

Classroom

VIDEO

Teacher's Notes

WWII

CONFLICT IN THE PACIFIC

PART 2

1942-1952

Years: 8-12

Duration: 28 mins

THE BATTLE FOR AUSTRALIA

1942 was a dark and crucial year for Australia. Following the fall of Singapore, Australians became increasingly aware of the vulnerability of their island continent. This vulnerability was brought home to the people of Australia with the first bombing raid on Darwin on February 19, 1942. War had come to Australia, causing major concern among military leaders and alarm among the civilian population.

Even the arrival in Melbourne of the US commander, General Douglas MacArthur on March 17, 1942, to establish an American base, was greeted with some pessimism as he had been forced to flee from the Philippines by the Japanese.

There seemed no limit to Japanese successes. During March 1942 the Japanese advance continued. Their forces had occupied many of the islands east of New Guinea including the Solomons and Bougainville. Important Japanese airfields had been established on the Islands of Tulagi and Guadalcanal.

In late April, US intelligence detected a major Japanese flotilla heading towards the Coral Sea to launch an attack on Port Moresby. From here they could bomb Australian cities or even invade Australia. Allied ships were instructed to prevent this move and the stage was set for the Battle of the Coral Sea, from May 5 to May 8. In this battle, the US Fleet contained two aircraft carriers, the USS Lexington and the USS Yorktown. The US fleet was supported by HMAS Australia and HMAS Hobart. The battle was the first carrier-to-carrier battle in history. The two fleets did not sight each other. All the fighting was done by planes dropping bombs and

torpedoes. While no side could claim a decisive victory, for Australia the Battle of the Coral Sea was of vital importance, as it forced the invasion fleet to turn back. However despite this, Japanese bombers and submarines continued to attack Australia.

The battle that proved to be a turning point in Japan's Pacific war however, was the Battle of Midway fought in June 1942. Admiral Yamamoto sought to weaken the USA by destroying their base on Midway. The Japanese fleet comprised five aircraft carriers with nearly 400 aircraft, seventeen warships and an invasion fleet of 5000 troops. However they were confronted by wave after wave of US dive bombers, destroying one aircraft carrier and badly damaging three others. The Japanese lost all their aircraft. From this point on, the Japanese navy was weakened and put on the defensive.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Secret codes

Research: Why has Coral Sea Week been celebrated since 1946?

How did the Battle of the Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway impact on Japanese war plans? List the losses on both sides.

What was the importance of the USA cracking the Japanese secret codes?

What was the role and impact of Admiral Yamamoto in the Pacific War?

What was General MacArthur's working relationship, with both the Australian Prime Minister and the military chiefs in Australia?

Discussion: Why was the Battle of the Coral Sea of so much importance to Australia?

Film study: What did the footage reveal about the changing nature of warfare at sea?

THE ALLIED COUNTER OFFENSIVE

The defeat of Japan was orchestrated largely by three Allied commanders, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander for South East Asia, General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Allied Commander in the South West Pacific and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas.

Their strategy was to concentrate their forces and recapture territory kilometre by kilometre, island by island. The US Navy, with some support from Australian ships was to defeat the Japanese Navy in a number of significant naval battles. Finally as the Allied forces drew closer to Japan and the country came within bombing range, the USA were to literally bomb the Japanese into submission.

In July 1942, the Battle for New Guinea accelerated, when the Japanese set out to cross the Owen Stanley Ranges and attack Port Moresby. The trail that the Japanese took was to be known as the Kokoda Track. Within six months the mud of the Kokoda Track had become soaked with the blood of thousands of Australian, American and Japanese soldiers. The Japanese were made to taste defeat however, when in September and October, Australian troops pushed the Japanese back along the Kokoda Track to bases on the Solomon Sea coast. The Australians with American support went on to take the Japanese bases of Gona, Buna and Sanananda. In 1943, the Australians launched attacks to remove the Japanese from New Guinea. After fierce fighting, the

Australians took Lae and Salamaua back from the Japanese, followed by Finschhafen and Shaggy Ridge. In June-July 1944, the Australians reached the Sepik River, ending the Japanese occupation of the New Guinea mainland.

The forces of MacArthur and Nimitz moved west and then north against the Japanese. MacArthur adopted the strategy of 'leap frogging' along the coast of New Guinea and then 'island hopping' through the Solomons towards the Philippines, bypassing and isolating many of the Japanese held islands.

On August 7, 1942, US forces under General MacArthur landed at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and the attack on the Japanese perimeter began. The campaign which liberated the Solomon Islands lasted until February 1943.

After the recapture of the Solomons, Nimitz joined MacArthur for a two pronged assault on the Philippines. The US forces landed at Leyte, in the central Philippines on October 20, 1944. The Japanese considered the Philippines vital to controlling the sea lanes and their supply routes and Admiral Yamamoto ordered the Japanese fleet to stop the US advance at all costs. The Battle of Leyte Gulf beginning on October 23, was the largest sea battle of the war, involving more than 230 warships and nearly 2000 aircraft. The Japanese Fleet under the command of Admiral Soemu fought desperately, supported by 'kamikaze' aircraft, but was decisively beaten by a superior force. The Japanese fleet of sixty- five ships, lost their four aircraft carriers, three battleships and ten cruisers. This proved to be a crippling loss for Japan and virtually eliminated her navy as an effective fighting force.

Understanding the Issues

Explanation of terms: Kamikaze; 'Island hopping'.

Research: How important was air power to the success of the Allied forces?

What difficulties did the Japanese have with their lines of supply? Why?

How does the Cult of Bushido help explain the fanaticism of the Japanese soldiers in their refusal to surrender?

How was MacArthur able to keep his promise to the people of the Philippines?

Discussion: Why does the Kokoda Track have so much significance for Australian people?

Film study: What does the footage reveal about the ferocity of the Battle of Guadalcanal?

THE DEMISE OF JAPAN

By the middle of 1944 it was evident that Japan could not win the war.

In May 1944, British and Indian troops advancing from Imphal in Assam, began the reconquest of Burma. By 1945 the Burma Road was reopened, Rangoon and Singapore were bombed and plans were made to invade Malaya.

American aircraft based in China began attacks on the Japanese mainland.

The USA reoccupied the Gilbert and Marshall Islands, Saipan and Guam.

Following the US victory in the Philippines, it was a relatively short distance to the islands south of Japan. Two of these islands, Iwo Jima and Okinawa, were selected for a large amphibious attack. Iwo Jima was invaded on

February 19, 1945. After thirty nine days of fierce fighting the US was able to take the island. On April 1, Okinawa was invaded at the cost of some 100,000 Japanese lives.

Japan was now ready to invade. General Tojo had been replaced as Prime Minister in 1944 by General Koiso Kuniaki. Following the landings at Okinawa, Koiso and his cabinet were replaced by Admiral Suzuki Kantoro.

The Allies issued the Potsdam Declaration to Japan on July 26, 1945. This was an ultimatum that demanded unconditional Japanese surrender. Japan was to be stripped of its empire and occupied until a new political system was in place. Failure of the Japanese to comply would result in complete destruction. The Declaration left the position of the Emperor, whom the Japanese revered as a demi-god, ambiguous.

Air offensives were now dramatically stepped upon Japan. Three quarters of Tokyo and many other industrial cities were destroyed. B-29s dropped incendiary bombs, which caused massive fires to spread through factories and houses. In two air raids on Tokyo, approximately 100,000 Japanese had been killed.

However the Japanese fighting spirit remained unbroken.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Burma Road; Potsdam Declaration; Unconditional surrender; Demi-god.
 Research: Why did the Emperor Hirohito have so much influence on the Japanese people?

What factors made it likely that Japan would be defeated in the war by mid-1944? Why did they continue in the war?

What was the significance for Japan, of the Yalta Conference of February 1945?

What impact did the surrender of Germany have on the Pacific War?

Why were the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa so important to both sides?

Why was there so much controversy over the Japanese treatment of prisoners of war?

Discussion: Why did the issue of unconditional surrender prove such a controversial one?

Film study: What does the footage on Iwo Jima and Okinawa suggest about the motives and strategies of both sides?

THE DROPPING OF THE ATOMIC BOMBS

By the middle of 1945, although Japan was militarily beaten, she was still capable of inflicting heavy casualties on any invading army. While many of the wartime leaders realised that defeat was inevitable, they were unwilling to surrender unconditionally to the Allied forces. Many Japanese feared unconditional surrender might mean losing their Emperor. However the Allied nations were not prepared to compromise on this issue.

While an economic blockade would eventually have succeeded, the USA wanted to terminate the war as soon as possible, due to war weariness and the expectation that the Soviet Union was about to declare war on Japan. The USA was keen to end the war without Soviet intervention, in order to maintain complete control over Japan.

The USA also believed a full-scale invasion of Japan would incur high casualty rates on both sides.

President Harry S. Truman then made the decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan, one on Hiroshima on August 6 and the second one on Nagasaki on August 9. Both of these cities were devastated. On August 10, Emperor Hirohito informed his cabinet that Japan must surrender.

The official surrender took place aboard the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945, in Tokyo Bay. The Foreign Minister, Shigemitsu Mamoru, signed the surrender in the presence of General MacArthur.

While the dropping of the bombs may have achieved their purpose for the USA, it has also proved to be a very controversial decision, with a range of supporting and opposing arguments.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: 'Little Boy' (Uranium bomb used at Hiroshima); 'Fat Man' (Plutonium bomb used at Nagasaki).

Research: Outline the race among the major powers to develop the first atomic bomb.

What were the short and long term effects of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? What role did Emperor Hirohito play in the Japanese surrender?

Discussion: How justified was the USA in dropping atomic bombs on Japan?

Film study: What views does the film portray about dropping the bomb?

THE ALLIED OCCUPATION OF JAPAN

Following the surrender of Japan, the country was occupied by Allied forces, the majority from the USA. The occupation forces remained in Japan from September 1945 until April 1952. General Douglas MacArthur was made Supreme Commander for the Allied powers, with his headquarters in Tokyo.

Emperor Hirohito had appealed to the Japanese people to accept the occupation without protest as did the Prime Minister, Admiral Suzuki. Most Japanese had had enough of war and the effects of rationing and American bombing. Millions had also been made homeless. The Japanese Empire was dismantled with Japan forced to surrender all territory seized since 1868.

One of MacArthur's main objectives was to demilitarise the country. The Japanese forces at home and abroad were demobilised and war materials destroyed. The military code of Bushido was suppressed and pro-militarists were removed from public positions. Twenty- five Japanese wartime leaders, including General Tojo, were tried by an International Tribunal in Tokyo between May 1946 and November 1948. Tojo and six others were sentenced to be hanged, the rest to imprisonment. Thousands of other officers and men were tried for war crimes and given sentences from hanging to imprisonment. While many felt that Hirohito should be charged for war crimes as the Japanese forces had acted in his name, MacArthur did not want to see Hirohito hang. He felt that Hirohito was the focus of Japanese loyalty and that the occupation forces could make use of him. Many

Japanese believed that the Emperor should have followed the honourable code and taken his own life.

MacArthur and the USA believed it was important that Japan introduce a more democratic form of government. A new constitution came into effect on May 2, 1947. War was outlawed. While the Emperor remained as a figurehead to unite the people, he was no longer 'divine' in status. The Japanese Diet or Parliament was the highest body of the nation. The vote was given to all men and women over the age of twenty-one. The Prime Minister and his Cabinet came from the Diet. New political parties were formed.

The USA played a prominent role in the rebuilding of the economy. The Zaibatsu was destroyed, agricultural reforms were carried out, and a more modern system of education was introduced. In less than ten years Japan had made an amazing recovery.

In September 1951, Japan finally signed a Peace Treaty with 48 nations in San Francisco. The Treaty came into effect in April 1952. This marked the end of the occupation period. Four years later in December 1956, Japan was admitted to the United Nations.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: SCAP, Diet; Zaibatsu

Research: Why didn't the Japanese oppose the Allied occupation?

What was the role and impact of Allied occupation forces?

How was the Japanese Empire dismantled?

How effectively did MacArthur work with the US Government during the occupation period?

What political and economic changes were forced onto Japan?

Discussion: Should Emperor Hirohito have been tried as a war criminal?

Film study: From your study of this documentary, how much influence did the USA have on Japan during the occupation?

OVERVIEW - DECOLONISATION

After Japan's defeat in the war, the Allies forced her to surrender all territory seized since 1868, including the Ryukyu and Kurile Islands. Manchuria was handed back to China. By agreement, Korean territory north of the 38th parallel was occupied by Soviet troops, while in the south it was occupied by US forces. In 1948 this division was formalised by the proclamation of the Republic of Korea (South) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North).

The consequences of the Pacific War were epoch making. By exposing the fragility of the colonial regimes, Japan gave new impetus to the anti-imperial revolt of Asia, which would be a dominant feature of the postwar world.

None of the European Powers surrendered their colonies voluntarily. After the Japanese defeat, France fought stubbornly to restore control in Indochina, and the Netherlands struggled to contain the nationalists in Java, who had proclaimed an Indonesian republic in 1945.

Neither was successful. Vietnamese victory at Dien Bien Phu forced France to give way. In Indonesia the nationalists advanced step by step until by 1956 they controlled the whole of the former Dutch East Indies except West Irian, which they annexed in 1963. The British

also had no intention of abdicating their imperial position, but continual unrest forced their hand and in 1947 India and Pakistan became independent, followed by the colonies of Burma and Ceylon. Nevertheless Britain still clung to its base at Singapore, fought a long war against Malayan insurgents and resisted Indonesian attempts to annex Sarawak and Brunei. Malaya secured its independence from Britain in 1957 and Singapore became a republic in 1965. The Republic of the Philippines was proclaimed as an independent sovereign state in 1946.

Understanding the issues

Explanation of terms: Mandates; Decolonisation; Nationalism.

Research: What was the impact of the Potsdam Declaration of July 1945 on Japan?

What factors prevented a reunified and independent Korea possible after the war?

Why did decolonisation occur so rapidly after the war?

Discussion: Why did the conflict in the Pacific lead to a growth of nationalistic movements in the region?

Film study: From your study of this film, why did the Pacific War have such far reaching consequences?

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