

Book Review – The Thousand Mile War by Brian Garfield

Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI



So, for my history buff friends, try these: When and where was the last US soil invaded and held by a foreign power? During World War II, when and what was the first Theater of Operations considered conquered by the US and its allies? And another WW II question for my Navy Air readers. What Japanese decision was considered crucial for the US victory at Midway Island?

If you are shouting, “Alaska, you fool !!” you have either been stationed out on Aleutian chain, or you are a WW historian.

The distance from the last inhabited island in the Aleutian chain to Alaska’s largest city, Anchorage, is greater than the distance from Anchorage to Washington DC. (And I have flown both of those routes.) And as far as I know, this is the only inhabited part of the world where the temperature can be freezing, the cloud layer on the deck, and the winds blowing at forty knots – simultaneously for days on end. So why would anybody want this land?

The war in the Aleutians was weird. It was fought not only between the United States and Canada against the Japanese, it was fought between the Army and

Navy as they both tried to figure out who was in command. (And the Army Air Corps battled them both.) And it was fought by all combatants against the weather.

On April 18, 1942, General Jimmy Doolittle and his raiders dropped bombs on Tokyo. The Japanese high command was convinced that the aircraft had departed from one of the Aleutian Islands. And at that time, the closest, reasonable point of departure seemed to be Dutch Harbor. Dutch Harbor wasn’t much, but the Japanese felt that they could not leave themselves open to attack from the North. So, on June 3, 1942 aircraft from two Japanese carriers attacked the island. They subsequently invaded, but found it was too far from home to hold. Their next decision was to occupy the far western Aleutian Islands, Attu, Shemya, Adak, and others. But the cost of sailing around in the fog, looking for the US Navy (who was doing the same, in the same fog) was splitting their forces. And thus ships were not available for the Battle of Midway.

Japan wanted to hold the Islands to preclude the Allies from launching raids from the north. Why did the US feel the need to hold a piece of dormant volcano, thousands of miles from nowhere, where the weather and the bogs would never allow air operations? Essentially, because the Japanese wanted them. And also, like the Falkland Islands, Argentina, and Great Britain forty years later, “national honor”.

The US high command considered the war in the Northern Pacific Theater complete in August, 1943, when joint Army, Navy and Army Air Corps forces

successfully planned and executed a major amphibious landing on the uninhabited island of Kiska. Yes, the end of the northern campaign was as ignominious as its opening.

Brian Garfield was a novelist and a Hollywood screenwriter when he came upon this story. And his background as a novelist shows through. Although it is obvious that he has dug deep for the

details of this forgotten bit of the war, it reads like an action novel. I found myself turning pages, rooting in turn for the army, the navy, and even the Japanese as they battled each other and their respective higher headquarter. And all of them battling the weather.

Check it out.

Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order

You can reach him at: Thehopeschris@gmail.com

And here are more favorites: www.ChrisHopeFAAFlightInstructor.com/books/books.html