

Photo: IWM

Background to the sacrifices of a generation

for the 75th anniversary of
Victory over Japan Day

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The Pacific War

Distance is a great determinant in what matters to people. A serious local crime – such as murder – is far more important to us if it happens near where we live (our village, town or county) than if it happens at the other end of the British Isles.

So too with the two spheres of warfare in WWII – Europe and the Pacific. The pre-war manoeuvrings on the Continent were more immediate, recognisable and understandable than not dissimilar manoeuvrings on the other side of the world. And once war broke out in 1939, the nation's interest and attention was on the war in Europe. It was right on our doorstep and the Far East and the Pacific, where nothing of similar note was happening seemed very far away.

The invasion of Poland, the declaration of war, the "Phoney War" and then the blitzkrieg in early 1940, which meant the British army faced an existential threat on the harbour and mole at Dunkirk, were preludes to the real threat of invasion, the Battle of Britain and the bombing Blitz. The war in Europe was lapping at our shores.

No doubt many families at the time were thankful that relatives or friends were serving in India or the Far East, and not facing the Nazi war machine on a daily or often nightly basis.

It would take more than two years for Japan to enter the war by which time the nation was familiar with the pattern of the European conflict. A familiarity that continues to this day.

This is much less the case with the war on the other side of the world. This unfamiliarity runs from the nature of the enemy, the reasons for war, the run up to it, the British forces involved and the battles that took place on land, sea and air.

In a modest way we try to rectify this in this booklet.

Introduction

This booklet has been written as a companion volume to the one published by the Bishop's Waltham Society in May 2020 to coincide with VE day. They are both designed to explain why "Victory in Europe Day" and then "Victory over Japan Day" were so important to so many in 1945.

Both are being published electronically by the Society on its website at www.bishopswalthamsociety.org.uk/ in collaboration with Bishop's Waltham Museum who have a 'virtual' exhibition about the war at a local level on their website at www.bishopswalthammuseum.com.

In addition, the BW Society has just published a 28-page booklet, compiled by Trish Simpson-Davis, entitled "Around Bishop's Waltham during in the Second World War", based on the Oral History undertaken by the Museum Trust. It is priced at £5.00 and is widely available at retail outlets in the area and to order direct on our website.

The Second World War

WWII is deemed to have lasted from 3rd September 1939 to 15th August 1945. However in reality it was a war of two parts. A war in Europe that lasted from September 1939 until May 1945 (nearly six years) and a war in the Pacific that lasted from December 1941 until August 1945 (less than four years). Though both were fought between the so-named Allied and Axis forces, two of the main adversaries, the United States and Japan, did not declare war or actively engage in the war until the end of 1941.

Britain, its dominions, colonies and dependencies were at war for the entire period – as had been the case in the First World War. However WWI was largely fought on the European continent.

WWII was, after 1941, fought around the globe and whilst Britain was able to call on its Empire for help in terms of men and resources during both world wars, this time the situation was different. The

sprawling empire, “on which the sun never sets” and shown in pink on maps of the time, was suddenly also a defensive liability. If Japan chose to enter the war on the side of its Axis partners, Germany and Italy, then whole areas of Asia – from Hong Kong to Singapore and from Burma to India itself – would be under threat. The Free French faced the same problem with their possessions in Indo-China, as did the Dutch government-in-exile in the East Indies.

After the extraordinarily rapid defeat of the Belgian, Dutch and French armies in May-June 1940, both the hasty withdrawal of the British Army from Dunkirk in May 1940 and the “Battle of Britain” fought in the skies over the summer were absolutely critical to Britain’s survival.

As France fell, Italy threw in its lot with Hitler in June 1940, which made the Mediterranean a more dangerous place for British forces to operate. However Japan remained neutral. It is not difficult to speculate what would have happened to British possessions in the Far East if Japan had followed Italy’s example. Britain was barely able to defend itself, let alone project any reinforcements to the other side of the world.

DEAR READER

Most of us know little of Japan’s history. This next section describes how the country emerged from a closed feudal system in the mid-1800s and yet within less than a century was able to build an empire and make war against the United States. If you would like to know more, please read on. If you want to move onto the outbreak of war, please go to **The Route to War** on page 7.

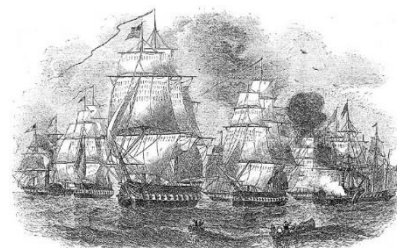
Japan Emerges

Japan is a collection of islands that form a nation state with a long history. Not unlike the United Kingdom.

From a European perspective, it was “discovered” by Dutch and English

seafarers in the 16th century. Despite its deeply embedded culture and class system, the country was initially keen to adopt and adapt new technologies – especially the gun. Not only did they start to manufacture guns, but made significant technological developments. So much so that by 1600 Japan had “more and better guns than any country in the world”¹. But the powerful class of Samurai regarded the sword as a symbol of their class and as works of art. Guns could be used by hurriedly trained peasants and thus presented a direct threat to the Japanese class system. So, over a short period of years Japan abandoned the gun and turned inward on itself under the Tokugawa Shogunate.

Under the Shogunate its capital Edo (modern day Tokyo) had a population in the mid-18th century of more than one million – one of the most populous cities in the world at the time – but life was feudal. This self-isolation lasted for more than 200 years and was only broken by the arrival in 1854 of an American fleet armed to the teeth with guns demanding that Japan open up for trade. To put this isolation in context, it lasts the same time period between the Elizabethan and Victorian eras in Britain.



The Tokugawa Shogunate fell and what is known as the Meiji Restoration took place with the Emperor of Japan effectively returned to an absolute monarchy. The transformation of Japan to a modern industrial state began.

Industrialisation

The rapid industrialisation that Japan achieved in the 50 year period from the 1860s to 1910 was founded on iron and steel, shipbuilding and coal mining, particularly to meet defence needs. Initially it was achieved by blending local craft skills with Western textbooks but this was rarely successful. So the next

¹ “Guns, Germs and Steel”; Jared Diamond, Vintage Press, 1998

phase involved the importation of Western technology and the expertise to operate it. The Japanese sent delegations and students around the world to learn and assimilate Western arts and sciences, with the intention of making Japan an equal to the Western powers. From this grew full-blown local industrialisation achieved with newly acquired Japanese expertise adapting Western technology to local needs and local materials, all organised by local engineers and supervisors.

Flexing its new muscles

This is considered to be the first successful transfer of Western industrialization to a non-Western nation. It enabled Japan to challenge China's predominance in the area for the first time. In 1895 tensions over Korea between the Chinese Qing Dynasty and the Japanese Imperial government reached a crisis point and eventually Japan invaded the country to counteract Chinese troop movements. The first Sino-Japanese War began.

All outside observers believed China would overwhelm the Japanese. But that was not to be the case. After more than six months of unbroken successes by Japanese land and naval forces, the Qing government sued for peace in February 1895. As part of the treaty, Japan took possession of Formosa (the island off the coast of China now known as Taiwan) and Korea became a co-protectorate of China and Japan.



A Punch cartoon of the time expresses surprise that small Japan could beat huge China

A Western Ally



For much of the 19th century Britain was a dominant world power and, as such, sought to avoid entanglement in the endless round of treaties that aligned groups of European and other nations with each other. It is a remarkable fact that after the Battle of Waterloo (in 1815) no British soldier died in combat on Continental Europe until 1914. The latter phase of this period became known as the "Splendid Isolation".

However by the turn of the century Britain was surrounded by growing military powers who had played "catch-up". To the surprise of others, in 1902, it broke its isolation by signing a bilateral treaty with none other than Japan! A growing naval and military force on the other side of the world. A force to be reckoned with.

In 1904 the Eastern expansionist policies of the Russian Empire under Tsar Nicholas II (for instance the occupation of Manchuria in 1900) met the growing ambitions of Japan in both Korea and Manchuria. What followed was a short hard-fought war from February 1904 to September 1905. Russia had one of the largest armies in the world and a powerful navy. Few doubted that Russia would prevail.



But Japan broke international etiquette by attacking the Russian Eastern Fleet at Port Arthur before declaring war (as it did later to the US at Pearl Harbour). This left the Tsar, who had been advised

Japan wouldn't dare go to war, "almost incredulous".

By April 1904 Japan had invaded and occupied Korea and they then pushed on into Manchuria (see map above). Russia suffered multiple defeats at the hands of the Japanese army, but Tsar Nicholas II decided to send the Russian Baltic Fleet around the world to confront Japan. At the decisive battle of Tsushima in the straits between Korea and Japan, Russia's Baltic fleet was effectively destroyed. Shortly thereafter Russia, a world power, sued for peace. Japan then forced the Korean Government into a treaty that made it a protectorate of Japan thus removing Korea's sovereignty.

Expansionist policies

Japan was now a recognised power on the world stage and the United States played a big role in arranging the treaty between Russia and Japan. Japan then set about creating its own empire of colonies.

In 1905 it signed the Taft-Katsura Agreement with the United States, which confirmed Hawaii and the Philippines as American while the US acknowledged Japanese partial control of Korea.

In 1910 Japan annexed Korea. And then in 1914 Japan entered WWI on the side of the allies and sent a naval fleet half way round the world to the Mediterranean to protect British and French shipping.

In the Pacific, Japanese forces alongside British and Indian soldiers attacked German possessions in the area. These included the Germany Colony in China and the groups of Pacific Islands, including the Marshall Islands, which Germany had colonised as well as German New Guinea. German colonial troops surrendered on 7th November 1914 and Japan took over the German holdings and colonies.

In 1915 Japan issued a set of demands (the Twenty-One Demands) to the Chinese government. These demands included access to Inner Mongolia for raw materials, as a manufacturing site,

and as a strategic buffer against Russian encroachment in Korea and Japanese control of the Han-Ye-Ping mining and metallurgical complex in central China. But the most aggressive group of demands was that Japanese advisors should take effective control of China's finance and police. Japan would also be empowered to build three major railways in China.

The latter group of demands were dropped but the rest accepted by China under threat of a 48-hour invasion ultimatum. This may be seen as a turning point in Anglo-American relationships with Japan. The US expressed strongly negative reactions to some of the demands and Japan's closest ally, Britain, was deeply concerned by Japan's overbearing, bullying approach to diplomacy.

After the fall of the Tsar in 1917, the new Bolshevik government signed a separate peace treaty with Germany and civil war in Russia broke out. In the ensuing chaos the United States put together a joint Allied force consisting of American, French, British and Japanese troops to occupy Russian Siberia in 1918. Part of US thinking was to stop Japan invading and taking Siberia. Japan refused to work under a unified command and provided a force of 70,000 with every intention of holding on to resource-rich parts of Siberia. But when the force pulled-out in 1920, intense US and British diplomatic pressure forced the Japanese to withdraw too.

After the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 China became a republic but in the power struggles that followed much of the country fell under the control of local warlords while a weak government ruled from Beijing. In 1921 an increasingly bitter power struggle began between the ruling Kuomintang Nationalist Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This turned into civil war in 1927. General Chiang Kai-shek had seized leadership of the KMT in 1926 and set about bringing Chinese warlords to heel. In 1928 he took Beijing and soon much of eastern China was under KMT control. The central government, based in Nanjing, rapidly received international

recognition as the sole legitimate government of China. But Mao Zedong had formed the Chinese Red Army and debilitating civil war continued.

In the 1920s, many influential Japanese pointed to the apparent decline of Europe as a world power, and they increasingly saw Japan as the natural leader for all of East Asia. But they also recognised that the colonial powers, especially Britain, the United States, the Netherlands and France, would deliberately block Japan's aspirations, particularly as far as China was concerned.

As if to confirm this belief, in 1923 the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was terminated by the UK under strong US pressure. Japanese opinion was deeply insulted by what was seen as a racial act. Many scholars see this breach as an early cause of WWII. And, as a result, under the slogan "Asia for the Asians" Japan began fomenting anti-colonial sentiment in India and Southeast Asia.

Japan finally seized control of Manchuria in 1931 despite the strong objections of

the League of Nations, Britain and especially the United States. As a result Japan left the League of Nations.

This direct invasion of China and the setting up of a puppet state called Manchukuo is seen by some as the real start of WWII. Japanese army-owned corporations turned the area, rich in natural resources and labour, into a powerful material support machine for the Japanese Army.

In 1936 Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany. Effectively this was an alliance against the Soviet Union by powerful states at each end of Russia.

In early July 1937 Japanese and Chinese forces clashed close to the (Japanese occupied) Manchurian border just north of Beijing. Despite strong American protests this escalated in days into the second Sino-Japanese War which would become a tripartite war between the Chinese KMT Nationalist Army, the Chinese Red Army and the Imperial Japanese forces. It would last from 1937 to 1945.



Japanese Empire in 1939/40 showing dates of acquisition

Bamse

Over a two-year period Japan pushed into mainland China occupying major cities such as Beijing, Nanjing and Shanghai and taking all its sea ports – thus effectively cutting it off from the world.



Japanese troops enter Beijing (August 1939)

The Route to War

American public and political opinion – including the isolationists - strongly opposed Japan's invasion of China. On the other side, Japanese leaders believed that their deep-rooted Asian civilization gave them a natural right to control East Asia and so refused to negotiate on Western demands that it withdraw from China.

Japanese expansionist policy was, at one level, driven by its sense of historical destiny, but at another level, in a modern industrial – especially military – age it desperately needed the raw materials which it lacked.

Through the 1930s, Japan needed to import such material, none more so than oil for military vehicles, aircraft and warships. 90% of this oil was imported, 80% of it coming from the United States. This overdependence on the US was an important factor in realigning military policies to enable Japan to seize British and Dutch oil wells. For example, the British-Dutch conglomerate Royal Dutch Shell had rich oil reserves in Malaysia and Brunei.

The United States was firmly and almost unanimously committed to defending the integrity of China. In order to force Japan's withdrawal, in July 1940 the US

government passed the Export Control Act to impose increasingly stringent economic sanctions intended to deprive Japan of the oil and steel that it needed to continue its war in China. Further sanctions were threatened. In fact Japan saw it as a blockade to counter Japanese military and economic strength so immediately started to stockpile. By the time the embargo was imposed in July 1941, Japan had stockpiled around 54 million barrels of oil.

Japan also reacted by forging an alliance with Germany and Italy in 1940, known as the Tripartite Pact and the powers that signed became known as the Axis Powers. This simply worsened its relations with the US. In July 1941, the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands froze all Japanese assets and cut off oil shipments.

President Roosevelt also sanctioned the recruitment of American pilots to fly US planes wearing Chinese uniforms from Kunming (the capital of Yunnan province) in China. Nicknamed the "Flying Tigers", their task was to help the Chinese air force against Japanese aerial attacks. He also ordered the latest American heavy bomber, the B-17, to the Philippines – within range of Japanese cities. This latter was intended as a deterrent to any Japanese war plans.

Japan's position

In 1939 the Japanese army became involved in a series of battles with Soviet forces on the border of Manchukuo (Manchuria) and Mongolia. In the decisive battle of Khalkhin Gol, Soviet armed forces decisively defeated the Japanese. This and the Non-Aggression Pact between Hitler and Stalin (in contravention of the Anti-Comintern Pact), signed at about the same time, were two of the reasons why Japan did not enter the war on the Axis side in 1939. Although it seized the chance to invade French Indo-China (Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia) in 1940, it didn't occupy the countries because of an agreement with the French Vichy government. If war came, Japan would choose its moment.

In the 1940s the Japanese Army command took the core national decisions which were then rubber-stamped by the Emperor. They saw the conquest of China as their primary mission. The Navy and many civilians, including Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro, believed that war with the US would end in defeat. But the alternative, withdrawal from China, would be an impossible loss of honour and prestige, let alone power.

The only way that the Navy command could imagine coping with the combined American and British navies was to deal the American Pacific Fleet a knock-out blow. Negotiations were tried but it became clear that compromise could not be reached. In Japan the civilian government fell and the head of the army, General Tojo Hideki, took full control of the country, determined to go to war.

Britain's position

British governments had long foreseen the rise of a nationalistic, military power in the Far East as a threat to British colonies and possessions. But apart from maintaining a Pacific fleet and turning Singapore into a fortress, little could be done.

Once war in Europe started it was one of Churchill's worst nightmares that Japan would unleash war in the Pacific. He believed it would happen but did everything he could to delay it. He invited the American fleet to visit Singapore to show solidarity and even closed the Burma Road (the only overland route to supply the Chinese Nationalist Army) for two months to pacify Japanese demands. Huge diplomatic energy was expended to ensure that if the worst happened America would join in.

And then it happened

The attack on Pearl Harbour was possibly prompted by the British Navy's successful attack on the Italian fleet in its harbour at Taranto in November 1940. Using torpedo-carrying aircraft flying from the aircraft carrier HMS

Illustrious, the attack meant that the Italian fleet lost half its capital ships in one night.

On November 26, 1941, the Japanese task force comprising six aircraft carriers with over 400 aircraft left the Japanese Kurile Islands heading for Pearl Harbour. The attack was launched just before 8.00 am on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941. Twenty-one ships were damaged or lost in the attack but through good fortune the three US aircraft carriers normally based there were out on exercise at the time.

A few hours later, Japan declared war on the US and the US reciprocated. Britain declared war on Japan immediately. Two days later Germany and Italy declared war on America. To Churchill's absolute delight Hitler had involved the US in the European conflict. Doubts remain as to whether Roosevelt would ever have persuaded America to join the European theatre otherwise.

The War

What follows is a very selective set of dates and events that are intended simply to show the ebb and flow of war in the Far East from December 1941 to August 1945 – just under 4 years.

The first year: December 1941-December 1942

December (1939)

- * Japan attacks Hong Kong
- * Japan invades Thailand by land and sea
- * Japan launches seaborne invasion of Malaysia
- * Japan defeats American garrison on Guam
- * Battleship HMS Prince of Wales and battlecruiser HMS Repulse sunk off coast of Malaysia by Japanese aircraft
- * American forces on Wake Island surrender to Japanese
- * Japanese take Borneo
- * Japan invades Philippines

January

- * Japan invades Burma, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands

- * Japan captures Manila, capital of the Philippines, and Kuala Lumpur, capital of Malaysia
- * Malaysia is overrun with 30,000 British, Indian, Australian and Malayan soldiers taken prisoner

February

* The Battle for Singapore is over in seven days (8th – 15th February). Not only did Japan take the “Gibraltar of the East” but it also captured 80,000 British, Indian and Australian troops. Churchill called it the “worst disaster” and “largest capitulation” in British military history

“I speak to you all under the shadow of a heavy and far-reaching military defeat. It is a British and Imperial defeat. Singapore has fallen....This, therefore, is one of those moments when the British race and nation can show their quality and their genius. This is one of those moments when it can draw from the heart of misfortune the vital impulses of victory. We must remember that we are no longer alone.”

Winston Churchill February 1942

* After its Malaysian and Singapore campaigns, Japan had suffered just 9,657 casualties; Allied losses totalled 145,703, including 130,000 captured



General Percival (second right) on his way to sign the surrender of Singapore

* A joint American-British-Dutch-Australian command had been formed to resist the Japanese. Ships under the command fought several unsuccessful naval battles in February 1942 (e.g. the Battles of Makassar Strait, Badung Strait, Sundra Strait)

* Nearly 250 Japanese aircraft, in two separate raids, attacked Darwin, the

- ships in its harbour and its two airfields in the first attack on Australian soil
- Darwin was temporarily rendered useless as a critical supply base
- * Battle of the Java Sea was a decisive naval victory for Japan. Fought to stop the Japanese invading Java, the Allies lost 10 ships and over 2,000 sailors
- * Bali and Timor fall
- * First Japanese attack on the US mainland as a submarine shells an oil refinery near Santa Barbara, California

March

- * After 12 days fighting Java falls and the whole of the Dutch East Indies are lost.
- * Japan pushes into central Burma and Allied forces make a fighting retreat
- * Japanese navy starts the Indian Ocean Raid. Aircraft carriers sail to Shri Lanka (Ceylon) and damage port facilities, sink aircraft carrier HMS Hermes and two cruisers, destroy a third of British ground-based fighters and nearly all the bombers. In addition 23 merchant ships are sunk. Japan lost just 18 aircraft

April

- * In Burma 7,000 British troops, encircled by the Japanese, are rescued by the Chinese Expeditionary Force moving south from China to help the Allies
- * Bataan in the Philippines falls to Japan and 76,000 American and Filipino soldiers are made prisoner
- * The Doolittle Raid. Sixteen US medium bombers are launched without fighter escort from the US Navy's aircraft carrier USS Hornet 600 miles from Japan. They bomb Tokyo and then fly on to land in China (most crashed). Damage was little but the psychological benefit to US forces was huge

May

- * British campaign to capture the Island of Madagascar from the Vichy-French government begins. Its purpose is to prevent its takeover by Japan which would have been a major threat to Allied shipping routes
- * On 9th May the Philippines finally falls and 80,000 US and Filipino soldiers are made PoWs. They are marched 60 miles in what is known as the Bataan Death March

- * Battle of the Coral Sea. Japanese aircraft carriers are intercepted (at a 90 mile range) by US carriers. Both sides suffer heavy losses in aircraft and carriers damaged or sunk but never make visual contact. But the battle marks the first time since the start of the war that a major Japanese advance had been checked by the Allies.

- * British complete retreat from Burma
- * Japanese forces attack China from Burma

June

- * Battle of Midway. Japanese Admiral Yamamoto viewed the operation against the American-held island of Midway as the potentially decisive battle of the war. He plans to lure the US carrier fleet into a trap. But his plans do not allow for the US navy to act first. In a battle between four Japanese and four American aircraft carriers, the Japanese lost all and the Americans lost one of their carriers. A decisive victory for the allies and often seen as the turning point in the war
- * Japanese invade the Aleutian Islands

one of the worst Allied naval defeats of the war

October

- * In Battle of Santa Cruz Islands the USS loses its carrier US Hornet and another carrier, USS Enterprise, badly damaged. Japanese carriers lose many aircraft and experienced aircrew
- * Bitter fighting continues at Guadalcanal
- * British secure Madagascar

December

- * Japanese aircraft bomb Kolkata (Calcutta) in India



IndiaToday

- * Emperor Hirohito gives permission to his troops to withdraw from Guadalcanal after five months of bloody fighting
- * British incursion into Burma fails

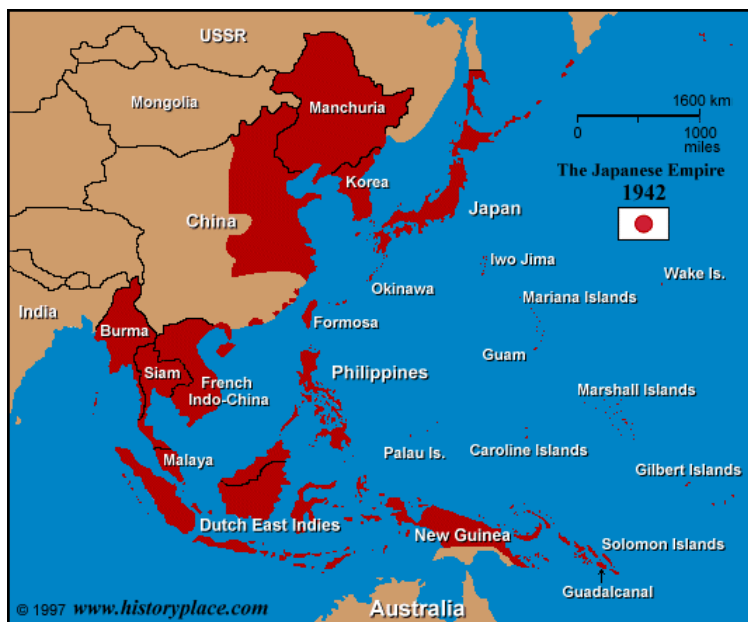
The second year: January 1943-December 1943

January

- * Allies inflict two land defeats on Japanese in New Guinea thus securing the island

February

- * The Chindits, known officially as the Long Range Penetration Groups, were special operations units of the British and Indian armies created to operate far behind enemy lines in Burma. Their first operations, under the command of Brigadier Orde Wingate began on 8th February
- * Japanese complete evacuation of Guadalcanal. The Japanese lost a total of 24,000 men killed while the Americans sustained 1,600 killed, 4,200 wounded



Japanese occupied territory at its peak in 1942

August

- * In the first US amphibious landing of the Pacific War, 1st Marine Division invades Tulagi and Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands
- * Battle of Savo Island, a brilliant Japanese victory during which four Allied heavy cruisers are sunk within an hour, while no Japanese ships are lost. It was

April

* Japan announces it will execute captured US pilots from Doolittle Raid (April 1942)

May

* Chinese Nationalist Army launches counterattack along the Yangtze River
* Japanese submarine sinks the Australian hospital ship Centaur resulting in 299 dead
* Japan end their occupation of the Aleutian Islands

June

* US begins submarine warfare against Japanese shipping to strangle its oil and raw material supplies

July

* Americans land on New Georgia in the Solomon Islands

October

* Japanese launch "Rice Offensive" in Central China, it fails
* Japanese execute approximately 100 American POWs on Wake Island.
* Burma Railway (between Burma and Thailand) is completed after 16 months, some 60,000 native labourers and 16,000 Allied PoWs died in its construction

November

* US Marines invade Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. From now on, until 1945, the US and its allies are on the offensive, taking many Pacific islands – too many to name individually here

The third year: January 1944-December 1944

February

* Second Chindit operation into Burma leads to heavy fighting over next two and a half months

March

* Battles of Imphal and Kohima in India. Fought between 8th March and 18th July 1944, these were the turning point of one of the most gruelling campaigns of the Second World War. The decisive Japanese defeat in north-east India became the springboard for the

Fourteenth Army's subsequent reconquest of Burma

June

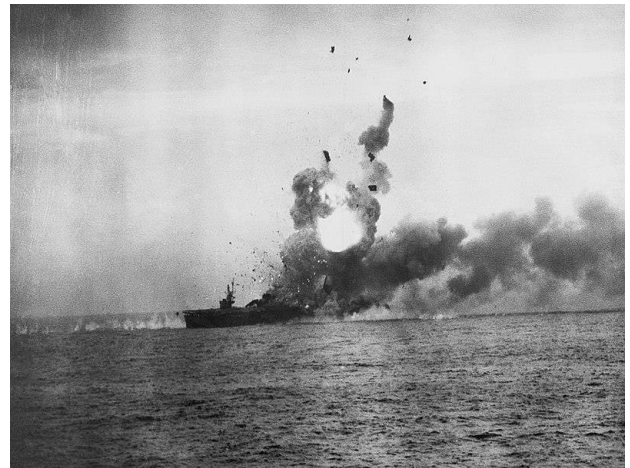
* The first bombing raid on Japan since the Doolittle raid using US B-29s based in Bengal in India
* Battle of the Philippine Sea. US carrier-based fighters shoot down 220 Japanese planes with a loss of only 20 American planes

July

* Japanese retreat in Burma
* Guam is liberated

October

* Battle of Leyte Gulf. This is considered to have been the largest naval battle of WWII and, by some criteria, possibly the largest naval battle in history, with over 200,000 naval personnel involved. In a running three-day battle (23–26 October) the US lost 7 warships and the Japanese 27. The Imperial Japanese Navy suffered its greatest loss of ships and crew ever
* The Battle of Leyte saw the first use of Japanese Kamikaze (Divine Wind) suicide bombers. By the end of the war it is estimated that Japan sent an estimated 2,257 Kamikaze pilots to their death



USS St Lo is hit by a Kamikaze bomber during the Battle of Leyte

The fourth year: January 1945-August 1945

January

* General MacArthur is placed in command of all US ground forces and Admiral Nimitz in command of all naval forces, in preparation for planned

assaults against Iwo Jima, Okinawa and Japan itself

February

- * Burma Road (India to China) is reopened
- * Amphibious assault on Iwo Jima begins
- * British forces breach Irrawaddy line in Burma

March

- * First Allied fire-bombing on Japan hits Tokyo with 279 B-29s. Fifteen square miles of Tokyo erupts in flames
- * Iwo Jima falls to US Marines

April

- * Allied invasion of Okinawa
- * President Franklin D Roosevelt dies

May

- * Rangoon in Burma retaken
- * Japanese begin withdrawal from China.
- * Operation Olympic, the invasion of Japan, is scheduled for 1st November

June

- * Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki announces Japan will fight to the very end rather than accept unconditional surrender
- * Okinawa falls
- * All Japanese resistance in the Philippines ends

July

- * 1,000 bomber raids against Japan begin
- * US Naval bombardment of Japanese home islands starts
- * First Atomic Bomb is successfully tested in the US

August

- * US bomber drops first Atomic Bomb on Hiroshima on 6th August
- * Soviet Union declares war on Japan then invades Manchuria
- * Second Atomic Bomb is dropped by US bomber on Nagasaki on 9th August and Emperor Hirohito and Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki decide to seek an immediate peace with the Allies.
- * Japanese accept unconditional surrender on 15th August (UK time). General MacArthur is appointed to head the occupation forces in Japan

Conclusion

It is hoped that this places the war in the Pacific in greater context – especially the long build-up to Pearl Harbour. It is also intended to show the ebb and flow of a war in which many different nations fought and in which many British soldiers served.

From a British standpoint, the Far East was not a priority in terms of men and resources compared to the Middle East and the Suez Canal. This meant that our forces were understaffed and short of up-to-date material to fight the Japanese.

After the fall of Burma, the Fourteenth Army was raised. It was a multi-national army drawing units from the British and Indian armies, as well as men from the West and East African divisions of the British army and the Gurkhas. At its peak in 1944 it reached a strength of nearly a million men, speaking 40 different languages. Often under-resourced they fought in appalling conditions in jungles and monsoons, and suffered from malnourishment, malaria and dysentery.

It is often referred to as the "Forgotten Army" because its operations were overlooked by the British press, and remained more obscure than those of the British forces in Europe up to the present day. For most of the Army's existence, it was commanded by Lieutenant-General William Slim.

Omissions

Two issues in particular have not been addressed – Japanese War Crimes and the Allied use of the Atomic Bomb on civilian populations.

Both are complex issues that deserve proper explanation or exploration. It is not in the remit of this booklet to address either issue in the detail they require – nor is there space!

Those whose relatives suffered in any way will know what happened, others who are interested will find many excellent resources online.