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# The Round Tablette

*Founding Editor: James W. Gerber, MD (1951–2009)*

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**Welcome to the first meeting of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table's 31st year.** Tonight's speaker is James D. Hornfischer, author of *The Fleet at Flood Tide* and *Neptune's Inferno*. He will be joined by veterans speaking on the campaign in the central Pacific that led to the final victory over Japan.

The strategy for the Pacific theater was a two pronged approach, one going through New Guinea towards the Philippines under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, and the other at sea in the central Pacific under the command of Admiral Chester A. Nimitz. By the middle of 1944, the Central Pacific campaign came to its defining objective, the Marianas Islands. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Ernest King believed that taking the Marianas would be key to disrupting Japanese lines of communications, providing bases to aid the attacks on Palau and the Philippines, forcing the Imperial Japanese Navy to combine their fleet to enhance the possibility of its destruction, and providing air bases for the newest long-range bombers: the B-29.

Originally colonized by the Spanish, the Marianas archipelago is named after the Spanish queen Mariana of Austria. The Spanish maintained control of the island chain until their loss in the 1898 Spanish-American War to the United States. The United States took over the southern island of Guam, and the Spanish sold the northern islands which included Saipan and Tinian to the Germans. After the German defeat in World War I, the Japanese took over the northern islands as part of the Treaty of Versailles mandate system. A large Japanese population settled on the islands during the inter-war period and produced sugar cane.

The Japanese captured the American colony of Guam in December 1941, part of the same attacks that took place at Pearl Harbor and the Philippines. Because of the logistical nightmare of fighting over a battlefield that was thousands of miles long (the distance from New Guinea to Guam is over 1,200 miles, the distance from Hawaii to Guam is over 3,000 miles), the US

took several years before it was ready to invade the Marianas. That did not mean that American forces were idle, with victories at Midway, Guadalcanal, and New Guinea. In June 1944, the two great amphibious landings of the Second World War would take place on opposite sides of the world. On June 6, 1944, OPERATION OVERLORD would take place on the Normandy coast in France, while on June 15, 1944, OPERATION FORAGER, the land invasion of Saipan began.

On the morning of the invasions the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Marine divisions under the command of Holland "Howling Mad" Smith were able to secure a beachhead on Saipan, and on 16 June they were joined by the Army's 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. As the Americans made steady progress to secure the island, the Japanese had little hope for resupply but were determined to fight to the last man. The Japanese engaged in "banzai attacks" and convinced many civilians, many of Japanese descent, to jump from cliffs committing suicide in fear of the American invaders. Declared secured by July 9, Saipan still had pockets of Japanese fighting in the rocky wooded terrain, and some Japanese units did not surrender until December 1945.

In response to the invasion, the Imperial Japanese Navy, which was surprised by the invasion on Saipan expecting the assault further to the south, combined its forces to attack US Naval forces supporting the invasion. This resulted in the Battle of the Philippine Sea, otherwise known as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" for the high ratio of American to Japanese aviation kills. US Naval Fifth Fleet under the command of Admiral Raymond Spruance, crippled the Japanese carrier fleet in the battle and became the largest carrier versus carrier battle in history.

After securing Saipan, US forces moved quickly securing the other islands in the Marianas chain. Fighting remained, but by the end of August, Guam and Tinian were secured. Once the Marianas were secured, the US forces were only 1300 miles from the Japan and 1600 miles to the Philippines. The US Army Air Forces' new long range B-29 bombers were able to fly from Saipan and Tinian supporting the invasion of the Philippines and bombing the Japanese home islands. Tinian became home to the 509<sup>th</sup> Composite Group under the

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**If you are a veteran, or know a veteran, of one of these campaigns** – contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)

command of Colonel Paul Tibbets. On 6 August 1945, Tibbets took off from Tinian in the B-29, *Enola Gay*, and dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima.

The Marianas campaign, with its three-dimensional fighting, proved to be high water mark for US military power in the Pacific theater. While there would still be hard fighting, after subduing the archipelago, US forces were ensured of ultimate victory.

**FURTHER READINGS:**

- James Hornfischer, *The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).
- Harold J. Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific: The Battle of Saipan* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007).
- Ian Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2016).
- Gordon Rottman & Howard Gerrard, *Saipan and Tinian 1944: Piercing the Japanese Empire* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2004).
- William Craig, *The Fall of Japan: The Final Weeks of World War II in the Pacific* (New York: Open Road Media, 2017).

**Announcements:**

- Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 19 Sept. 2017 – *Sword & Pen: Lew Wallace* - [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)
- St. Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 25 Sept. 2017 – *Picket's Charge* - 715-386-1268 - [rossandhaines@comcast.net](mailto:rossandhaines@comcast.net)
- Cannon Valley CWRT - ? Sept. 2017 – *TBA* – [dnl1.peter-son@gmail.com](mailto:dnl1.peter-son@gmail.com)
- Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 7 Apr. 2018 - [info@tccwrt.com](mailto:info@tccwrt.com)
- Minnesota Military Museum, Camp Ripley, 15000 Hwy 115, Little Falls, MN 56345, 320-616-6050, <http://www.mnmilitarymuseum.org/>
- Minnesota Air Guard Museum - [www.mnangmuseum.org](http://www.mnangmuseum.org) 612-713-2523
- World Without Genocide, 651-695-7621, <http://www.worldwithoutgenocide.org/>
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN, 320-564-6644, Air show - 16 June 2018. <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
- Airshow - Eden Prairie - 14-15 July 2018 [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org) 952-746-6100
- Military History Book Club, Har Mar Barnes & Noble: - Zetter, *Stuxnet and Cyberwar* - 19 Apr. - [sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com](mailto:sdaubenspeck52@gmail.com)
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - [crazyjerry45@hotmail.com](mailto:crazyjerry45@hotmail.com) - 651-338-2717
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - [www.cafm-n.org](http://www.cafm-n.org) 651-455-6942
- Friends of Ft. Snelling, [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)

**We need volunteers to drive our veterans to and from meetings. Please contact Don Patton at cell 612-867-5144 or [coldpatton@yahoo.com](mailto:coldpatton@yahoo.com)**

**Round Table Schedule 2017-2018**

- 2017**
- 12 Oct. First Invasion: Operation TORCH
- 26 Oct. Palawan: POWs of Japan
- 9 Nov. Deutsch Lecture: Origins Grand Alliance
- 14 Dec. Battle of the Bulge
- 2018**
- 11 Jan. Eastern Front: Stalingrad
- 8 Feb. Berlin Airlift
- 8 Mar. American Airpower in World War II
- 22 Mar. OSS Woman v. Imperial Japan
- 12 Apr. Lucian Truscott: Greatest Field CO
- 10 May Marshall Plan: Saving Victory

