

AKUTAN ZERO

HOW THE US NAVY ENGAGED IN A RACE TO UNCOVER THE SECRETS OF THE FEARED ZERO

BY C.E. COLBY

The date was 4 June 1942 and the military forces of Japan seemed to be unbeatable. All across the Pacific, the Japanese were steamrolling over American and Allied defenses in a quest for total domination. On this date, a young (he was thought to be only 19-years-old) Japanese pilot named Tadayoshi Koga carefully strapped into the cockpit of his Zero fighter prior to attacking American targets in the remote Aleutian Islands. Little did he know that his flight would aid America in defeating Japan's plans for the destruction of the United States and its Allies in the Pacific.

Today, it may seem odd that an intense battle was being fought at the top of the world to gain a foothold in American occupied territory but there were a number of reasons for this. First, Japan was planning a massive strike to capture the small but vital island of Midway in the far reaches of the Pacific. Second, Japanese troops could gain bases in the Aleutians and then hop across the 120 islands that comprised the chain to invade Alaska and then work down into Canada and eventually the United States. The attack



The red circle denotes the remote location of the downed fighter. on the Aleutians would draw battered American forces away from the Pacific (and Midway) to protect our national interests.

At Pearl Harbor, brave American pilots and anti-aircraft gunners accounted for 29 Imperial Japanese



Koga posing for a formal portrait.

The salvage crew notes what needs to be done to transport the Zero to Dutch Harbor. As can be seen, the plane was in an extremely remoted location and care had to be taken to not further damage the airframe.