

US History

World War II – The Pacific

Learning Target:

I can examine the impact of two major battles on the war in the Pacific, Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

4. Iwo Jima and Okinawa

Iwo Jima (February – March 1945) –

- February 1945 the US Marines attacked the island of Iwo Jima
- Located only 750 miles from Tokyo
- Fighting took place on the volcanic island with little to no cover

Japanese Forces (18,000 troops):

- Despite almost certain US victory the Japanese fought viciously
- Faced almost certain defeat because they were outnumbered and could not retreat or be resupplied
- Japanese positions were heavily fortified with networks of bunkers and caves to protect against American bombardment of the island
- Japanese snipers and kamikaze pilots were also used

American Forces (70,000 troops):

- 3 day bombardment of Iwo Jima preceded the invasion – had limited success
- Invasion was difficult due to volcanic terrain
- Japanese bunkers that were cleared were resupplied by the tunnel system

Results:

- Japanese fought viciously but became desperate as they ran out of food, water, and artillery
- Of the 18,000 Japanese troops only 216 were taken prisoner – the rest died

Strategic Importance:

- Prevented early warning from Japanese radar to the mainland
- Became a refueling site for American bombers going to Japan
- Designated as a crucial emergency landing for the B-29 bombers carrying the nukes

The Picture –

- When the US Marines finally took the high ground they planted the flag
- Became a famous Pulitzer Prize winning photograph

Okinawa (April - June 1945)

- Located 340 miles from mainland Japan
- US hoped to use Okinawa as a base for an invasion of the Japanese mainland

The Land Battle:

- Bloody cave clearing common at Okinawa
- Clearing the caves led to many US casualties
 - Battle of Hacksaw Ridge:
 - Famous cave clearing campaign
 - Tunnels had multiple entry points so soldiers could not get trapped
 - Also designed with many turns and angles to neutralize flame throwers
And grenades

The Naval Battle:

- Kamikaze attacks had been previously used by Japan
- Kamikaze attacks for the first time became a major part of the Japanese plans
- Seven major kamikaze missions were attempted involving over 1500 planes

Casualties:

- US: 62,000 casualties, 12,000 killed or missing
- Japan: Over 100,000 killed

Forced Suicide:

- Many civilians on Okinawa committed mass suicides
- Urged to do so by Japanese military who said Americans would kill and rape
- Japanese soldiers often gave grenades to civilians to kill themselves
- Some accounts have civilians throwing themselves and their families off cliffs

Strategic Importance:

- Military value of Okinawa was priceless
- Was used to anchor the US fleet, stage troops, and its airfields were close to Japan

Aftermath:

- Some historians have asserted that Okinawa led directly to the atomic bombings
- After seeing the cost of invading Okinawa the US wanted to do anything to avoid invading the mainland