. total casualties, including those from exposure who were temporarily evacuated, were considerably less than 3,000.

B. Out of approximately 2,300 Japanese on the island, 29 prisoners were taken.

C. For many weeks after the battle isolated snipers lurked in the mountains and the last surrendered in September 1943.

### *Analysis*

I. Evaluate Yamasaki’s decision to attack. Was it the best choice? Was it the only feasible choice?

II. Clearly the culture of the Japanese Army influenced Yamasaki and made surrender a less likely choice. What cultural aspects of today’s US Army might influence our commanders’ decision-making?

## Order of Battle

### Japanese

IJA 2<sup>nd</sup> District, North Seas Garrison: Colonel Yasuyo Yamasaki

83<sup>rd</sup> Independent Infantry BN: Lieutenant Colonel Isamu Yonegawa  
303<sup>rd</sup> Independent Infantry BN: Major Jokuji Watanabe  
Aoto Anti-aircraft BN: Major Seiji Aoto  
Northern Kurile Fortress Infantry BN: Lieutenant Colonel Hiroshi Yonekawa  
6<sup>th</sup> Independent Mountain Artillery BN (-): Second Lieutenant Taira Endo  
302<sup>nd</sup> Independent Engineer Company: Captain Chinzo Ono  
6<sup>th</sup> Ship Engineer Regiment, 2nd Company: Captain Kobayashi

### US

Landing Force Attu (7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division): Major General Albert Brown

Provisional Scout BN: Captain William H. Willoughby  
7<sup>th</sup> Scout Company  
7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop

Northern Force: Colonel Frank L. Culin  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, 7<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC Albert V. Hartl

Southern Force: Colonel Edward Palmer Earle  
2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 7<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): MAJ Edward P. Smith  
3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 7<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): MAJ James R. Montague  
2<sup>nd</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> RCT: MAJ Charles G. Fredericks

Reinforcing forces  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC Earnest H. Bearss  
3<sup>rd</sup> BN, 32<sup>nd</sup> Regimental Combat Team (RCT): LTC John M. Finn  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, 4<sup>th</sup> RCT (at Adak): MAJ John D. O'Reilly  
78<sup>th</sup> Coast Artillery (Anti-aircraft) Regiment  
50<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineer BN