

10 占守(シュムシュ)島と樺太の戦い

樋口はソ連の行動いかんによっては自衛戦争が必要になるだろうと考えていましたが、その懸念は現実のものとなりました。

この時日本軍の占守島と幌延島の総兵力は陸海部隊合わせて3万2千、火砲200門、戦車85輛、艦攻機8機でした。

18日午前零時、凄まじい砲弾の炸裂音に眠りについていた将兵は一斉に跳ね起きました。

これがソ連軍による占守島への上陸作戦の開始でした。やがて凄まじい艦砲射撃とともに18日午前1時過ぎには、ソ連軍の上陸部隊が占守島北端の竹田浜に上陸してきました。

激戦の末、21日午前8時にやっと双方は停戦しました。

ソ連軍の損害は戦死行方不明者4500名、艦隊撃沈14、舟艇20など日本軍の死傷者は600名となりました。樺太でも日本軍はソ連軍の陸海空からの猛攻に耐え続け、南樺太を北海道侵攻の前線基地にしようとするスターリンの作戦を不可能にしたのです。

スターリンはトルーマン米大統領に対し、22日、不満ながら北海道占領を断念する旨の回答を送りました。ついに樋口は、北海道という本土防衛を戦い抜いたのでした。

もし北海道北半の武力占領が実現していたら、ソ連は北海道だけでなくさらに東北地方の占領、首都東京の分割統治まで視野に入れていたと伝えられています。その意味で、占守島と樺太の戦いは、ソ連の果てしない野望を完全に破壊したものと言えましょう。

10. Battle on Shumshu and Sakhalin Islands

Higuchi feared that depending on how the Soviets would react, the Japanese might need to fight a war of self-defense, and his fear was realized. At that time, Japan's total military force on Shumshu and Paramushir Islands, with the army and navy combined, consisted of 32,000 men, 200 artillery pieces, 85 tanks and eight carrier-based attack planes.

On August 18, at the stroke of midnight, an ear-piercing sound of artillery shells jerked officers and soldiers out of sleep. It was the Soviets beginning their military offensive to land on Shumshu Island. Just past 1 a.m., Soviet troops began landing on Takeda Beach at the northern tip of Shumshu with the aid of heavy naval bombardment.

After a fierce battle, soldiers on both sides finally stopped fighting at 8 a.m. on August 21. Soviet forces suffered 4,500 deaths and missing in action, 14 sunken navy squadrons and another 20 boats out of action, whereas Japan suffered 600 deaths and wounded.

On Sakhalin Island, Japanese forces also withstood a ruthless assault by land, sea and air from the Soviets, thwarting Stalin's plan to turn southern Sakhalin into the base from which the Soviets would launch an invasion into Hokkaido.

On August 22, Stalin sent a message to President Truman that stated that against his will the Soviet Union would abandon its plan to gain possession of Hokkaido. In other words, Higuchi had successfully defended Hokkaido in his homeland. Had the Soviet Union placed the northern half of Hokkaido under its control, Stalin would have proceeded to seize not only the entire Hokkaido but also the Tohoku region in northeastern Japan and even divided and ruled Tokyo along with the United States. In this sense, the battles on Shumshu and Sakhalin Islands effected an end to Stalin's ambitions in Japan.