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# The Round Tablette

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## Welcome to the second March session of the Dr. Harold C. Deutsch World War II History Round Table.

Tonight's speaker is Chris Hemler, author of *Delivering Destruction*. He will discuss Nimitz's island-hopping strategy that required the seizure of the Marianas to secure the bases needed by the B-29s to deliver destruction to Japan.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the Axis declarations of war on the United States, America was forced to fight a two front war. The intense economic mobilization was only just beginning and it would be better than a year before our forces could be raised, trained, and equipped in the numbers required for global war. The first Allied grand strategic decision, made by British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and President Franklin Roosevelt at the ARCADIA Conference in late December 1941, was that Germany was the greater threat to American interests and was to be the primary focus of Allied and US planning. The "Victory Plan" relegated the Pacific war to step-child status and the Pacific theater planners had to fight their own two front war. One front was in Washington DC to secure the resources essential to carry the fight to the enemy, and the second front was against the Japanese.

The US "War Plan Orange" assumed that the Philippines would be abandoned until the navy could fight its way across the Pacific, taking island bases for fleet support, and fighting a decisive battle with the Imperial Japanese Navy somewhere in the western Pacific. (The IJN similarly planned for a climatic fleet engagement (*Kantai Kessen*) near Japan.) At that point, aerial bombardment and naval blockade would yield a victory without invasion. Unfortunately, the realities of 1942 torpedoed ORANGE and the Europe First strategy. Somewhat ironically, given our then limited resources and need to secure sea lanes to Australia and China, the first offensive was in the Pacific at Guadalcanal. For a variety of good and not so good reasons, the Pacific Area was divided into the Southwest Pacific and the Central Pacific Areas of Operation, commanded by General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz respectively.

After Guadalcanal and the Battle of the Coral Sea, the planners of the Pacific war thus had two avenues of advance on the Home Islands. First, from the south, landing on New Guinea, New Britain, the Philippines and Formosa to provide B-29 bases and ground attack staging areas for bombardment and possible invasion of Japan. The second, taking the islands in the central Pacific, the Gilbert, Marshall, and the Marianas island chains, specifically to take Guam, Saipan and Tinian for the bombers. In both advances, we did not land where the Japanese were strong; instead both advances utilized an "island hopping" strategy, going around and isolating strong outposts, leaving them to starve.

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 (i.e., *decisive battle*), and providing air bases for the B-29 bombing Japan. The Japanese continued their search for a decisive engagement, first in the Battle of the Philippine Sea in June and then in the Battle of Leyte Gulf in October of 1944.

In June 1944, the two great amphibious landings of the Second World War took place on opposite sides of the world. On June 6, 1944, in OPERATION OVERLORD, Allied forces landed on the Normandy coast of France and 9 days later, on June 15, 1944, the land invasion of Saipan, OPERATION FORAGER, began.

On the morning of the invasions the 2nd and 4th Marine divisions under the command of Holland "Howling Mad" Smith secured a beachhead on Saipan, and on 16 June they were joined by the Army's 27th Infantry Division. 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. The Imperial Japanese Navy had expected the assault further to the south and was surprised by the invasion on Saipan. It 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

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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)

carrier fleet in that battle – 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 1944, 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 Force’s 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 509th Composite Group under the 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 (“in the air, on land, and sea”), 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:**

- Chris, K. Hemler, *Delivering Destruction* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2023).
- James Hornfischer, *The Fleet at Flood Tide: America at Total War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 2016).
- Ian Toll, *The Conquering Tide: War in the Pacific Islands, 1942-1944* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 2016).
- Sharon Tosi Lacey, *Pacific Blitzkrieg: World War II in the Central Pacific* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2013).
- John McManus, *Fire and Fortitude: The US Army in the Pacific War, 1941-1945* (New York: Dutton Caliber, 2019).
- Craig Symonds, *Nimitz at War: Command Leadership from Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay* (Oxford University Press, 2022).
- Craig Symonds, *World War II at Sea: a Global History* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
- Philipps Payson O’Brien, *How The War Was Won: Air-Sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

**Announcements:**

- Civil War Symposium – 12 Apr. 2025, *Vicksburg and the Mississippi* – [www.tccwrt.com](http://www.tccwrt.com) – e-mail: [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/>.
- 8th AF Historical Society of MN, KC Hall Bloomington, 2nd & 4th Wednesdays at 1100. <https://www.8thmn.org>.
- Friends of Ft. Snelling - [www.fortsnelling.org](http://www.fortsnelling.org)
- Fagen Fighters WWII Museum, Granite Falls, MN - Air show – TBA 2025 – 320-564-6644 <http://www.fagenfighterswwiimuseum.org>.
- Wings of the North Airshow - Eden Prairie –TBA 2025 - Flying Cloud Airport - 952-746-6100 - [www.wotn.org](http://www.wotn.org)
- Alliance Française 612-332-0436 - [www.afmisp.org](http://www.afmisp.org)
- Friends of the National WW II Memorial – <http://www.wwiimemorialfriends.org.US>
- Pittsburg Veterans Breakfast Club - <http://www.vbcphg.org>.

- Western Naval Historical Association – [info@wnha.net](mailto:info@wnha.net)
- WWII Discussion Forum – [www.wwiidf.org](http://www.wwiidf.org)
- History Happy Hour** - Sundays, 3 pm - [www.historyhappyhour.com](http://www.historyhappyhour.com)
- CAF - Commemorative Air Force - 651-455-6942 - [www.cafmn.org](http://www.cafmn.org)
- Honor Flight - Jerry Kyser - 651-338-2717 - [jkysr45@gmail.com](mailto:jkysr45@gmail.com)

**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 2024–2025**

- 8 Apr. 11th Airborne Division
- 22 Apr. **Eighth Air Force (new)**
- 13 May Patton’s Tactician: War and Occupation

**The Round Table is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. We would greatly appreciate your supporting the HCDWW2HRT.**



Japanese map of the Pacific War, from WWII Multimedia Database



Nimitz and MacArthur discuss Pacific war strategy, 27 March 1944, at MacArthur’s Brisbane headquarters. US Army Signal Corps, NARA.



B-17 and B-24 ranges in 1945. B-29 range not shown. From the MacArthur Memorial, Norfolk, VA.