Major Operations of World War Two in the Pacific Theater

United States Military Academy at West Point

Activity: RADAR: Innovating Naval Warfare | Handouts

Map, Major Operations of World War Two in the Pacific Theater

From 7 December 1941, until June 1942, the Japanese successfully attacked Hawaii and conquered the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaya, and seized the British base of Singapore. They conquered Burma, thereby cutting off China from all overland routes to the western allies, and seized the Netherlands East Indies and British Borneo, thereby securing a much-needed source of oil. The Japanese advance came to a halt with the American victories at the Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942) and the Battle of Midway (June 1942). The second phase was one of a relative stalemate. From June 1942 until late 1943, neither side could muster the land, sea or air required to take the offensive and seize the initiative from the other. The Battle of Guadalcanal is a good example of this stalemate. The third phase, from mid-1943 to September 1945, can be characterized as the period of Allied offensives. Two drives were under American control; General MacArthur's Southwest Pacific campaign and Admiral Nimitz's Central Pacific campaign. MacArthur's drive was a series of army amphibious drives from Australia to New Guinea, with the Philippine Islands as the ultimate objective. Nimitz's strategy was designed to move directly towards Japan and draw the Imperial Navy into a decisive fleet engagement as happened at the Battles of the Philippine Sea campaigns merged into one for the invasion of the Philippines. Afterwards, the Central Pacific campaign continued with the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

During the later stages of the war, the Army Air Force, operating from the Marianas Islands and flying the B-29 Superfortress, had begun to fire bomb the cities of Japan. These raids culminated with the dropping of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 and Nagasaki three days later. Japan surrendered to the Allies on 2 September 1945.