

アッツ島とキスカ島の戦い【1】

アッツ島(熱田島)とキスカ島(鳴神島)はアメリカアラスカ州アリューシャン列島に位置し、北方地域における日米を結ぶ中継地点で、戦況を左右する重要拠点となりうる地域であったこの島を大本営はミッドウェイ海戦の陽動作戦も兼ねて昭和17年(1942年)6月に占領した。

樋口季一郎中将は1942年(昭和17年)8月1日に北部軍司令官に着任して直ぐ、アッツ島(熱田島)とキスカ島(鳴神島)を改善するように大本営に進言し、北部方面軍として指令下に入れ飛行場などを建設し増援した。

アメリカ軍は周到な準備をして、潜水艦や爆撃機を投入し1万5000名が昭和18年(1943年)5月12日アッツ島(熱田島)に上陸を開始した。

日本軍は守備隊長山崎保代大佐率いる2600名が迎え撃った。樋口中将は増援部隊を準備したが海軍が船を出さず大本営の中止通告により断腸の思いで断念した。山崎大佐以下守備隊は士気が高く、3日で制圧するというアメリカ軍の想定を遥かに超える18日間を戦い抜いて玉砕した。

樋口中将はこの18日の戦いで山崎大佐との応援部隊を出す約束を守れなかった苦惱で10kg痩せたと言われています。

だがキスカ島(鳴神島)にはまだ5,800名は将兵が取り残されている。

樋口中将はアッツ島は諦めるがキスカ島の将兵は絶対撤退させるとの思いで大本営を承諾させ、実行に移す。

The Battle of Attu and Kiska Islands【1】

Attu Island (Atsuta Island) and Kiska Island (Narukami Island) were located in the Aleutian Islands of the U.S. state of Alaska. Serving as relay points between Japan and the U.S. in the northern region, they were potentially important bases that would determine the outcome of the Pacific War. These islands were occupied by the Imperial Army of Japan according to an order issued by the Imperial Headquarters of Japan in June 1942. The primary motive was to draw the attention of the U.S. Pacific Fleet away from the planned attack on Midway Island, a crucial battle in the Pacific theater.

Immediately after taking office as Commander-in-Chief of the Northern District Army on August 1, 1942, Lieutenant General Kiichiro Higuchi advised that the Imperial Headquarters should put Attu Island and Kiska Island under the control of the Northern District Army to improve the conditions of these islands by constructing airfields and other facilities there.

The U.S. forces made careful preparations, deploying submarines and bombers, and 15,000 troops began landing on Attu Island on May 12, 1943.

The Japanese forces, led by Colonel Yasuyo Yamazaki, commander of the garrison, with 2,600 men, intercepted the U.S. forces. Lieutenant General Higuchi prepared reinforcements, but the Imperial Navy of Japan did not send any ships, and he gave up on the idea of sending reinforcements to Attu Island after being informed by the Imperial Headquarters of Japan that the landing had been canceled. The garrison under Colonel Yamazaki was highly motivated and fought for 18 days—far longer than the three days the U.S. forces had expected it would take to seize the island—before being reduced to ashes.

It is said that Lieutenant General Higuchi lost 10 kilograms due to the agony of not being able to fulfill his promise to Colonel Yamazaki to send out a support force during the 18-day battle.

However, there were still 5,800 officers and soldiers left behind on Kiska Island.

While Lieutenant General Higuchi had given up on Attu Island, he was determined to have the officers and soldiers on Kiska Island withdraw. He therefore persuaded the General Headquarters to agree to his evacuation plan and put it into action.