



OPERATION PACIFIC THEATER

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

MIDWAY ISLAND

The Battle of Midway signaled the end of Japanese expansion in Asia and the Pacific. The Japanese looked to strike a blow against the US Carrier Fleet, but codebreakers in Pearl Harbor deciphered the Japanese plan. The battle was a decisive victory for the United States. From June 4-7, 1942, planes from American carriers decimated the Japanese force sinking four aircraft carriers.

GUADALCANAL

On August 7, 1942, the United States Marines launched its first counteroffensive against the Japanese on Guadalcanal, a small island located in the Solomons between Australia and New Guinea. They encountered initial success, but the Japanese would fortify the island with reinforcements and conduct devastating naval attacks on Allied ships. For seven months, a grueling battle on land, at sea, and in the air tested the resolve of both sides. In the end, the Americans controlled the island and its airfield.

NEW GUINEA

General Douglas MacArthur was ordered out of the Philippines in March 1942. Arriving in Australia, MacArthur declared that he would return. The first step his campaign was New Guinea, an unfamiliar mountainous country. The Japanese advanced over the Owen Stanley Mountains almost reaching Port Moresby, and the Australians barely held. American soldiers trekked through the mountainous terrain in pursuit. Fighting continued along New Guinea's coast and on several islands until August 1945.

TARAWA

Across the Central Pacific, the Road to Tokyo began with the Gilbert Islands and a small atoll called Tarawa. On November 20, 1943, the US 2nd Marine Division landed on a coral reef near Tarawa. The tide had not risen as much as expected, and the Higgins Boats stalled on the reef. The Japanese mounted a furious defense along the beach, inflicting heavy casualties. Overwhelming numbers finally overtook the Japanese, and Tarawa provided many lessons for future campaigns.

KWAJALEIN, MARSHALL ISLANDS

The Battle of Kwajalein marked the opening of the campaign for the Marshall Islands. Employing the lessons learned from Tarawa, the US Navy adjusted their bombardment of the coast in preparation for landings. Using armor-piercing shells from closer range, the Navy devastated the thin Japanese defensive line. The victory at Kwajalein in February 1944 marked the first time the Americans advanced into territory held by Japan prior to the war.

MARIANAS ISLANDS

The Marianas Islands formed Japan's inner defense ring. On December 8, 1941, Japanese forces from Saipan and Tinian attacked the US territory of Guam. Retaking Guam and capturing Saipan and Tinian would bring Tokyo within range of B-29 Superfortresses. American troops faced several harrowing experiences in the Marianas, including mass suicides by Japanese soldiers and civilians. In August 1945 the B-29s *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar* took off from Tinian with atomic bombs.

IWO JIMA

Iwo Jima is a volcanic island just over 700 miles from Tokyo. For the Americans, its capture would provide an emergency landing spot for aircraft returning from bombing runs over Japan. The campaign was brutal. The Japanese dug themselves into caves on Mount Suribachi and throughout the island. Twenty-seven Medals of Honor were awarded for heroism on Iwo Jima. On February 23, 1945, photographer Joe Rosenthal captured an image of Marines raising the flag on Mount Suribachi.

PHILIPPINES

General Douglas MacArthur's long return to the Philippines finally reached the island of Leyte in October 1944, but the main objective was Manila and the prison camps throughout Luzon. In February 1945, American troops entered Manila and liberated the Santo Tomas Prison Camp, which housed foreign civilians. By the end of February, Manila was in ruins and an estimated 120,000 Filipinos died from fighting and Japanese atrocities.

OKINAWA

The last major land battle in the Pacific led President Harry Truman to hope for ways of preventing "an Okinawa from one end of Japan to the other." Uneventful landings on April 1, 1945 masked the horror that was to come. As American forces entered the ridges and caves in the middle of the island, they faced wave after wave of Japanese attacks. The Okinawa Peace Memorial Museum lists 240,931 killed during the battle including 14,009 Americans.

TOKYO BAY

Following the use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese Emperor Hirohito announced Japan's surrender. A radio broadcast of the surrender announcement on August 15, 1945 marked the first time most Japanese citizens heard the emperor's voice. The surrender signing took place on the deck of the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945, ending a war that resulted in over 65 million deaths