

# Chapter 1 of: **An Inseparable Mountie**

Adventures of the First Woman Mountie

Book 5

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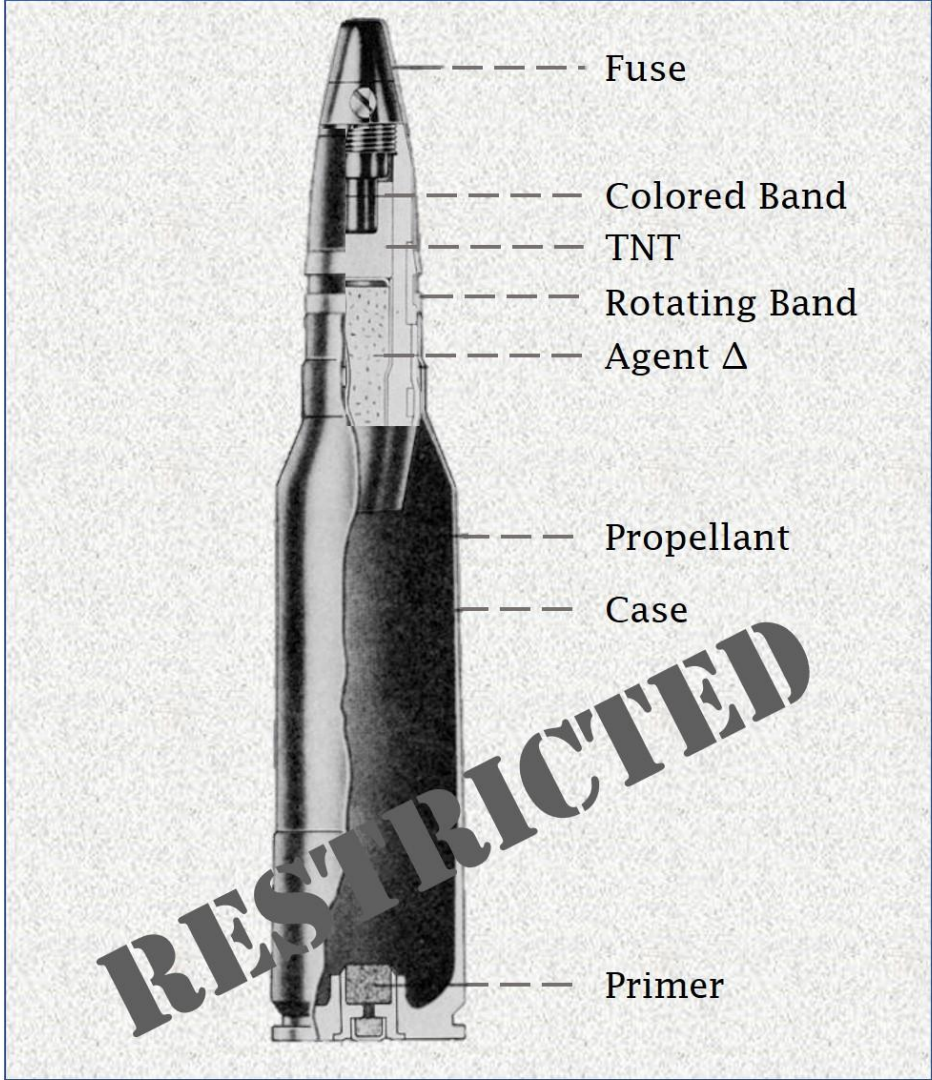
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**LAURIE SCHRAMM**

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## CHAPTER 1. PRELUDE. 1943

August 15, 1943

Semisopochnoi, Aleutian Islands, Alaska

*‘What a waste!’ thought Lieutenant Reo Saitō, as he paused from his work sifting through piles of documents.*

*The Third Special Landing Force of the Imperial Japanese Army had landed on three of Alaska’s Aleutian Islands the previous month<sup>1</sup>. Proud to have been part of the original landing, he had seen their invasion force quickly grow to nearly 7,000 personnel. In establishing bases here in the Aleutians and on Midway Island, some 1,600 miles further south, their superiors planned to support air and naval operations across the breadth of the north and central Pacific Ocean.*

*Although a Kaigun-daii (Naval Lieutenant) Saitō himself had been attached to assist the Imperial Japanese Army, which comprised the bulk of the invading force, and he had been assigned to Semisopochnoi Island, the most secret of the three islands. He and his colleagues had been lucky. They had been able to quickly locate and move into natural caves (old lava channels) in the volcanic Mount Cerberus. Assisted by speed and concealment, their modest force had remained undetected by the enemy.*

*Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the bulk of their forces, which were distributed among the other two islands, Kiska and Attu. Within only a day of their landing, an Allied patrol plane (most likely American or Canadian) had discovered their ships off Kiska Island. By the next day, the enemy had discovered their force on Attu Island. Within the first week, bombers had started arriving periodically, and then submarines had come. In one attack alone, enemy submarines had torpedoed three of their destroyers in Kiska’s harbour, sinking one and damaging the others. That had all been in June, 1942, just over a year ago.*

*The competition between their forces’ efforts to establish defenses, an airfield, roads, and accommodations and the enemy’s almost constant attempts to destroy them from air and sea had continued all year long. It had been a fairly even struggle, back and forth. Sometimes they would achieve a major advance, other times they would suffer a major setback. If only they had been able to complete the airfield, then the fighters could arrive that would provide the security of air cover for the remainder of their construction. After that, they would be able to seize the initiative and take the fight to the enemy.*

*Unfortunately, the enemy had clearly been worried about the same thing as two months earlier, on May 11, 1943, the Americans had launched their own major invasion on Attu. Despite fierce resistance, the Japanese forces were eventually overwhelmed and, facing*

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<sup>1</sup> In reality, only two (not three) of the Aleutian Islands – Kiska and Attu - were occupied by the Japanese in June 1942, during the Second World War. Attu was retaken after a two-week battle in May 1943, involving ground forces of the US Army and air support from the RCAF. In July 1943, and just before a combined US-Canadian force attacked, the Japanese destroyed and/or booby-trapped most of their weapons, equipment, and supplies on Kiska, and evacuated it without a single loss of life.

certain defeat, mounted a final, glorious two-day banzai charge on May 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>.

While the Americans regrouped for an assault on Kiska, the Imperial General Headquarters had decided to move first and evacuate. On July 28, "Operation KE" had launched. Two cruisers and six destroyers had entered the Kiska Harbor under the cover of heavy fog. Then, a sign... the fog suddenly lifted and, having already destroyed and/or booby-trapped everything that could be of possible use to the enemy, over 5,000 troops had boarded the ships within a single afternoon and been spirited away!

Their presence on Semisopchnoi Island had not been discovered. Nevertheless, Reo's superiors had decided to evacuate it as well. With the surface ships gone, Reo and his colleagues would be taken off by submarine. It was just as well, Reo decided. Today was August 15<sup>th</sup>, and they had listened with almost magnetic fascination to the radio reports as a dawn attack at Kiska Island was underway by a huge force of Americans.

Amused by the embarrassment the Americans were going to suffer when they discovered that their huge invasion force had bravely conquered an abandoned island, Reo and his colleagues prepared for their own evacuation as, coincidentally, today was to be their day.

Now here he was, sorting through the last of their files, removing each of the confidential documents and tossing them through an open grate and into the crackling fire of a wood-burning stove. There wasn't much to destroy. Semisopchnoi Island had only been intended to be used for intelligence work and special operations support. The former had produced many files, which Reo was now destroying. The latter involved stores of special, large calibre ammunition.

Lieutenant Boshiro Isobe, Reo's friend in the army, had given him a tour of their munition stores, which were contained in long tunnels under the mountain. Along the way, Boshiro had opened a few crates.

The conventional, explosive rounds had black projectile bodies, and red-painted tips on the fuse caps indicated that the rounds had been filled and were ready for use. Coloured bands painted on the projectile bodies, just below the fuse-caps identified the payload contents, yellow or green meant high-explosive (HE), red meant shrapnel, white meant armor-piercing (AP), and combinations of colours meant combinations of contents, like yellow/green for HE-tracers.

"See here," Boshiro had said, taking a shell from its crate. "Black body means explosive, white and green band means armour-piercing tracers, and the red tip means it's filled and ready to go!"

Next, Boshiro had shown him some of the "specials," as they were called. These carried unconventional loads that were also identified by colour. The specials' projectile bodies were grey, and for these rounds blue-painted tips on the fuse caps indicated that they had been filled and were ready for use. Here again, coloured bands identified the payload contents, green meant "tear," yellow meant "blister," blue meant "choke," and red meant "vomit."

"Chemical weapons," said Reo. "I have heard of them but never seen them before."

"Now look at this one," Boshiro said, taking a shell from a different crate. Reo noticed that Boshiro was much more careful in his handling of this one. "Grey body means it's gas- or liquid-filled - a 'special.' The brown band means "nerve," and the blue tip means it's filled and ready to go!"

"A nerve weapon," whispered Reo, as a cold chill suddenly ran down his spine. He suddenly

*felt afraid. "Put it away..."*

*Boshiro put on a brave face, but he was quick enough to carefully put the round back into its case. Then, in a low voice, he added, "In use, we would add one of these special rounds every four or five rounds, just like we often insert a tracer round after every four or five explosive rounds."*

*"They are small," Reo commented, surprised.*

*"Small but powerful. In this case, only a few special rounds are needed to kill or incapacitate dozens of enemy soldiers. These are 25 mm rounds, designed to be fired from large rapid-fire weapons like the Type 96, Kyūroku-shiki niyūgo-miri Kōkakukijū guns. You navy types use them for anti-aircraft defenses on your ships."*

*Reo nodded. The ship he had arrived on had carried triple-barreled AA guns. The British called them Hotchkiss Guns.*

*"In the army, we normally use them against tanks and other vehicles. With high explosives, an effective firing range of four miles, and a firing rate of fire of over a hundred rounds per minute, I've seen them shred an armoured half-track in less than a minute!"*

*"As you can see, we have a lot of ammunition stored here." Boshiro waved his arm dramatically at the long tunnel whose sides were stacked from floor to ceiling with crates. The tunnel seemed to extend forever into the distance, under the mountain.*

*"And with the specials?" asked Reo.*

*"For use against troops in buildings and fortifications," said Boshiro. "Much more effective than flame throwers, easier to aim, vastly greater range, and..." he lowered his voice, almost to a whisper, "terrifying."*

*"Do you actually use these weapons?" Reo asked.*

*"Officially, no. In reality, yes... Trust me, you don't want to know. You don't want to see them in action."*

*Reo shivered again. "I believe you. I'll stick to intelligence work, thank you. Let's go." Then, another thought struck him. "If we ever have to leave this place in a hurry, you wouldn't want to leave all this behind, would you?"*

*"No..." said Boshiro, thoughtfully. Then he grinned. "On the other hand, destroying them would be simplicity itself. One small charge with a slow burning fuse is all we'd need. That would set off the entire armoury and probably blow the top off of this mountain we're under."*

*"I don't think either of us would want to be close enough to see that!"*

*"Maybe just close enough to see it," said Boshiro, grinning again.*

*"You army types always want to blow things up," Reo accused, playfully.*

*"You navy types always want to sink things," Boshiro countered.*

*Their moods restored, the two friends had left together but Reo was thinking about his visit to the munitions stores as he continued to burn the last of the sensitive documents. They would be leaving any minute now, so the army really would have to blow them all up... He definitely did not want to be anywhere nearby when that happened!*

*Reo had no sooner shivered with recollection than his superior had arrived to check that all of the sensitive documents had been destroyed, after which he'd been ordered to board one of the three submarines that were waiting to remove the last of their forces from Semisopochnoi Island.*

*It turned out that Reo was one of the last to board the last of the three submarines and he*

was pleased to encounter his friend Boshito again in the crowded forward torpedo room of the sub.

As the submarine pulled away from the coast and began to submerge, Reo asked his friend about the munitions.

*“Just as I predicted,” Boshito said, confidently. “A series of charges spaced throughout the entire complex, all wired to a chemical fuse. The fuse is started by crushing a glass vial of copper chloride in acid. The acid eats away at a thin wire that holds back a spring-loaded striker. When the wire is eaten away, the striker hits a percussion cap at the end of the detonator. When it goes off, everything will go up! Too bad we won’t get to see it.”*

*“I don’t think I want to see it,” Reo said. “What happens if the fuse goes out or the charges don’t go off?”*

*“That rarely happens, but it doesn’t really matter in this case. We’re leaving an uninhabited island with an active volcano on it, and the enemy doesn’t know we were ever here. No one will ever find it anyway.”*

*Boshito said this so confidently that Reo dropped the topic and their conversation turned to other matters as the submarine began its journey south to their new assignment in the central Pacific, at the Tarawa Atoll, Gilbert Islands.*

*With all three submarines well submersed and on their way, there was no one left to see the fuse as it fizzled out...*

RCMP Constable Alexandra Houston’s adventures continue in: ***An Inseparable Mountie. Adventures of the First Woman Mountie Book 5***, by Laurie Schramm, 2020.

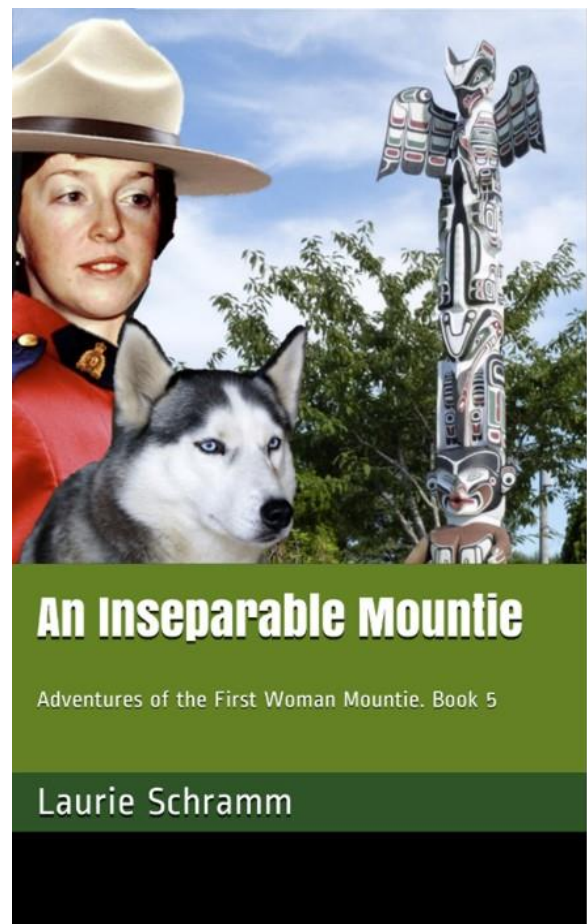
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*Book 4: An International Mountie*

*Book 5: An Inseparable Mountie*

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