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Obscured by the fog that covers the North Pacific front, a grim struggle is going on for the island highway that links North America and Asia.

The 180th meridian divides the Eastern and Western Hemispheres and the Japanese and United States forces with geometric neatness.

The Japanese advance base is at Kiska. The furthest west United States base, so far as known, is in the Andreanof Island group. The east-west meridian almost exactly separates them.

This "front" is a mid-link in the chain of islands stretching from the Alaskan mainland to Japan proper. The over-water hops between islands average 50 to 100 miles, with one exception—the big gap between Attu and Paramushiru, northernmost of the Japanese Kuriles.

The United States Navy-Army forces in the Alaska-Aleutian theatre have the advantage of shorter supply lines. It is roughly 2,000 miles east of the main United States supply port at Seattle. The Japanese have a 2,850-mile haul from Yokohama.

The United States command has more and better bases supporting its spearhead. Dutch Harbor, 465 miles away, backs up the Andreanofs. The closest major Japanese base is Paramushiru, 760 miles off.

In addition, the United States has half a dozen major bases in back of Dutch Harbor, plus an alternate, protected supply route via the Alaska Highway and Fairbanks.

To the south, the distances also favor the United States. Midway is 1,600 miles away from the Andreanofs. Wake, 2,350 miles away, is the closest Japanese base to the south, giving American forces the advantage of flank interception against a thrust from that sector.

The area of major operations is

from 50 to 55 degrees north latitude, and stretches for 10 degrees on either side of "the line." Here is where the war for control of the Pacific island highway is being waged this spring.

Kiska, and Attu to a lesser degree, have taken a fearful pasting from United States bombers. The Jap is hanging on grimly to precipitous Rat (Kiska) and Near (Attu) islands.

Despite bombings, work goes

ahead on the landing field at Kiska. Completed and usable, it would give the Japanese a roost for land planes. They have heretofore been restricted to float planes.

Spring and early summer is the season for fighting in the murky, weather-breeding Aleutians. At other times, it is a rare day when the "soup" lifts enough for air operations.

Beyond routine announcements

that Kiska and Attu are being bombed up to 15 times daily, navy communiques have made a clam seem positively talkative. There has been no hint of landing operations in the "no man's islands" between Kiska and the Andreanofs.

The stakes are high. A 200-mile advance by United States forces to recapture Kiska and Attu would set the Japanese back on their heels a thousand miles west to Paramushiru. The war would be in their hemisphere then, and the threat to Alaska inherent in a Japanese base on Kiska would be eliminated.

The Kuriles would be the next step on the road to Japan proper. Not a few strategists hold that this short route offers definite advantages over the Southwest Pacific approach to Japan.

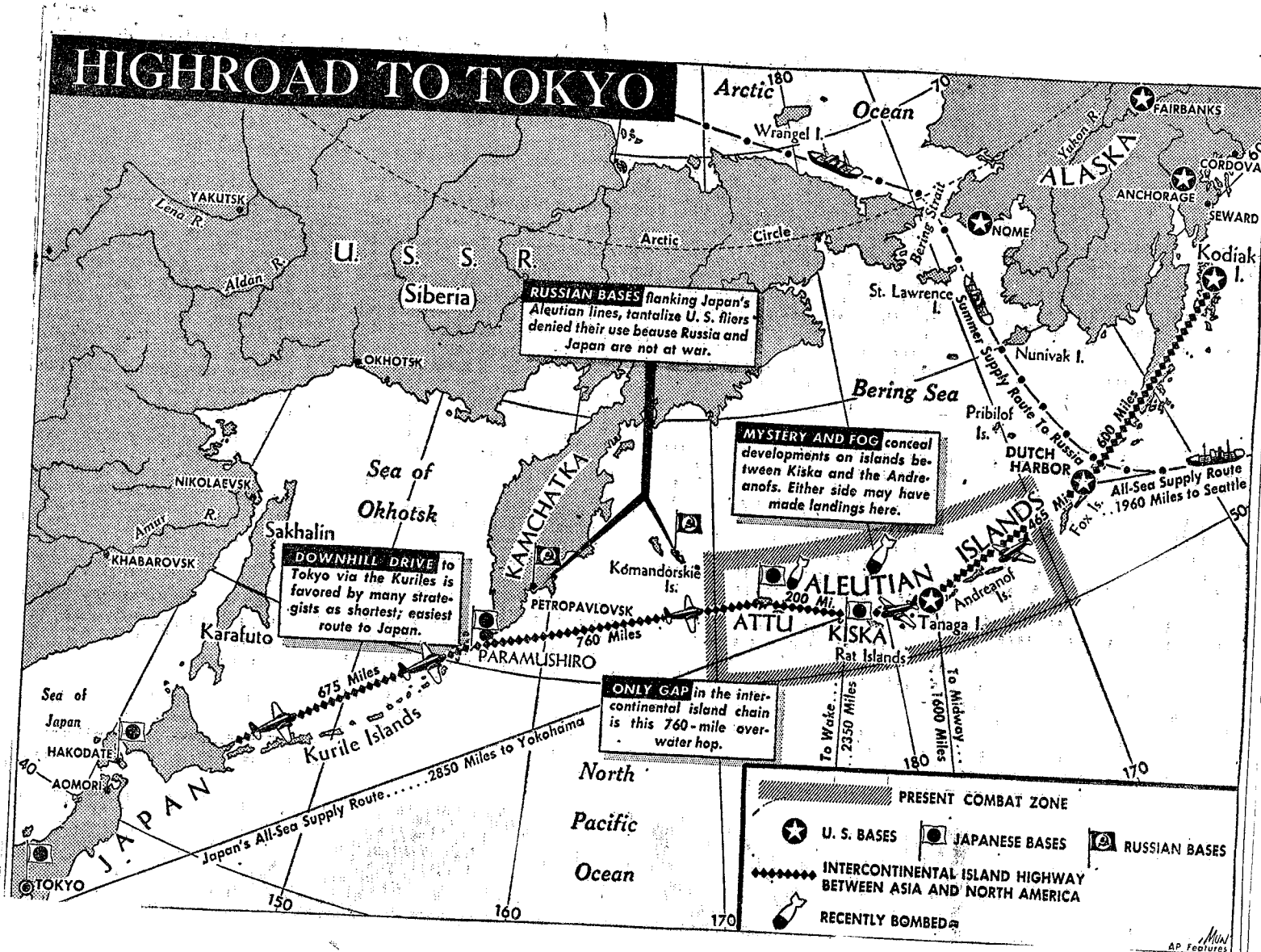
It is half as far from United States bases and supply ports. It offers more potential havens for aircraft. Just as the Japanese can hop fighter aircraft into the South Pacific along an island chain, so could the United States ferry fighters along the North Pacific highway.

It is only 700 miles from Paramushiru to Hokkaido, northernmost of the "main" Japanese islands.

The fighting along the front where hemispheres meet may decide this summer whether the eventual invasion of Japan moves in from the north or south. If Kiska and Attu are regained, they will be potent arguments for the northern approach.

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149
WAR
PACIFIC
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ALEUTIANS



149
WAR
PACIFIC
1941
ALEUTIANS

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