

World War II: The Pacific Front



The USS West Virginia under attack at Pearl Harbor.

Japan was in the Axis Powers with Germany and Italy. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) feared Japanese expansion in Asia. He tried to pursue measures to stop them. FDR gave aid to China to help them against Japan and cut off oil supplies to Japan. Angry at these actions, Japan assumed that, eventually, the USA would join the war. In a preemptive strike, Japan attacked American naval ships in Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Over 2,000 Americans were killed. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (1884-1943) led the attack for Japan on December 7th, 1941.

The USA controlled the Philippines and Guam due to gaining these territories in the Spanish American War of 1898. By 1942, Japan had invaded these areas and took them from the USA. Likewise, Japan attacked the British

controlled area of Hong Kong in China. They also took the Dutch East Indies. The Japanese aggressively were seeking to control all of Asia.

#1: Why did Japan attack Pearl Harbor? After Pearl Harbor, what did Japan do in the Pacific region?

The Japanese were vicious toward the regions they conquered and especially toward the soldiers who resisted their occupation. This cruelty was particularly evident in the Japanese conquest of the Philippines, which was a territory of the USA. Their malice was chiefly made visible in The Bataan Death March of 1942. Tens of thousands of American and Filipino soldiers were taken as prisoners of war. The Japanese forced the soldiers to march down the Bataan Peninsula. During the march, the prisoners of war were physically beaten and abused. Thousands were also murdered during and after the march.



Soldiers forced on the Bataan Death March

After Pearl Harbor, the USA joined the Allies and declared war on Japan and the Axis Powers. Their main military focus was on Hitler's Nazi takeover of Europe. However, the USA wanted to prove they could strike back against Japan on its own mainland. On April 18th, 1942, Colonel James Doolittle (1896-1993) led an American bombing raid on Tokyo, taking out various military targets. This operation boosted the attitude of the USA because it proved to the world that Japan could be attacked in their own capital. It was called Doolittle's Raid.

#2: Describe what occurred in the Bataan Death March. Explain what happened during Doolittle's Raid.

Japan had conquered various areas in the Pacific and turned next to Australia, in May of 1942. The Imperial Japanese Navy tried to take various areas in the Coral Sea, like New Guinea, as a launching pad for a full invasion of Australia. American naval fleets arrived to fight the Japanese and defend Australia.



President Franklin Delano Roosevelt pinning the Medal of Honor on Colonel James Doolittle.

In the Battle of the Coral Sea in 1942, Aircraft carriers played a major role in the Battle of the Coral Sea. War Planes caused the vast majority of the damage to both the American and Japanese naval vessels. Admiral Shigeyoshi Inoue (1889-1975) led the Imperial Japanese Navy in its attempt to secure strong holds for a future Australian invasion. US Admiral Frank Fletcher (1885-1973) led a group of American and Australian forces to face off against the Japanese. The Battle of the Coral Sea was costly to both Japan and the team of American and Australia. Yet, it halted a full Japanese takeover of Australia.

In the Battle of Midway, one month after the Battle of the Coral Sea, in June of 1942, Japan sought to invade and control the island of Midway, the location of an American base.

Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (1884-1943), helped lead the attack for the Imperial Japanese Navy. Yet, American Admiral Chester Nimitz (1885-1966), resisted the attack and maintained the American strong hold. This was a massive victory for the Allies, because the Imperial Japanese Navy had to retreat. Four Japanese ships that had participated in Pearl Harbor were at Midway and were sunk by the Americans.

#3: Describe the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. In each situation, what did Japan hope to achieve? What was the result of these two battles?

After the Battle of Midway, the Allies launched various offenses against Japanese strong holds in the Pacific. General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964) led America and the Allies in these pursuits. MacArthur launched invasions to take the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In the Battle of Iwo Jima from February to March of 1945 and the Battle of Okinawa from April to June of 1945, the two islands were seized from Japan as the Allies then focused their attention to Japan’s mainland. Japan had overtaken a massive amount of the Pacific region. Yet, now, the Allies were bringing great defeats to the Japanese. In an attempt of desperation, the Japanese commanded their pilots to crash into Allied vessels. These pilots were called kamikazes. Even with these drastic measures, the Japanese could not halt the Allies progression against their nation.



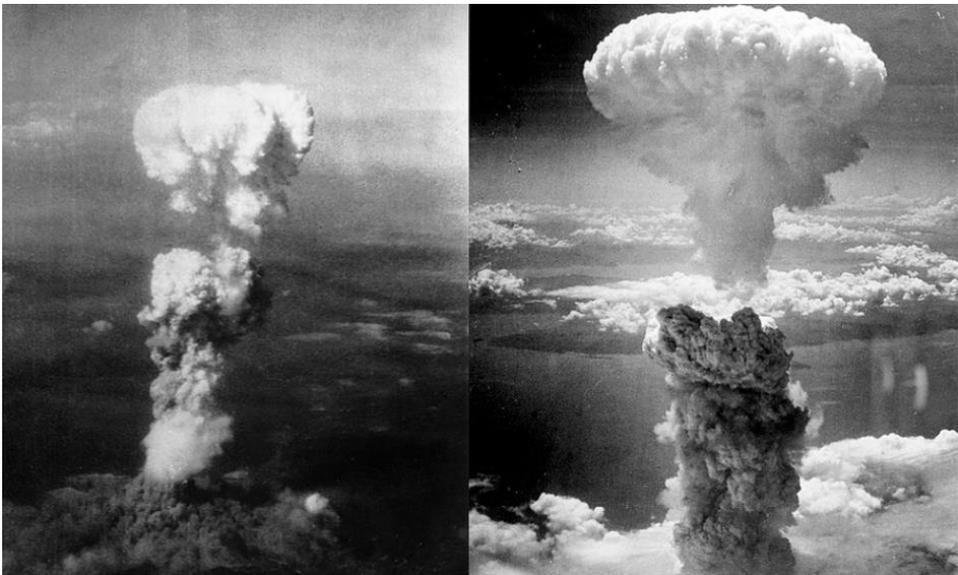
American soldiers run as a kamikaze crashes a plane onto their vessel.

#4: Explain how Japan used the kamikaze pilots. What did the implementation of kamikaze pilots suggest about the attitude and approach of the military plans of Japan at this point in the war?

What Japan did not realize was that a gargantuan secret development was taking place in the USA, code named the Manhattan Project. Led by J. Robert Oppenheimer (1904-1967), scientists built the first nuclear weapons, atom bombs. Helping them was a Jewish scientist who escaped Nazi occupied Europe, Albert Einstein (1879-1955). This was called the Manhattan Project. President Franklin Roosevelt died on April 12th, 1945 from natural causes, before the bomb was ready to use. Harry Truman (1884-1972) became President. He knew a land invasion of the mainland of Japan could cost millions of Japanese and American lives. Truman gave the command to force Japan to surrender by ordering atom bombs to be dropped on Hiroshima on August 6th, 1945 and Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945. The aircraft called the Enola Gay dropped the first atom bomb on Hiroshima. The attack was devastating instantly killing tens of thousands of Japanese citizens. It was the most powerful weapon ever used in warfare.

#5: What was the Manhattan project? Who was President when the decision was made to use what the Manhattan Project had created? How did he become President?

After the devastating atomic bomb attack, Japan surrendered. Now, Germany, Italy, and Japan, (the Axis Powers) were all defeated. General MacArthur met with Japanese leadership on the USS Missouri in Tokyo, on September 2nd, 1945, to sign the Japanese Instrument of Surrender Treaty. The Prime Minister of Japan, and mastermind of many military campaigns, Hideki Tojo (1884-1948), was eventually executed. Emperor Hirohito (1901-1989) was allowed to stay in power, but had to submit to all of the Allied demands for the future of Japan.



The mushroom clouds that appeared over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, after they were bombed.

World War II, which saw the Allies battle the Axis Powers, forever changed the world. There were between 70 to 80 million casualties in the war, the highest of any war ever fought in history. Yet, the Allies were able to take down the Fascist regimes of Germany and Italy and halt the Japanese Empire’s stranglehold on the Pacific. The USA emerged as the most powerful superpower on earth, but a Cold War was on the horizon.

#6: What arguments could one give to assert that the use of the atom bomb in WW II was unethical? What arguments could one give to assert that the use of the atom bomb in WW II was necessary?

Answers:**#1: Why did Japan attack Pearl Harbor? After Pearl Harbor, what did Japan do in the Pacific region?**

The USA had not officially joined the Allies against the Axis Powers, prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. Yet, it was clear that FDR favored the Allies and would get involved, eventually. FDR gave aid to China in their struggle against Japan and pursued oil embargos against Japan. Pearl Harbor was a preemptive strike against the USA. Afterward, the Japanese further expanded their Pacific conquest.

#2: Describe what occurred in the Bataan Death March. Explain what happened during Doolittle's Raid.

In the Bataan Death March, the Japanese took American and Filipino soldiers and forced them to march down the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines. Many died through the brutal treatment they experienced. In Doolittle's Raid, the USA launched attacks against Tokyo and other areas in Japan. They were led by Colonel Doolittle and landed in China and Russia, two Allied nations, after the attack.

#3: Describe the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway. In each situation, what did Japan hope to achieve? What was the result of these two battles?

In the Battle of the Coral Sea, the Japanese tried to secure New Guinea and invade Australia. They were stopped by American and Australian soldiers. At the Battle of Midway, the Japanese tried to take an American base in the Pacific and were turned back. Both of these were victories for the Allies and resulted in the Japanese losing momentum in the war.

#4: Explain how Japan used the kamikaze pilots. What did the implementation of kamikaze pilots suggest about the attitude and approach of the military plans of Japan at this point in the war?

Once the Allies gained momentum in the Pacific Front, Japan began using drastic measures against the Allied vessels. Kamikaze pilots crashed their planes into the Allied ships. This desperate move displayed that Japan was losing the war and could not halt the Allied presence in the regions they had conquered from advancing against their controlled areas.

#5: What was the Manhattan project? Who was President when the decision was made to use what the Manhattan Project had created? How did he become President?

The Manhattan Project built the first atom bombs. Harry Truman was the president that decided to use the atom bombs. FDR had died of natural causes, which is how Truman, his Vice-President, had become president.

#6: What arguments could one give to assert that the use of the atom bomb in WW II was unethical? What arguments could one give to assert that the use of the atom bomb in WW II was necessary?

The atom bomb was the most catastrophic, powerful weapon the world had ever created. One could argue that such a weapon could never be used ethically, since so many civilians would die and the sheer numbers of casualties it would produce. Yet, some could argue the bomb was necessary. A land invasion of Japan would have cost millions of Japanese and American lives, more than would be lost if atom bombs were used. Therefore, the use of atom bombs would be necessary to prevent more deaths than a land invasion would produce.

