

The War in the Pacific Overview

Background

Though Americans volunteered to fight for other countries before December 7, 1941, the U.S. government officially remained neutral during the first two years of the war. The months leading up to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor saw increasing tensions between America and Japan, including a trade embargo that sought to remove vital supplies and materials from the Japanese.

Key Figures

General Douglas MacArthur- U.S. Army, Commander of the Allied forces in the southwest Pacific.

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz- U.S. Navy, Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet.

Island Hopping

Strategy

Island Hopping was a strategy designed to enable the Allies to reach Japan without having to conquer every island held by the Japanese. The Allies picked strategically important islands, attacked them, and set up bases to support future attacks. This enabled the Allies to "hop" over more fortified Islands and cut the defenders off from supplies while minimizing losses of men and supplies. The Island Hopping strategy gave the Allies the ability to surprise the Japanese on any given island.

Pearl Harbor

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched a surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. Though the attack was devastating, costing America over 2,400 lives and a large portion of the Pacific Fleet, the Japanese were not able to knock America out of the fight. Luckily for America, their three aircraft carriers were out to sea at the time of the attack. The Japanese failure to destroy these ships would be critical to the American war effort.