

Course of War: Japan issued a declaration of war on February 8, 1904. However, three hours before Japan's declaration of war was received by the Russian Government, Japan attacked the Russian Far East Fleet at Port Arthur. Tsar Nicholas II was stunned by news of the attack. He could not believe that Japan could initiate a warlike act without a formal declaration of war, and had been assured by his ministers that the Japanese would not fight. Russia declared war on Japan eight days later.

Campaign of 1904: Port Arthur, on the Liaodong Peninsula in the south of Manchuria, had been fortified into a major naval base by the Russians. Since it needed to control the sea in order to fight a war on the Asian mainland, Japan's first military objective was to neutralize the Russian fleet at Port Arthur. On the night of February 8, 1904, the Japanese fleet under Admiral Heihachiro Togo opened the war with a surprise torpedo boat attack on the Russian ships at Port Arthur. The attack badly damaged two battleships. These attacks developed into the Battle of Port Arthur the next morning. A series of indecisive naval engagements followed, in which Admiral Togo was unable to attack the Russian fleet successfully as it was protected by the shore batteries of the harbor, and the Russians were reluctant to leave the harbor for the open seas, especially after the death of Admiral Stepan Osipovich Makarov on April 13, 1904.

However, these engagements provided cover for a Japanese landing near Incheon in Korea. From Incheon the Japanese occupied Seoul and then the rest of Korea. By the end of April, the Japanese army under Kuroki Itei was ready to cross the Yalu river into Russian-occupied Manchuria.

In contrast to the Japanese strategy of rapidly gaining ground to control Manchuria, Russian strategy focused on fighting delaying actions to gain time for reinforcements to arrive via the long Trans-Siberian railway which was at the time incomplete near Irkutsk. On May 1, 1904, the Battle of the Yalu River became the first major land battle of the war, when Japanese troops stormed a Russian position after an unopposed crossing of the river. Japanese troops proceeded to land at several points on the Manchurian coast, and, in a series of engagements, drove the Russians back towards Port Arthur. These battles, including the Battle of Nanshan on May 25, 1904, were marked by heavy Japanese losses from attacking entrenched Russian positions, but the Russians maintained their focus on defending, and did not counterattack.

The Japanese next attempted to deny the Russians use of Port Arthur. During the night of February 13-14, the Japanese attempted to block the entrance to Port Arthur by sinking several cement-filled steamers in the deep water channel to the port, but they sank too deep to be effective. Another similar attempt to block the harbor entrance during the night of 3-4 May also failed. In March, the charismatic Vice Admiral Makarov had taken command of the First Russian Pacific Squadron with the intention of breaking out of the Port Arthur blockade.

On April 12, 1904 two Russian pre-dreadnought battleships, the flagship *Petropavlovsk* and the *Pobeda* slipped out of port but struck Japanese mines off Port Arthur. The *Petropavlovsk* sank almost immediately, while the *Pobeda* had to be towed back to port for extensive repairs. Admiral Makarov, the single most effective Russian naval strategist of the war, had perished on the battleship *Petropavlovsk*.

On April 15, 1904 the Russian government made overtures threatening to seize the British war correspondents who were taking the ship *Haimun* into warzones to report for the London-based *The Times* newspaper, citing concerns about the possibility of the British giving away Russian positions to the Japanese fleet.

The Russians learned quickly, and soon employed the Japanese tactic of offensive minelaying. On 14 May 1904, two Japanese battleships, the *Yashima* and the *Hatsuse*, were lured into a recently laid Russian minefield off Port Arthur, each striking at least two mines. The *Yashima* sank within minutes, taking 450 sailors with her, while the *Hatsuse* sank under tow a few hours later. On June 23, 1904, a breakout attempt by the Russian squadron, now under the command of Admiral Wilhelm Vitgeft failed. By the end of the month, Japanese artillery were firing shells into the harbor.

Japan began a long siege of Port Arthur. On August 10, 1904, the Russian fleet again attempted to break out and proceed to Vladivostok, but upon reaching the open sea were confronted by Admiral Togo's battleship squadron. Known to the Russians as the Battle of August 10, but more commonly

referred to as the Battle of the Yellow Sea, battleships from both sides exchanged gunfire. The battle had the elements of a decisive battle, though Admiral Togo knew that another Russian battleship fleet would soon be sent to the Pacific. The Japanese had only one battleship fleet, and Togo had already lost two battleships to Russian mines. The Russian and Japanese battleships continued to exchange gunfire, until the Russian flagship, the battleship *Tsesarevich*, received a direct hit on the bridge, killing the fleet commander, Admiral Vitgeft. At this, the Russian fleet turned around and headed back into Port Arthur. Though no warships were sunk by either side in the battle, the Russians were now back in port and the Japanese navy still had battleships to meet the new Russian fleet when it arrived. Eventually, the Russian warships at Port Arthur were sunk by the artillery of the besieging army. Attempts to relieve the besieged city by land also failed, and, after the Battle of Liaoyang in late August, the Russians retreated to Mukden (Shenyang). Port Arthur finally fell on 2 January 1905 when the garrison's commanding officer ceded the port to the Japanese without consulting his high command.

Meanwhile, at sea, the Russians were preparing to reinforce their fleet by sending the Baltic Sea fleet, under Admiral Zinovy Rozhdestvensky, around the world via the Cape of Good Hope to Asia. On October 21, 1904, while passing by the United Kingdom (an ally of Japan but neutral in this war), they nearly provoked a war in the Dogger Bank incident by firing on British fishing boats that they mistook for enemy torpedo boats.

Campaign of 1905:

Harsh winter and final battles: With the fall of Port Arthur, the Japanese 3rd army was now able to continue northward and reinforce positions south of Russian-held Mukden. With the onset of the severe Manchurian winter, there had been no major land engagements since the Battle of Shaho the previous year. Both sides camped opposite each other along 60 to 70 miles (110 km) of front lines, south of Mukden.

The Russian Second Army under General Oskar Grippenberg, between January 25–29, attacked the Japanese left flank near the town of Sandepu, almost breaking through. This caught the Japanese by surprise. However, without support from other Russian units the attack was stalled, Grippenberg was ordered to halt by Kuropatkin and the battle was inconclusive. The Japanese knew that they needed to destroy the Russian army in Manchuria before Russian reinforcements arrived via the Trans-Siberian railroad.

The Battle of Mukden commenced on February 20, 1905. In the following days Japanese forces proceeded to assault the right and left flanks of Russian forces surrounding Mukden, along a 50 mile (80 km) front. Both sides were well entrenched and were backed with hundreds of artillery pieces. After days of harsh fighting, added pressure from both flanks forced both ends of the Russian defensive line to curve backwards. Seeing they were about to be encircled, the Russians began a general retreat, fighting a series of fierce rearguard actions, which soon deteriorated in the confusion and collapse of Russian forces. On March 10, 1905 after three weeks of fighting, General Kuropatkin decided to withdraw to the north of Mukden.

The retreating Russian Manchurian Army formations disintegrated as fighting units, but the Japanese failed to destroy them completely. The Japanese themselves had suffered large casualties and were in no condition to pursue. Although the battle of Mukden was a major defeat for the Russians it had not been decisive, and the final victory would depend on the navy.

Japanese victory at Tsushima: The Russian *Second Pacific Squadron* (the renamed Baltic Fleet) had journeyed 18,000 miles (29,000 km) to relieve Port Arthur. However, Port Arthur had fallen and the demoralizing news reached the fleet while at Madagascar. Admiral Rozhdestvensky's only hope now was to reach the port of Vladivostok. There were three routes that existed to Vladivostok, but the Tsushima Straits between Korea and Japan was the shortest and most direct route, however, it was also the most dangerous as it was very close to the Japanese home islands.

Admiral Togo was aware of the Russian progress and understood that with the fall of Port Arthur, the Second and Third Pacific Squadrons would try to reach the only other Russian port in the Far East,

Vladivostok. Battle plans were laid down and ships were repaired and refitted to intercept the Russian fleet.

The Japanese *Combined Fleet*, which had originally consisted of six battleships, was now down to four (two had been lost to mines), but still retained its cruisers, destroyers, and torpedo boats. The *Second Pacific Squadron* contained eight battleships, including four new battleships of the *Borodino* class, as well as cruisers, destroyers and other auxiliaries for a total of 38 ships.

By the end of May the Second Pacific Squadron was on the last leg of its journey to Vladivostok. Unfortunately for the Russians, one of their hospital ships exposed a light, which was sighted by the Japanese armed merchant cruiser *Shinano Maru*. Wireless communication was used to inform Togo's headquarters, where the Combined Fleet was immediately ordered to sortie. Still receiving naval intelligence from scouting forces, the Japanese were able to position their fleet so that they would "cross the T" of the Russian fleet. The Japanese engaged the Russian fleet in the Tsushima Straits on 27 May–28 May 1905. The Russian fleet was virtually annihilated, losing eight battleships, numerous smaller vessels, and more than 5,000 men, while the Japanese lost three torpedo boats and 116 men. Only three Russian vessels escaped to Vladivostok. After the Battle of Tsushima, the Japanese army occupied the entire Sakhalin Islands chain to force the Russians to sue for peace.

TREATY OF PORTSMOUTH: The domestic problems in Russia had become a major concern for the Tsar and his government. Under these circumstances, he chooses to negotiate for peace. The US President Theodore Roosevelt offered to mediate (which gave him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906).

The **Treaty of Portsmouth** was signed September 5th 1905 (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, USA).

- *Russia recognized Korea as Japan's sphere of influence*
- *Japan took over the 25-year lease of Port Arthur + Hinterland*
- *Japan also took over the lease of the Railroad in southern Manchuria (and its access to several strategic resources)*
- *The southern half of the Sakhalin Island was ceded to Japan*
- *Both Russia and Japan agreed to evacuate Manchuria*
- *Russia did not have to pay any war indemnity*

CASUALTIES: Several different figures exist;

Samuel Dumas: Japan: 86,100 dead
Russia: 43,300 dead

Japanese Bureau of Military Statistics

Japan: 80,378 dead

Gaedke: Russia 71,453 dead

Small & Singer: Japan: 85,000 dead

Russia: 45,000 dead

Gilbert: Japan: 58,000 dead

Russia: 120,000 dead

Eckhardt: Total: 130,000 dead

Urlanis: Total: 139,000 dead

RESULTS

- The loss was very embarrassing for Russia (and Europe) who had been convinced about their superiority. Russia lost a lot of prestige...
- The loss of the war contributed to the 1905 Revolution in Russia
- The lost war in the Far East made Russia change the focus on her Foreign Policy. She now concentrated more on the development in Europe. Especially in the weak part in the South-East... the declining Ottoman Empire = the "Eastern Question"!
- Japan became a power to count on and started her domination of China as well as other areas in the Far East. She would find a new competitor in the Pacific – USA