

Pacific theatre in world war ii

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On 1 September 1939 the country of Germany led by Adolf Hitler invaded Poland using blitzkrieg tactics or in other words “ lightning war”. As Germany is capturing Europe one country at a time Japan is doing the same except with Asia and Japan is also preparing for the attack of the United States naval base on the island of Oahu called Pearl Harbor. The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States to declare war on Japan, break isolationism and get deeply involved in World War II.

On 7 December 1941 at 7: 30 am army privates George Elliot and Joseph Lockard were operating in a radar station when they noticed a large amounts of aircraft incoming but they did not sound the alarm because there was supposed to be a group of B-17 bombers due to Pearl Harbor (Michael 10). At 8: 00 am the words “ Tora Tora Tora” sounded over Japanese radios meaning that the Japanese have achieved complete surprise on the Americans and that the attack was a go and the dive bombers started to drop their deadly payloads on the American airfields, aiming specifically for United States war planes (Michael 11).

As the Japanese attacked the airfields they also simultaneously attacked the harbor with more dive bombers and torpedo planes equipped with torpedoes specially made for the shallow waters of the harbor (Michael 12). During all of the chaos a dive bomber dropped its deadly payload on to the USS Arizona, with a single bomb hit to the magazine, the whole bow of the ship was severed from the rest and 1, 000 men died instantly (Michael 12). At 8: 45 am even more Japanese torpedo planes and dive bombers attacked the harbor targeting repair yards and any other ships that the pilots saw.

The attack was planned months before 7 December, the Japanese built a model of the actual harbor to help prepare for the attack and they practiced on it until each and every pilot knew exactly which target to hit and how to hit it and until they could achieve an 80% hit rate on the American ships (Michael 47). The task force the Japanese used consisted of 6 aircraft carriers each equipped with hundreds of planes and 20 other ships including battleships, heavy cruisers, destroyers and a few submarines (Michael 49).

The attack killed 2, 388 Americans and injured another 2, 000, the attack destroyed 21 ships out of 92 total in the harbor, nearly 300 American aircraft were destroyed and only 29 Japanese aircraft were destroyed (Reid 219). The Americans were infuriated with the attack, they felt as if they were vulnerable and they wanted the United States government to declare war on Japan. On 8 December 1941 President Franklin D. Roosevelt makes a speech to congress asking them to declare a state of war on Japan. Later that day with a vote of 388 to 1 the United States is at war with Japan.

The industry skyrocketed as the United States prepares for war; everything from food to weapons is rationed and made in a method called mass production. On 9 December 1941 Germany and Italy declare war on the United States. The United States is now deeply involved in World War II, but the United States has a difficult decision to make whether or not they should concentrate their forces over in Europe to fight the Italians and Germans or concentrate their forces in the Pacific and get revenge on the Japanese and avenge Pearl Harbor.

On 8 April 1942 Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle launched an air attack consisting of B-25 medium range bombers. The attack was designed to inflict

damage on Tokyo and to destroy the Japanese morale and avenge Pearl Harbor. The plan was for 16 B-25s to be launched off the coast of Japan and their mission was to bomb the city of Tokyo and land on American air bases in China. Most of the 16 B-25s, each with a five-man crew, attacked the Tokyo area, with a few hitting Nagoya (“The Doolittle Raid”).

However none of the planes made it to China and most of the crews were captured, but this attack was considered a success because it deeply embarrassed the Japanese High Command and it greatly boosted the morale of the Americans, this attack would lead to the desire of the Japanese to completely destroy the American aircraft carriers and would lead to the Japanese defeat in Midway a month later. The Battle of Midway was fought over and near the tiny United States’ mid-pacific base at the Midway island atoll.

The objective of the Japanese was to draw out and destroy the United States aircraft carrier striking forces which had embarrassed the Japanese in the Doolittle Raid. The Japanese’s plan was to soften up the defenses on Midway, invade it, capture the island and hope that the United States would come out with their aircraft carriers in order to take back the island and the Japanese would quickly destroy them and have a decisive victory.

However, the United States had brilliant code breakers and knew exactly when, where and how the Japanese were going to strike so the Americans were waiting. On 7 June 1942, the Japanese with a force of 4 aircraft carriers, 2 battleships, 15 support ships and 248 carrier based aircraft started the attack. Starting with bombing the American base the Japanese weren’t able to soften up the American defenses well enough because the Americans had

knew in advance that Japanese were coming so they built up their defenses and brought in additional reinforcements.

As the Japanese were focusing their attacks on the island, the American aircraft carrier strike force consisting of 3 carriers, 7 heavy cruisers, 1 anti-aircraft cruiser, 15 destroyers, 233 carrier based aircraft and 16 submarines attacked the Japanese forces. After 4 days of bitter combat, the Americans had only lost 1 carrier, 1 destroyer, 150 aircraft, and 307 sailors and airmen, while on the Japanese side, they had lost 4 carriers, 1 cruiser, all of their aircraft, and 3,057 sailors and airmen (“Battle of Midway”).

The Battle of Midway was a huge success in American code breaking and proving that the use of the aircraft carrier would definitely be a vital resource in the Pacific Theater (“Battle of Midway”). Three months later the Americans pressed forward setting their eyes on a near Australia called Guadalcanal. This battle would be the first allied offensive on the Empire of Japan. On 7 August 1942 American forces landed on the islands of Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida in the southern Solomon Islands with the objective of denying their use by the Japanese to threaten the supply and communication routes between the US, Australia, and New Zealand.

The Allies also intended to use Guadalcanal and Tulagi as bases to support a campaign to eventually capture or neutralize the major Japanese base at Rabaul on New Britain (“Battle of Guadalcanal”). Powerful United States naval forces had supported the landings. Surprised by the Allied offensive, the Japanese made several attempts between August and November 1942 to retake Henderson Field. Three major land battles, seven large naval

battles, and continual, almost daily aerial battles culminated in the decisive Naval Battle of Guadalcanal in early November 1942, in which the last Japanese attempt to bombard Henderson Field from the sea and land with enough troops to retake it was defeated. In December 1942, the Japanese abandoned further efforts to retake Guadalcanal and evacuated their remaining forces by 7 February 1943 in the face of an offensive by the US Army's XIV Corps, securing the island to the Allies.

The Americans originally started with a strength of 60, 000 men and lost 7, 100 while the Japanese forces were almost completely wiped out, starting out with only 36, 200 they had lost 32, 000 (" Battle of Guadalcanal"). The Guadalcanal campaign was a significant strategic combined arms victory by Allied forces over the Japanese in the Pacific theatre The Battle of the Philippines was the American campaign that lasted from 1944-1945 and the objective was to completely expel the Imperial Japanese Forces occupying this long chain of islands that was captured by the Japanese during the first half of 1942.

The Battle of the Philippines started on 20 October 1944 with the amphibious landings on the eastern Philippine island of Leyte. The operation would last through the end of the war in august of 1945. During this campaign the Japanese showed how desperate they were in not giving up when they started utilizing kamikaze attacks where they would purposely fly planes equipped with explosives into the American forces. This campaign was very successful however, because the Americans had driven out the Japanese and liberated the Philippines.

The Battle of Iwo Jima fought on 19 February through 26 March 1945 was a major battle in which the United States Armed Forces fought for and captured the island of Iwo Jima from the Japanese Empire. The American invasion had the goal of capturing the entire island, including its three airfields, to provide a staging area for attacks on the Japanese main islands. This five-week battle comprised some of the fiercest and bloodiest fighting of the War in the Pacific of World War II.

After the heavy losses incurred in the battle, the strategic value of the island became controversial. It was useless to the Army as a staging base and useless to the Navy as a fleet base; however it was of limited use by the United States Army Air Force only for emergency landing of planes coming back from missions over Japan. The Japanese positions on the island were heavily fortified, with a large network of bunkers, hidden artillery positions in the mountains, and nearly 11 miles of underground tunnels.

This invasion was the first American attack on Japanese home territory, and the Japanese soldiers and marines defended their positions tenaciously with no thought of surrender. The Americans had a force of 70, 000 marines and had high losses of 6, 821 killed and 19, 217 wounded. The Japanese, however had a smaller force of 22, 060 soldiers and lost 18, 844, but they had nearly 3, 000 in hiding until long past the end of the war and because of their extensive network of tunnels and bunkers they were able to inflict heavy damage on the Americans (“ Battle of Iwo Jima).

Later in the summer of 1944 the United States had set their eyes on the largest island in the Marianas, Guam. There was a major strategic advantage of Guam because of its very large size and its location to the Japanese

mainland made it ideal for the American forces to establish airfields for B-29 Superfortress long range bombers. Guam, ringed by reefs, cliffs, and heavy surf, presents a formidable challenge for an attacker. But despite the obstacles, on July 21, the Americans landed on both sides of the Orote peninsula on the western side of Guam, planning to cut off the airfield.

By nightfall the Americans had established beachheads about 2,000 meters deep. Japanese counter-attacks were made throughout the first few days of the battle, mostly at night, using infiltration tactics. Several times they penetrated the American defenses and were driven back with heavy loss of men and equipment. Rain and thick jungle made conditions difficult for the Americans, but after an engagement at Mount Barrigada from August 2 to August 4, the Japanese line collapsed; the rest of the battle was a pursuit to the north.

As in other battles of the Pacific War, the Japanese refused to surrender, and almost all were killed. On August 10, after 3 long weeks of bloody and ferocious fighting, organized Japanese resistance ended, and Guam was declared secure. The Battle of Okinawa was the largest amphibious assault in the Pacific Theatre. The 82-day-long battle lasted from early April until mid-June 1945. After a long campaign of island hopping, the Allies were approaching Japan, and planned to use Okinawa, a large island only 340 mi away from mainland Japan, as a base for air operations on the planned invasion of Japanese mainland.

Okinawa provided a fleet anchorage, troop staging areas, and airfields in close proximity to Japan. The U. S. cleared the surrounding waters of mines in Operation Zebra, occupied Okinawa, and set up the United States Civil

Administration of the Ryukyu Islands, a form of military government, after the battle. The Americans started out with 183, 000 men and by the end of the battle 12, 000 were killed and 38, 000 were wounded.

The Japanese started out with 160, 000 men and more than 110, 000 were killed and 7, 000 were captured (“ The Battle of Okinawa”). While the Pacific war rages, the United States had conducted many air raids on Japan during World War II, causing extensive destruction to the country's cities and killing anywhere from 241, 000 to 900, 000 people. From June 1944 until January 1945, B-29s stationed in India staged through bases in China to make a series of raids on Japan, but this effort proved unsuccessful.

The strategic bombing campaign was greatly expanded from November 1944 when bases in the Mariana Islands became available as a result of the Mariana Islands Campaign. The air raids concentrated mainly on industrial facilities but the fire bombings were concentrated on the civilian population since most of the homes were made from paper and wood (“ Skies on fire”). With the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 the United States was ultimately forced to break isolationism and get very involved in World War II.

From the Doolittle raid in 1942 to the massive bombing campaigns in 1945, from the battle of Midway to the invasion of Okinawa, the United States was very involved in the Pacific theatre and the loss of life was very high. Along with the Pacific Theatre the United States also had a very high death toll in the European Theatre but not as high as in the Pacific. Had the Japanese not have attacked Pearl Harbor, the turn out of the war could have been so much different and the United States probably would not have gotten involved until late in the war like they did in World War I