

Alaska State Library  
Historical Collections

**Guide to Collection**

**Betts, William J.**

**“Captain Castner of Chilkoot”**

**MS 4-37-14**

1 Folder  
16 page manuscript  
11 – 8x10 b&w photographs

Processed by: Alea Oien &  
Anastasia Tarmann, Apr. 2009  
Revised by: Connie Hamann, Oct. 2017

**ACQUISITION:** Provenance unknown. #42 in Kay’s “T” files.

**ACCESS:** The collection is unrestricted.

**COPYRIGHT:** Request for permission to publish or reproduce material from the collection should be discussed with the Librarian. Photocopying does not constitute permission to publish.

**PROCESSING:** This collection has been described at the item level. All items have been placed in mylar and into a pH-neutral folder.

## **BIOGRAPHICAL / HISTORICAL NOTE**

William J. Betts enlisted in the Army, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry, Chilkoot Barracks, Haines, Alaska in 1935. The subject of his manuscript is Captain Lawrence V. Castner, Betts' commanding officer, and his company while stationed at Chilkoot Barracks. Betts later reenlisted and the promoted Colonel Castner invited him to join "Castner's Cutthroats," a group of scouts sent to the Aleutian Islands. Betts declined the offer, but attributed the scouts' accomplishments to their training under Captain Castner at the Chilkoot Barracks. Captain Castner was a grandson of Lt. J.C. Castner of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry, who led an expedition up the Matanuska Valley and over the divide into the Tanana Valley in the 1880s.

## **SCOPE AND CONTENTS NOTE**

This collection contains a 16 page manuscript by William J. Betts, titled "Captain Castner of Chilkoot" and eleven 8x10 black and white images to accompany the manuscript. The photographs depict activities at Chilkoot Barracks, 1935-1937, and Colonel Castner.

## **SUBJECTS**

Castner, 7th Infantry, Chilkoot Barracks, Ft. Seward, Haines, Alaska, Castner's Cutthroats, Lawrence V. Castner, WWII, Aleutian Islands.

## **INVENTORY**

### **Folder 1 of 1**

01. Manuscript "Captain Castner of Chilkoot" by William J. Betts, 5000 words, 16 pages
  1. The author as he looked at the time of the trek up the Chilkat River, July, 1936.
  2. The first view the new soldier to Chilkoot received as his ship rounded the point below the Barracks. Chilkat Valley extends to the north in the right hand area of the picture. This little military post held the full complement of fighting men in all of the northland prior to about 1940. Haines lies to the left of the picture.
  3. Leaving camp for a training hike on snowshoes. It is snowing. The soldiers didn't exactly appreciate the storm but there was surprisingly little griping.
  4. Our kitchen-dining room on the Chilkat. The snow didn't stop. The storm continued to dump new snow on our camp for several days. Reason for the fussiness was that the cold weather did something to my film or camera.

5. The "mess hall" on the Chilkat, 1936. Capt. Castner is standing second from left, hidden from the camera. The man in the rear of the canoe is the mess sergeant (name lost in my notes). That canoe must have been rugged for those four men to be standing up in it.
6. Looking up the Chilkat River, Summer 1936. Copy from pic in author's album.
7. One of the Alaska Steamship Company's ships. I believe that this is the old Victoria but am not sure. The picture was taken late one summer's day from the back window of E Company barracks. 1936.
8. SC 144462 Dutch Harbor, Alaska. A task force of transports and other vessels departed from near Dutch Harbor, Alaska, to land on Islands of the Andreanof group. Col. Lawrence V. Castner, G-2 ADC, who commands the Alaskan G-2 Combat Scouts, prepared his men for their submarine trip to smooth the way for the force. His men, composed of toughened soldiers who know Alaska thoroughly, landed a few days ahead of the force. Their mission was to wipe out any Jap outpost and to give the signal to the force for entry into the Adak Harbor. 1942 "U.S. Army Photograph"
9. Some of the men relaxing with a beer after the long hike up the Chilkat was over. Bottom row L. R. Albecker, unidentified, H. F. Holliday; middle row, Db. Allmond, W. Wall, R. W. Kester, McGeorge, Baker, Cpl. Wilson, others unidentified.
10. A group of Company E men going on a two weeks camping-training camp up the Chilkat River. There had just been a snow storm and the snow was piling up. This is the beginning of the Haines road. (I imagine the new highway must run near the same place)
11. SC 189461 Colonel L. V. Castner, Infantry, being awarded the Legion of Merit medal by Commanding General of Letterman Hospital, Brig. Gen. Frank W. Weed. Col Castner was largely responsible for the military intelligence system in the Alaska Theatre of operations. 9<sup>th</sup> S.C., Presidio of San Francisco, San Francisco, Calif., 11/17/43. "U.S. Army Photograph"