

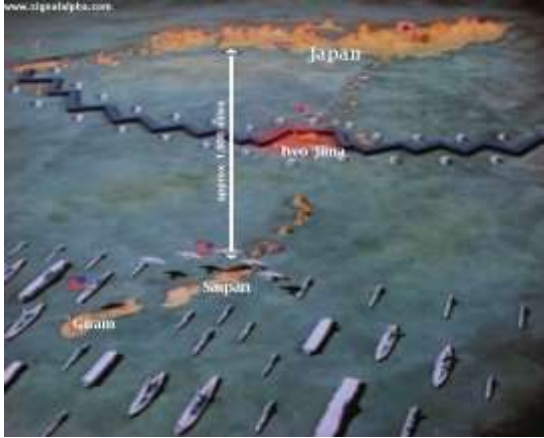
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US History: WWII the Battle of Iwo Jima

The Second World War was an unprecedented catalyst for massive shifts in political, military and economic strength across the entire world but the United States didn't enter direct combat until almost three years into the conflict. The United States entered the war in response to the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and by 1945 the American military was advancing on the Japanese home islands. The only thing the American air force needed to bomb the Japanese into submission was an airfield near them so the Navy began the Battle of Iwo Jima to capture one.



By 1945 the American industrial power allowed the US military to outnumber the Japanese by ten to one and it was advancing on the Japanese home islands every day.

Judging from this image, what is the only thing standing in the way between the American armada and the islands of Japan?

1. What did the United States need to defeat Japan once and for all and how did they plan to do it?

Japan had been on the attack since devastating the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor but they had failed to destroy the American aircraft carriers. In the summer of 1942 the US fleet found the Japanese ships that had attacked Pearl Harbor and sank the entire force in the Battle of Midway. The Japanese lost their aircraft carriers, two battleships, most of their destroyers and all their attack aircraft which meant that the Japanese home islands were finally open to direct attack. The only problem was that the island of Iwo Jima stood in the way and had to be captured first.

The United States sent its naval and marine forces to Iwo Jima in order to set up a base that they could use to bomb the Japanese home islands directly.

What kind of geographic feature was Japan prevented the US forces from marching there and instead forced them to attack them from the sea and air?

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| (1) Island | (3) Canyon |
| (2) Peninsula | (4) Mountain |



2. What did the United States do to the Japanese in the Battle of Midway and what remained between the Americans and Japan afterwards?

The United States chose the island of Iwo Jima as their next target for multiple reasons. The first was that it had a fully-operational airfield large enough for long-range bombers to launch from and attack Japan directly. The second was that Japan's few remaining attack aircraft were based on the island and attacked any American ship that tried to pass it. Finally, the island was native Japanese soil so capturing it would weaken their morale and make them easier to defeat. As a result, the United States started the battle by unleashing a titanic artillery barrage that destroyed every Japanese trench, pillbox and building on the surface of the island.



The United States initiated the battle by firing the main guns of 35 battleships directly at the island which killed every Japanese soldier that didn't find cover underground.

Do you think it was fair for the United States to use their battleships on the island when the Japanese had none to defend it? Why or why not?

3. Why did the United States want to capture Iwo Jima and how did they begin the battle?

The Japanese knew that the United States would assault the island but they didn't have the resources to stop them at the time. Instead they sent one of their best generals, Tadamichi Kuribayashi to Iwo Jima with 21,000 men and told him to hold the island at all costs. Kuribayashi, who had spent time in California as a diplomat for Japan knew how powerful the American military had become and came up with multiple tactics to maximize the defense of the island. The United States responded by assembling a massive invasion force of 5,000 ships and 80,000 marines to attack the island with everything they had.

The United States assaulted the island of Iwo Jima with over 80,000 marines. Many of them were killed in the first two days of fighting on the beaches.

What do you think it was like getting shot at on the beaches of Iwo Jima?



4. How did the Japanese prepare to defend the island? What did the US send to attack it?

With such overwhelming numbers the United States quickly captured the beaches of Iwo Jima but Kuribayashi had been expecting this and had his men fall back into underground bunkers to continue the fight. After securing the beaches the marines advanced on the high ground of Mt. Suribachi on the western edge of the island. The Japanese resisted viscously and bitter fighting broke out all over the mountain. By the morning of the fourth day the marines secured the peak and planted the American flag for all to see. The Japanese continued to fight back however and the battle raged for another four weeks.



The marines planted the American flag on the highest point on Iwo Jima so all the soldiers on the island could see it.

How do you think the Americans on the rest of the island felt when they saw that the high ground had been captured?

5. What did the United States accomplish on the fourth day of the battle and how did the Japanese respond?

With the high ground taken the marines had the advantage and began hunting down the remaining Japanese garrisons across the rest of the island. The Japanese resisted for 36 long, grueling days but by the end of March 1945 Kuribayashi was dead and the rest of his men either surrendered or committed suicide. By May of 1945 the United States had repaired the Iwo Jima airfield and used it to launch daily air raids on the Japanese home islands. Thanks to the efforts of the marines, the United States now had a base to use their B-29 Superfortress bombers to drop firebombs on Tokyo, Edo and Nagasaki every day for five months. Despite their victory and the constant threat of air raids, the Japanese government still refused to surrender and it would take an even more deadly weapon to finally bring the war to an end.

The United States used its new base on Iwo Jima to attack Japan's main two islands of Honshu and Kyushu with the B-29 but the Japanese still refused to surrender.

If you were in charge of Japan would the bombing of your cities convince you to surrender? Why or why not?



6. Which side won the Battle of Iwo Jima and what did they use the island for afterwards?
