

Module 8: World War II - 1939 to 1945
Topic 5 Content: Turning Points in the Pacific Notes

Introduction



In all of the battles in the Pacific theatre of war, the Japanese soldiers and civilians believed it was more honorable to commit suicide than surrender to the Americans. Although the Americans won the battles at Iwo Jima, Okinawa, and Midway, the Japanese soldiers fought hard, and caused many American casualties. Click **Next** to learn about these three turning points in the Pacific theatre of war.

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Instructions



Click each marker to explore the turning points in the Pacific theatre of war. Make sure to visit each marker before closing the interactivity.

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Battle of Midway

The Battle of Midway

The Japanese knew they had a naval advantage, so they put together a plan to lure out the United States aircraft carriers and destroy them in battle. Specifically, the Japanese navy planned to attack the tiny Pacific island of Midway, which housed an American naval base. The United States learned of the attack ahead of time and set a trap to catch the Japanese aircraft carriers.

At the Battle of Midway, a smaller American naval force of aircraft carriers defeated a much larger Japanese naval force of aircraft carriers. The “Miracle at Midway”, as some called it, happened only six months after Pearl Harbor, and marked the turning point in the Pacific theatre. Japan lost the ability to invade Hawaii with the loss at Midway Island, while America began its “island hopping” strategy.



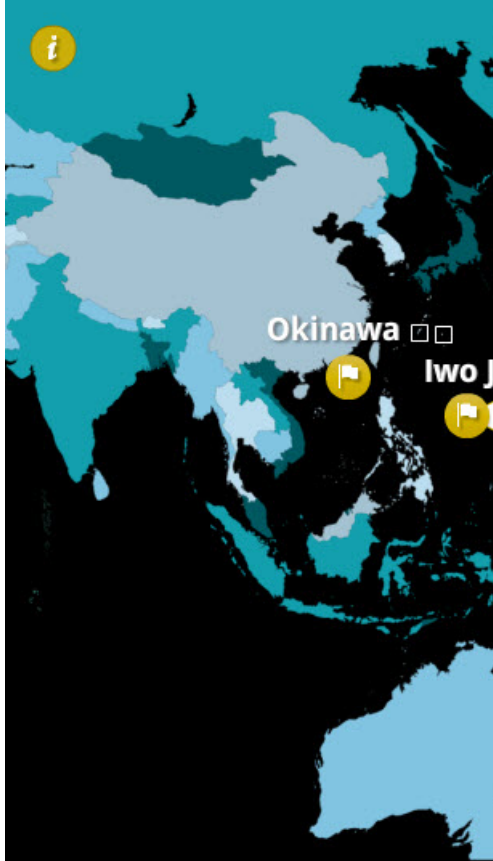
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Iwo Jima



The map shows the Pacific Ocean region with Japan to the east and the United States to the west. Okinawa is marked with a yellow square and Iwo Jima with a yellow circle. A yellow information icon is in the top left corner.

The Battle of Iwo Jima

In early 1945, the United States realized that with the capture of a few more islands, they would have enough military bases to attack mainland Japan. In February and March 1945, United States Marines attacked and captured the island of Iwo Jima. Japanese soldiers fought fiercely for every square inch of the island. It was the only battle in the Pacific theatre where American casualties reached higher than Japanese casualties. About 26,000 Americans were injured or killed, compared to 18,000 Japanese. The image shows a famous picture from this battle, showing American Marines raising the American flag.



A black and white historical photograph showing several American Marines on a rocky, flat-topped island. They are gathered around a flagpole, raising the United States flag. The sky is overcast.

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Okinawa



In April through June of 1945, the United States military attacked the island of Okinawa in the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific theatre. Again, the Japanese soldiers fought fiercely. This battle had the highest number of total casualties in the Pacific theatre. More than 77,000 Japanese soldiers were killed, while more than 65,000 Americans were injured or killed.