

ordered hundreds of conspirators and suspects tortured to death. Rommel was granted the option of suicide, which he took.

Meanwhile, the Führer's tactics brought calamity to the German forces in western France. On July 25, American units broke out westward into Brittany and eastward toward Paris. On August 15 a joint American-French invasion force landed on the French Mediterranean coast and raced up the Rhone Valley. German resistance in France collapsed. A division of the Free French Resistance, aided by American forces, had the honor of liberating Paris on August 25. Nazi forces retired pell-mell toward the German border, and by mid-September most of France and Belgium had been cleared of enemy troops.

SLOWING MOMENTUM Even though they had moved so much faster than expected, in fact, that the Allies were running out of gasoline. Neither their plans nor their supply system could keep up with the rapid movement of tanks and troops. British and Canadian forces under General Bernard Montgomery had moved into Belgium, where they took Antwerp on September 4. From there, Montgomery argued, a quick thrust toward Berlin could end things. On the right flank, General George Patton was just as sure he could take the American Third Army all the way to Berlin. Eisenhower reasoned, however, that a swift, narrow thrust into Germany would be cut off, counterattacked, and defeated. Instead he advocated advancing along a broad front. Prudence demanded getting his supply lines in order first, which required clearing out stubborn German forces and opening a supply channel to Antwerp—a long, hard battle that lasted until the end of November 1944.

LEAPFROGGING TO TOKYO

Even in the Pacific, relegated to a lower priority, Allied forces had brought the war within reach of the enemy's homeland by the end of 1944. The Pacific war's first American offensive, in fact, had been in the southwest Pacific. There the Japanese, stopped at the Battles of Coral Sea and Midway, had captured the southern Solomon Islands and were building an airstrip on Guadalcanal, from which they would be able to attack Allied transportation routes to Australia. On August 7, 1942, two months before the North African landings, the First Marine Division landed on Guadalcanal and seized the airstrip.

MACARTHUR IN NEW GUINEA Meanwhile, American and Australian forces under General Douglas MacArthur had begun to push the

Japanese out of their positions on the northern coast of New Guinea. These battles, fought through some of the hottest, most humid, and most mosquito-infested swamps in the world, bought advances at a heavy cost, but by the end of January 1943 the eastern tip of New Guinea had been secured.

At this stage, U.S. strategists made a critical decision. The brilliant but egotistical MacArthur, sometimes accused of being a legend in his own mind, wanted to move westward along the northern coast of New Guinea toward the Philippines and ultimately to Tokyo. Admiral Chester Nimitz, from his headquarters at Pearl Harbor, argued for a sweep through the islands of the central Pacific to Formosa and China. In March 1943 the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed to pursue both plans.

During the Battle of the Bismarck Sea (March 2–3, 1943), American bombers sank eight Japanese troopships and ten warships carrying reinforcements. Thereafter the Japanese dared not risk sending transports to reinforce points under siege, thereby making it possible for the Allies to use the tactic of neutralizing Japanese strongholds with airpower and sea power and moving on, leaving them to die on the vine. Some called it leapfrogging, and Japanese leaders later acknowledged the strategy as a major factor contributing to the Allied victory. Meanwhile, in mid-April, before the offensive got under way, U.S. fighter planes shot down a Japanese plane that code breakers knew was carrying Admiral Yamamoto, Japan's naval commander and the planner of the Pearl Harbor attack. His death shattered Japanese morale—for a time.

NIMITZ IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC Admiral Nimitz's advance through the central Pacific had as its first target two tiny islands, Makin (Butaritari) and Tarawa. After advance bombing raids, a fleet of 200 ships delivered infantry and marines at dawn on November 20, 1943. Makin, where the Japanese had only a small force, was soon cleared. Tarawa, however, was one of the most heavily protected islands in the Pacific. There, nearly 1,000 American soldiers, sailors, and marines lost their lives rooting out Japanese soldiers who refused to surrender.

Invasion of the Marshall Islands, the next step up the ladder to Tokyo, began on January 31, 1944. American forces took Saipan, in the Marianas, on June 15, bringing the new American B-29 bombers within striking distance of Japan itself. In the Battle of the Philippine Sea, fought mostly in the air on June 19–20, 1944, the Japanese lost 3 more aircraft carriers, 2 submarines, and over 300 planes. The battle secured the Marianas, and soon B-29s were winging their way from Saipan to bomb the Japanese homeland. Defeat in the Marianas convinced General Tōjō that the war was lost. On July 18, 1944, he and his entire cabinet resigned.



MacArthur's triumphant return

General Douglas MacArthur (center) theatrically coming ashore at the island of Leyte in the Philippines, October 1944.

THE BATTLE OF LEYTE GULF With New Guinea and the Mariana Islands all but conquered, President Roosevelt met with General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz in Honolulu on July 27–28, 1944. They decided next to liberate the Philippine Islands from Japanese control. MacArthur's forces made their move into the Philippines on October 20, landing first on the island of Leyte. Wading ashore behind the first troops, the pompous general issued an emotional announcement: "People of the Philippines: I have returned. . . Rally to me. . . Let no heart be faint."

The Japanese, knowing that the loss of the Philippines would cut them off from the essential raw materials of the East Indies, brought in fleets from three directions. The three encounters that resulted on October 25, 1944, came to be known collectively as the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval engagement in history. The Japanese lost most of their remaining sea power and the ability to defend the Philippines. The battle also brought the first of the suicide attacks as Japanese pilots crash-dived into American carriers, sinking one and seriously damaging others. The "kamikaze" units, named for the "divine wind" that centuries before was believed to have saved Japan from a Mongol invasion, inflicted considerable damage.

A GRINDING WAR AGAINST JAPAN The sobering thought that the defeat of Japan remained to be accomplished cast a further pall over the victory celebrations in Europe in the spring of 1945. American forces continued to assault the Japanese Empire in the early months of 1945, but at a heavy cost. While fighting continued in the Philippines, marines invaded Japanese-controlled Iwo Jima Island on February 19, 1945, a speck of volcanic rock 760 miles from Tokyo that was needed as a base for fighter planes escorting bombers over Japan and as a landing strip for disabled B-29 bombers. Nearly six weeks was required to secure an island five miles square from defenders hiding in underground caves. The cost was more than 20,000 American casualties, including nearly 7,000 deaths.

The fight for Okinawa, beginning on Easter Sunday, April 1, was even bloodier. The largest island in the Ryukyu chain, Okinawa was large enough to afford a staging area for the planned invasion of Japan. Assaulting Okinawa would be the largest amphibious operation of the Pacific war, involving some 300,000 troops. The fight raged until late June. An estimated 140,000 Japanese died. Casualties also included about 42,000 Okinawans. When resistance on Okinawa collapsed, the Japanese emperor instructed his new prime minister to seek peace terms, but with conditions that proved unacceptable to the Allies.