

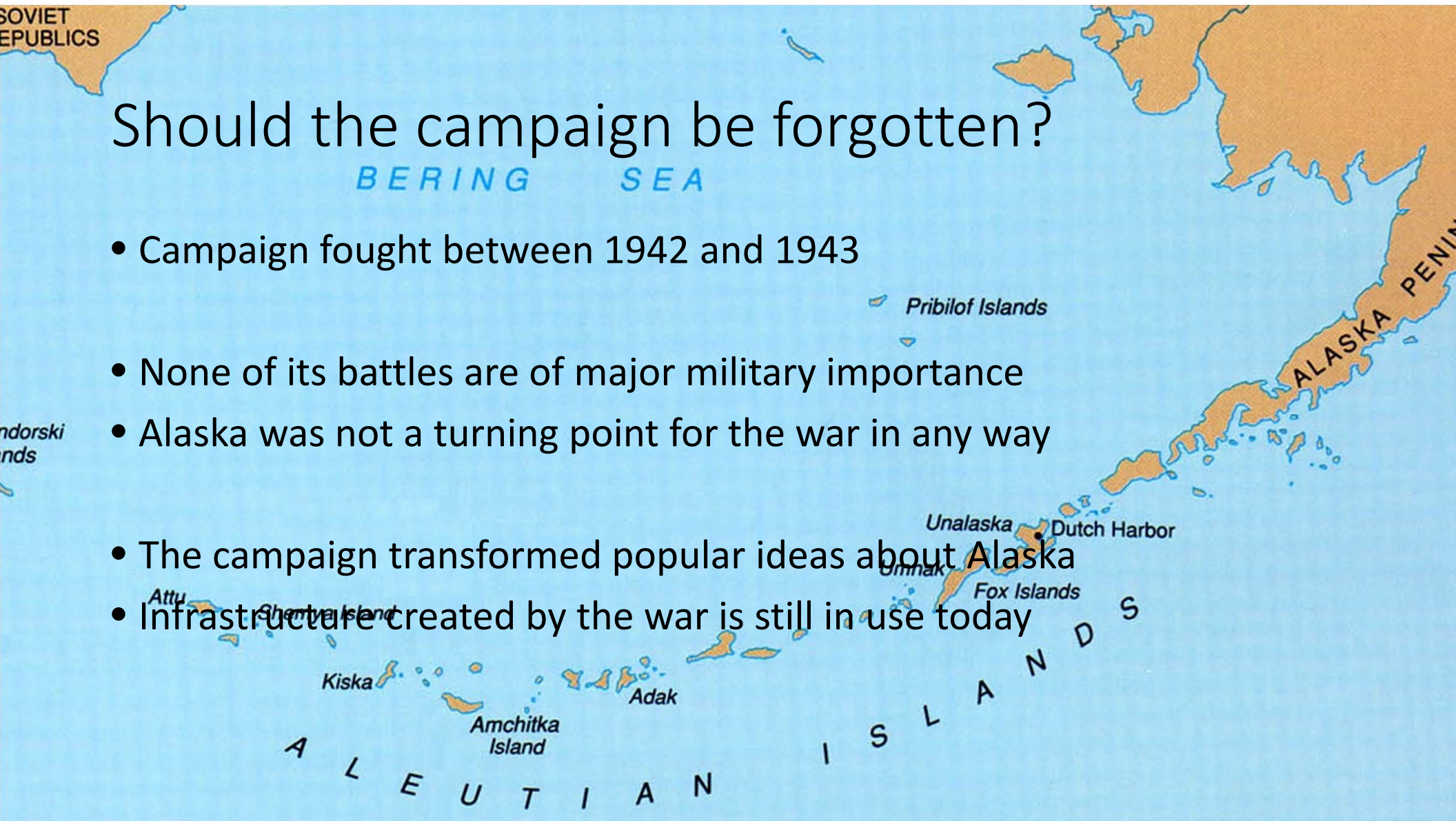
A map of Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. The Bering Sea is to the west, and the Soviet Republics are to the northwest. The Aleutian Islands are shown as a chain of islands extending from the Alaska Peninsula. Labeled islands include Attu, Shemya Island, Kiska, Amchitka Island, Adak, Umnak, Fox Islands, Unalaska, and Dutch Harbor. The Pribilof Islands are also labeled. The text "SOVIET REPUBLICS" is visible in the top left, "BERING SEA" in the top center, "ALASKA PENIN" on the right, and "ALEUTIAN ISLANDS" along the bottom.

Remembering Alaska's Forgotten Campaign

Lea Johannsen

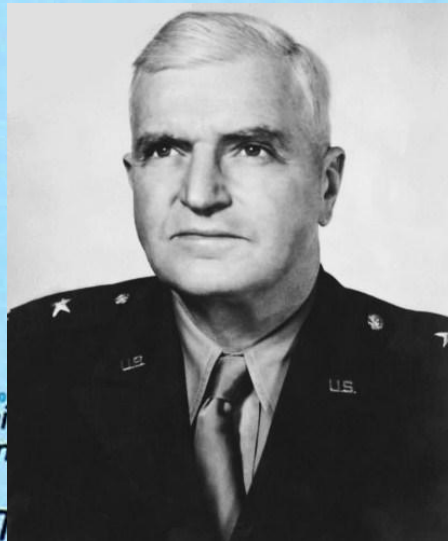
Should the campaign be forgotten?

- Campaign fought between 1942 and 1943
- None of its battles are of major military importance
- Alaska was not a turning point for the war in any way
- The campaign transformed popular ideas about Alaska
- Infrastructure created by the war is still in use today



Alaska's Growing Importance

- Previously untouched wilderness with no modern infrastructure
- Strategic importance
 - Start of WWII: as a naval base to counter Japanese expansion in Asia
- Colonel Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr.'s improves US defenses in Alaska



Alaskan Highway and Northwest Staging Route

- Joint construction project finally gets the road built
- The Highway and Staging Route become a boon to Alaskan pilots
- Lend-lease program with Russia takes off
- Horrific building conditions plague construction



SOVIET
REPUBLIC



Andorski
lands



Collateral: The Aleuts

- The Aleuts are the indigenous people of Alaska
- The US Army debated back and forth on an evacuation plan
- Eventual evacuation was sudden and without warning
- Aleuts were forced to live in canneries with minimal supplies
- This resulted in a huge death toll due to disease and starvation



SOVIET
EMPIRE

THE ALEUTIANS 1942-1943

--- Japanese Limit of Advance

0 300
Miles

UNION OF SOVIET
SOCIALIST REPUBLICS

ndors
nds

BERING SEA

St. Lawrence

ALASKA

ALASKA PENINSULA

Kodiak
Island

ENIN

Komandorski
Islands

Attu

Shemya Island

Kiska

Amchitka
Island

Adak

Unalaska

Dutch Harbor

Umnak

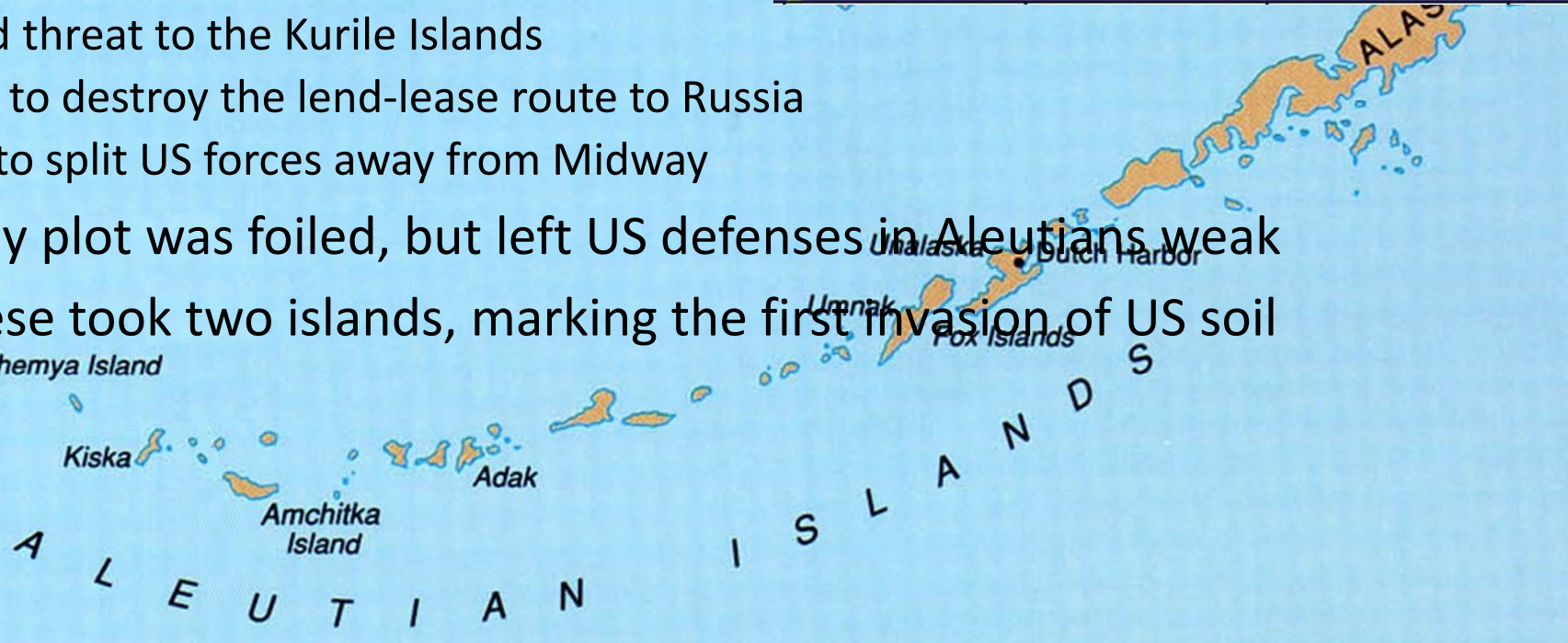
Fox Islands

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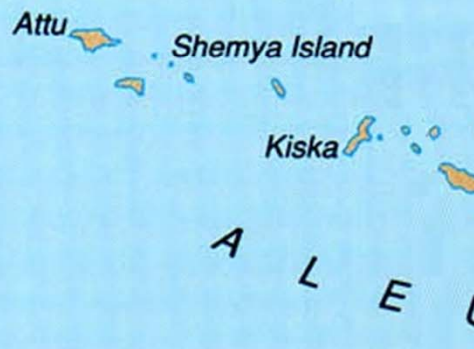
The Japanese Attack

- Reasons for the Aleutian attack included
 - Perceived threat to the Kurile Islands
 - A chance to destroy the lend-lease route to Russia
 - Attempt to split US forces away from Midway
- The Midway plot was foiled, but left US defenses in Aleutians weak
- The Japanese took two islands, marking the first invasion of US soil since 1812



Lackluster battles throughout the campaign

- Dutch Harbor's inexplicable lack of readiness
 - Both sides hindered by weather and miscommunication
- Failed bombing attempts on Kiska and Attu
- All airplane losses on both sides were mainly due to weather
- The Battle of Komandorski
 - 3 ½ hour naval battle ended with both sides retreating major loss free



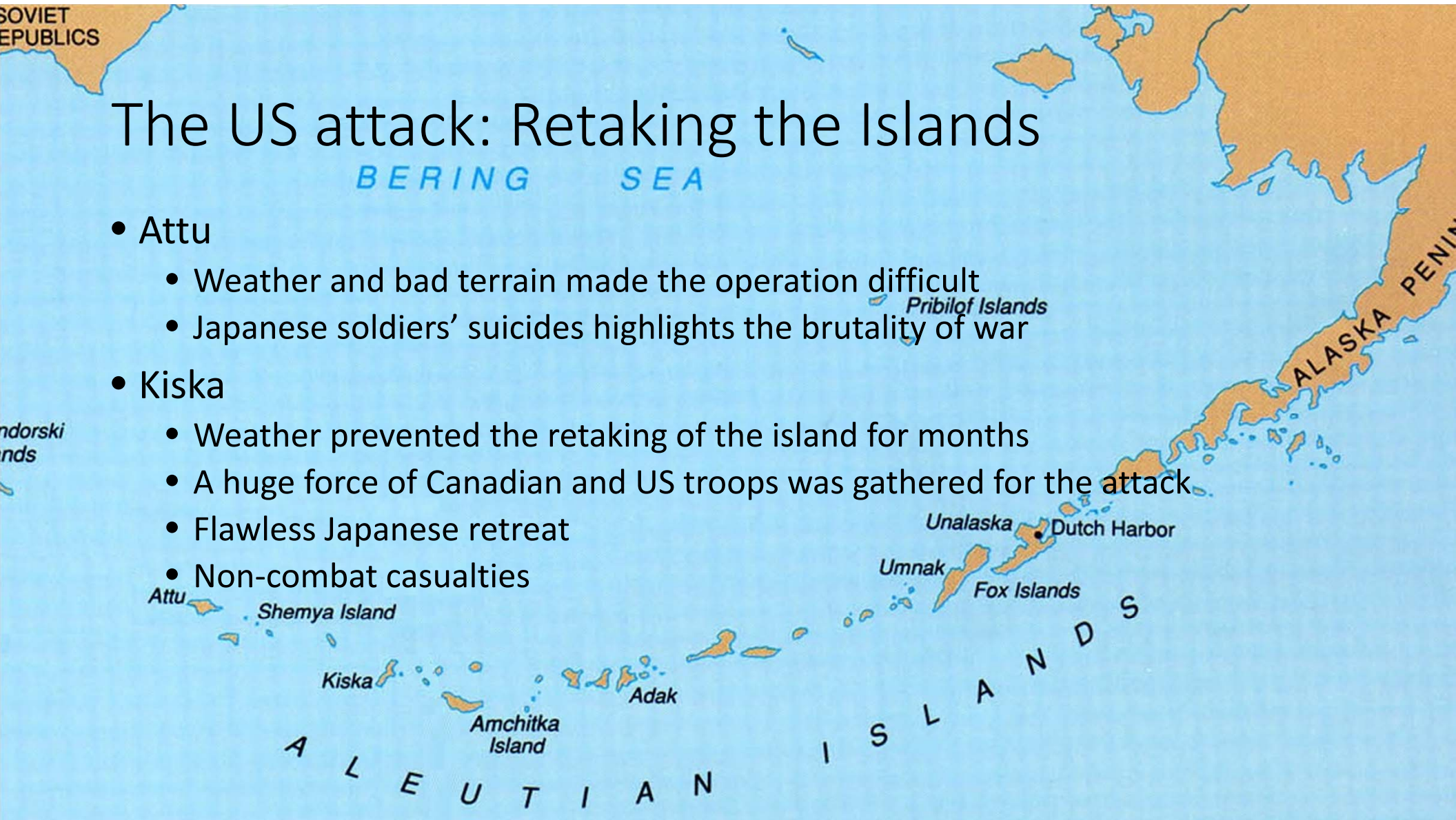
The US attack: Retaking the Islands

- Attu

- Weather and bad terrain made the operation difficult
- Japanese soldiers' suicides highlights the brutality of war

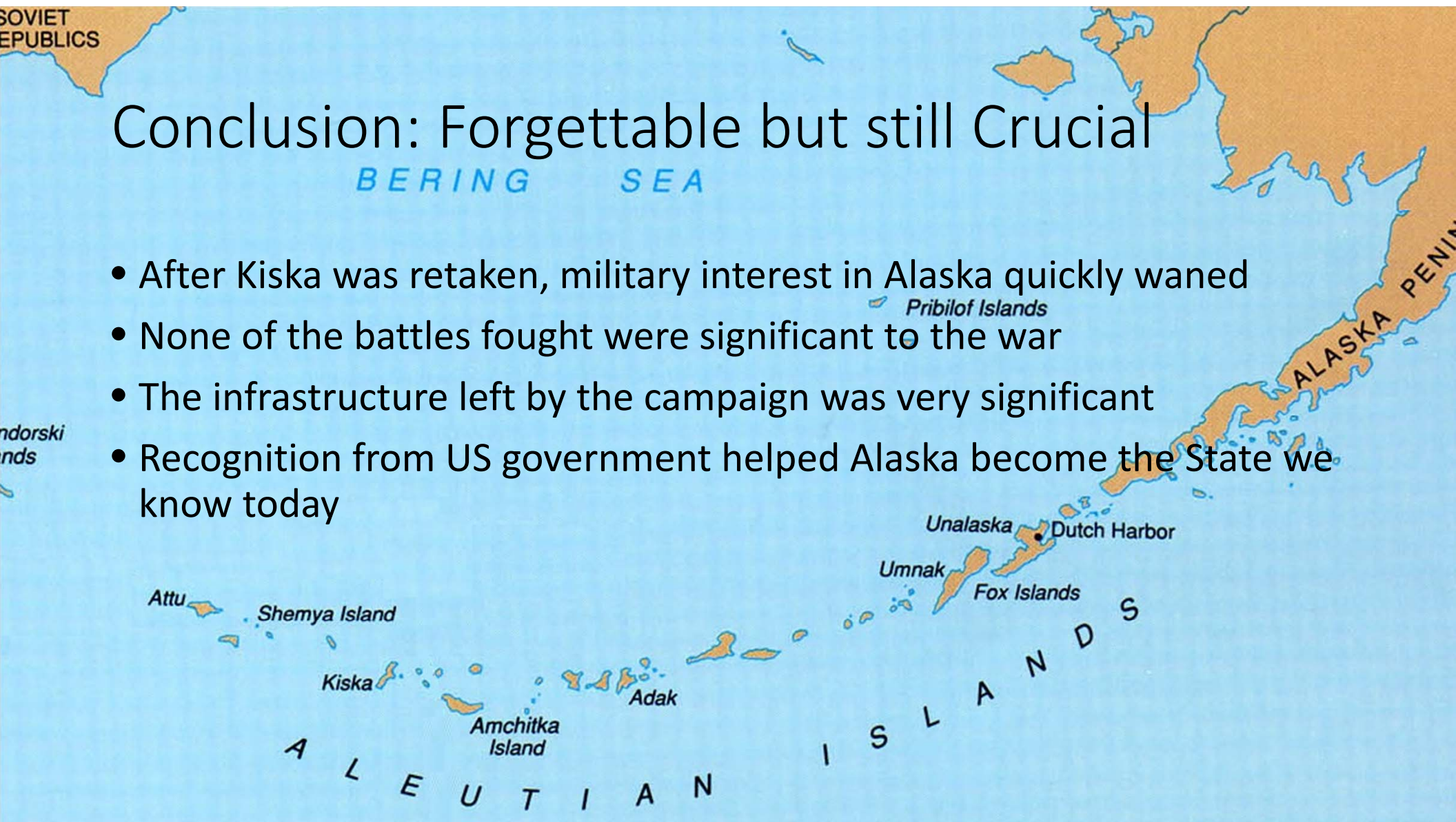
- Kiska

- Weather prevented the retaking of the island for months
- A huge force of Canadian and US troops was gathered for the attack
- Flawless Japanese retreat
- Non-combat casualties



Conclusion: Forgettable but still Crucial

- After Kiska was retaken, military interest in Alaska quickly waned
- None of the battles fought were significant to the war
- The infrastructure left by the campaign was very significant
- Recognition from US government helped Alaska become the State we know today



Picture credits

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