

# Dutch Harbor

By Sergeant Raymond R. Tull and Corporal C. Grant Burton

For three days the fog had hung over the North Pacific and the Bering Sea. Somewhere west of Dutch Harbor on tiny Amakanal Island a Japanese task force waited for an opportunity to strike along the Aleutian chain. The soldiers, sailors, and the marines at the new naval base had been expecting a visit from the Jap ever since his treachery at Pearl Harbor.

We had maintained gun crews continuously, especially the anti-aircraft defenses, which we all knew were the most likely to have the main rôle in any clash with the enemy. There had been practice alerts, simulating the conditions of actual attack. Digging of fox holes and other shelters necessary for the protection of personnel had been done faithfully. All men who were not absolutely necessary to the operation of the main camp area had been moved to safer buildings. There had been as much decentralization as practicable. So, Dutch Harbor was prepared in advance for the attacks from the air which came June 3 and 4.

When the fog began to lift, and the eighteen carrier-based Jap bombers and fighters found their way in, there was, however, a certain element of surprise. Although every person on the island knew that bombing was inevitable, the change from contemplation to reality brought its own shock.

The first warning we ourselves had came when the larger anti-aircraft artillery guns opened fire as the enemy came into their maximum range.

As we rushed to our positions, it was easy to distinguish the rising sun on the first two formations which swooped in low over the town of Unalaska across the channel from Dutch Harbor. They were machine gunning as they came, but fortunately, at that early hour, streets were clear, and so casualties were few. A PBY patrol bomber, taxiing along the water for a while, strafed, and its crew put out of action. By this time the enemy was getting into the range of their automatic weapons, which sent up a terrific fire. One of them appeared to lurch, and then slipped down out of formation,

heading for the open water. His crash was observed by a seaplane tender out in the harbor.

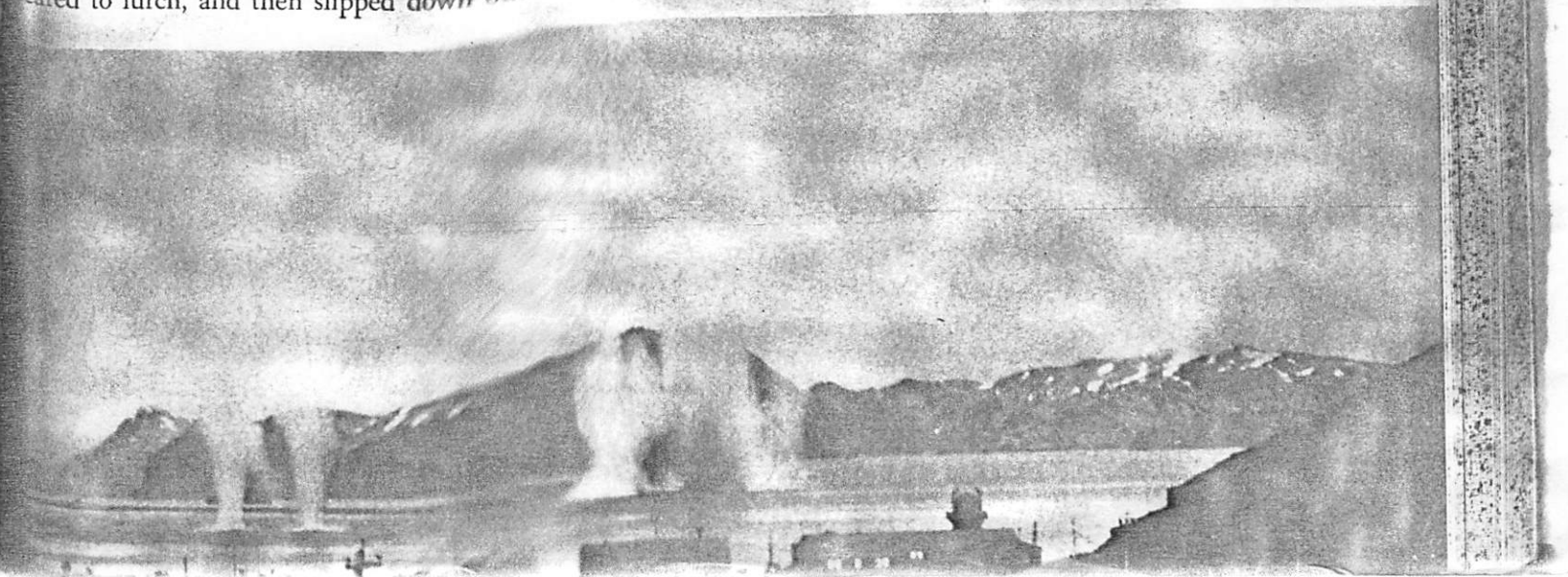
Along with the tender was a transport which had just arrived the night before. Both ships were throwing up a heavy barrage of AA fire. The smaller ship brought down a plane, despite the fact that she appeared to be jumping all around in the water, so strong was the sea and the force of her fire.

Apparently respecting our artillery at close range, the bombers came in high over the army camp. Meanwhile, the big guns continued to blaze away. Although several successive groups were badly rocked, and one completely routed by a barrage which accounted for another of the enemy, they were not entirely prevented from doing damage. It was noticeable that the Japanese seemed to know as much about the geography of the country and the location of various installations as we did. This is not surprising when considered in the light of the extensive activity of the Jap fishing fleets along the Aleutians in past years.

As they had demonstrated elsewhere, the enemy pilots were surprisingly accurate in their bombing, and adept in the handling of their ships. A well-aimed stick of five-hundred-pound bombs, and another of incendiaries, hit a barracks, the officers' mess hall, and a couple of warehouses. Army firemen made a heroic attempt to put out the flames. They did succeed in preventing them from spreading to adjacent buildings.

Mainly because of well-planned slit trenches and fox holes, casualties among military personnel were relatively very slight. Once again, it was proved that, with proper protection, men can survive extremely close explosions. It is interesting that there were noticeably fewer soldiers injured among gun batteries like our own than among groups once considered as noncombatant.

The second day, the Japanese did not make their appearance until evening. This time there was ample warning for everyone to reach his assigned position. Waiting for the enemy planes to appear during the



next thirty minutes was probably the most nerve-racking part of the whole affair. Finally, there was a drone of motors, which grew louder and louder, until the planes could be seen with the naked eye, approaching from all directions. As before, all weapons sprang into action. At the first shot, the tension was broken, and the men settled down for a very busy forty or fifty minutes. As contrasted with the first visit the second was made mostly by dive bombers and Zero fighters. Thirty or more planes in all, they came in from all directions again, this time at a height of 5,000 feet. When the gun batteries opened up, and the air began to fill with tracers and bursts, the enemy roared down, concentrating, for the most part, on gun positions, the docks, oil tanks, radio stations, and power plants. One of the first planes to dive placed his 500-pound "egg" squarely in the middle of an oil storage tank. Other ships dived repeatedly upon the old station ship, *Northwestern*, beached near the Dutch Harbor docks.

From our gun position we could see, at intervals, the tremendous columns of smoke rising up from the tanks and the small dock near by. The air was filled with the acrid odor of burning fuel and wood.

How many planes flew back and forth, over and in

front of us, it was hard to tell. It seemed as if there was always a new group to fire upon. One gun crew near ours had just made a direct hit upon one bomber. Before they had time to traverse their 37mm gun to pick up another plane on an incoming diving course, they were hit and put completely out of action by a large bomb. The neighboring crew only a hundred feet away merely increased their fire, calling for more planes and ammunition. Those men from the bombed crew, after doing what they could for their own dead and wounded, joined the second gun and carried on until the end of the attack.

After what seemed like hours, the enemy was finally driven away, and we had an opportunity to relax and take stock of the situation. Although more planes were involved, the actual damage had been relatively slight, less than that of the preceding day. The greatest material loss, but one by no means irreparable, had been that of the oil tanks. The particular loss that affected us most was that of close friends and comrades. It does, however, give us, and those left behind at Dutch Harbor only greater determination to do all we can to win the war. In the two bombings, the Japanese lost six planes. Next time they will lose more.

