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Article Summary: This is the story of a Nebraska National Guard unit selected for a top secret mission in the Aleutian Islands (Alaska) during World War II. After Japan occupied two of the Aleutian Islands, the 134<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment's Second Battalion was sent to remote Adak Island where they built an airfield, dug trenches, and performed other backbreaking labor in preparation for an assault on the Japanese-held islands. It was not a "glamour" mission, and the battalion spent much of their time poorly housed, clothed, and fed, but their work earned them a commendation read into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Harry S Truman. The "Lost Battalion" underwent many organizational re-affiliations, thus the name.

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Photographs / Images: Members of Second Battalion practice climbing landing net at Kodiak Island; Army Air Forces B-24 on steel runway mats installed by Second Battalion; Colonel Butler B Miltonberger, commander of the 134th Infantry Regiment; Members of Company H, Second Battalion, training on a .30 Caliber water-cooled machine gun on Great Sitkin in 1943; A second battalion soldier standing in the door of a completely camouflaged Quonset hut in the winter of 1943; Inset map showing Attu, Kiska, Adak, and Kodiak Islands in the Aleutians; Second battalion soldiers Ed Grella, George Thiel, and Bob Hazen; Second Battalion's medical detachment displaying unit's guidon and Aleutian Campaign battle streamer after its return, 1944

# NEBRASKA'S LOST BATTALION

*By Douglas R. Hartman*

The 134th Infantry Regiment, one of four infantry regiments in the Thirty-fifth Division, was a Nebraska National Guard unit mobilized on December 23, 1940, for one year of preparedness training. After Japan bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, the 134th was immediately transferred to California and assigned to the Western Defense Command. In 1942 the 134th Infantry Regiment's second battalion was selected for a top secret mission in the Aleutian Islands. During its mission, the battalion was absorbed into another unit, redesignated in 1943 as Second Battalion, 197th Infantry, and returned to the U.S. mainland in 1944. The 197th was then dissolved and its soldiers used as cadre to form new regiments or as replacements for existing units. When it became evident that the Second Battalion would not rejoin the 134th Infantry Regiment, the regiment organized a new second battalion to replace what has become known as the 134th's "lost battalion."

The Aleutian Island chain extends westward from the tip of Alaska's peninsula in an arc for approximately 1,000 miles. Each island in the chain is mountainous, rising several thousand feet above sea level. There are no trees on any of the islands, which were formed from volcanic ash and topped with a spongy mat of vegetation called tundra. These characteristically bleak islands are completely covered by fog much of the time and battered by violent winds that can bring rain, snow,

or mist year round. The thin layer of tundra and volcanic ash turns into mud following any precipitation. The rough terrain and unique subsoil make construction on the islands difficult, while poor weather renders aerial reconnaissance an unreliable source of intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

These desolate, largely uninhabited islands became significant to both the United States and Japan during the early months of 1942 as the Japanese expanded across the Pacific. Since its attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 Japan had captured Guam, Indochina, Thailand, Wake Island, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, Java, Burma, and the Philippines. Its armies had invaded the Solomons and were in New Guinea. The British fleet had been driven from the Indian and Pacific Oceans. What was left of America's sea power after the battles of Wake Island and Coral Sea was forced back to Hawaii and the West Coast. U.S. strategy during these months revolved around a frail line of defense which began in the south at New Guinea, extended to the northwest through Samoa and Midway Island, and was anchored in the north at Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians.<sup>2</sup>

Japan's expansion in the Pacific was directly related to its primary strategy of luring the United States into a decisive naval battle and destroying the Pacific Fleet. The Aleutians became a Japanese target soon after General James Doolittle's raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942.

The Japanese believed that Doolittle's land-based bombers had taken off from the western Aleutians, only 650

miles from Japan's Kurile Islands. They surmised that because Doolittle, the son of an Alaskan gold miner, had grown up in Nome he had launched his attack from familiar territory. The Japanese did not learn until after the war that Doolittle's bombers had flown from Admiral William Halsey's carriers in the central Pacific.<sup>3</sup>

In May the Japanese devised a plan to protect their northern flank and destroy the U.S. fleet. A multiple task force would attack Dutch Harbor, while a landing force invaded the western Aleutians. Japan hoped that this would lure the U.S. fleet out of Pearl Harbor. Then Admiral Yamamoto and the Japanese fleet of 190 ships and over 700 aircraft would ambush the Americans at Midway.<sup>4</sup>

The United States suspected that Japan would retaliate for the Doolittle raid with some sort of attack upon the West Coast or on Alaska.<sup>5</sup> Because the Japanese code had been broken, U.S. military planners predicted that Japan would attack the Aleutians around June 1 but correctly concluded that the Aleutian attack was a diversion and that the crucial battle would involve Midway.

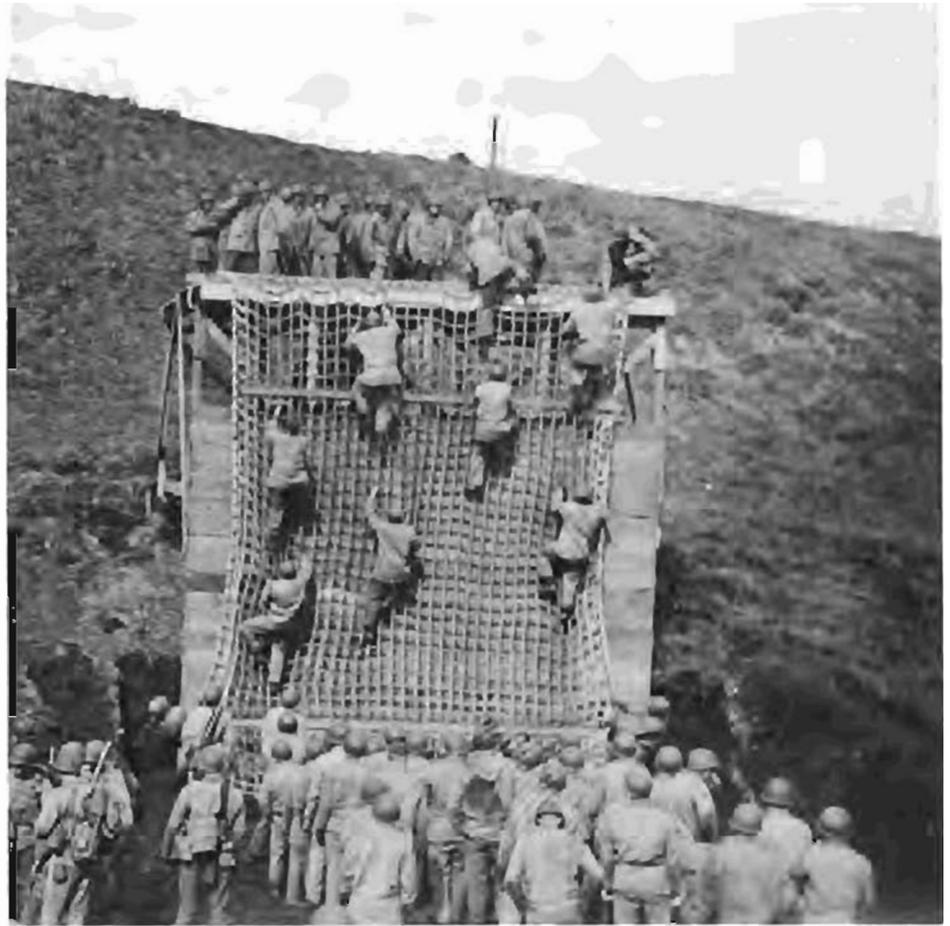
On June 3-4 a Japanese naval task force bombed Dutch harbor in the opening phase of the Midway campaign. However, the forewarned U.S. Navy sank four Japanese carriers and destroyed over 300 planes at Midway on June 4-5. Despite this disaster, the Japanese landed troops on the islands of Attu and Kiska on June 7.<sup>6</sup>

Their defeat at Midway made control of the Aleutians of less importance to the Japanese. Nevertheless the

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*Members of Second Battalion practice climbing landing net at Kodiak Island in 1942 in preparation for its amphibious assault on Adak Island. Courtesy of Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln.*



occupation did block any potential U.S. offensive against Japan from the north. Japan decided to fortify the captured islands and possibly expand eastward if the opportunity presented itself.

From the American perspective the Japanese presence in the Aleutians threatened U.S. supply lines to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the invasion of Kiska and Attu represented a psychological defeat because for the first time, Japan had penetrated the Western Hemisphere's defenses and actually occupied U.S. territory.

Lieutenant General John L. DeWitt, commander of the Fourth Army which included the Alaska Defense Command, was charged with protecting the West Coast and Alaska from Japanese attack and sabotage. He believed that Japan was preparing for an eastward offensive to capture the American base at Dutch Harbor.<sup>7</sup>

DeWitt immediately began planning a large, multi-service operation involving thousands of sailors, soldiers, and marines to establish an advanced air base and resupply point on one of the western-most islands in the Aleutian chain. This would counter expected Japanese advances and serve as a jumping-off point for U.S. efforts to retake Attu and Kiska. However, DeWitt's grandiose plans were scaled down when the War Department decided not to commit a large force to an Aleutian offensive. The department believed that "the Aleutian situation was of little consequence and Alaska a minor theater of operations."<sup>8</sup> Consequently any offensive operations in the Aleutians had to be carried out with men and equipment already under DeWitt's command.

On July 16, 1942, after considerable

engineer reconnaissance, DeWitt chose Tanaga Island, located about 180 miles east of Kiska, as the best location for the construction of an airfield and advanced supply base. The navy responded that, although Tanaga would make a good airfield, it could not accommodate large naval vessels. The navy preferred Adak Island as the site for the advanced base. However, Adak's rough terrain would make construction of an airfield more difficult and it was sixty miles farther east than Tanaga. After careful consideration of all factors, the Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that Tanaga remained the best location.<sup>9</sup>

For the initial landing, DeWitt formed a task force of 4,500 men, which included an assortment of infantry and artillery elements from the West Coast.<sup>10</sup> He asked Major General Maxwell Murray, commander of the Thirty-fifth Division, to supply the infantry battalion around which the remainder of the task force could be formed. In turn Murray called on the 134th

Regiment's commander, North Platte native Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger, to provide one reinforced battalion for a "top secret" mission. The operation was so secret that verbal orders were issued from General DeWitt down to the regimental level.<sup>11</sup>

Such secrecy hinged upon the belief that Japan possessed an excellent intelligence system on the west coast. The United States, though it had repeatedly bombed and strafed the Japanese on Kiska, did not want to give them any indication that it was preparing to contest the enemy occupation of the Aleutians. Speed in establishing an American presence in the islands was another reason for the verbal orders. Miltonberger chose Second Battalion for the special mission because it was the best trained of the regiment's three battalions. It consisted of Nebraska National Guard companies from Omaha, Scottsbluff, Hastings, Gering, and Grand Island.<sup>12</sup>

Second Battalion was immediately brought up to its authorized strength of

1,100 men with "fillers" from the remainder of the 134th. A cannon platoon, an anti-tank platoon, one section from the transportation platoon, one section of the medical detachment, one mine squad, two chaplains, a mail clerk, a mechanic, and a supply man were also attached to the unit.<sup>13</sup>

Colonel Miltonberger and the remainder of the 134th were proud that Second Battalion had been selected for such an important mission. "Morale was very high," recalled Sergeant Lewis W. Schafer, "because we were picked over everyone else in the Thirty-fifth Division."<sup>14</sup> The enthusiasm and pride of the moment, combined with an understanding that Second Battalion would return to the 134th upon completion of its assignment, made it easier for the 134th's commander to part with the unit.

Second Battalion, commanded by Frank Dunkley, was temporarily assigned to the Fifty-third Composite Regiment commanded by General Eugene Landrum. The Fifty-third also included First Battalion of the Fifty-third Infantry and Third Battalion of the 153rd Regiment. Technically all three battalions remained part of their original units, but were on loan for the duration of their special service.<sup>15</sup>

On July 24 Second Battalion, 134th Infantry, was ordered to Ojai, California, where the men prepared for overseas movement, culminating in a full dressed inspection on August 1. The unit went by train to San Francisco where it arrived on August 2 at 11 P.M. The battalion was immediately loaded on boats under the cover of darkness, and taken to Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. The men spent eight days on

Angel Island getting rid of excess equipment, checking their records, receiving inoculations, and drawing new combat gear.<sup>16</sup>

Second Battalion's "normal issue" of clothing consisted of a wool overcoat, cloth two-buckled overshoes, a wool "pea" cap, a set of long underwear, brown shoes with canvas leggings, and wool olive drab pants and shirts. However, no foul weather gear was issued other than a garrison raincoat, which eventually proved inadequate for the Aleutian winters.<sup>17</sup> The raincoat was too short to keep soldiers dry below the waist and quickly came apart at the seams in the constant moisture.

On August 12 Second Battalion boarded small transport boats and was ferried to the Oakland port of embarkation. The next day the battalion, aboard

*An Army Air Forces B-24 on steel runway mats installed by Second Battalion. Courtesy of Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln.*



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the *J. Franklin Bell*, departed San Francisco Bay via the Golden Gate Bridge for its unknown destination.<sup>18</sup>

The *J. Franklin Bell* was once a luxury liner named the *SS President McKinley* before it was converted into a troopship. It carried a crew of 600, 2100 troops from the Fifty-third Composite Regiment, and a load of supplies. Explosives, ammunition, and gasoline were packed in the holds side by side with the men. The Nebraskans worried about what would happen if they were attacked by submarines while carrying all of this flammable material. However, the soldiers' main concern was sea sickness, which struck ninety percent of the battalion.

The Fifty-third Composite was escorted to Alaska by several converted, lightly armed fishing boats. "It looked like a big armada from a distance," recalled Sergeant Kenneth J. Walker, "but up close it was a pretty scroungy escort with not much fire power."<sup>19</sup> On August 19 the *Bell* finally anchored in the harbor of Kodiak Island, located approximately forty miles south of Alaska's mainland near the entrance to Cook Inlet.<sup>20</sup>

Second Battalion's five days at Kodiak were devoted to training on the proper loading of landing craft, and on day and night amphibious landings. The soldiers practiced several repetitions of descending rope ladders into assault craft which, in turn, dropped them off in cold, waist deep water. The men waded ashore, small boats picked them up, and they were returned to the transports to repeat the whole process.<sup>21</sup> After two days of training Tanaga Island was finally confirmed as the regiment's objective.

The units were supplied with maps of the designated island and preliminary plans were drawn up for the assault. However, prior to the troops' departure from Kodiak, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reversed their earlier decision to land on Tanaga. The navy had convinced the chiefs that a Tanaga landing presented serious navigational hazards and off shore support for the



*Colonel Butler B. Miltonberger, commander of the 134th Infantry Regiment. (NSHS-M662-210)*

army could not be guaranteed. Adak Island, part of the Andreanof Island Group, was chosen as Second Battalion's new objective.<sup>22</sup>

Adak, located 275 miles east of Kiska, was an extremely rugged island with numerous mountains reaching over 2,000 feet above sea level. It was dominated by 3,924-foot Mount Moffett. The only level area was a place called Sweeper Cove, which was usually flooded during high tide.<sup>23</sup>

On August 25, as revised preparations for the Adak assault continued, Second Battalion left Kodiak Harbor and began the five-day journey to Adak. Its mission was to secure Adak and remain on the island to provide

security while the navy constructed a port, a runway, and a base from which to attack Japanese-controlled Attu and Kiska. Sunday, August 30, was the scheduled landing.

D-day began at 1:30 A.M. with breakfast, followed by an equipment check, combat loading, and readying assault boats. At 6 A.M. troops embarked in small landing craft that were "tossed around like wash tubs" en route to the beach. The first elements of Second Battalion landed unopposed on Adak after half an hour's battle with the ice-cold, choppy waters.<sup>24</sup> The battalion's assault on Adak was the U.S. Army's first amphibious landing of World War II.

When the battalion came ashore the men immediately unloaded the landing boats, discarded their flat, rubberized, waist-fitting life belts, and prepared to fight any Japanese who might have landed on the island undetected. After a quick reconnaissance failed to turn up any enemies, the landing of additional troops, supplies, and equipment, was called off because of high seas, poor visibility, and 100 mile-per-hour wind gusts.<sup>25</sup> This placed Second Battalion in a vulnerable situation. It could not return to the transports, while additional men and supplies could not land on Adak.

The battalion established a defensive perimeter on the landing beach the first night while the soldiers erected two-man pup tents for protection from the elements. Some men were low on food and scavenged emergency ten-in-one rations from the landing crafts. Others tried to find something to burn on the barren island which would keep them warm during that first cold, wet, and windy night. A few men picked up previously discarded rubber life belts, cut them up, and burned them in their tents. According to Sergeant George Thiel, "This turned out to be a mistake, because burning the rubber turned them black."<sup>26</sup> Several veterans of the Aleutian campaign called their first night on Adak "the worst they had ever spent in their lives."<sup>27</sup>



*Members of Company "H," Second Battalion, training on a .30 Caliber water-cooled machine gun on the volcanic island of Great Sitkin in 1943 in preparation for the attack on Kiska Island. Courtesy of Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln.*

The weather improved on day two, allowing other elements of the landing party to come ashore and unload equipment and supplies. However, a barge containing some steel matting for the airstrip capsized in the rough waters. Meanwhile, Second Battalion slogged a mile inland through knee deep mud to set up a command post in a ravine. On the grueling trek some of the men encountered a stream so packed with fish "you could catch them with your hands."<sup>28</sup> The fish were spawning when we landed," explained Walker, "so all we had to do was reach in and grab them."<sup>29</sup>

However, there were no trees, coal, or other fuel nor any stoves and cooking utensils. This did not deter the hungry men, who used the stream as a main source to supplement their diet. Second Battalion soldiers lived on raw fish and "C" rations until kitchens were established on Adak.

The command post was moved another mile inland the following day while soldiers retrieved supplies from

the beach. The men made several trips from the new command post to the beach in the days that followed to bring food, equipment, and supplies up to the battalion area. Because there were no roads the men slogged overland in deep mud hauling everything from boxes of rations and barrack bags to kitchen stoves and large tents weighing over 225 pounds.<sup>30</sup> From the air the procession of troops from the command post to the beach and back resembled a colony of ants retrieving food to their hole. Everyone was "one big mud ball," cold, wet, and wishing they were back in sunny California.

Once Second Battalion's command post was established on high ground overlooking Adak, the men traded their rifles for shovels. The unit began to construct an airfield, which had been the primary reason for securing the island. Heavy equipment was brought in to build a road to the airfield to be located on Sweeper Cove. A dike was built and the entire cove was drained. The hardened volcanic ash made a fine

airstrip after it had dried and on September 10, the first aircraft landed on Adak's runway.<sup>31</sup>

A new shipment of steel matting arrived, was hauled to the runway, and installed by the Second Battalion soldiers under the watchful eye of navy Seabees.<sup>32</sup> In all 2,700 feet of perforated steel landing mat over 100 feet wide was laid by September 13.<sup>33</sup> The men also built runway revetments and other essential airfield installations. Though the Seabees received most of the credit for runway construction, Second Battalion provided the majority of the backbreaking labor.

Even after the airfield was completed, the men of Second Battalion continued to serve primarily as laborers. They hauled coal, dug trenches, and constructed the navy's billets while the soldiers themselves spent the cold winter of 1942-43 in six-man pyramid tents. Because navy personnel were housed closer to the temporary dock and main supply point, and the Second Battalion was living in

*A Second Battalion soldier stands in the door of a completely camouflaged quonset hut in the winter of 1943. Courtesy of Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln . . . Four arrows indicate Attu (left), Kiska, Adak, and Kodiak (far right) Islands in the Aleutians . . . (below) Second battalion soldiers Ed Grella (front left), Ashton, Nebraska; George Thiel, Grand Island, Nebraska; and Bob Hazen, Remsen, Iowa. Courtesy of George Thiel.*

the hills two miles from the harbor, the soldiers often were shortchanged. For example, each tent housing Second Battalion received a stove but was issued only one sack of coal every ten days for heating it.<sup>34</sup>

During Second Battalion's stay on Adak the men felt they were treated as second class citizens in regard to equipment, housing, and supplies, while at the same time performing as common laborers. Though large quantities of supplies were stockpiled on Adak, they were allocated for the assault forces accumulating on the island, not the troops of the garrison. Eventually Adak housed over 90,000 soldiers, most of whom were passing through on their way to invade Attu and Kiska. "We felt that we had been insulted," said Schafer. "We had trained for combat for over a year and we ended up performing menial labor instead of the job we were trained for. It was a low blow to our morale."<sup>35</sup> Inadequate food added to the battalion's plight.

When kitchens finally became operational the soldiers received their first prepared meal in seven days. To Second Battalion's disgust, its first hot meal on Adak consisted of beans and one piece of spam.<sup>16</sup> Needless to say, the men augmented their diet by fishing during the remainder of their stay on Adak. Second Battalion was also forced to scrounge for adequate clothing in the cold wet climate.

When the men were provided with new equipment at Angel Island they had not been issued any special cold weather gear. The only way Second





*Second Battalion's medical detachment proudly displays its unit's guidon and Aleutian Campaign battle streamer after its return to Camp Chaffee in May 1944. Courtesy of Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln.*

Battalion obtained cold weather clothing was by trading with the navy. The sailors liked the army's wool shirts and trousers so they exchanged extra parkas and blue wool knit hats for the army's clothing. This caused many of the soldiers to look remarkably navy-like, which led to other benefits for Second Battalion.<sup>37</sup>

The Aleutian Islands' defenders received a beer ration on a fairly regular basis. When Second Battalion's men learned that the navy was doling out its beer, they jumped in line with the sailors. After all, they looked like they belonged in the navy. After a few weeks the navy caught on that it was being duped. The navy then required each man to show his dog tags, stamped with the individual's branch of service, prior to issuing the beer rations.<sup>38</sup> However, even extra clothing and alcohol could not keep Second Battalion from feeling the effects of the weather during the coldest part of the season.

Adak's climate was disagreeable for most of the year, particularly during

winter. Cold gales, constant moisture, and daily fog that seldom allowed sunlight to penetrate had a demoralizing effect, which gradually eroded morale. The winter weather also limited training and outdoor recreational opportunities. Most of the soldiers' off hours were spent playing checkers, cards, and cribbage. "It was kind of boring," said Walker.<sup>39</sup>

The worst blow to the men's morale occurred on January 29, 1943. General Order Number Fifteen redesignated Second Battalion of the 134th Infantry as Second Battalion of the 197th Infantry. "We surrendered our colors and guidon, which were shipped back to the 134th where a new Second Battalion was organized from a cadre from First and Third Battalions," according to Schafer.<sup>40</sup> The redesignation had, in effect, severed Second Battalion's lineage to the Nebraska National Guard and 134th Infantry Regiment.

In the spring of 1943 Second Battalion's morale improved as the weather began to warm and the soldiers

turned their attention to building their own quonset hut living quarters. The navy was adequately housed and the required material was finally allocated to Second Battalion. Construction began by cutting and rolling back tundra around the building site. A hole was dug by hand, approximately eleven feet deep. "It seemed like we only got down about an inch or so a day," said Walker. "The ground was frozen and we were digging in volcanic rock."<sup>41</sup> A semi-cylindrical corrugated metal building was then constructed in the hole.

Dirt was piled on the building's top and sides, the tundra was rolled back over the partially buried hut for camouflage, and only a small opening remained as an entryway. Walker noted, "You couldn't see them for fifty yards, pretty slick."<sup>42</sup> Once a hut was completed men from two squads moved in and construction on another one began. About the time Second Battalion was comfortably housed, it received word that it would once again

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become infantrymen instead of laborers.

On July 6, 1943, the battalion's spirits rose with the news that it would take part in recapturing Kiska Island. Two months earlier American forces had liberated Attu. Kiska now remained as the only Aleutian island under Japanese control. The unit immediately began to train for its new operation. Most of its amphibious warfare training was done on the volcanic island of Great Sicken, where troops familiarized themselves with captured Japanese machine guns, knee mortars, and hand grenades.<sup>43</sup> On August 10 Second Battalion boarded the USAT *Henry Failing* bound for Kiska.

Second Battalion's mission was to land in the second wave of the assault on the west end of the island near Kiska

Volcano. Poor weather delayed the invasion until August 15. As Second Battalion finished its final combat checks, and before the soldiers were completely loaded in their landing crafts, word came that Japan had abandoned its base and evacuated all of its forces.<sup>44</sup> Second Battalion's dejected soldiers never even got off the transport. They quietly filed back into the ship's hold, and returned to Adak.

Six months later Second Battalion learned that its Aleutian Islands mission was completed and it would return to the United States. On April 1, 1944, Second Battalion boarded the USAT *Grant* and sailed for the Port Edward staging area and Prince Rupert, British Columbia.<sup>45</sup> The battalion remained a week at Fort Rupert.<sup>46</sup>

On April 14 Second Battalion board-

ed troop trains that traveled through the Canadian Rockies, entered the United States at Bellingham, Washington, and passed through Company "H's" home town of Grand Island before it eventually arrived at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, on April 20. Every man in the unit immediately received a twenty-one-day pass — the first furlough for most of the soldiers in over two years.<sup>47</sup>

The accomplishments of the battalion in the Aleutians earned it a commendation that was read into the *Congressional Record* by Senator Harry S. Truman:

The operation participated in by the 2nd Battalion, One Hundred and Thirty-fourth Infantry, in the north had been highly successful and was carried out in a most excellent manner and that the 2nd Battalion of the One Hundred and Thirty-fourth Infantry was to be highly commended for its exemplary action in this operation.<sup>48</sup>

*William Chalupsky of Comstock, Nebraska, enlisted in the Nebraska National Guard in December 1940. He was assigned to Company H, Second Battalion, 134th Infantry Regiment, and was one of the Nebraskans sent to the Aleutian Islands in 1942. He described the landing on Adak and the construction of the airfield in a 1989 interview with Lori Cox of the Nebraska State Historical Society.*

We did the assault landing, and it was kind of strange because naturally we didn't know if it [Adak Island] was occupied so we had to go prepared to do battle. I was a corporal at that time and I was in charge of a squad, an 81mm mortar squad. We had to carry two of them and they're pretty heavy. I mean you carried the barrel and the base plate and then you had kind of a tripod and each one of those weighed about fifty pounds. Then you had to carry ammunition along with it. Then you had a rifle strapped on you and your pack and you had to crawl off this boat, coming down this rope ladder, and the water was rough, and you climbed

down into that boat and then you hit the beach trying to carry all of those weapons. Well, it was bad enough trying to carry one bunch of weapons, let alone two. I don't know who dreamed that up, but somebody thought we needed them. Really, it was more of a hindrance because when we hit the beach we were all wet, a lot of us, and there was a lot of confusion. By the time you got everything organized, why you had to leave half of your equipment there so we might just as well have started out with one [mortar] . . . . We were just fortunate that the Japanese had not got there before we did.

Our main purpose was to build an air base so that they could go bomb [the Japanese]. Attu and Kiska were occupied at that time [by the enemy]. Actually that's more of an engineer's job, but we were pulled into it also to assist, and so we did. In ten days time we were able to land bombers. I think under those conditions we did pretty good.

When we were there we did set up a perimeter of defense, but really they just used us to build this airstrip. We had to go down and lay the mat. They

had mats, they called them, and they interlocked, and you just kept joining them. They were probably about ten feet wide and you just kept putting them together until you had enough.

The weather was always something that was bad there. We lived in pup tents at first, exposed to the elements. It was so wet and we had the wrong type of equipment and your feet would swell up and get cracked, so that was kind of a hindrance, [and] you'd get frostbite . . . . It was usually windy every day, maybe 30 miles-an-hour, but there would be times when it would blow 110 miles-an-hour. It was hazardous to airplanes, mostly. It got down to forty below zero at times.

If you didn't know how to play cards it was kind of bad . . . . We did a lot of that. Of course there was no TV. We did have radio however. I can remember Dinah Shore, we used to get her once in a while, and she was great. Outside of that there was just nothing to entertain you. Eventually the base was set up and they were able to have some forms of entertainment.

When Second Battalion returned from its leave it was broken up and the men sent to training camps all across the nation. Some were used as cadre to begin new units. Others managed to get transferred back to the 134th and saw combat in Europe.

Second Battalion's special "top secret" mission to the Aleutian Islands did not turn out to be the glamour assignment that some had expected. "We thought we would go up there, give the Japanese a knockout blow, and return to the 134th as heroes . . . . but it sure did not turn out that way," recalled Lewis Schafer.<sup>49</sup> The harsh climate, the battalion's use primarily as a labor force, its failure to see combat, and its eventual disbandment, resulted in its service being overlooked.

Few Nebraskans realize that an American possession and future state was invaded by Japan during World War II. Fewer still realized that a former Nebraska National Guard battalion was deployed to help stop Japanese expansion in the area. When homecoming parades in 1945 and 1946 were organized in Omaha, Lincoln, North Platte, and other towns in Nebraska to celebrate the return of the 134th Infantry Regiment and its commander, Brigadier General Butler B. Miltonberger, Second Battalion's Aleutian Island veterans were not included.

Despite this lack of recognition, the Aleutian service of the Second Battalion did not disappear from the

record of the 134th Infantry Regiment. Just before the battalion (then part of the 197th Regiment) was broken up, an Aleutian Islands campaign streamer was authorized for the unit's guidon. Because the Second Battalion was to be disbanded, its commander, Lieutenant Colonel C. J. Stewart, forwarded the citation for the streamer to the Nebraska Adjutant General.<sup>50</sup> Today, the colors of the Nebraska National Guard's 134th Infantry Regiment proudly include a streamer marked "Aleutian Campaign."

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Stetson Conn, ed., *The United States Army in World War II. The Western Hemisphere: Guarding the United States and Its Outposts* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1964), 157.

<sup>2</sup>Brian Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War: World War II in Alaska and the Aleutians* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1969), 5.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>5</sup>Conn, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 260.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 265.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, 270; Stetson Conn, *The Forgotten War: A Pictorial History of World War II in Alaska* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 140.

<sup>10</sup>Conn, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 270.

<sup>11</sup>Alfred C. Boatsman to Butler B. Miltonberger, Jan. 26, 1948, information on Second Battalion's Aleutian service, Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<sup>12</sup>*Biennial Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Nebraska, 1939-1940* (Lincoln: 1940), 318-28.

<sup>13</sup>Boatsman to Miltonberger, Jan. 26, 1948.

<sup>14</sup>Lewis W. Schafer, interview by author, Grand

Island, Nebr., October 10, 1987.

<sup>15</sup>James A. Huston and Butler B. Miltonberger, *All Hell Can't Stop Us* (Gering, Nebr.: Courier Press, 1950), 21; Schafer interview.

<sup>16</sup>Richard W. Bass, personal diary, 1941-45. Nebraska National Guard Historical Society Museum, Lincoln.

<sup>17</sup>George Theil, interview by author, Grand Island, Nebr., June 26, 1990.

<sup>18</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>19</sup>Kenneth J. Walker, interview by author, Grand Island, Nebr., June 26, 1990.

<sup>20</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>Schafer interview; Conn, *Guarding the United States and Its Outposts*, 270.

<sup>23</sup>Conn, *The Forgotten War*, 140.

<sup>24</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>25</sup>Theil interview.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>This sentiment was echoed by several veterans during an Aleutian Island veterans' reunion in Grand Island in Sept. 1990.

<sup>28</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>29</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>30</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>31</sup>Garfield, *The Thousand Mile War*, 138.

<sup>32</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>33</sup>Conn, *The Forgotten War*, 141.

<sup>34</sup>Theil interview.

<sup>35</sup>Schafer interview.

<sup>36</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>37</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>38</sup>Theil interview.

<sup>39</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>40</sup>Schafer interview.

<sup>41</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>Henry W. Hall, *The Battle of the Aleutians, A Graphic History* (Headquarters, Western Defense Command, 1944), 10.

<sup>44</sup>Schafer interview.

<sup>45</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>46</sup>Walker interview.

<sup>47</sup>Bass diary.

<sup>48</sup>Boatsman to Miltonberger, Jan. 26, 1948.

<sup>49</sup>Schafer interview.

<sup>50</sup>General Orders No. 83, Alaskan Department, Apr. 22, 1944; and Lieutenant Colonel C. J. Stewart to Nebraska Adjutant General, June 26, 1944 in RG 18, Records of the Nebraska Military Department, SG2, S7, F1, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln.