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### Gilbert Endecavageh in the Battle of Attu

Six months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, on June 7th, 1942, Japan sought to continue its naval offensive in the Pacific and landed in Kiska and Attu in Alaska.<sup>1</sup> Despite originally training at Fort Ord in California to fight in Africa, the 7th Infantry Division landed in Attu on May 11th, 1943 to combat the Japanese invasion in two main places—Holtz Bay and Massacre Bay.<sup>2</sup> Now known as the Battle of Attu, the action lasted for eighteen days.<sup>3</sup> In addition to military conflict, the U.S. soldiers faced extreme weather conditions. They were unprepared for winds over one hundred miles per hour, pouring rain, fog, and rugged terrain.<sup>4</sup> Although the Japanese used the climate and landscape to their advantage, the 7th Infantry Division was ultimately able to corner them into defense positions at Holtz Bay and Chicago Harbor.<sup>5</sup> The final push of the Japanese defense on Attu was a Banzai charge on May 29th, a surprise suicidal attack in a last-ditch effort to escape defeat.<sup>6</sup> In spite of facing much adversity, the 7th Infantry Division proved triumphant. The American victory in the Battle of Attu was crucial to the war effort because of Attu's strategic geographical importance; it helped the U.S. prevent any further

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<sup>1</sup> Claus-M. Naske, “The Battle of Alaska Has Ended and ... the Japs Won It,” *Military Affairs* 49, no. 3 (1985): 144, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1987922>.

<sup>2</sup> Ephriam D. Dickson, “Sergeant George F. Noland and the Battle of Attu Island, 1943,” *On Point* 21, no. 3 (2016): 30–30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26365594>; “Battle for Attu,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 1943, <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1943/05/19/83922503.html?pageNumber=24>.

<sup>3</sup> *The Battle of Attu: 60 Years Later*, United States: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Alaska Region, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> John Haile Cloe, *Attu: The Forgotten Battle*, United States: Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Alaska Affiliated Areas, Aleutian World War II National Historic Area, 2017, 8-9.

<sup>5</sup> “Battle for Attu”; *The Battle of Attu: 60 Years Later*.

<sup>6</sup> Dickson, 30.

advances from the Pacific and caused Japan to redistribute their forces and retreat.<sup>7</sup> The Battle of Attu was also a wakeup call for U.S military preparedness, as the U.S. subsequently made several additions to their equipment, clothing, and rations.<sup>8</sup> Despite the American success, however, the Battle of Attu was also one of the deadliest.<sup>9</sup> Many heroic Americans in the 7th ID sacrificed their lives for the battle—one of which being Gilbert Endecavageh.

On April 19th, 1920, Henry and Lulu Endecavageh gave birth to Gilbert Endecavageh—their fifth child.<sup>10</sup> Gilbert grew up in Cook County in Lemont, IL with his two older brothers, Robert and Lloyd, his two older sisters, Ethel and Isabelle, and his younger sister Marion.<sup>11</sup> After graduating from Lemont High School, at 5’ 8” and 168 lbs, Gilbert finally enlisted in the army on October 9, 1941 in Chicago, IL.<sup>12</sup> As a Pfc. soldier of the 17th Infantry Regiment in the 7th ID, Gilbert landed in Massacre Bay on May 11th, 1943.<sup>13</sup> As the U.S. cornered the Japanese, Gilbert fearlessly fought up Massacre Valley in an effort towards Chicago Harbor, even taking a bullet to the back and continuing to fight.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, he was killed in action on May 23rd.<sup>15</sup> Although originally interred in Little Falls Cemetery on Attu, Gilbert was

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<sup>7</sup> Cloe, 114; The Battle of Attu: 60 Years Later.

<sup>8</sup> The Battle of Attu: 60 Years Later.

<sup>9</sup> Infobase Editorial Staff, 2023, “Attu Battlefield and U.S. Army and Navy Airfields on Attu,” *Alaska: National Historic Landmarks*, Facts On File, [online.infobase.com/ Auth/Index?aid=15454&itemid=WE52&articleId=649840](https://online.infobase.com/Auth/Index?aid=15454&itemid=WE52&articleId=649840).

<sup>10</sup> Ancestry.com, *Cook County, Illinois, U.S., Birth Certificates Index, 1871-1922* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Ancestry.com, *1940 United States Federal Census* [database on-line], Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>12</sup> "THE MERCHANTS START SEASON WITH TIE GAME," *The Lemont Herald*, October 31, 1940. <https://basic.newspapers.com/article/the-lemont-herald-this-shows-vitol-lingi/129715943/>; National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland, USA, *Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, 1938-1946*, NAID: 1263923, Record Group Title: *Records of the National Archives and Records Administration, 1789-ca. 2007*, Record Group: 64, Box Number: 10615, Reel: 123; *1940 United States Federal Census*.

<sup>13</sup> Cloe, 72; Ancestry.com, *U.S., Find a Grave® Index, 1600s-Current* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Dennis Dupras, “PFC Gilbert J Endecavageh Attu May 1943,” Fold3 Stories, Accessed April 10, 2024, <https://www.fold3.com/memorial/89635198/gilbert-j-endecavageh/stories>; Gilbert J Endecavageh in the US, WWII Hospital Admission Card Files, 1942-1954, last updated June 12, 2020, accessed through Fold3.

<sup>15</sup> Dupras.

later moved to Sitka National Cemetery.<sup>16</sup> Because of his sacrifice, Gilbert posthumously received a Purple Heart award.<sup>17</sup> While Gilbert is neither a prominent hero nor a highly-ranked soldier, it is still necessary to honor his WWII legacy. After all, he not only sacrificed his life for the good of his country in a crucial battle of WWII, but, by continuing to fight when severely injured, also displayed determination and perseverance along the way.

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<sup>16</sup> Ancestry.com, *U.S., National Cemetery Interment Control Forms, 1928-1962* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

<sup>17</sup> "Endecavageh, Gilbert J.," TracesOfWar.com, Accessed April 10, 2024, <https://www.tracesofwar.com/persons/74318/Endecavageh-Gilbert-J.htm>.

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