



>> Analyze Maps Why was the location of Midway Island so significant? **Make Predictions** What impact would a Japanese victory at Midway have on the war in the Pacific?

Turning Points in the Pacific

While the Allies pursued their "Europe First" strategy, they did not ignore the Pacific. Through May 1942, Japanese forces continued to advance with seemingly unstoppable momentum. They had attacked American, British, and Dutch colonies, winning control of the Philippines, Malaya, Dutch East Indies, Hong Kong, Wake Island, Guam, and Burma. Then, the United States struck back. The American success at the Battle of Coral Sea in May 1942 served as a warning that the war in the Pacific was about to change.

Americans Triumph at Midway Admiral Yamamoto, commander of Japanese forces in the Pacific, knew that the United States Navy was a powerful threat. Before the Americans could retaliate for Pearl Harbor, Yamamoto sought to destroy American aircraft carriers in the Pacific. He turned his attention to Midway, an American naval base in the Central Pacific that was vital to the defense of Hawaii. Losing Midway would force American defenses back to the California coast. Yamamoto's ambitious plan entailed taking Midway and establishing a military presence in the Aleutians, a string of islands off the coast of Alaska.

What Yamamoto did not realize was that Admiral **Chester Nimitz**, commander of the United States Navy in the Pacific, knew the Japanese plans. U.S. Navy code breakers had intercepted Japanese messages. To meet the expected assault, Nimitz sent his only available aircraft carriers to Midway. The Japanese navy was stretched out across more than a thousand miles, from the Aleutians to well west of Midway. American forces were all concentrated near Midway.

The Japanese began their attack on June 4, 1942. In the **Battle of Midway**, the most important naval battle of World War II, the United States dealt Japan a decisive defeat. American torpedo planes and dive bombers sank four Japanese aircraft carriers, along with all 250 aircraft on board and many of Japan's most experienced pilots. America lost only one aircraft carrier.

Midway was the turning point of the war in the Pacific, ending the seemingly unstoppable Japanese advance. Japan still had a powerful navy, committed troops, and fortified positions. But Japanese forces would never again threaten Hawaii or dominate the Pacific. Japan was now on the defensive.

Americans Take the Offensive The first American offensive in the Pacific took place in August 1942, with



>> U.S. soldiers in the jungles of Guadalcanal, 1942.
Express Problems Clearly How might conditions like this affect the U.S. advance through the Pacific toward Japan?

an assault on the island of Guadalcanal. One marine described fighting on Guadalcanal:

It was beautiful, but beneath the loveliness . . . Guadalcanal was a mass of slops and stinks and pestilence; of scum-crusting lagoons and vile swamps inhabited by giant crocodiles . . . of ants that bite like fire, of tree leeches that fall, fasten and suck; of scorpions,

across . . . track of inflamed flesh, of snakes and land crabs, rats and bats and carrion birds and of a myriad of stinging insects.
—Robert Leckie, *Delivered From Evil: The Saga of World War II*

Guadalcanal was part of a U.S. strategy to approach Japan from both the southwest Pacific and the central Pacific. The logic behind the offensives was to force Japan to fight a two-front war and to capture bases from which to attack Japan. In jungles and on coral reefs, under torrential monsoons and the blistering sun, American servicemen began their slow, painful trek toward Japan.

? IDENTIFY CENTRAL ISSUES Why was the Battle of Midway the turning point in the Pacific?

ASSESSMENT

1. **Identify Central Issues** Why did Roosevelt support a “Europe First” strategy even though it had been Japan that had first attacked the United States?
2. **Draw Conclusions** Why was the Battle of Stalingrad a turning point in the European war?
3. **Describe** What was Germany’s response to Italy’s surrender to the Allies?
4. **Compare and Contrast** British and American bombing strategies in Europe.
5. **Apply Concepts** How does the Battle of Midway illustrate the importance of intelligence gathering and espionage in modern warfare?