BOOK GUIDE

THE FORGOTTEN WAR

BY CANDACE FLEMING

The Forgotten War: A World War II Battle on American Soil

By Candace Fleming

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The Story

Charlie Groth has just been drafted into the US Army's 7th Infantry as a litter-bearer in October 1942 when he boards a ship bound for remote parts of Alaska. Japanese forces have invaded mere months after their deadly attack on Pearl Harbor and are occupying two of the Aleutian Islands. Yet Charlie and his fellow soldiers have been assured it's bound to be an easy fight and a quick victory. The boys will be home with their families for the holidays.

It will be three years before Charlie see his family again.

Paul Nobuo Tatsuguchi is a physician in the Imperial Japanese Armed Forces with a penchant for journaling, a way to distract himself from how much he misses his family. As Charlie and his fellow soldiers make their way to Attu Island, Paul and his troops construct foxholes and field hospitals in preparation for the vicious battle to come.

When the two armies meet amid the fog and freezing rain, neither side is ready for the desperate fight that will become the second-bloodiest battle in the Pacific after Iwo Jima. And neither is prepared for the price that patriotism and loyalty will demand.

Following two parallel stories from opposite sides of the conflict and capturing the war through first-person accounts, brilliant analysis, and archival photographs, award-winning author Candace Fleming brings this history to life with a thrilling, movingly personal, and fast-paced examination of the little-known World War II campaign that unfolded on American soil and wound up playing an essential role in the ultimate defeat of the Japanese Admiralty in the Pacific.

Reading Group Questions

1. The Aleutian Islands are remote and subject to extreme weather, as we learn in *The Forgotten War*. How do the physical attributes of Attu Island influence the eventual battle?

2. Why did the United States government keep news of the invasion of Attu Island from the American people? Can you point to one way the government censored or otherwise hid this information?

3. What were some of the errors both the American and Japanese forces made when planning the invasion and defense of Attu Island? How did these mistakes affect troop movements or the battle at large?

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About the Author

Photo © Candace Fleming

Candace Fleming is the award-winning and highly acclaimed author of more than twenty books for children and young adults, including *Is It Real? The Loch Ness Monster; Crash from Outer Space: Unraveling the Mystery of Flying Saucers, Alien Beings, and Roswell*; *The Curse of the Mummy: Uncovering Tutankhamun's Tomb*; and Sibert Honor Book *The Enigma Girls: How Ten Teenagers Broke Ciphers, Kept Secrets, and Helped Win World War II.* Candace is also the winner of the ALA's 2026 Margaret A. Edwards and Children's Literature Legacy Awards. She lives outside of Chicago, and you can visit her online at candacefleming.com.

Author Q&A

This is a very personal project for you. What was it like to write a book about your father's experiences during World War II? Did anything surprise you during your research or writing process?

I went into this project with both excitement and trepidation; excitement because I was setting off to discover parts of my father I'd never known; trepidation because I feared what I might learn. War, after all, is not clean and neat, and neither is its aftermath. There was a reason my dad refused to talk about the gritty realities of his experiences on Attu. What had *really* happened to him over there? It pained me to imagine my gentle, sensitive father facing the horrors of battle. But I *had* to know. Beyond my father's personal experiences, this book is about the immense pain and suffering caused by war and the changes it makes in a person, as well as the long struggle to find one's way back from war, and all that that means.

The biggest surprise? The story of the Saskinax people. The island of Attu had been their ancestral home long before the Japanese invaded. The sorrow and tragedy resulting from that invasion—loss of their homeland, relocation to a POW camp, starvation, and death—still ripples across their community today. As I researched, I kept asking myself, "Why haven't we heard about this before?" It's a story we need to know.

What was the most difficult part of the book to write? What was the most fun part?

By far the hardest part to write was the bonsai attack on Engineer Hill. Recreating that hand-to-hand battle, and my father's part in it, brought me to tears. On the other hand, the most fun part was writing my parents' "meet cute." I probably heard that story in all its romantic detail a hundred times when I was a kid. I grinned the entire time I wrote that scene.

What would you love a reader to come away with after reading this book?

First and foremost, I want readers to gobble up this book; to keep turning the pages; to close the cover and think "great story." Beyond that, I hope it sparks some questions about the nature of war, and what we truly ask of those men and women our country sends into harm's way.

Did the fact that the United States government went to great lengths to keep the battles on the Aleutian Islands from the American people impact your research?

Luckily, my research wasn't impacted by the government's initial secrecy. By war's end, officials stopped covering up the events on Attu. Since the battle received so little press coverage at the time, however, it was largely forgotten. Still, the information was out there—buried in the collections of the National Archives, the Navy Office of Information, the Alaskan Command at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Anchorage, as well as in the memories of Attu's veterans, among other places. Much of this material has now been digitized, making my research process relatively painless. Additionally, I was helped along by dozens of military scholars who have recently begun re-examining the "Forgotten War." In many ways, this book really does stand on their academic shoulders.

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