MARIANA ISLANDS CAMPAIGN: SAIPAN, GUAM & TINIAN

DATE: JUNE 15 – AUGUST 10 1944

Belligerents

The Mariana Islands are made up of the islands of Saipan, Tinian, Aguijan, Rota, and much to the soreness of the American military, the island of Guam. Admiral Chester Nimitz launched Operation Forager to reclaim Guam and to defeat the Japanese garrisons on these islands. From the airfields on the Mariana Islands, future operations against the Philippines, Taiwan, and even the Japanese home islands would be able to be supported from the skies.

SAIPAN: JUNE 15 – JULY 09 1944

The island of Saipan was defended by two officers of equal rank. Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saito represented the Army, while Vice Admiral Chuichi Nagumo represented the Navy. Nagumo was a former victorious commander, but had since lost face after the major defeat at Midway; the Admiral was demoted to lead this local flotilla. Bearing with his shame, Nagumo allowed Saito to make all the important command decisions. Saito had his own 43rd division under his charge, as well as a mixed brigade, the 47th Independent, supported by various Army and Navy personnel. This group of defenders was twice the size reported by American intelligence; when the Americans came ashore, resistance was much greater than they had anticipated. Fortunately, as the Americans would later find out, most of the supplies Saito's garrison badly needed were taken away from him, thanks to the American submarine campaign and air superiority. The Japanese transport ships simply could not reach the Marianas in one piece.

Regardless, Saito, as well as Tokyo, knew the importance of the Mariana Islands. From here, 1,100 miles south of Tokyo, the new American B-29 Super Fortress bombers could reach the Japanese Home Islands and would have enough fuel for the return trip. Tokyo was starting to feel the pressure after earlier defeats in the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, the Gilbert Islands, and the Marshall Islands.
The pre-landing preparations came like a thunderclap for the Japanese garrison. On Jun 13 1944, seven American battleships fired 15,000 shells at Saipan, though with little effectiveness. The next day, Rear Admirals Jesse Oldendorf and Walden Ainsworth bombarded Saipan and Tinian with their bombardment groups. Meanwhile, Navy divers formed Underwater Demolition Teams and scouted out planned landing beaches for the impending invasion, taking out any mines and tank traps as they were found.

D-Day on Saipan was June 15 1944. The US 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions under the command of Lieutenant General Holland Smith landed 8,000 men in 20 minutes despite heavy fire from Japanese positions, some as far as three miles away. The beachhead was secured the following day after suffering a 10% casualty rate, at which point a signal was sent to Major General Ralph C. Smith's 27th Army Division to begin landing operations.

Piecemeal Japanese counterattacks didn’t break the defensive perimeter set up by the American Marines, allowing the Army to land more troops behind them. By the fourth day, the Japanese had retreated into the treacherous terrain of Saipan, hoping to use the tough ground to their advantage. Holland Smith ordered an advance northward on Jun 23, with the Marines advancing on the flanks and the 27th Army Division in the center.
After Mount Tipo Pale was taken the next obstacle was Mount Tapotchau. By this time, Smith’s 27th Army soldiers were being slowed both by Japanese defenses and a difference in fighting mentality. Marines, by training, advanced aggressively; Army soldiers, contrastingly, aimed for a well-rounded advance, digging in at regular intervals to ensure their supplies could catch up and their flanks were well-guarded. This difference in mentality resulted in a deep U-shaped line, with the Marines far ahead of the center, and this angered Holland Smith. Smith, who had overall tactical command on the island, submitted a request to remove Ralph Smith to Admirals Richmond Turner and Raymond Spruance. The repercussions of this were felt all the way back to Washington. "We've had more experience in handling troops than you've had, and yet you dare remove one of my generals! You Marines are nothing but a bunch of beach runners anyway", exclaimed General George Marshall’s representative in the theater. "What do you know about land warfare?" Holland Smith won the political game and succeeded in replacing the Army commander.

By Jul 5, despite the bitter US military political battles, the remaining Japanese troops were driven to the northern tip of the island. With their backs to the cliff, the largest banzai charge of the Pacific war took place. 3,000 Japanese troops charged the advancing American line and broke through the western flank, but they were ultimately stopped by the Marines. While the banzai charge was taking place, Lieutenant General Saito and Vice Admiral Nagumo, after giving orders for the suicide charge, both committed suicide in their respective command bunkers.

When the Americans declared the island secured four days later, Holland Smith’s men counted over 23,000 Japanese troops killed. Holland Smith lost 3,426 men in comparison. Unfortunately, this was not the end of major bloodshed on Saipan. Encouraged by Tokyo, thousands of Japanese civilians on Saipan committed mass suicide to avoid the shame of being ruled by the conquering Americans. Men dived off cliffs into the shark-infested waters, and mothers threw their babies against rock walls before jumping into the water to join their husbands and brothers. Even children committed suicide, holding on to grenades as they jumped from the cliffs. Nearly 8,000 civilians on Saipan were part of this mass suicide. The Americans watched on in absolute horror but were finally able to stop the madness by convincing the civilians that they would receive fair treatment via loudspeakers. After the battle, the two sites where the mass suicides took place were named Banzai Cliff and Suicide Cliff as memorials to these fallen civilians.
THE BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINE SEA: JUNE 19 - 20 1944

By mid-1944, the Mitsubishi Type 00 fighters, better known as "Zeros", were no longer on the cutting edge of fighter design. By this time, the United States was out-producing the Axis in war machinery, and their new F6F Hellcat was better armored and better suited to dog fighting than the Zeros of their Japanese counterparts. Meanwhile, the pilot talent in the Japanese Navy was running dangerously short, and it was becoming commonplace for combat pilots to have less than 50 hours of flight training.

On Jun 18, as US Marines secured the beachhead at Saipan for an Army landing, search planes from Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa's fleet spotted the American fleet. Ozawa decided to forgo the opportunity for a surprise attack, despite the fact that he had aircraft range advantage. He was concerned that his fighter pilots were not capable of making safe night landings on carrier flight decks. This decision proved to be fatal in hindsight: by the time he launched his fighter attacks, the Americans were already alerted to Ozawa's presence, and were prepared for such an attack. Admiral Spruance launched a strike against Guam to pin down the Japanese aircraft based there, as well as to damage its airfields so that the eventual Ozawa attack would not be able to utilize Guam.

Ozawa's ships were operating in two groups one hundred miles apart from each other. The fore group had three carriers, and the rear six, each group escorted by battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. The US fleet's 11 carriers were broken up to four groups.

The battle started shortly after 10 am on Jun 19 with the first wave of 60 Japanese planes attacking the US fleet. 42 planes were shot down, scoring only one bomb hit on USS South Dakota. The second wave consisted of 128 planes; 97 of them were lost without causing any significant damage to the American ships. Warrant Officer Sakio Komatsu's name must be mentioned for his bravery: immediately after taking off from the Taiho, he spotted a torpedo swimming straight for his aircraft carrier. He plunged his plane into the ocean, intercepting the torpedo with his fighter. His self-sacrifice saved his carrier - for the moment. The 47 planes in the third attack wave had a better casualty rate, losing only 7, but they didn't make it past the US escort ships, let alone reach the aircraft carriers. 82 planes were launched in the fourth attack wave; 54 of them were shot down.
Between Ozawa's attacks on the American fleet and the attacks on Guam and Rota, 429 Japanese planes in total were shot down. The Americans lost 29. This battle is commonly referred to as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot". Many historians agree that this event marked the end of Japanese naval air power. Future events would force Japan to rely mainly on the guns of its battleships and cruisers.

The torpedo that Warrant Officer Komatsu sacrificed himself to save the Taiho was fired from USS Albacore, a US submarine which among others, closed in on the Japanese carriers during the confusion of battle. Moments after Komatsu's noble self-sacrifice, the Albacore launched another torpedo. The torpedo time struck the Taiho's starboard side, triggering an internal explosion that sank the ship. Another submarine, USS Cavalla, fired six torpedoes into the group, sinking the Shokaku after three of the 6 hit the Pearl Harbor veteran and caused a tremendous explosion. Ozawa abandoned his burning flagship, the Taiho, and ordered all ships to withdraw. After losing over 400 pilots and then two precious carriers, Ozawa’s only consolation was that what was left of his fleet managed to escape American detection for two days, allowing him to regroup.

This small piece of luck would end however, as a scout plane from the USS Enterprise found the Japanese fleet on Jun 21, leading to the launch of 216 planes against what remained of Ozawa's fleet. The Japanese fleet carrier Hiyo was struck by torpedoes and sunk, and the carriers Zuikaku and Chiyoda and the battleship Haruna were damaged. Although these 216 planes would return later than scheduled and 80 were lost in risky night time carrier landings, this attack would be marked as one of the most effective attacks against enemy ships in the entire war yet. By the time Ozawa had made his way back to Okinawa, he counted only 35 carrier aircraft left in his fleet.

GUAM: JULY 21 – AUGUST 10 1944

Guam, gained by the United States at the conclusion of the Spanish-American War in 1898, was the largest island in the Marianas and it was an important American base. Taken by the Japanese days after the Pearl Harbor attack in 1941, it was originally planned to be attacked by US forces on Jun 15, but delays with the operations on Saipan and the Japanese naval attack delayed the Guam landings by more than a month. During the delay, the US Navy bombarded Guam. 28,761 heavy shells were fired on the island, devastating the Guam defenses and potentially saved thousands of lives among the landing troops. The Japanese intra-island radios were demolished, and half of their 8-inch coastal batteries were disabled or destroyed. Unfortunately, the Guam capital city of Agana was also leveled as a result of an earlier B-24 aerial bombardment and this pre-invasion naval bombardment.

The initial landing took place on Jul 21 on Guam's northwestern beaches, spearheaded by the 3rd Marine Division. At the initial landing Japanese defenders sank 20 LVTs (Landing Vehicles, Tracked), however by nightfall the Marines and the 77th Infantry Division, which landed immediately after the Marines, were able to secure a beachhead nearly two kilometers deep. The Japanese commander, General Takeshi Takashina ordered his garrison of 19,000 to launch counterattacks, several of which broke through American lines but proved to be largely ineffective. One such counterattack took place on the Orote Peninsula, where Japanese troops had worked themselves into a frenzy with sake (Orote had been Japan's spirits depot for the entire region) before charging viciously into the American lines. "Within the lines there were many instances when I observed Japanese and Marines lying side by side, which was mute evidence of the violence
of the last assault”, observed one American. At Chonito Cliff, the Japanese counterattack was so fierce that the Marines ran out of ammunition. They were only able to hold ground and then drive back the enemy after the Japanese troops found themselves in a state of disarray after the deaths of several of their own officers.

General Takashina was killed in action during the counterattacks, and was succeeded by Lieutenant General Hideyoshi Obata. With food and ammunition running dangerously low, Obata retreated into the southern mountainous regions of Guam. The Marines returned to the old US Marine parade ground on Jul 29, and on Aug 10 the island was declared secured with most Japanese defenders killed. Several Japanese soldiers hid in the jungles in the hopes of conducting guerrilla warfare.

Resistance lasted 17 weeks after Japan had surrendered. On Dec 8 1945, three US Marines were ambushed and killed by some of these soldiers. On Jan 24 1972, Sergeant Shoichi Yokoi was discovered by Guam residents; he refused to believe that Japan had surrendered to the Allies. He had survived 27 years in the mountains on a diet of fruits, coconuts, and the occasional fish. He returned to Japan a national hero, but deeply felt survivor’s guilt. "It is with much embarrassment that I have returned alive," he said.
TINIAN: JULY 24 – AUGUST 02 1944

The island of Tinian, five miles south of Saipan, was characterized by its sugar plantations. On Jul 24, the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions landed with supportive fire from artillery on Saipan and from ships at sea. Immediately upon the capture of Ushi Point airfield on Jul 26, construction crews were brought in to begin extending the airfield to accommodate B-29 bombers. Tinian made weapons history as it was where the first napalm bomb was used, and where the world’s first atomic bombs, Fat Man and Little Boy, would be loaded onto B-29 bombers bound for Hiroshima and Nagasaki little more than a year after this battle.

Tinian was secured on Aug 2 after more than a week of heavy fighting. However, many Japanese soldiers hid in the jungles and outlying small islands, and did not surrender until much later. A small handful of civilians on Tinian committed suicide upon sighting American troops, just as they had done on Saipan, but on a much smaller scale.

CONCLUSION OF THE MARIANAS CAMPAIGN

Watching from the sidelines, Germany’s naval attaché to Tokyo noted the change in psyche among top ranks in the IGHQ immediately after the American landings on Saipan: "Saipan was really understood to be a matter of life and death. About that time they began telling the people the truth about the war. They began preparing them for whatever must happen. Before that they had been doing nothing but fooling the people."
Vice Admiral Shigeyoshi Miwa, the last commander of the Sixth Fleet, put it very bluntly, "Our war was lost with the loss of Saipan.... The loss of Saipan meant the Americans could cut off our shipping and attack our homeland...."

Japanese pride was greatly hurt by the loss of the Marianas, particularly the fortress of Saipan which had been Japanese territory before the Pacific War broke out. As Emperor Hirohito noted, "The Japanese people in general had placed much expectation on Saipan. They had thought that Saipan was heavily fortified and heavily defended, but this proved otherwise, and the consequences greatly shocked the Japanese people." With the shame of Americans landing on Saipan, Prime Minister General Tojo was starting to see signs of his commanders losing confidence in him. Only Jul 22 he resigned as Japanese Prime Minister and was succeeded by General Kuniaki Koiso.

**EPILOGUE**

During the night of 9-10 Mar 1945, the residents of Tokyo felt the full impact of the Americans making use of the Marianas for their war effort. 325 B-29 bombers dispatched from the Marianas loaded with E-46 incendiary clusters, magnesium bombs, white phosphorus bombs, and napalm flew over Japan; 279 of them targeted Tokyo. Flying over Tokyo during a three-hour window their 1,665 tons of bombs destroyed 267,171 buildings and killed 83,793 civilians. Alice Bowman, an Australian nurse who was imprisoned in Totsuka POW camp some distance outside of Tokyo recalled: "Flames were caught in the swirling winds and danced upward, turning into fireballs feverishly feeding upon themselves. Explosions tortured the air and the shocking scene took on the spectacle of a volcano in violent eruption." The destruction was also observed from high above; pilots in later waves of bombers reported the stench of burning flesh as they flew over the city. Unfortunately, although it was to be the largest carpet bombing raid against Japanese cities for the remainder of the war, it was only the start of a program aimed at bombing Japan into submission. Most of these bombing missions were to be launched from the airfields in the Mariana Islands.

![MEMOIR '44](image)

**M’44 SCENARIOS FOR THE MARIANA ISLANDS CAMPAIGN**

The Mariana Islands Campaign includes 23 scenarios, including 2 Breakthrough (BT) maps. These scenarios chronicle the major engagements that took place on the islands of Saipan, Guam and Tinian, and include only the best available in the Scenarios from the Front (SFTF) files section on the DoW website, as well as 3 official scenarios by Richard Borg and Jacques “jdrommel” David.

No campaign rules are included; not all M’44 players have access to the Campaign books. Instead, simply tally up the number of medals won in each scenario after playing both sides. This campaign is broken down into 3 smaller campaigns; one for each island. Medal tally tables for each are included below, as well as a final medal tally table. Imperial Japanese Army rules are in force for all scenarios.

**PART 1: SAIPAN**

1. JUN 15: Invasion of Saipan
2. JUN 15 – JUN 16: Japanese Counter Attack
3. JUN 16: The Armored Counter Attack of General Saito
4. JUN 16 – JUN 18: The 27th Infantry – Aslito Airfield
5. JUN 21 – JUL 05: Battle of Mount Tapotchau **
6. JUL 05: Hell’s Pocket
7. JUL 07: Last Banzai Charge
8. JUL 08: The US Begins Mopping Up

**Scenario notes:**

1. Battle of Mount Tapotchau: place badges on each of the 6 US Marine units to distinguish them from the 27th Infantry Division.
There are a total of 102 medals for the 8 standard scenarios.

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<tr>
<th>SCENARIO (+ total medal count)</th>
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<td>1. Invasion of Saipan (16)</td>
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<td>2. Japanese Counter Attack (12)</td>
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<td>3. Saito’s Armored Counter Attack (16)</td>
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<td>4. 27th Infantry – Aslito Airfield (12)</td>
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<td>5. Battle of Mount Tapotchau (12)</td>
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<td>7. Last Banzai Charge (12)</td>
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<td>8. The US Begins Mopping Up (10)</td>
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**TOTAL MEDAL TALLY**

**PART 2: GUAM**

1. JUL 21: Guam Landings
2. JUL 21: Landing on Yellow Beach
3. JUL 21: Asan Beachhead
4. JUL 21: Southern Agat Beaches
5. JUL 21: The Battle of Guam BT
6. JUL 23: Banzai Attack
7. JUL 25: Japanese Counter Attack
8. JUL 25: Orote Peninsula **
9. JUL 28 – AUG 02: Northern Offensive BT **
10. JUL 31: Northern Chase
11. JUL 31 – AUG 02: Final Battle

**Scenario notes:**

1. Orote Peninsula: if the Allies reach the airfield before the Japanese player has taken 6 medals, the Japanese player scores 0 medals.
2. Northern Offensive BT: The map locations text is out of alignment. Mount Barrigada is the town hex with the permanent Victory medal.

There are a total of 142 medals if all scenarios are played and 106 medals if only the standard scenarios are played.

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<td>2. Landing on Yellow Beach (14)</td>
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<td>3. Asan Beachhead (11)</td>
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<td>4. Southern Agat Beaches (12)</td>
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<td>5. The Battle of Guam (BT) (24)</td>
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<td>6. Banzai Attack (12)</td>
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<td>7. Japanese Counter Attack (12)</td>
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<td>11. Final Battle (12)</td>
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**TOTAL MEDAL TALLY**
PART 3: TINIAN

1. JUL 24: Landing at Tinian
2. JUL 24 – JUL 25: Japanese Counter Attack
3. JUL 26 – JUL 28: Consolidation **
4. JUL 31: Tinian Island

** Scenario notes:

1. Consolidation: do not be confused by the scenario name or the dates. This is indeed a Tinian scenario.

There are a total of 48 medals for the 4 standard scenarios.

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<td>4. Tinian Island (12)</td>
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TOTAL MEDAL TALLY

There are a grand total of 292 medals if all scenarios are played, and 256 medals without the 2 Breakthrough maps.

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<th>MARIANA ISLANDS CAMPAIGN</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Saipan</td>
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<td>2. Guam</td>
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<td>3. Tinian</td>
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FINAL MEDAL TALLY

There is 1 additional official M’44 scenario that is not included in this Campaign booklet that you may wish to include if you have access to it:

1. Orote Peninsula: Campaign Book Volume 2

Acknowledgments to the authors of the scenarios that make up this Mariana Islands Campaign compilation:

Richard Borg kevusmc yangtze
jdrommel secret_strategem 50th
hester24 player guy THE Scribe

This Mariana Islands Campaign booklet was compiled by Semba