

# WORLD WAR II – THE PACIFIC WAR...

The **Pacific War** was the part of World War II—and preceding conflicts—that took place in the Pacific Ocean, its islands, and in East Asia, between July 7, 1937 and August 14, 1945. The most decisive actions took place after the Empire of Japan attacked various countries, who together came to be known as the Allies (or Allied powers), on or after December 7, 1941, including an attack on Pearl Harbor.

## Name

In western countries during the war, it was not usually distinguished from World War II in general, or it was known simply as the **War with Japan**. In the US, the term **Pacific Theater** was widely used, although technically this did not cover the China or Southeast Asia theaters.

During the war, Japanese sources used the name **Greater East Asia War** (大東亜戦争 *Dai Tō-A Sensō*<sup>?</sup>). This name was chosen by a cabinet decision on December 10, 1941, to refer to both the war with the western Allies and the ongoing war in China. The name was released to the public two days later, on December 12, with an explanation that it involved Asian nations achieving independence from the western powers through the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere. Japanese officials distinguished between what they called the **Holy War** (聖戦 *Seisen*<sup>?</sup>) in China, and the **Greater East Asia War** in the Pacific.

After the war, during the occupation of Japan, these terms were prohibited in official documents, although informal usage continued. In Japan, after 1945, the war became known as **Pacific War** (太平洋戦争 *Taiheiyō Sensō*<sup>?</sup>). This latter term has been in use since that time. **Fifteen Year War** (十五年戦争 *Jūgonen Sensō*<sup>?</sup>) is also used, referring to the period from the Mukden Incident of 1931 until 1945.

## Participants

The Axis states which assisted Japan included the authoritarian government of Thailand, which joined the Japanese side in 1942, and sent forces to invade and occupy northeastern Burma. The Japanese puppet states of Manchukuo (parts of Manchuria and Inner Mongolia) and the Wang Jingwei Government (which controlled the coastal regions of China). Japan enlisted many soldiers from its colonies of Korea and Formosa (later known as Taiwan). To a small extent, some Vichy French, Indian National Army, and Burmese National Army forces were active in the area. To an even smaller extent, German and Italian naval forces (mainly armed merchantmen and submarines) also operated in the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.

The major Allied participants were the United States (including forces of the Commonwealth of the Philippines), China, the United Kingdom, (including the forces of British India), Australia, The Netherlands (as possessor of the Dutch East Indies), and New Zealand. Canada, Mexico, Free France and many other countries also took part, especially forces from other British colonies.

The Soviet Union fought two short, undeclared border conflicts with Japan in 1938 and 1939, then remained neutral until August 1945, when it joined the Allies and invaded Manchuria in an operation known as Operation August Storm.

# Theatres

Between 1942 and 1945, there were four main areas of conflict in the Pacific War: **China**, the **Central Pacific**, **South East Asia** and the **South West Pacific**.

U.S. sources refer to two theaters within the Pacific War: the Pacific Theater of Operations (PTO) and the China Burma India Theater (CBI). However, these were not operational commands. In the PTO, the Allies divided operational control of their forces between two supreme commands, known as Pacific Ocean Areas and Southwest Pacific Area.<sup>[3]</sup>

In 1945, for a brief period just before the Japanese surrender, the Soviet Union and its Mongolian ally engaged Japanese forces in Manchuria and northeast China.

## Conflict between China and Japan

### Background

The roots of the war began in the late 19th century with China in political chaos and Japan rapidly modernising. Over the course of the late 19th century and early 20th century, Japan intervened and finally annexed Korea and expanded its political and economic influence into China, particularly Manchuria. This expansion of power was aided because by the 1910s, China had fragmented into warlordism with only a weak and ineffective central government.

However, the situation of a weak China unable to resist Japanese demands appeared to be changing toward the end of the 1920s. In 1927, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and the National Revolutionary Army of the Kuomintang (KMT) led the Northern Expedition. Chiang was able to defeat the warlords in southern and central China and was in the process of securing the nominal allegiance of the warlords in northern China. Fearing that Zhang Xueliang, the warlord controlling Manchuria, was about to declare his allegiance to Chiang, the Japanese staged the Mukden Incident in 1931 and set up the puppet state of Manchukuo. The nominal Emperor of this puppet state was better known as Henry Pu Yi of the defunct Qing Dynasty.

Japan's imperialist goals in China were to maintain a secure supply of natural resources and to have puppet governments in China that would not act against Japanese interests. Although Japanese actions would not have seemed out of place among European colonial powers in the 19th century, by 1930, notions of Wilsonian self-determination meant military force in support of colonialism was no longer seen as appropriate behavior by the international community.

Hence Japanese actions in Manchuria were roundly criticized and led to Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations. During the 1930s, China and Japan reached a stalemate with Chiang focusing his efforts at eliminating the Communist Party of China, whom he considered to be a more fundamental danger than the Japanese. The influence of Chinese nationalism on opinion both in the political elite and the general population rendered this strategy increasingly untenable.

Though they had at first cooperated in the Northern Expedition, during the period of 1930–34, the nationalist KMT and the Chinese Communist Party entered into direct conflict.<sup>[4]</sup> The Japanese capitalized on the infighting between Chinese factions to make greater inroads, forcing a landing at Shanghai in 1932.<sup>[5]</sup>

Meanwhile, in Japan, a policy of assassination by secret societies and the effects of the Great Depression had caused the civilian government to lose control of the military. In addition, the military high command had limited control over the field armies who acted in their own interest, often in contradiction to the overall national interest, but in keeping with Hirohito's wishes.<sup>[6]</sup> Pan-Asianism was also used as a justification for expansion. This is perhaps best summarized by the "Amo Doctrine" of 1934, issued by Eiji Amo, head of information department of the Japanese Foreign Ministry. Known as the "Monroe Doctrine of Asia," it announced Japan's intention for European countries to adopt a "hands off" policy in China, thereby negating the Open Door Policy. It stated that Japan was to be the sole leader in security in East Asia, including the task of defeating

communism. Economics was also a very important factor leading to the invasion of China. During the Depression, Japanese exports to American and European markets were severely curtailed, and Japan turned to completely dominating China politically and economically to provide a stable market. In the period leading up to full-scale war in 1937, Japan used force in localised conflicts to threaten China unless the latter reduced its protective tariff and suppressed anti-Japanese activities and boycotts.

## **Second Sino-Japanese War**

In 1936, Chiang was kidnapped by Zhang Xueliang. As a condition of his release, Chiang agreed to form a united front with the communists and fight the Japanese. Soon after, the Marco Polo Bridge Incident took place on July 7, 1937, which succeeded in provoking a war between the Republic of China and the Empire of Japan. Though the Nationalist and Communist Chinese would cooperate in military campaigns against Japan and sought to create a united national front, Mao Zedong refused to directly submit to the Kuomintang, and the aim of the Communists remained social revolution. In 1939, the Chinese Communist Red Army consisted of 500,000 troops independent of the KMT.<sup>[7]</sup>

In addition, throughout the 1930s Japan succeeded in alienating public opinion in the West, particularly the United States and Britain. During the early 1930s, public opinion in the United States had been neutral. However, news reports of the Panay incident caused American public opinion to swing against Japan.

In 1939 Japanese forces tried to push into the Soviet Far East from Manchuria. They were soundly defeated in the Battle of Khalkhin Gol by a mixed Soviet and Mongolian force led by Georgy Zhukov. This stopped Japanese expansion to the north, and Japan and the Soviet Union kept an uneasy peace until 1945.

In September 1940, Japan attempted to cut Chinese links with other countries by obtaining approval for bases in French Indochina, which was controlled at the time by Vichy France. Japanese forces broke the terms of their agreement with the Vichy administration and fighting broke out, ending in a Japanese victory. On September 27, Japan signed a military alliance with Germany and Italy.

By 1941, the conflict had become a stalemate. Although Japan had occupied much of north and central China, the Kuomintang had retreated to the interior with a provisional capital set up at Chungking while the Chinese communists remained in control of base areas in Shaanxi. In addition, Japanese control of north and central China was somewhat tenuous, in that Japan was usually able to control railroads and the major cities ("points and lines") but did not have a major military or administrative presence in the vast Chinese countryside. The Japanese found that its aggression against the retreating and regrouping Chinese army was stalled by the mountainous terrain in southwestern China while the Communists organised widespread guerrilla and saboteur activities in eastern and central China behind the Japanese front line.

Japan sponsored several puppet governments, one of which was headed by Wang Jingwei. However, its policies of brutality toward the Chinese population, of not yielding any real power to the governments, and of supporting several rival governments failed to make any of them a popular alternative to Chiang's government. Japan was also unwilling to negotiate directly with Chiang, nor was it willing to attempt to create splits in the Chinese united front.

## **Tensions between Japan and the western powers**

In an effort to discourage Japanese militarism, western powers including Australia, the United States, Britain, and the Dutch government in exile (which controlled the oil-rich Dutch East Indies) stopped selling oil, iron ore and steel to Japan, to deny it the raw materials needed to continue its activities in China and French Indochina. This was known unofficially as the "ABCD encirclement" ("American-British-Chinese-Dutch"). Japan saw these embargos as acts of

aggression; imported oil made up about 80% of domestic consumption, without which Japan's economy, let alone its military, would grind to a halt.

Faced with a choice between economic collapse and perceived surrender, the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters began planning for a war with the western powers in April or May 1941.

The key objective was for the Southern Expeditionary Army Group to seize economic resources under the control of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, most notably those in Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, known as the "southern plan". It was also decided—because of the close relationship between the UK and United States, and the (mistaken) belief the U.S. would inevitably become involved<sup>[8]</sup>—Japan would also require an "eastern plan".

The eastern plan required

- initial attacks on the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, with carrier-based aircraft of the Combined Fleet, and
- following this attack with
  - seizure of the Philippines, and
  - cutting the U.S. lines of communication by seizing Guam and Wake.

The southern plans called for:

- attacking Malaya and Hong Kong, and
- following with attacks against
  - the Bismarck Archipelago,
  - Java, and
  - Sumatra.
- isolating Australia and New Zealand

Following completion of these objectives, the strategy would turn defensive, primarily holding their newly acquired territory while hoping for a negotiated peace.

By November these plans were essentially complete and were modified only slightly over the next month. Japanese military planners' expectation of success rested on the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union being unable to effectively respond to a Japanese attack because of the threat posed to each by Germany; the Soviet Union was even seen as unlikely to commence hostilities.

There is no evidence the Japanese planned to defeat the United States; the alternative would be negotiating for peace after their initial victories. In fact, the Imperial GHQ noted, should acceptable negotiations be reached with the Americans, the attacks were to be canceled—even if the order to attack had already been given.

They also planned, should the U.S. transfer its Pacific Fleet to the Philippines, to intercept and attack this fleet *en route* with the Combined Fleet, in keeping with all Japanese Navy prewar planning and doctrine.

Should the United States or Britain attack first, the plans further stipulated the military were to hold their positions and wait for orders from GHQ. The planners noted attacking the Philippines and Malaya still had possibilities of success, even in the worst case of a combined preemptive attack including Soviet forces.

## **German and Italian involvement**

Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy both had limited involvement in the Pacific War. The German Navy (*Kriegsmarine*) and the Italian Royal Navy (*Regia Marina*) operated submarines and "armed merchantmen" in the Pacific. Both navies had access to "concession territory" naval bases in China. After Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent declarations of war, both navies had access to Japanese naval facilities.

## Japan attacks the western powers

*I shall run wild considerably for the first six months or a year, but I have utterly no confidence for the second and third years. — Isoroku Yamamoto*

On December 8, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the British crown colony of Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, and the US-controlled Commonwealth of the Philippines. Japan also used its bases in French Indochina to invade Thailand, then using the gained Thai territory to launch an assault against Malaya.

### Attack on Pearl Harbor

On December 7th, Japan (December 8 in the Eastern Hemisphere) launched a carrier-based air attack on Pearl Harbor, knocking eight American battleships out of action. The Japanese had gambled that the United States, when faced with such a sudden and massive defeat, would agree to a negotiated settlement and allow Japan free rein in China. This gamble did not pay off. American losses were less serious than initially thought: the American aircraft carriers were out to sea, and vital naval infrastructure (fuel oil tanks and the shipyard), submarines and signals intelligence units were unscathed. Japan's fallback strategy, relying on a war of attrition to make the US come to terms, was beyond the IJN's capabilities.<sup>[10]</sup>

When the attack on Pearl Harbor occurred, the United States was not at war anywhere in the world. The America First Committee, 800,000 members strong, had vehemently opposed any American intervention in the foreign conflict, even as America provided military aid to Britain and the Soviet Union, through the Lend-Lease program. Opposition to war in the United States vanished after the attack. Four days after Pearl Harbor, on December 11, in a massive strategic blunder, Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy declared war on the United States, drawing America into a two-theater war.

## Japanese offensives, 1941–42

*I praise the Army for cutting down like weeds large numbers of the enemy.. — Hirohito*

British, Australian and Dutch forces, already drained of personnel and matériel by two years of war with Germany, and heavily committed in the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere, were unable to provide much more than token resistance to the battle-hardened Japanese. The Allies suffered many disastrous defeats in the first six months of the war. Two major British warships, HMS *Repulse* and HMS *Prince of Wales* were sunk by a Japanese air attack off Malaya on December 10, 1941. Thailand surrendered within 24 hours of the Japanese invasion and formally allied herself with Japan on December 21, allowing her bases to be used as a springboard against Singapore and Malaya. Hong Kong fell on December 25, and U.S. bases on Guam and Wake Island were lost at around the same time.

Following the January 1, 1942 *Declaration by United Nations* (the first official use of the term United Nations), the Allied governments appointed the British General Sir Archibald Wavell to the American-British-Dutch-Australian Command (ABDACOM), a supreme command for Allied forces in South East Asia. This gave Wavell nominal control of a huge but thinly spread force covering an area from Burma to the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines. Other areas, including India, Australia and Hawaii remained under separate local commands. On January 15, Wavell moved to Bandung in Java to assume control of ABDA Command (ABDACOM).

In January, Japan invaded Burma, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and they captured Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Rabaul. After being driven out of Malaya, Allied forces

in Singapore attempted to resist the Japanese during the battle of Singapore but surrendered to the Japanese on February 15, 1942; about 130,000 Indian, British, Australian and Dutch personnel became prisoners of war.<sup>[2]</sup> The pace of conquest was rapid: Bali and Timor also fell in February. The rapid collapse of Allied resistance had left the "ABDA area" split in two. Wavell resigned from ABDACOM on February 25, handing control of the ABDA Area to local commanders and returning to the post of Commander-in-Chief, India.

Meanwhile, Japanese aircraft had all but eliminated Allied air power in South-East Asia and were making attacks on northern Australia, beginning with a psychologically devastating (but militarily insignificant) attack on the city of Darwin on February 19, which killed at least 243 people.

At the battle of the Java Sea in late February and early March, the Japanese Navy inflicted a resounding defeat on the main ABDA naval force, under Admiral Karel Doorman. The Netherlands East Indies campaign subsequently ended with the surrender of Allied forces on Java.

In March and April, a raid into the Indian Ocean by a powerful Imperial Japanese Navy aircraft carrier force resulted in a wave of major air raids against Ceylon and the sinking of a British aircraft carrier, HMS *Hermes* as well as other Allied ships and driving the British fleet out of the Indian Ocean. This paved the way for a Japanese assault on Burma and India.

The British, under intense pressure, made a fighting retreat from Rangoon to the Indo-Burmese border. This cut the Burma Road which was the western Allies' supply line to the Chinese Nationalists. Cooperation between the Chinese Nationalists and the Communists had waned from its zenith at the Battle of Wuhan, and the relationship between the two had gone sour as both attempted to expand their area of operations in occupied territories. Most of the Nationalist guerrilla areas were eventually overtaken by the Communists. On the other hand, some Nationalist units were deployed to blockade the Communists and not the Japanese. Furthermore, many of the forces of the Chinese Nationalists were warlords allied to Chiang Kai-Shek, but not directly under his command. "Of the 1,200,000 troops under Chiang's control, only 650,000 were directly controlled by his generals, and another 550,000 controlled by warlords who claimed loyalty to his government; the strongest force was the Szechuan army of 320,000 men. The defeat of this army would do much to end Chiang's power."<sup>[12]</sup> The Japanese used these divisions to press ahead in their offenses.

Filipino and U.S. forces put up a fierce resistance in the Philippines until May 8, 1942, when more than 80,000 of them surrendered. By this time, General Douglas MacArthur, who had been appointed Supreme Allied Commander Southwest Pacific, had relocated his headquarters to Australia. The U.S. Navy, under Admiral Chester Nimitz, had responsibility for the rest of the Pacific Ocean. This divided command had unfortunate consequences for the commerce war,<sup>[13]</sup> and consequently, the war itself.

## Allies re-group

*For every advance that the Japanese have made since they started their frenzied career of conquest, they have had to pay a very heavy toll in warships, in transports, in planes, and in men. They are feeling the effects of those losses* — Franklin D. Roosevelt, 28 April 1942

In early 1942, the governments of smaller powers began to push for an inter-governmental Asia-Pacific war council, based in Washington D.C.. A council was established in London, with a subsidiary body in Washington. However, the smaller powers continued to push for a U.S.-based body. The Pacific War Council was formed in Washington on April 1, 1942, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt, his key advisor Harry Hopkins, and representatives from Britain, China, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Canada. Representatives from India and the Philippines were later added. The council never had any direct operational control, and any decisions it made were referred to the U.S.-British Combined Chiefs of Staff, which was also in Washington.

Allied resistance, at first symbolic, gradually began to stiffen. Australian and Dutch forces led civilians in a prolonged guerilla campaign in Portuguese Timor. The Doolittle Raid did minimal damage but was a huge morale booster for the Allies, especially the United States, and it caused repercussions throughout the Japanese military because they were sworn to protect the Japanese emperor and homeland but did not intercept, down, or damage a single bomber

## **Coral Sea and Midway: the turning point**

By mid-1942, the Japanese Combined Fleet found itself holding a vast area, even though it lacked the aircraft carriers, aircraft, and aircrew to defend it, and the freighters, tankers, and destroyers necessary to sustain it. Moreover, Fleet doctrine was incompetent to execute the proposed "barrier" defence.<sup>[15]</sup> Instead, they decided on additional attacks in both the south and central Pacific. While Yamamoto had used the element of surprise at Pearl Harbor, Allied codebreakers now turned the tables. They discovered an attack against Port Moresby, New Guinea, was imminent with intent to invade and conquer all of New Guinea. If Port Moresby fell, it would give Japan control of the seas to the immediate north of Australia. Nimitz rushed the carrier USS *Lexington*, under Admiral Fletcher, to join USS *Yorktown* and a U.S.-Australian task force, with orders to contest the Japanese advance. The resulting Battle of Coral Sea was the first naval battle in which ships involved never sighted each other and aircraft were solely used to attack opposing forces. Although *Lexington* was sunk and *Yorktown* seriously damaged, the Japanese lost the aircraft carrier *Shōhō*, suffered extensive damage to *Shōkaku*, took heavy losses to the air wing of *Zuikaku* (both missed the operation against Midway the following month), and saw the Moresby invasion force turn back. Even though losses were almost even, the Japanese attack on Port Moresby was thwarted and their invasion forces turned back, yielding a strategic victory for the Allies.

Destruction of U.S. carriers was Yamamoto's main objective, and he planned an operation to lure them to battle. After Coral Sea, he had four fleet carriers operational — *Sōryū*, *Kaga*, *Akagi* and *Hiryū* — and believed Nimitz had a maximum of two: *Enterprise* and/or *Hornet*. *Saratoga* was out of action, undergoing repair after a torpedo attack, and *Yorktown* sailed after three days' work to repair her flight deck and make essential repairs, with civilian work crews still aboard.

A large Japanese force was sent north to attack the Aleutian Islands, off Alaska. The next stage of Yamamoto's plan called for the capture of Midway Atoll, which would give him an opportunity to destroy Nimitz's remaining carriers; afterward, it would be turned into a major Japanese airbase, giving them control of the central Pacific. In May, Allied codebreakers discovered his intentions. Nagumo was again in tactical command but was focused on the invasion of Midway; Yamamoto's complex plan had no provision for intervention by Nimitz before the Japanese expected him. Planned surveillance of the U.S. fleet by long range seaplane did not happen (as a result of an abortive identical operation in March), so U.S. carriers were able to proceed to a flanking position on the approaching Japanese fleet without being detected. Nagumo had 272 planes operating from his four carriers, the U.S. 348 (of which 115 were land-based).

As anticipated by U.S. commanders, the Japanese fleet arrived off Midway on June 4 and was spotted by PBY patrol aircraft[4]. Nagumo executed a first strike against Midway, while Fletcher launched his aircraft, bound for Nagumo's carriers. At 09:20 the first U.S. carrier aircraft arrived, TBD Devastator torpedo bombers from *Hornet*, and their attacks were poorly coordinated and ineffectual;<sup>[16]</sup> they failed to score a single hit, and Zero fighters shot down all 15. At 09:35, 15 TBDs from *Enterprise* skimmed in over the water; 14 were shot down by Zeroes. Fletcher's attacks had been disorganized yet succeeded in distracting Nagumo's defensive fighters. When U.S. dive bombers arrived, the Zeros could not offer any protection. In addition, Nagumo's four carriers had drifted out of formation, reducing the concentration of their anti-aircraft fire. His most-criticized error was twice changing his arming orders: he first held aircraft for shipping attack as a hedge against discovery of U.S. carriers, changed this based on reports an additional strike was needed against Midway, then again after sighting the Fletcher, wasting time and leaving his hangar decks crowded with refueling and rearming aircraft, and ordnance stowed outside the magazines.

Yamamoto's dispositions, which left Nagumo with inadequate reconnaissance to detect (and therefore attack) Fletcher before he launched, are often ignored.<sup>[17]</sup>

When SBD Dauntlesses from *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* appeared at an altitude of 10,000 feet (3,000 m), the Zeroes at sea level were unable to respond before the bombers pushed over. They scored a small number of significant hits; *Sōryū*, *Kaga*, and *Akagi* all caught fire. *Hiryū* survived this wave of attacks and launched an attack against the American carriers which caused severe damage to *Yorktown* (which was later finished off by a Japanese submarine). A second attack from the U.S. carriers a few hours later found and destroyed *Hiryū*. Yamamoto had four additional small carriers, assigned to his scattered surface forces, all too slow to keep up with the *Kido Butai* and therefore never in action. Yamamoto's enormous superiority in gun power was irrelevant as the U.S. had air superiority at Midway and could refuse a surface gunfight (and, by remarkable good fortune, Spruance moved to avoid, based on a faulty submarine report<sup>[18]</sup>); Yamamoto's flawed dispositions had made closing to engage after dark on June 4 impossible.<sup>[19]</sup> Midway was a decisive victory for the U.S. Navy and the high point in Japanese aspirations in the Pacific.

## New Guinea and the Solomons

Japanese land forces continued to advance in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. From July 1942, a few Australian reserve battalions, many of them very young and untrained, fought a stubborn rearguard action in New Guinea, against a Japanese advance along the Kokoda Track, towards Port Moresby, over the rugged Owen Stanley Ranges. The militia, worn out and severely depleted by casualties, were relieved in late August by regular troops from the Second Australian Imperial Force, returning from action in the Mediterranean theatres.



The Pacific Theater in August, 1942.

In early September 1942, Japanese marines attacked a strategic Royal Australian Air Force base at Milne Bay, near the eastern tip of New Guinea. They were beaten back by the Australian Army, which inflicted the first outright defeat on Japanese land forces since 1939.

## Guadalcanal

At the same time as major battles raged in New Guinea, Allied forces identified a Japanese airfield under construction at Guadalcanal. In August, 16,000 Allied infantry — primarily US Marines — made an amphibious landing, to capture the airfield.

Japanese and Allied forces occupied various parts of the island. Over the following six months, both sides fed resources into an escalating battle of attrition on the island, at sea, and in the sky. Most of the Japanese aircraft in the South Pacific were drafted into the Japanese defence of Guadalcanal, facing Allied air forces based at Henderson Field. Japanese ground forces launched attacks on US positions around Henderson Field, suffering high casualties. These offensives were resupplied by Japanese convoys known to the Allies as the "Tokyo Express", which often faced night battles with the Allied navies, and expended destroyers that the IJN could ill-afford to lose. Later fleet battles involving heavier ships and even daytime carrier battles resulted in a stretch of



water near Guadalcanal becoming known as "Ironbottom Sound", from the severe losses to both sides. However, only the US Navy could quickly replace and repair its losses. The Allies were victorious on Guadalcanal in February 1943.

### **Allied advances in New Guinea and the Solomons**

By late 1942, the Japanese were also retreating along the Kokoda Track in the highlands of New Guinea. Australian and U.S. counteroffensives culminated in the capture of the key Japanese beachhead in eastern New Guinea, the Buna-Gona area, in early 1943.

In June 1943, the Allies launched Operation Cartwheel, which defined their offensive strategy in the South Pacific. The operation was aimed at isolating the major Japanese forward base, at Rabaul, and cutting its supply and communication lines. This prepared the way for Nimitz's island-hopping campaign towards Japan.

### **Stalemate in China and South-East Asia**

British Commonwealth forces were also counter-attacking in Burma, albeit with limited success.

In August 1943, the western Allies formed a new South East Asia Command (SEAC) to take over strategic responsibilities for Burma and India from the British India Command, under Wavell. In October 1943, Winston Churchill appointed Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten as Supreme Allied Commander, SEAC. General William Slim was commander of Commonwealth land forces and directed the Burma Campaign. General Joseph Stilwell commanded U.S. forces in the CBI Theater, directed aid to China and assisted in the coordination of Chinese operations.

On November 22, 1943, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and ROC leader Chiang Kai-Shek met in Cairo, Egypt, to discuss a strategy to defeat Japan. The meeting was also known as Cairo Conference and concluded with the Cairo Declaration.

### **Allied offensives, 1943–44**

Midway proved to be the last great naval battle for two years. The United States used the two years to turn its vast industrial potential into actual ships, planes, and trained aircrew. At the same time, Japan, lacking an adequate industrial base or technological strategy, a good aircrew training program, and adequate naval resources and doctrine for commerce defense, fell further and further behind. In strategic terms the Allies began a long movement across the Pacific, seizing one island base after another. Not every Japanese stronghold had to be captured; some, like Truk, Rabaul and Formosa were neutralized by air attack and bypassed. The goal was to get close to Japan herself, then launch massive strategic air attacks, improve the submarine blockade, and finally (only if necessary) execute an invasion.

In November 1943, U.S. Marines sustained high casualties when they overwhelmed the 4,500-strong garrison at Tarawa. This helped the Allies to improve the techniques of amphibious landings, learning from their mistakes and implementing changes such as thorough pre-emptive bombings and bombardment, more careful planning regarding tides and landing craft schedules, and better overall coordination.

The U.S. Navy did not seek out the Japanese fleet for a decisive battle, as Mahanian doctrine would suggest (and as Japan hoped); the Allied advance could only be stopped by a Japanese naval attack, which oil shortages (induced by submarine attack) made impossible.<sup>[20]</sup>

### **Submarine warfare**

US submarines, as well as some British and Dutch vessels, operating from bases at Cavite, in the Philippines (1941-42) Fremantle and Brisbane in Australia; Pearl Harbor; Trincomalee, Ceylon; Midway; and later Guam, played a major role in defeating Japan. This was the case even though submarines made up a small proportion of the Allied navies — less than two percent in the case of

the US Navy.<sup>[21]</sup> Submarines strangled Japan by sinking its merchant fleet, intercepting many troop transports, and cutting off nearly all the oil imports essential to weapons production and military operations. By early 1945 the oil tanks were dry. The Japanese military claimed its defenses sank 468 Allied subs.<sup>[22]</sup> Only 42 US submarines were sunk in the Pacific, with 10 others going down in accidents, the Atlantic Ocean, or as the result of friendly fire.<sup>[23]</sup>

US submarines accounted for 56% of the Japanese merchantmen sunk; most of the rest were hit by planes at the end of the war, or were destroyed by mines.<sup>[24]</sup> US submariners also claimed 28% of Japanese warships destroyed.<sup>[25]</sup> Furthermore, they played important reconnaissance roles, as at the battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf (and, coincidentally, at Midway), when they gave accurate and timely warning of the approach of the Japanese fleet. Submarines also rescued hundreds of downed fliers.

The Allied submarines did not adopt a defensive posture and wait for the enemy to attack. Within hours of Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt ordered a new doctrine into effect: unrestricted submarine warfare against Japan. This meant sinking any warship, commercial vessel, or passenger ship in Axis controlled waters, without warning and without help to survivors.<sup>[26]</sup> Allied submarine bases were well-protected by surface fleets and aircraft.

While Japan had a large number of submarines, they did not make a significant impact on the war. In 1942, the Japanese fleet subs performed well, knocking out or damaging many Allied warships. However, Imperial Japanese Navy (and pre-war US) doctrine stipulated naval campaigns are won only by fleet battles, not *guerre de course* (commerce raiding). So, while the US had an unusually long supply line between its west coast and frontline areas, and was vulnerable to submarine attack, Japan's submarines were instead primarily used for long range reconnaissance and only occasionally attacked US supply lines. The Japanese submarine offensive against Australia in 1942 and 1943 also achieved little.<sup>[27]</sup> As the war turned against Japan, IJN submarines were increasingly used to resupply strongholds which had been cut off, such as Truk and Rabaul. In addition, Japan honored its neutrality treaty with the Soviet Union and ignored US freighters shipping millions of tons of war supplies from San Francisco to Vladivostok.<sup>[28]</sup>

The US Navy, by contrast, relied on commerce raiding from the outset. However, the problem of Allied forces surrounded in the Philippines, during the early part of 1942, led to diversion of boats to "guerrilla submarine" missions. As well, basing in Australia placed boats under Japanese aerial threat while *en route* to patrol areas, inhibiting effectiveness, and Nimitz relied on submarines for close surveillance of enemy bases. Furthermore, the standard issue Mark 14 torpedo and its Mark VI exploder were both defective, problems not corrected until September 1943. Worst of all, before the war, an uninformed US Customs officer had seized a copy of the Japanese merchant marine code (called the "*maru* code" in the USN), not knowing Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) had broken it;<sup>[29]</sup> The Japanese government promptly changed it, and the new code was not broken again until 1943.

Thus, it was not until 1944 the US Navy began to use its 150 submarines to maximum effect: effective shipboard radar was installed, commanders lacking in aggression were replaced, and faults in torpedoes were fixed. Japanese commerce protection was "shiftless beyond description,"<sup>[30]</sup> and convoys were poorly organised and defended compared to Allied ones, a product of flawed IJN doctrine and training — errors concealed by American faults as much as Japanese overconfidence. The number of U.S. submarine patrols (and sinkings) rose steeply: 350 patrols (180 ships sunk) in 1942, 350 (335) in 1943, and 520 (603) in 1944.<sup>[31]</sup> By 1945, sinkings had decreased because so few targets dared to move on the high seas. In all, Allied submarines destroyed 1,200 merchant ships for about five million tons of shipping. Most were small cargo carriers, but 124 were tankers bringing desperately needed oil from the East Indies. Another 320 were passenger ships and troop transports. At critical stages of the Guadalcanal, Saipan, and Leyte campaigns, thousands of Japanese troops were killed or diverted before they arrived where they were needed. Over 200 warships were sunk, ranging from many auxiliaries and destroyers to one battleship and no fewer than eight carriers. Underwater warfare was especially dangerous; of the 16,000 Americans who went out on patrol, 3,500 (22%) never returned, the highest casualty rate of

any American force in World War II.<sup>[32]</sup> The Japanese losses, 130 submarines in all,<sup>[33]</sup> were even higher.

A single German submarine, *U-862*, operated in the Pacific Ocean during the war, patrolling off the Australian east coast and New Zealand in December 1944 and January 1945. It sank one ship in the Pacific before it was recalled to Batavia.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Japanese counteroffensives in China, 1944

In mid-1944, Japan launched a massive invasion across China, under the code name Operation Ichigo. These attacks, the biggest in several years, gained much ground for Japan before they were stopped in Guangxi.

## The beginning of the end in the Pacific, 1944

### Saipan and Philippine Sea:

On June 15, 1944, 535 ships began landing 128,000 U.S. Army and Marine personnel on the island of Saipan. The Allied objective was the creation of airfields within B-29 range of Tokyo. The ability to plan and execute such a complex operation in the space of 90 days was indicative of Allied logistical superiority.

It was imperative for Japanese commanders to hold Saipan. The only way to do this was to destroy the U.S. Fifth Fleet, which had 15 fleet carriers and 956 planes, 28 battleships and cruisers, and 69 destroyers. Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa attacked with nine-tenths of Japan's fighting fleet, which included nine carriers with 473 planes, 18 battleships and cruisers, and 28 destroyers. Ozawa's pilots were outnumbered 2-1 and their aircraft were becoming obsolete. The Japanese had substantial anti-aircraft defenses but lacked proximity fuzes or good radar. With the odds against him, Ozawa devised an appropriate strategy. His planes had greater range because they were not weighed down with protective armor; they could attack at about 480 km (300 mi)<sup>[citation needed]</sup>, and could search a radius of 900 km<sup>[citation needed]</sup> (560 mi). U.S. Navy Hellcat fighters could only attack within 200 miles (320 km) and only search within a 325-mile (523 km)<sup>[citation needed]</sup> radius. Ozawa planned to use this advantage by positioning his fleet 300 miles (480 km)<sup>[citation needed]</sup> out. The Japanese planes would hit the U.S. carriers, land at Guam to refuel, then hit the enemy again, when returning to their carriers. Ozawa also counted on about 500 land-based planes at Guam and other islands.

Admiral Raymond A. Spruance was in overall command of the Fifth Fleet. The Japanese plan would have failed if the much larger U.S. fleet had closed on Ozawa and attacked aggressively; Ozawa had the correct insight that the unaggressive Spruance would not attack. U.S. Admiral Marc Mitscher, in tactical command of Task Force 58, with its 15 carriers, was aggressive but Spruance vetoed Mitscher's plan to hunt down Ozawa because Spruance's orders made protecting the landings on Saipan his first priority. This has led to postwar criticism of Spruance for lack of aggressiveness.

The forces converged in the largest sea battle of World War II up to that point. Over the previous month American destroyers had destroyed 17 of 25 submarines out of Ozawa's screening force. Repeated U.S. raids destroyed the Japanese land-based planes. Ozawa's main attack lacked coordination, with the Japanese planes arriving at their targets in a staggered sequence. Following a directive from Nimitz, the U.S. carriers all had combat information centers, which interpreted the flow of radar data and radioed interception orders to the Hellcats. The result was later dubbed the *Great Marianas Turkey Shoot*. The few attackers to reach the U.S. fleet encountered massive AA fire with proximity fuzes. Only one American warship was slightly damaged.

On the second day U.S. reconnaissance planes finally located Ozawa's fleet, 275 miles (443 km) away and submarines sank two Japanese carriers. Mitscher launched 230 torpedo planes and dive bombers. He then discovered that the enemy was actually another 60 miles (97 km) further off, out of aircraft range. Mitscher decided that this chance to destroy the Japanese fleet was worth the risk of aircraft losses. Overall, the U.S. lost 130 planes and 76 aircrew. However, Japan lost 450 planes, three carriers, and 445 aircrew. The Imperial Japanese Navy's carrier force was effectively destroyed.

## Leyte Gulf 1944

The Battle of Leyte Gulf was arguably the largest naval battle in history. It was a series of four distinct engagements fought off the Philippine island of Leyte from October 23 to October 26, 1944. Leyte Gulf featured the largest battleships ever built, it was the last time in history that battleships engaged each other, and was also notable as the first time that kamikaze aircraft were used. Allied victory in the Philippine Sea established Allied air and sea superiority in the western Pacific. Nimitz favored blockading the Philippines and landing on Formosa. This would give the Allies control of the sea routes to Japan from southern Asia, cutting off substantial Japanese garrisons. MacArthur favoured an invasion of the Philippines, which also lay across the supply lines to Japan. Roosevelt adjudicated in favor of the Philippines. Meanwhile, Japanese Combined Fleet Chief Toyoda Soemu prepared four plans to cover all Allied offensive scenarios. On October 12, Nimitz launched a carrier raid against Formosa to make sure that planes based there could not intervene in the landings on Leyte. Soemu put Plan *Sho-2* into effect, launching a series of air attacks against the U.S. carriers. However, the Japanese lost 600 planes in three days, leaving them without air cover.

*Sho-1* called for V. Adm. Jisaburo Ozawa's force to use an apparently vulnerable carrier force to lure the U.S. 3rd Fleet away from Leyte and remove air cover from the Allied landing forces, which would then be attacked from the west by three Japanese forces: V. Adm. Takeo Kurita's force would enter Leyte Gulf and attack the landing forces; R. Adm. Shoji Nishimura's force and V. Adm. Kiyohide Shima's force would act as mobile strike forces. The plan was likely to result in the destruction of one or more of the Japanese forces, but Toyoda justified it by saying that there would be no sense in saving the fleet and losing the Philippines.

Kurita's "Center Force" consisted of five battleships, 12 cruisers and 13 destroyers. It included the two largest battleships ever built: *Yamato* and *Musashi*. As they passed Palawan Island after midnight on October 23, the force was spotted, and U.S. submarines sank two cruisers. On October 24, as Kurita's force entered the Sibuyan Sea, USS *Intrepid* and USS *Cabot* launched 260 planes, which scored hits on several ships. A second wave of planes scored many direct hits on *Musashi*. A third wave, from USS *Enterprise* and USS *Franklin* hit *Musashi* with 11 bombs and eight torpedoes. Kurita retreated but in the evening turned around to head for San Bernardino Strait. *Musashi* sank at about 19:30.

Meanwhile, V. Adm. Onishi Takijiro had directed his First Air Fleet, 80 land-based planes, against U.S. carriers, whose planes were attacking airfields on Luzon. USS *Princeton* was hit by an armour-piercing bomb and suffered a major explosion which killed 200 crew and 80 on a cruiser which was alongside. *Princeton* sank, and the cruiser was forced to retire.

Nishimura's force consisted of two battleships, one cruiser and four destroyers. Because they were observing radio silence, Nishimura was unable to synchronise with Shima and Kurita. Nishimura and Shima had failed to even coordinate their plans before the attacks — they were long time rivals and neither wished to have anything to do with the other. When he entered the narrow Surigao Strait at about 02:00, Shima was 22 miles (40 km) behind him, and Kurita was still in the Sibuyan Sea, several hours from the beaches at Leyte. As they passed Panaon Island, Nishimura's force ran into a trap set for them by the U.S.-Australian 7th Fleet Support Force. R. Adm. Jesse Oldendorf had six battleships, four heavy cruisers, four light cruisers, 29 destroyers and 39 PT boats. To pass the strait and reach the landings, Nishimura had to run the gauntlet. At about 03:00 the Japanese battleship *Fuso* and three destroyers were hit by torpedoes and *Fuso* broke in two. At 03:50 the

U.S. battleships opened fire. Radar fire control meant they could hit targets from a much greater distance than the Japanese. The battleship *Yamashiro*, a cruiser and a destroyer were crippled by 16-inch (406mm) shells; *Yamashiro* sank at 04:19. Only one of Nishimura's force of seven ships survived the engagement. At 04:25 Shima's force of two cruisers and eight destroyers reached the battle. Seeing *Fuso* and believing her to be the wrecks of two battleships, Shima ordered a retreat. Ozawa's "Northern Force" had four aircraft carriers, two obsolete battleships partly converted to carriers, three cruisers and nine destroyers. The carriers had only 108 planes. The force was not spotted by the Allies until 16:40 on October 24. At 20:00 Soemu ordered all remaining Japanese forces to attack. Halsey saw an opportunity to destroy the remnants of the Japanese carrier force. The U.S. Third Fleet was formidable — nine large carriers, eight light carriers, six battleships, 17 cruisers, 63 destroyers and 1,000 planes — and completely outgunned Ozawa's force. Halsey's ships set out in pursuit of Ozawa just after midnight. U.S. commanders ignored reports that Kurita had turned back towards San Bernardino Strait. They had taken the bait set by Ozawa. On the morning of October 25, Ozawa launched 75 planes. Most were shot down by U.S. fighter patrols. By 08:00 U.S. fighters had destroyed the screen of Japanese fighters and were hitting ships. By evening, they had sunk the carriers *Zuikaku*, *Zuiho*, and *Chiyoda*, and a destroyer. The fourth carrier, *Chitose* and a cruiser were disabled and later sank.

Kurita passed through San Bernardino Strait at 03:00 on 25 October and headed along the coast of Samar. The only thing standing in his path was three groups (Taffy 1, 2 and 3) of the Seventh Fleet, commanded by Admiral Thomas Kinkaid. Each group had six escort carriers, with a total of more than 500 planes, and seven or eight destroyers or destroyer escorts (DE). Kinkaid still believed that Lee's force was guarding the north, so the Japanese had the element of surprise when they attacked Taffy 3 at 06:45. Kurita mistook the Taffy carriers for large fleet carriers and thought he had the whole Third Fleet in his sights. Since escort carriers stood little chance against a battleship, Adm. Clifton Sprague directed the carriers of Taffy 3 to turn and flee eastward, hoping that bad visibility would reduce the accuracy of Japanese gunfire, and used his destroyers in to divert the Japanese battleships. The destroyers made harassing torpedo attacks against the Japanese. For ten minutes *Yamato* was caught up in evasive action. Two U.S. destroyers and a DE were sunk, but they had bought enough time for the Taffy groups to launch planes. Taffy 3 turned and fled south, with shells scoring hits on some of its carriers and sinking one of them. The superior speed of the Japanese force allowed it to draw closer and fire on the other two Taffy groups. However, at 09:20 Kurita suddenly turned and retreated north. Signals had disabused him of the notion that he was attacking the Third Fleet, and the longer Kurita continued to engage, the greater the risk of major air strikes. Destroyer attacks had broken the Japanese formations, shattering tactical control, and two of Kurita's heavy cruisers had been sunk. The Japanese retreated through the San Bernardino Strait, under continuous air attack. The Battle of Leyte Gulf was over.

The battle secured the beachheads of the U.S. Sixth Army on Leyte against attack from the sea, broke the back of Japanese naval power and opened the way for an advance to the Ryukyu Islands in 1945. The only significant Japanese naval operation afterwards was the disastrous Operation Ten-Go, in April 1945. Kurita's force had begun the battle with five battleships; when he returned to Japan, only *Yamato* was combat-worthy. Nishimura's sunken *Yamashiro* was the last battleship to engage another in combat.

## **Philippines, 1944–45**

On October 20, 1944, the U.S. Sixth Army, supported by naval and air bombardment, landed on the favorable eastern shore of Leyte, north of Mindanao. The U.S. Sixth Army continued its advance from the east, as the Japanese rushed reinforcements to the Ormoc Bay area on the western side of the island. While the Sixth Army was reinforced successfully, the U.S. Fifth Air Force was able to devastate the Japanese attempts to resupply. In torrential rains and over difficult terrain, the advance continued across Leyte and the neighboring island of Samar to the north. On December 7, U.S. Army units landed at Ormoc Bay and, after a major land and air battle, cut off the Japanese

ability to reinforce and supply Leyte. Although fierce fighting continued on Leyte for months, the U.S. Army was in control.

On December 15, 1944, landings against minimal resistance were made on the southern beaches of the island of Mindoro, a key location in the planned Lingayen Gulf operations, in support of major landings scheduled on Luzon. On January 9, 1945, on the south shore of Lingayen Gulf on the western coast of Luzon, General Krueger's Sixth Army landed his first units. Almost 175,000 men followed across the twenty-mile (32 km) beachhead within a few days. With heavy air support, Army units pushed inland, taking Clark Field, 40 miles (64 km) northwest of Manila, in the last week of January.

Two more major landings followed, one to cut off the Bataan Peninsula, and another, that included a parachute drop, south of Manila. Pincers closed on the city and, on February 3, 1945, elements of the 1st Cavalry Division pushed into the northern outskirts of Manila and the 8th Cavalry passed through the northern suburbs and into the city itself.

As the advance on Manila continued from the north and the south, the Bataan Peninsula was rapidly secured. On February 16, paratroopers and amphibious units assaulted Corregidor, and resistance ended there on February 27.

In all, ten U.S. divisions and five independent regiments battled on Luzon, making it the largest campaign of the Pacific war, involving more troops than the United States had used in North Africa, Italy, or southern France.

Palawan Island, between Borneo and Mindoro, the fifth largest and western-most Philippine Island, was invaded on February 28, with landings of the Eighth Army at Puerto Princesa. The Japanese put up little direct defence of Palawan, but cleaning up pockets of Japanese resistance lasted until late April, as the Japanese used their common tactic of withdrawing into the mountain jungles, dispersed as small units. Throughout the Philippines, U.S. forces were aided by Filipino guerrillas to find and dispatch the holdouts.

The U.S. Eighth Army then moved on to its first landing on Mindanao (17 April), the last of the major Philippine Islands to be taken. Mindanao was followed by invasion and occupation of Panay, Cebu, Negros and several islands in the Sulu Archipelago. These islands provided bases for the U.S. Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces to attack targets throughout the Philippines and the South China Sea.

## **Final stages**

### **Allied offensives in Burma, 1944–45**

The British launched a series of offensive operations back into Burma during late 1944 and the first half of 1945. Command of the British formations on the front was rearranged in November 1944; the 11th Army Group was replaced with Allied Land Forces Southeast Asia.

The Japanese Burma Area Army withdrew the 15th Army behind the Irrawaddy River (Operation BAN). 28th Army was to continue to defend the Arakan and lower Irrawaddy valley (Operation KAN), while 33rd Army would attempt to prevent the completion of the new Ledo Road between India and China by defending Bhamo and Lashio, and mounting guerrilla raids (Operation DAN).

In Arakan, as the monsoon ended, the British Commonwealth XV Corps resumed its advance on Akyab Island for the third year in succession. This time the Japanese were numerically far weaker and had already lost the most favorable defensive positions. The Indian 25th Infantry Division advanced on Foul Point and Rathedaung at the end of the Mayu Peninsula, while the West African 81st Division and West African 82nd Division converged on Myohaung at the mouth of the Kaladan River. The Japanese evacuated Akyab Island on December 31, 1944. It was occupied by XV Corps without resistance two days later.

Following the incursion into western Burma, XV Corps operations were halted in order to transfer transport aircraft to support Fourteenth Army. With the coastal area secured the Allies were free to

build sea-supplied airbases on the two offshore islands, Ramree Island and Cheduba. Cheduba, the smaller of the two islands, had no Japanese garrison, but the clearing of the small but typically tenacious Japanese garrison on Ramree took about six weeks

NCAC's operations were limited from late 1944 onwards by the need for Chinese troops on the main front in China. The American and British commanders attacked the Chinese leadership's decision to focus their limited resources on the defensive of Chinese cities rather than the defeat of the Japanese in Burma. In spite of these limitations, General Sultan was still able to resume his advance against the Japanese 33rd Army.

On his right, the British 36th Infantry Division, brought in to replace the Chindits, made contact with the Indian 19th Infantry Division near Indaw on December 10, 1944, and Fourteenth Army and NCAC now had a continuous front. Meanwhile, three Chinese divisions and a US Force known as the "Mars Brigade" (which had replaced Merrill's Marauders) advanced slowly from Myitkyina to Bhamo. The Japanese resisted for several weeks, but Bhamo fell on December 15.

Sultan's forces made contact with Chiang's Yunnan armies on January 21, 1945, and the Ledo road could finally be completed, although it was not yet secure. The Ledo road by this point in the war was also of uncertain value. It would not be completed soon enough to change the overall military situation in China. Chiang, to the annoyance of the British and Americans, ordered Sultan to halt his advance at Lashio, which was captured on March 7. In April, OSS Detachment 101 took over control of American forces from the NCAC, which had withdrawn to China, while the 36th Division withdrew to India.

Fourteenth Army made the main thrust into central Burma. It had IV Corps and XXXIII Corps under its command, with six infantry divisions, two armoured brigades and three independent infantry brigades. Logistics were the primary problem the advance faced. A carefully designed system involving large amounts of supply by air was introduced as well endless construction projects designed to improve the land route from India into Burma.

When it was realised that the Japanese had fallen back behind the Irrawaddy River, the plan was modified. Initially both corps had been attacking into the Shwebo Plain between the Chindwin and Irrawaddy rivers. Now, only XXXIII Corps would continue this attack, while IV Corps changed its axis of advance to the Gangaw Valley west of the Chindwin, aiming to cross the Irrawaddy close to Pakokku and then capture the main Japanese line of communication centre of Meiktila. Diversionary measures (such as dummy radio traffic) would persuade the Japanese that both corps were aimed at Mandalay.

The plan was completely successful. Allied air superiority and the thin Japanese presence on the ground meant that the Japanese were unaware of the strength of the force moving on Pakokku. During January and February, XXXIII Corps seized crossings over the Irrawaddy River near Mandalay. There was heavy fighting, which attracted Japanese reserves and fixed their attention. Late in February, Indian 7th Division, leading IV Corps, seized crossings at Nyaungu, near Pakokku. Indian 17th Division and 255th Indian Armoured brigade followed them across and struck for Meiktila.

While the Japanese were distracted by events at Meiktila, XXXIII Corps had renewed its attack on Mandalay. It fell to Indian 19th Division on March 20, though the Japanese held the former citadel of Fort Dufferin for another week. The battle was extremely costly in that much of the historically and culturally significant portions of Mandalay, including the old royal palace, were burned to the ground. With the fall of Mandalay (and of Maymyo to its east), communications to the Japanese front in the north of Burma were cut. The Japanese 15th Army was completely scattered, leaving only small detachments and parties of stragglers making their way east.

The Allied armies continued their southward drive towards Rangoon, with the goal of capturing the vital port before the monsoon season cut the overland supply routes. IV Corps made the main attack, down the "Railway Valley" by striking at the delaying position held by the remnants of Japanese 33rd Army at Pyawbwe. The Indian 17th Division and 255th Armoured Brigade were initially halted by a strong defensive position behind a dry chaung, but a flanking move by tanks

and mechanized infantry struck the Japanese from the rear and shattered them. Following the route of the 33rd Army, organised resistance along the route to Rangoon all but ceased.

A general uprising delayed the Japanese 15th Division long enough for the Allied forces to reach the city of Toungoo, only 136 miles (219 km) from Rangoon. The Indian 17th Division reached Pegu, 40 miles (65 km) north of Rangoon by April 25. Kimura had formed the various service troops, naval personnel and even Japanese civilians in Rangoon into the Japanese 105 Independent Mixed Brigade. This scratch formation used buried aircraft bombs, anti-aircraft guns and suicide attacks with pole charges to delay the British advance, holding the British off until April 30, and covered the evacuation of the Rangoon area.

General Slim feared that the Japanese would defend Rangoon to the last man through the monsoon, which would put Fourteenth Army in a disastrous supply situation. His lines of communication by land were impossibly long, and the troops relied on supplies ferried by aircraft to airfields close behind the leading troops. Heavy rain would make these airfields unusable and curtail flying. However, Kimura had ordered Rangoon to be evacuated, starting on April 22. Many troops were evacuated by sea, although British submarines claimed several ships. Kimura's own HQ left by land. The Japanese 105 Independent Mixed Brigade, by holding Pegu, covered this evacuation.

On May 1, a Gurkha parachute battalion was dropped on Elephant Point, which cleared Japanese rearguards from the mouth of the Rangoon River. The Indian 26th Infantry Division landed the next day and took over Rangoon, which had seen an orgy of looting and lawlessness similar to the last days of the British in the city in 1942. Following the capture of Rangoon, there were still Japanese forces to take care of in Burma, but it was largely a mopping up operation.

## **Liberation of Borneo**

The Borneo Campaign of 1945 was the last major Allied campaign in the Southwest Pacific Area. In a series of amphibious assaults between May 1 and July 21, the Australian I Corps, under General Leslie Morshead, attacked Japanese forces occupying the island. Allied naval and air forces, centred on the U.S. 7th Fleet under Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, the Australian First Tactical Air Force and the U.S. Thirteenth Air Force also played important roles in the campaign.

The campaign opened with a landing on the small island of Tarakan on May 1. This was followed on June 1 by simultaneous assaults in the north west, on the island of Labuan and the coast of Brunei. A week later the Australians attacked Japanese positions in North Borneo. The attention of the Allies then switched back to the central east coast, with the last major amphibious assault of World War II, at Balikpapan on July 1.

Although the campaign was criticised in Australia at the time, and in subsequent years, as pointless or a "waste" of the lives of soldiers, it did achieve a number of objectives, such as increasing the isolation of significant Japanese forces occupying the main part of the Dutch East Indies, capturing major oil supplies and freeing Allied prisoners of war, who were being held in deteriorating conditions.<sup>[35]</sup>

## **Landings in the Japanese home islands**

Hard-fought battles on the Japanese home islands of Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and others resulted in horrific casualties on both sides but finally produced a Japanese defeat. Faced with the loss of most of their experienced pilots, the Japanese increased their use of kamikaze tactics in an attempt to create unacceptably high casualties for the Allies. The U.S. Navy proposed to force a Japanese surrender through a total naval blockade and air raids.<sup>[36]</sup>

Towards the end of the war as the role of strategic bombing became more important, a new command for the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in the Pacific was created to oversee all U.S. strategic bombing in the hemisphere, under United States Army Air Forces General Curtis LeMay. Japanese industrial production plunged as nearly half of the built-up areas of 64 cities were destroyed by B-29 firebombing raids. On March 9-March 10, 1945 alone, about 100,000 people were killed in a fire storm caused by an attack on Tokyo. In addition, LeMay also oversaw Operation Starvation, in



which the inland waterways of Japan were extensively mined by air, which disrupted the small amount of remaining Japanese coastal sea traffic.

### **Atomic bomb and the Soviet invasion**

On August 6, 1945, a B-29, the *Enola Gay*, dropped an atom bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, in the first nuclear attack in history. On August 9, another was dropped on Nagasaki, in the last ever nuclear attack. More than 240,000 people died as a direct result of these two bombings.<sup>[37]</sup> The necessity of the atomic bombings has long been debated, with detractors claiming that a naval blockade and bombing campaign had already made invasion, and hence the atomic bomb, unnecessary.<sup>[38]</sup> However, other scholars have argued that the bombings did obviate invasion, including a planned Soviet invasion of Hokkaidō, or a prolonged blockade and bombing campaign, any of which may have exacted even higher casualties among Japanese civilians.<sup>[39]</sup>

On February 3, 1945, the Soviet Union agreed with Roosevelt to enter the Pacific conflict. It promised to act 90 days after the war ended in Europe and did so exactly on schedule on August 9, by launching Operation August Storm. A battle-hardened, one million-strong Soviet force, transferred from Europe attacked Japanese forces in Manchuria and quickly defeated the Japanese *Kantōgun* (Kwantung Army group).

In Japan, August 14 is considered to be the day that the Pacific War ended. However, Imperial Japan actually surrendered on August 15, and this day became known in the English-speaking countries as "V-J Day" (Victory in Japan).<sup>[40]</sup> The formal Instrument of Surrender was signed on September 2, 1945, on the battleship USS *Missouri*, in Tokyo Bay. The surrender was accepted by General Douglas MacArthur as "Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers", with representatives of several Allied nations, from a Japanese delegation led by Mamoru Shigemitsu and Yoshijiro Umezu.

Following this period, MacArthur went to Tokyo to oversee the postwar development of the country. This period in Japanese history is known as the occupation.

## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> [Russia and USSR in Wars of XX century](http://www.soldat.ru/doc/casualties/book/chapter5_10_1.html#5_10_51)  
[http://www.soldat.ru/doc/casualties/book/chapter5\\_10\\_1.html#5\\_10\\_51](http://www.soldat.ru/doc/casualties/book/chapter5_10_1.html#5_10_51)
2. <sup>^</sup> [The National World War II Museum, New Orleans](#)
3. <sup>^</sup> [\[1\] Map of the Pacific Theatre](#)
4. <sup>^</sup> [World War II Database: China](#). Retrieved on [2007-03-05](#).
5. <sup>^</sup> [World War II: 1930–1937](#). Retrieved on [2007-03-05](#).
6. <sup>^</sup> The Emperor was using the Army to keep the *Diet* off-balance and shore up Imperial prestige, so he did not use his authority to rein in "cowboy generals" in China, even as the China war dragged on. Bix, *Hirohito*.
7. <sup>^</sup> [Georgi Dimitrov and the United National Front in China 1936-1944 \(See: No. 22 New Soviet Aid for Chinese\)](#). Retrieved on [2007-03-05](#).
8. <sup>^</sup> Peattie & Evans, *Kaigun*.
9. <sup>^</sup> [Pearl Harbor to Midway](#). <http://www.militaryhistoryonline.com/> *Military History Online*. Retrieved on [May 27, 2007](#).
10. <sup>^</sup> Peattie, Mark R., & Evans, David C. *Kaigun* (United States Naval Institute Press, 1997); Parillo, Mark P. *Japanese Merchant Marine in World War II*. (United States Naval Institute Press, 1993).
11. <sup>^</sup> H. Bix, "The Shōwa Emperor's Monologue and the Problem of War Responsibility", *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1992, p. 344.
12. <sup>^</sup> Hoyt, Edwin P. (1986). Japan's War. *Da Capo*, 262–263. [ISBN 0-306-80348-8](#).
13. <sup>^</sup> Blair, *Silent Victory*
14. <sup>^</sup> <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/420428a.html>
15. <sup>^</sup> Parillo, *Japanese Merchant Marine*; Peattie & Evans, **Kaigun**.
16. <sup>^</sup> Thanks in part to terrible aircraft [torpedoes](#).
17. <sup>^</sup> Willmott, *Barrier and the Javelin*.
18. <sup>^</sup> By [John Murpy](#) in [Tambor](#). Blair, *Silent Victory*, p.246.
19. <sup>^</sup> Willmott, *op. cit.*
20. <sup>^</sup> Blair, *Silent Victory*; Parillo, *Japanese Merchant Marine*
21. <sup>^</sup> Clay Blair, *Silent Victory: The U. S. Submarine War Against Japan* (Lippincott, 1975) and Theodore Roscoe, *United States Submarine Operations in World War II* (US Naval Institute Press, 1949).
22. <sup>^</sup> Prange *et al.* *Pearl Harbor Papers*
23. <sup>^</sup> Roscoe, Theodore. *Pig Boats* Bantam Books, 1958.
24. <sup>^</sup> Roscoe, Theodore. *Pig Boats* Bantam Books, 1958.
25. <sup>^</sup> Larry Kimmett and Margaret Regis, [U.S. Submarines in World War II](#)
26. <sup>^</sup> The US thereby reversed its opposition to unrestricted submarine warfare. After the war, when moralistic doubts about Hiroshima and other raids on civilian targets were loudly voiced, no-one criticized Roosevelt's submarine policy. (Two German admirals, [Erich Raeder](#) and [Karl Dönitz](#), were charged at the [Nuremberg War Crimes Trials](#) with violating international law through unrestricted submarine warfare; they were acquitted after proving Allied merchant ships were legitimate military targets, under the rules in force at the time.
27. <sup>^</sup> David Stevens. [Japanese submarine operations against Australia 1942-1944](#). Accessed 18 June 2007.
28. <sup>^</sup> Carl Boyd, "The Japanese Submarine Gay Force and the Legacy of Strategic and Operational Doctrine Developed Between the World Wars," in Larry Addington ed. *Selected Papers from the Citadel Conference on War and Diplomacy: 1978* (Charleston, 1979) 27–40; Clark G. Reynolds, *Command of the Sea: The History and Strategy of Maritime Empires* (1974) 512.
29. <sup>^</sup> Farago, Ladislas. *Broken Seal*.
30. <sup>^</sup> Chihaya Masataka, in *Pearl Harbor Papers*, p.323. Chihaya went on to note, when IJN belatedly improved its ASW methods, the US submarine force responded by increasing Japanese losses.
31. <sup>^</sup> Blair, *Silent Victory*, pp.359-60, 551-2, & 816.
32. <sup>^</sup> Roscoe, *op. cit.*
33. <sup>^</sup> Blair, p.877.
34. <sup>^</sup> Uboat.net [The Monsun boats](#). Accessed 18 June 2007.
35. <sup>^</sup> Grey, Jeffrey (1999). A Military History of Australia. *Cambridge: Cambridge University Press*. [ISBN 0521644836](#). . Pages 184-186.

36. [^](#) Skates, James. *Invasion of Japan*.
37. [^](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nuclear_02.shtml) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nuclear\\_02.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwtwo/nuclear_02.shtml) Professor Duncan Anderson, 2005, "Nuclear Power: The End of the War Against Japan"] (*World War Two*, BBC History website) Access date: September 11, 2007.
38. [^](#) See, for example, Alperowitz, G., *The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb* (1995; New York, Knopf; ISBN 0-6794-4331-2) for this argument.
39. [^](#) See, for example, [Professor Duncan Anderson, "Nuclear Power: The End of the War Against Japan"](#) (*World War Two*, BBC History website) Access date: September 11, 2007.
40. [^](#) [Chronology of Japanese Holdouts](#)

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# Pacific War campaigns







## Second Sino-Japanese war

- 7 July 1937 – 9 September 1945

## Soviet-Japanese Border Wars

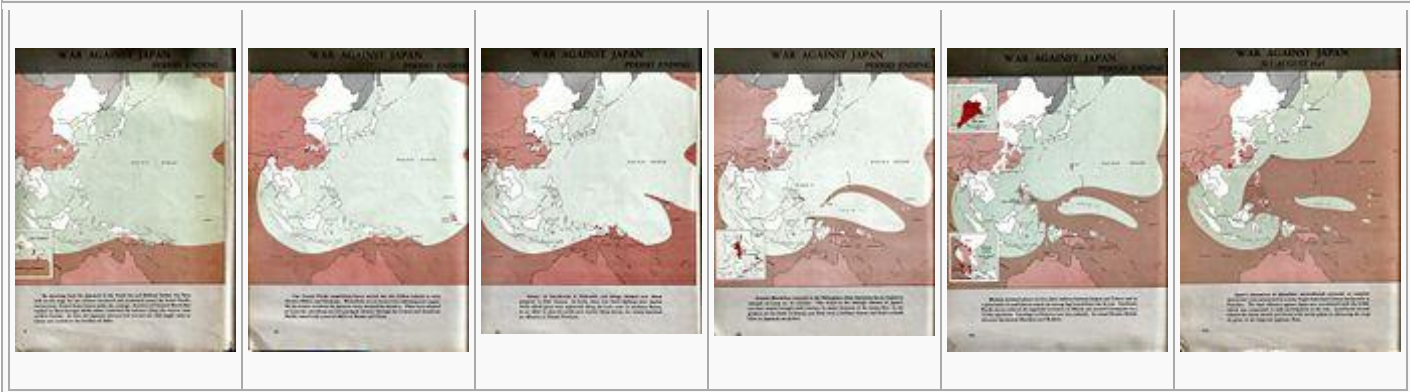
- 1938-07-29 – 1938-08-11 Battle of Lake Khasan
- 1938-05-11 – 1938-09-16 Battle of Khalkhin Gol
- 1945-08-08 – 1945-09-02 Operation August Storm

## Japanese conquest of Southeast Asia and Pacific


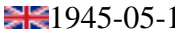
-  1941-12-07 (12-08 Asian Time) Attack on Pearl Harbor
-  1941-12-08 Japanese Invasion of Thailand
-  1941-12-08 Battle of Guam (1941)
- 1941-12-08 United States declares war on Japan
-  1941-12-08 – 1941-12-25 Battle of Hong Kong
-  1941-12-08 – 1942-01-31 Battle of Malaya
-  1941-12-10 Sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*
-  1941-12-11 – 1941-12-24 Battle of Wake Island
-  1941-12-16 – 1942-04-01 Borneo campaign (1942)
-  1941-12-22 – 1942-05-06 Battle of the Philippines
- 1942-01-01 – 1945-10-25 Transport of POWs via hell ships
-  1942-01-11 – 1942-01-12 Battle of Tarakan
-  1942-01-23 Battle of Rabaul (1942)
-  1942-01-24 Naval Battle of Balikpapan
- 1942-01-25 Thailand declares war on the Allies
-  1942-01-30 – 1942-02-03 Battle of Ambon
-  1942-01-30 – 1942-02-15 Battle of Singapore
-  1942-02-04 Battle of Makassar Strait
-  1942-02-14 – 1942-02-15 Battle of Palembang
-  1942-02-19 Air raids on Darwin, Australia
-  1942-02-19 – 1942-02-20 Battle of Badung Strait
-  1942-02-19 – 1943-02-10 Battle of Timor (1942-43)
-  1942-02-27 – 1942-03-01 Battle of the Java Sea
-  1942-03-01 Battle of Sunda Strait
-  1942-03-01 – 1942-03-09 Battle of Java
-  1942-03-31 Battle of Christmas Island
-  1942-03-31 – 1942-04-10 Indian Ocean raid
- 1942-04-09 Bataan Death March begins
-  1942-04-18 Doolittle Raid
-  1942-05-03 Japanese invasion of Tulagi
-  1942-05-04 – 1942-05-08 Battle of the Coral Sea
-  1942-05-31 – 1942-06-08 Attacks on Sydney Harbour area, Australia
-  1942-06-04 – 1942-06-06 Battle of Midway

## Allied offensives
















See Atlas of Battle Fronts from July 1943 to August 1945 at Half-Month intervals






### South East Asian campaigns: 1941-12-08 – 1945-08-15

-  Burma Campaign: 1941-12-16 – 1945-08-15
-  1945-05-15 – 1945-05-16 Battle of the Malacca Strait





### New Guinea campaign

-  1942-01-23 – Battle of Rabaul
- 1942-03-07 – Operation Mo (Japanese invasion of mainland New Guinea)
-  1942-05-04 – 1942-05-08 Battle of the Coral Sea
-  1942-07-01 – 1943-01-31 Kokoda Track Campaign
-  1942-08-25 – 1942-09-05 Battle of Milne Bay
-  1942-11-19 – 1942-01-23 Battle of Buna-Gona
-  1943-01-28 – 1943-01-30 Battle of Wau
-  1943-03-02 – 1943-03-04 Battle of the Bismarck Sea
-  1943-06-29 – 1943-09-16 Battle of Lae
-  1943-06-30 – 1944-03-25 Operation Cartwheel
-  1943-09-19 – 1944-04-24 Finisterre Range campaign
-  1943-09-22 – 1944-01-15 Huon Peninsula campaign
-  1943-11-01 – 1943-11-11 Attack on Rabaul
-  1943-12-15 – 1945-08-15 New Britain campaign
-  1944-02-29 – 1944-03-25 Admiralty Islands campaign
-  1944-04-22 – 1945-08-15 Western New Guinea campaign



### Aleutian Islands campaign

-  1942-06-06 – 1943-08-15 Battle of the Aleutian Islands
-  1942-06-07 – 1943-08-15 Battle of Kiska
-  1943-03-26 – Battle of the Komandorski Islands











### Guadalcanal campaign

-  1942-08-07 – 1943-02-09 Battle of Guadalcanal
-  1942-08-09 Battle of Savo Island
-  1942-08-24 – 1942-08-25 Battle of the Eastern Solomons
-  1942-10-11 – 1942-10-12 Battle of Cape Esperance








- 1942-10-25 – 1942-10-27 Battle of the Santa Cruz Islands
-  1942-11-13 – 1942-11-15 Naval Battle of Guadalcanal
-  1942-11-30 Battle of Tassafaronga





### **Solomon Islands campaign**

-  1943-01-29 – 1943-01-30 Battle of Rennell Island
-  1943-03-06 Battle of Blackett Strait
-  1943-06-10 – 1943-08-25 Battle of New Georgia
- 1943-07-06 Battle of Kula Gulf
-  1943-07-12 – 1943-07-13 Battle of Kolombangara
-  1943-08-06 – 1943-08-07 Battle of Vella Gulf
-  1943-08-17 – 1943-08-18 Battle off Horaniu
-  1943-08-15 – 1943-10-09 Land Battle of Vella Lavella
-  1943-11-01 – 1945-08-21 Battle of Bougainville
-  1943-11-01 – 1943-11-02 Battle of Empress Augusta Bay
-  1943-11-26 Battle of Cape St. George







### **Gilbert and Marshall Islands campaign**

-  1943-11-20 – 1943-11-23 Battle of Tarawa
-  1943-11-20 – 1943-11-24 Battle of Makin
-  1944-01-31 – 1944-02-07 Battle of Kwajalein
-  1944-02-16 – 1944-02-17 Attack on Truk
-  1944-02-16 – 1944-02-23 Battle of Eniwetok

### **Bombing of South East Asia, 1944-45**

-  Operation Cockpit 1944-04-19
-  Operation Transom 1944-05-17
-  Operation Matterhorn 1944-06-05 – May 1945
-  Operation Meridian 1945-01-24 – 1945-01-29




### **Mariana and Palau Islands campaign**

-  1944-06-15 – 1944-07-09 Battle of Saipan
-  1944-06-19 – 1944-06-20 Battle of the Philippine Sea
-  1944-07-21 – 1944-08-10 Battle of Guam
-  1944-07-24 – 1944-08-01 Battle of Tinian
-  1944-09-15 – 1944-11-25 Battle of Peleliu
-  1944-09-17 – 1944-09-30 Battle of Angaur






### **Philippines campaign**

-  1944-10-20 – 1944-12-10 Battle of Leyte
-  1944-10-24 – 1944-10-25 Battle of Leyte Gulf
-  1944-11-11 – 1944-12-21 Battle of Ormoc Bay
-  1944-12-15 – 1945-07-04 Battle of Luzon
-  1945-01-09 Invasion of Lingayen Gulf
-  1945-02-27 – 1945-07-04 Southern Philippines campaign

## **Volcano and Ryukyu Islands campaign**

-  1945-02-16 – 1945-03-26 Battle of Iwo Jima
-  1945-04-01 – 1945-06-21 Battle of Okinawa
-  1945-04-07 Operation Ten-Go

## **Borneo campaign**

-  1945-05-01 – 1945-05-25 Battle of Tarakan
-  1945-06-10 – 1945-06-15 Battle of Brunei
-  1945-06-10 – 1945-06-22 Battle of Labuan
-  1945-06-17 – 1945-08-15 Battle of North Borneo
-  1945-07-07 – 1945-07-21 Battle of Balikpapan

## **Japan campaign**

-  1945-07-22 Battle of Tokyo Bay
-  1945-08-06 – 1945-08-09 Atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki