

# The War in the Pacific

## READING FOCUS

- What advances did Japan make in Asia and the Pacific in late 1941 and 1942?
- Which Allied victories turned the tide of war in the Pacific?
- What was the strategy of the United States in the struggle to reconquer the Pacific islands?
- Why were the battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa important?
- How did the Manhattan Project bring the war to an end?

## MAIN IDEA

Fierce fighting and heavy casualties characterized the war in the Pacific Ocean as the Allied forces struggled to turn back Japanese advances.

## KEY TERMS

Bataan Death March  
 Geneva Convention  
 Battle of the Coral Sea  
 Battle of Midway  
 Battle of Guadalcanal  
 island-hopping  
 Battle of Leyte Gulf  
*kamikaze*  
 Battle of Iwo Jima  
 Battle of Okinawa  
 Manhattan Project

## TAKING NOTES

As you read, prepare an outline of this section. The sample below will help you get started.

- I. Japan attacks American and British bases across the Western Pacific.**
- A. American troops at Bataan and Corregidor surrender.**
- B. POWs are forced on Bataan Death March.**
- C. Allies defend India and extend aid to China.**
- D. Battle of the Coral Sea ends threat to Australia.**
- II. \_\_\_\_\_**



**VIEWING HISTORY** A Japanese soldier patrols the ruins of Bataan in the Philippines. **Drawing Inferences** Why was the United States unable to defend the Philippines successfully?

**Setting the Scene** The bombing of Pearl Harbor was only the first of several sudden attacks across the Pacific. Japanese forces attacked American bases on Wake Island on December 8 and on Guam on December 10. Just hours after striking Pearl Harbor, Japanese warplanes bombed Clark Field, the main American air base in the Philippines. Although news of Pearl Harbor had reached Douglas MacArthur, the commanding general, the Americans at Clark Field failed to prepare for an attack. The Japanese destroyed about half of MacArthur's airplanes, which were lined up in rows on the ground.

Within days, a large Japanese force landed on the main Philippine island of Luzon. MacArthur withdrew most of his troops southward to the Bataan Peninsula. There he set up defenses, hoping the navy would be able to evacuate his army to safety.

American and Filipino troops held out on the Bataan Peninsula under Japanese fire for several months as hopes of rescue dimmed. Realizing that the situation was hopeless, President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to escape to Australia. In March 1942, the general reluctantly boarded a torpedo boat and set off through Japanese-controlled waters to the safety of the southern Philippines. There, he boarded an airplane for Australia.

When he landed, MacArthur made a promise to the people of the Philippines and to his army: "I shall return."

## The Japanese Advance, 1941–1942

The Japanese struck Pearl Harbor and Clark Field to try to gain military control of the Western Pacific. By shattering American forces everywhere in the region, they hoped that the United States would withdraw, leaving them easy access to the natural resources of Southeast Asia. Oil from the Dutch East Indies and rubber from British Malaya would give Japan the economic independence it

needed. With this goal in mind, the Japanese attacked a number of other Allied colonies in December 1941. By early March 1942, they had overrun the British strongholds of Hong Kong and Singapore, seized the Dutch East Indies and Malaya, and invaded Burma. Japan's southern offensive swept aside British, American, and Dutch naval power in Southeast Asia and brought a wide band of colonies into the Japanese empire. Japan then turned its attention to securing the Philippines.

**The Philippines Fall** Facing starvation and renewed Japanese attacks, most of Bataan's defenders surrendered in early April 1942. About 2,000 soldiers and nurses escaped to the fortified island of Corregidor, just off the tip of the peninsula, to join the fort's defenders. American troops on Corregidor survived another month of continual Japanese bombardment by living in the rock tunnels of the fortress. Finally, running low on ammunition and food, more than 11,000 Americans and Filipinos surrendered to invading Japanese forces on May 6.

With the fall of the Bataan Peninsula in early April and Corregidor in May, the Japanese captured about 76,000 Filipinos and Americans as prisoners of war. Already weakened by disease and lack of food, these prisoners faced a grueling test in the tropical heat. Their Japanese captors split them into groups of 500 to 1,000 and force-marched them some 60 miles to a railroad junction. There, the prisoners were boarded on a train that took them to within eight miles of an army camp and then walked the rest of the way.

During the march, many prisoners were treated brutally. They were denied water and rest and many were beaten and tortured. At least 10,000 prisoners died during the 6- to 12-day journey. Many were executed by the guards when they grew too weak to keep up. Their ordeal became known as the **Bataan Death March**. Those who survived were sent to primitive prison camps, where an additional 15,000 or more died.

The brutality of Japanese soldiers in Bataan defied accepted international standards of conduct toward prisoners of war. Those standards had been spelled out in 1929 in the third **Geneva Convention**. "Prisoners of war," the convention stated, "shall at all times be humanely treated and protected, particularly against acts of violence. . . ."

**Defending China and Burma** China joined the Allies on December 9, 1941, by officially declaring war on Germany, Italy, and its longtime foe, Japan. The United States had already sent military advisors and Lend-Lease arms and equipment to China. They hoped to strengthen China and thus divert Japan from the drive to conquer Southeast Asia.

Shortly after the war began, China's Nationalist leader Jiang Jieshi asked an American general, Joseph Stilwell, to serve as his chief of staff. Stilwell led the Chinese armies defending Burma, an important link between the Allies and Jiang's base in southwestern China. Despite the support of volunteer American aviators called the "Flying Tigers," China's ragtag forces fared poorly against the well-trained Japanese. They lost control of China's lifeline, the Burma Road, and retreated back into China. British and Indian troops in Burma fled west into India, which now also faced the threat of Japanese invasion.

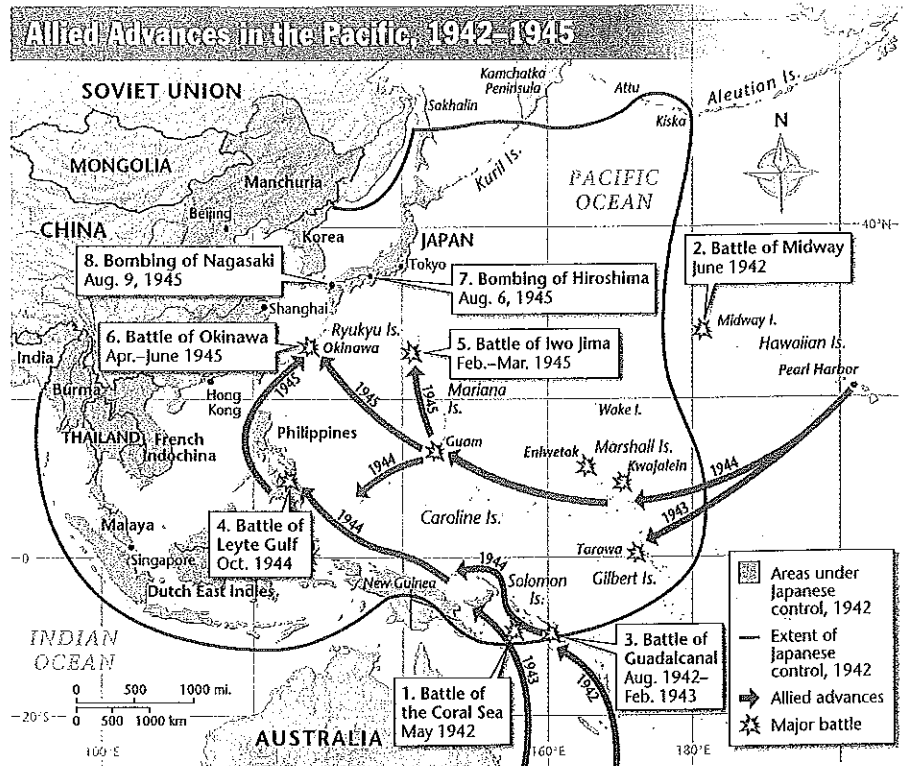


American and Filipino prisoners captured by the Japanese in the Philippines

## Focus on GOVERNMENT

**War Crimes in the Pacific** Word of the Bataan Death March did not reach the American public until a few years later when three soldiers escaped from their prison camp. As at Nuremberg, Japanese leaders accused of crimes against humanity faced a trial after the war. A United States military commission tried and convicted the general blamed for organizing the march. He was one of seven Japanese executed for war crimes.

**MAP SKILLS** United States forces advanced from island to island across the Pacific toward Japan. **Location** Why was the Battle of the Coral Sea important to the Allied cause?



**The War at Sea** At Pearl Harbor, Japan had not achieved one of its main goals: to destroy the three aircraft carriers that formed the heart of the Pacific Fleet. Two of the carriers, the *Lexington* and the *Enterprise*, had been away at sea during the attack, accompanied by the fleet's heavy cruisers. The third, the *Saratoga*, was undergoing repairs in California. These carriers would prove to be important American weapons in the war at sea.

Since World War I, the design of carriers and the aircraft that relied on them had improved tremendously. Carriers had become floating airfields, greatly extending the area in which warplanes could fly. These planes now included dive bombers and torpedo bombers capable of destroying enemy ships. Japan had used aircraft carriers as a base for the attack on Pearl Harbor.

In April 1942, a group of American B-25 medium bombers took off from the aircraft carrier *Hornet* on their own secret mission. Led by Lieutenant Colonel James Doolittle, the planes flew several hundred miles to Japan to carry out a daring American counterattack. Doolittle's squadron dropped bombs on Tokyo and other cities before crash landing in China. Most of the pilots survived. The Doolittle raid caused little physical damage, but it shocked Japan's leadership and boosted Allied morale at a crucial time.

Japanese forces continued to advance across the Pacific, and the battered American navy fought desperately to stop them. The fall of the Dutch East Indies opened the way to Australia. In May 1942, a largely American naval group engaged a superior Japanese fleet in the Coral Sea, northeast of Australia. In the **Battle of the Coral Sea**, aircraft launched from aircraft carriers bombed and strafed enemy ships more than 70 miles away. The five-day battle cost both sides more than half their planes. The Japanese destroyed the *Lexington* and badly damaged the *Yorktown*, another carrier. One Japanese carrier sank, another lost most of its planes, and a third was put out of action. The battle was a draw, but it prevented the Japanese from invading Australia.

The Battle of the Coral Sea also opened a new chapter in naval warfare. It was the first naval combat carried out entirely by aircraft. The enemy ships never came within sight of one another. From now on, aircraft and aircraft carriers would play the central role in naval battles.

## Allied Victories Turn the Tide

In the summer of 1942, while the Soviet Union resisted German attacks and the Allies prepared to invade North Africa, two critical battles took place in the Pacific. The fight for Midway Island, near Hawaii, and for Guadalcanal, near the Coral Sea, changed the course of the war in the Pacific.

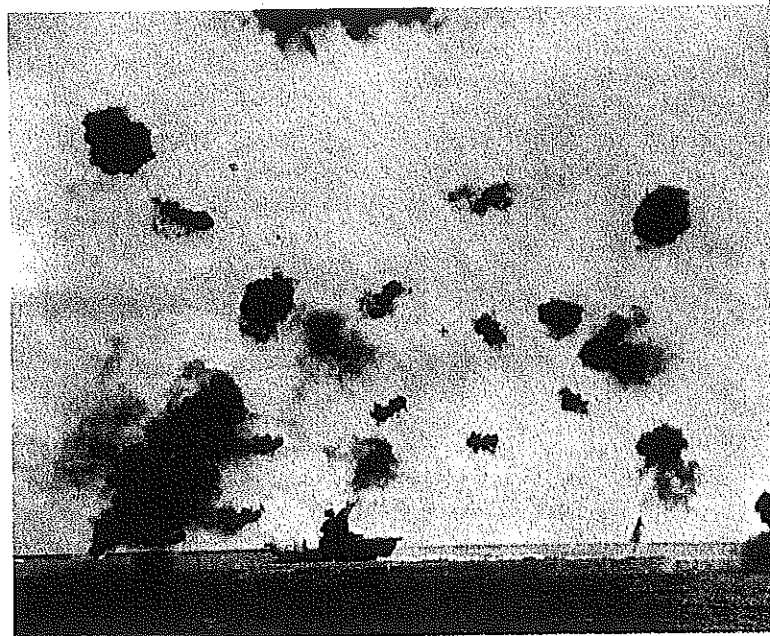
**The Battle of Midway** Japanese Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, architect of the Pearl Harbor attack, hoped to destroy what remained of the United States Pacific Fleet by luring it into battle near Midway Island, some 1,100 miles northwest of Hawaii. Yamamoto committed a large part of Japan's navy to his planned invasion of Midway. He believed, correctly, that American Admiral Chester Nimitz would use all his resources to protect the island so vital to the defense of Hawaii.

The **Battle of Midway** opened on June 4, 1942, with a wave of Japanese bomber attacks on the island and a simultaneous, unsuccessful American strike on the Japanese fleet. As in the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Battle of Midway was fought entirely from the air. At first, American planes based on Midway's airfields tried to fend off the Japanese carrier-based bombers. Then the American carriers intervened. Their warplanes surprised Japan's carriers at a vulnerable time as the Japanese were refueling planes and loading them with bombs. Aboard the targeted Japanese ships, fuel hoses caught fire and bombs stacked on the decks exploded. The Americans swiftly sank three of the four heavy Japanese carriers and finished off the fourth, the *Hiryu*, later the same day. Before the *Hiryu's* destruction, planes from that carrier had managed to disable the *Yorktown*, which was later sunk by a Japanese submarine. The other two American carriers, the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet*, emerged undamaged.

The sinking of four Japanese carriers, combined with the loss of some 250 planes and most of Japan's skilled naval pilots, was a devastating blow to the Japanese navy. The American victory owed much to Commander Joseph Rochefort, who broke the Japanese code JN-25 in time to learn crucial information before the attack began. After the Battle of Midway, Japan was unable to launch any more offensive operations in the Pacific.

**The Battle of Guadalcanal** The victory at Midway allowed the Allies to take the offensive in the Pacific. Their first goal was to capture Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, where the Japanese were building an airfield to threaten nearby Allied bases and lines of communication with Australia.

When more than 11,000 marines landed on the island in August 1942, the 2,200 Japanese who were defending the island fled into the jungle. The **Battle of Guadalcanal** provided the marines with their first taste of jungle warfare. They slogged through swamps, crossed rivers, and hacked through tangles of vines in search of the enemy. The marines made easy targets for Japanese snipers hidden in the thick underbrush or in the tops of palm trees.



Japanese planes attack an American aircraft carrier during the Battle of Midway. The black clouds of smoke come from antiaircraft fire.

### Estimated World War II Deaths

Country	Military Deaths	Civilian Deaths	Total Deaths
<b>Axis</b>			
Germany	3,250,000	2,350,000	5,600,000
Italy	226,900	60,000	286,900
Japan	1,740,000	393,400	2,133,400
<b>Allies</b>			
France	122,000	470,000	592,000
Great Britain	305,800	60,600	366,400
United States	405,400	—	405,400
Soviet Union	11,000,000	6,700,000	17,700,000
China	1,400,000	8,000,000	9,400,000

SOURCE: *World War II: A Statistical Survey*

#### INTERPRETING TABLES

Accurate death tolls are hard to determine, but scholars do not dispute the horrific human cost of the war. **Analyzing Information**  
Which nation suffered the greatest human loss?

#### READING CHECK

Why were *kamikaze* attacks effective?

Both sides landed thousands of reinforcements in five months of fighting. After several fierce naval battles, the American navy took control of the waters around the island in November, limiting Japanese troop landings. Japan's outnumbered forces finally slipped off the island in February 1943. The Allies had conquered their first piece of Japanese-held territory. Now they made plans for rolling back Japan's other conquests.

### Struggle for the Islands

From Guadalcanal, American forces began **island-hopping**, a military strategy of selectively attacking specific enemy-held islands and bypassing others. By capturing only a few crucial islands, the United States effectively cut off the bypassed islands from supplies and reinforcements and rendered those islands useless to the Japanese. This strategy also allowed the Americans to move more quickly toward their ultimate goal—Japan itself.

**Island-Hopping in the Pacific** In 1943 and 1944, the Allies pushed north from Australia and west across the Central Pacific. Forces under General MacArthur and Admiral William Halsey leapfrogged through the Solomon Islands while Admiral Nimitz led a similar island-hopping campaign in the Gilbert Islands. After seizing the island of Tarawa, Nimitz used it to launch bombing raids on Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands. By February 1944, these attacks had crippled Japanese air power, allowing Nimitz's forces to seize Kwajalein and Eniwetok at the northwest end of the island group.

From the Marshalls, Nimitz captured parts of the Mariana Islands in June. For the first time, Japan was within reach of long-range American bombers. By the end of 1944, B-29 Superfortresses were dropping tons of explosives on Japanese cities.

**The Philippines Campaign** As American forces pushed toward Japan in the summer of 1944, military planners decided to bypass the Philippine Islands. MacArthur vigorously opposed this strategy, claiming that the United States had an obligation to free the Filipino people. The general's arguments persuaded Roosevelt, who reversed the decision.

In mid-October, some 160,000 American troops invaded the Philippine island of Leyte. After the beach was secure, General MacArthur dramatically waded ashore from a landing craft. News cameras recorded the historic event as MacArthur proclaimed, "People of the Philippines, I have returned."

While American troops fought their way inland, the greatest naval battle in world history developed off the coast. More than 280 warships took part in the three-day **Battle of Leyte Gulf**. The Japanese high command directed nearly every warship still afloat to attack the United States Navy. This was the first battle in which Japanese *kamikazes*, or suicide planes, were used. *Kamikaze* pilots loaded their aircraft with bombs and then deliberately crashed them into enemy ships to inflict maximum damage. Despite this tactic, the American force virtually destroyed the Japanese navy and emerged victorious.

Japanese land forces in the Philippines continued to resist, however. American troops needed two months to liberate Leyte. Some 80,000 Japanese defenders were killed and fewer than 1,000 Japanese surrendered. The battle for the Philippines' capital city of Manila, on the island of Luzon, was equally hard fought. Fighting left most of Manila in ruins and some 100,000 Filipino civilians dead. Not until June 1945 did the Allies control the Philippines.



## Iwo Jima and Okinawa

The fighting grew deadlier as American troops moved closer to Japan. One of the bloodiest battles of the war took place on the tiny volcanic island of Iwo Jima, less than 700 miles from Japan. The island's steep, rocky slopes were honey-combed with caves and tunnels. The natural terrain protected more than 600 Japanese guns, many encased in concrete bunkers. In November 1944, American bombers, based in the recently conquered Marianas, began to pound Iwo Jima from the air. For 74 days, American planes and warships poured nearly 7,000 tons of bombs and more than 20,000 shells onto Iwo Jima's defenders.

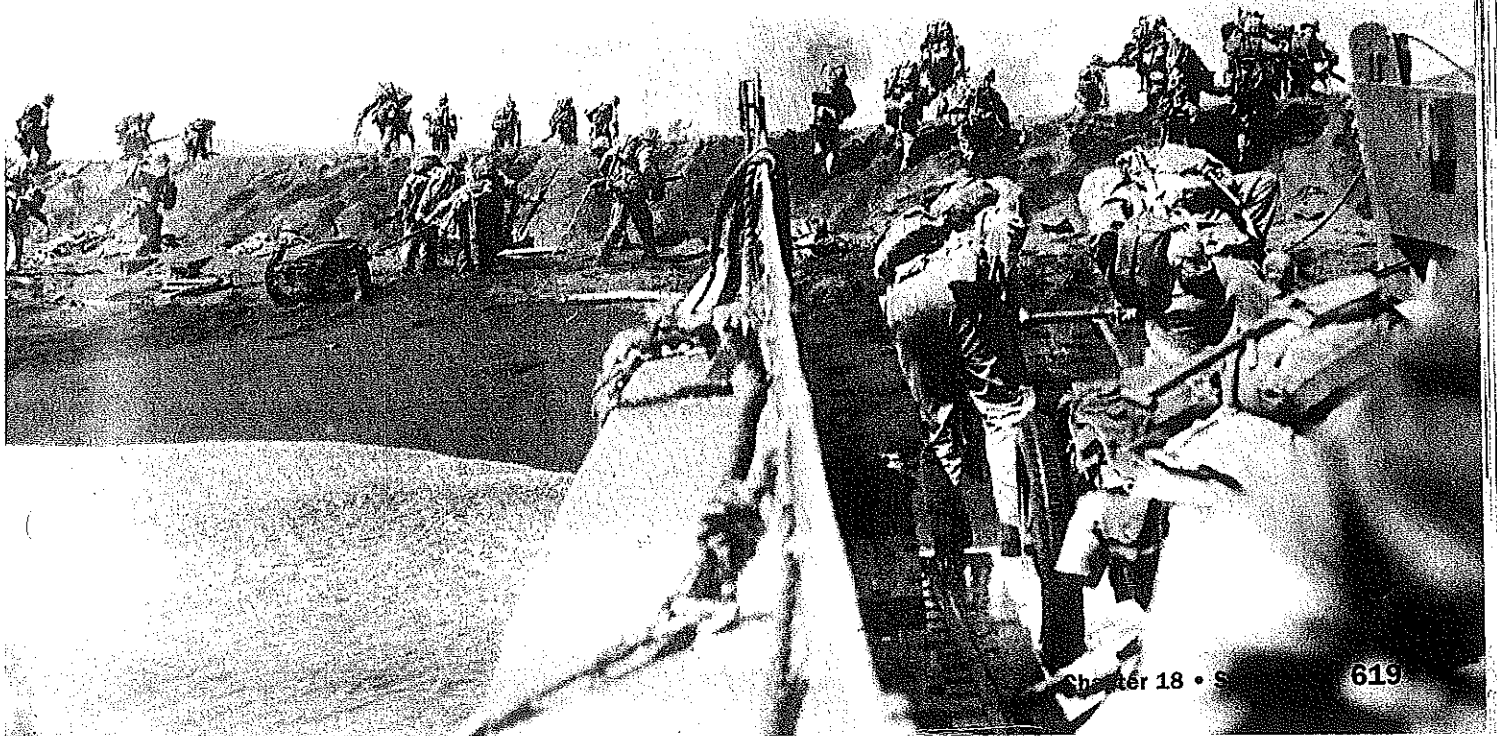
In mid-February 1945, marines stormed the beaches. They encountered furious resistance from the Japanese. After three days of combat, the marines had advanced only about 700 yards inland. Eventually nearly 110,000 American troops took part in the campaign. Although opposed by fewer than 25,000 Japanese, the marines needed almost a month to secure the island. The enemy fought almost to the last defender. Only 216 Japanese were taken prisoner.

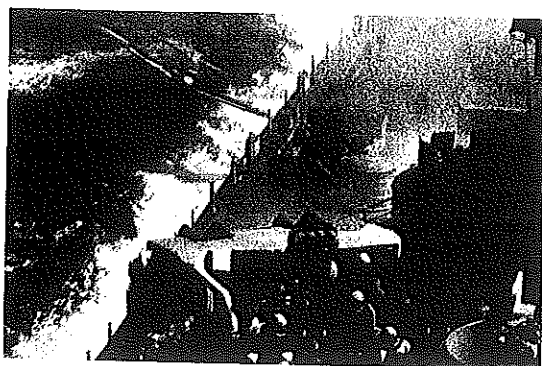
In the **Battle of Iwo Jima**, American forces suffered an estimated 25,000 casualties. The United States awarded 27 Medals of Honor for actions on Iwo Jima, more than in any other single operation of the war. Admiral Nimitz described the island as a place in which "uncommon valor was a common virtue." A photo of servicemen raising the United States flag on Mt. Surabachi came to symbolize the struggles and sacrifices of American troops during World War II.

The **Battle of Okinawa**, fought from April to June 1945, was equally bloody. The small island of Okinawa, little more than 350 miles from Japan itself, was historically Japanese soil. It was the last obstacle to an Allied invasion of the Japanese home islands. With this in mind, many of the island's nearly 100,000 defenders had pledged to fight to the death.

The Allies gathered some 1,300 warships and more than 180,000 combat troops to drive the enemy from Okinawa in an effort second only to the Normandy invasion in size. Japanese pilots flew nearly 2,000 *kamikaze* attacks against this fleet. As American soldiers stormed ashore, defenders made equally desperate *banzai* charges—attacks in which the soldiers tried to kill as many of the enemy as possible until they themselves were killed.

On February 19, 1945—the first day of the invasion—Marines fought to win a foothold on Iwo Jima under intense Japanese fire.





Kamikaze attacks took a toll on the United States Navy in the final year of the war.

One soldier described the long, hard-fought campaign to take Okinawa:

“Our attack pattern was: barrage a hill with bombs and shells, move up the foot soldiers, hold it against counterattacks, fight down the reverse slope, then start on the next one. We would attack during the day, dig in for the night—not for sleep, but for safety. A hole was never deep enough when the Japanese started their barrage. And then, at night, they would come, a screaming banzai or a single shadow.”

—An American GI at Okinawa

In June, when the Japanese resistance finally ended after almost three months, only 7,200 defenders remained to surrender. For American forces, the nearly 50,000 casualties made the Battle of Okinawa the costliest engagement of the Pacific war. At long last, however, the Allies had a clear path to Japan.

## The Manhattan Project

The next challenge for American soldiers was to prepare themselves for the invasion of Japan. After the grueling battles at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, they knew how costly such an invasion would be. Unknown to them, however, work was nearly complete on a bomb that would make the invasion unnecessary.

In August 1939, Roosevelt had received a letter from Albert Einstein, a brilliant Jewish physicist who had fled from Europe. In his letter, Einstein suggested that an incredibly powerful new type of bomb could be built by the Germans. Determined to build the bomb before Germany did, Roosevelt organized the top secret **Manhattan Project** to develop an atomic bomb.

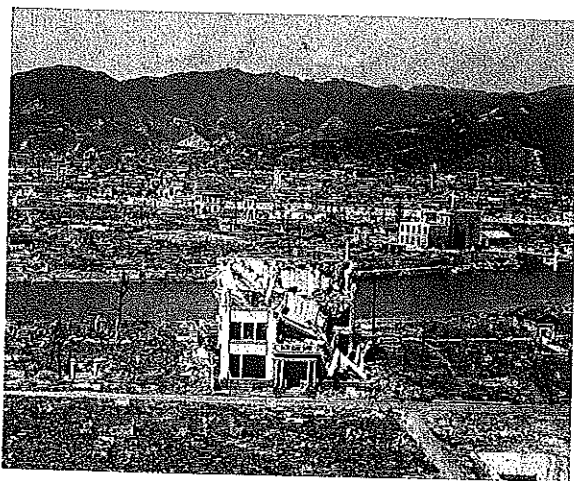
Scientists had already succeeded in splitting the nucleus of the uranium atom. To make an atomic bomb, however, they had to discover how to create a chain reaction. In such a reaction, particles released from the splitting of one atom would cause another atom to break apart, and so on. In theory, the energy released by the splitting of so many atoms would produce a massive explosion. In 1942, Enrico Fermi produced the first controlled chain reaction in a laboratory at the University of Chicago. Scientists worked to design a bomb that could store the raw materials and trigger a much more powerful chain reaction on demand.

On July 16, 1945, Manhattan Project scientists field-tested the world’s first atomic bomb in the desert of New Mexico. With a blinding flash of light, the explosion blew a huge crater in the earth and shattered windows some 125 miles away. As he watched, J. Robert Oppenheimer, who had supervised the building of the bomb, remembered the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Hindu holy book: “Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.”

**The Decision to Drop the Bomb** Once the bomb was ready, the question became whether or not to use it against Japan. There were a number of alternative possibilities for ending the war:

1. a massive invasion of Japan, expected to cost millions of Allied casualties
2. a naval blockade to starve Japan, along with continued conventional bombing
3. a demonstration of the new weapon on a deserted island to pressure Japan to surrender

**VIEWING HISTORY** A single atomic bomb leveled the city of Hiroshima. **Making Comparisons** How was the atomic bomb different from other war technology?



4. a softening of Allied demands for an unconditional surrender

An advisory group of scientists, military leaders, and government officials, called the Interim Committee, met in the spring of 1945 to debate these ideas. It could not recommend any of the alternatives. Heavy American casualties at Iwo Jima and Okinawa were a factor in the committee's support for using the bomb.

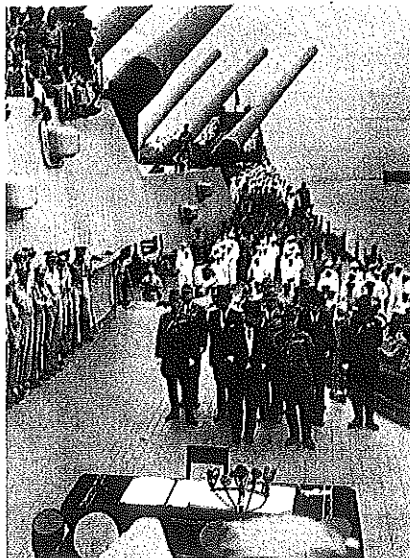
The final decision, however, rested with President Harry S Truman, who had taken office barely three months earlier, after Roosevelt's sudden death in April 1945. Truman had no difficulty making up his mind. He considered the bomb to be a military weapon and had no doubt that it should be used. Truman never regretted his decision. "You should do your weeping at Pearl Harbor," he said to his critics in 1963.

**Japan Surrenders** On August 6, 1945, an American plane, the *Enola Gay*, dropped a single atomic bomb on Hiroshima, a city in southern Japan and the site of a large army base. A blast of intense heat annihilated the city's center and its residents in an instant. Many buildings that survived the initial blast were destroyed by fires spread by powerful winds. Perhaps 80,000 died and at least as many were injured by fire, radiation sickness, and the force of the explosion. At least 90 percent of the city's buildings were damaged or totally destroyed. A Hiroshima resident described the scene after the bombing:

*"Wherever you went, you didn't bother to take the roads. Everything was flat, nothing was standing, no gates, pillars, walls, or fences. You walked in a straight line to where you wanted to go. Practically everywhere you came across small bones that had been left behind."*

—Hiroshima survivor

Three days later, a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. On August 14, the government of Japan accepted the American terms for surrender. The next day, Americans celebrated V-J Day (Victory in Japan Day). The formal surrender agreement was signed on September 2, 1945, aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. The long and destructive war had finally come to an end.



Japanese officials signed documents of surrender aboard the USS *Missouri*.

## Section

# 4

## Assessment

### READING COMPREHENSION

1. What was Japan's military strategy immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor?
2. How did the **Battle of Midway** and the **Battle of Guadalcanal** change the course of the war in the Pacific?
3. How did the **Battle of Okinawa** influence the decision to use the atomic bomb against Japan?

### CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

4. **Making Comparisons** (a) In what ways did naval power play a different role in the Pacific war than it did in the war in Europe? (b) Why were aircraft carriers crucial to the Japanese and American war efforts?
5. **Writing to Explain** Write a brief essay that explains why the Japanese were able to advance so easily in 1941 and early 1942.



### Take It to the NET

**Activity: Writing a Magazine Article** Select a battle, issue, or military unit from the War in the Pacific. Research your subject online, and then write a magazine article on that theme. Be sure to incorporate primary sources. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.

[www.phschool.com](http://www.phschool.com)