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THE JAPANESE EXPANSION IN THE PACIFIC
7 DECEMBER 1941 - 12 SEPTEMBER 1942

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph deals with the Japanese territorial expansion in the Pacific Ocean area during the period from 7 December 1941 to 12 September 1942.

In order to give the reader enough background for understanding the Japanese attack of December 1941 it will be necessary to go back several years.

Japan for many years desired to establish the "Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere". She wanted to establish this sphere of influence for her own benefit and become the dominating power in the Far East. She was going to attempt the establishment of this sphere, not through peaceful and friendly means, but by the use of armed might. (1)

The first step taken by Japan to indicate that she was on her way to establish a great empire in the Far East occurred on 18 September 1931. Declaring that Chinese soldiers had blown up a Japanese owned railroad in Mukden, Japan used this as a pretext for sending troops in and taking over control of the entire province of Manchuria. (See Map "A")

The "Mukden" incident went unpunished and Japan had set an example to the other aggressor nations that were to arise, Germany and Italy. During the next ten years Italy invaded Ethiopia, the Saar⁷ "plebiscite" took place, Germany (1) #1, p. 2

reoccupied the Rhineland and annexed Austria, Italy seized Albania, and Germany invaded Poland. We might therefore consider the occupation of Manchuria by Japan in 1931 as the first act of World War II and finally arrive at December 7, 1941 as the climax to the whole affair. (2)

? Consider further the activities of Japan during the ten year period following the "Mukden" incident. Shortly thereafter she invaded northern China and took possession of two Chinese provinces. China was unable to offer much resistance but it was not until 1937 that Japan seriously took up the invasion of China. Japan expected that China would be subdued in a very short time, but even though she gained a large amount of territory it was realized that China was fighting hard and her spirit would not be broken easily. Finally, near the end of 1938, Japan, in an effort to conserve troops, changed her policy on the taking of China. She attempted to cut China off from world supply by occupying the major ports along the China coast.

By 1940 Japan's attention was focused farther south to Indo-China and Thailand. Using political and military means she gained important concessions. ^{What?} Also during this year she became a formal partner in the Rome-Berlin axis. To further protect herself she occupied Hainan island and the Spratley Islands. ^(During 1939) (3) ^{map reference?}

In April of 1941 Japan, with a look to the future, signed a five year non-aggression pact with Russia. (4)

(2) #2, p. 293

(3) #1, p. 1

(4) #1, p. 2

Considering the bases and territory acquired by Japan during the period from 1931 to 1941 we can see how she was preparing for substantial conquests to the south. In the south she would gain the vast natural resources contained in the Netherlands East Indies and better enable herself to become self-sufficient. (5) She had bases along the coast of China to protect shipping lanes to the south. Her success in dealing with Thailand and Indo-China put her in position to deal blows against the British, Americans, and the Dutch who were located in Malaya and Burma, the Philippines, and the East Indies respectively. In her non-aggression pact with Russia she protected her rear in the proposed drive to the south. By the summer of 1940 the Japanese army and navy were well situated for the intended conquest. (6)

Japan now waited for the developments in Europe to bring about the opportune moment for her attack. She must necessarily strike quickly and when the Allies were at their worst in order to gain a victory. Japan did not have the war potential under her control at this time to consider a long offensive. ?

This opportune moment for the Japanese appeared in 1941. France and the Netherlands had fallen to the Nazis and Great Britain was struggling for her life in the Middle East. The Germans had driven deep into Russia and 1941 was sure to be an Axis year. Only the United States remained to worry about, but all of her efforts were directed toward providing the materials of war to the Allies in Europe. (7)

(5) #1, p.2

(6) #1, p. 5

(7) #3, p. 109

In considering the status of Japanese soldiers and material we find that both had been battle tested during four and one-half years of fighting in China. As for her navy, Japan, since her renouncement of the Washington Conference in 1934, had built up^z until by December of 1941 she possessed 230 major vessels. (8)

The one big item on which the Japanese took a chance was her merchant marine, which was just adequate to handle her needs during the war and made no allowance for any undue losses. (9)

As for the strength of the Allies in the Pacific we find that it was entirely inadequate. As the Netherlands had fallen to Germany, the East Indies could not expect aid from home and Australia and New Zealand had sent the majority of their troops to aid Britain in North Africa. The only real strength in the Pacific was located at Pearl Harbor where the United States Fleet was stationed. The United States also had some ground and air strength in the Philippines.

In the whole Pacific area the Allies had around 350,000 troops available. (10) However, they were made up of many nationalities; they spoke different languages; and they did not have any central control. They were, on the whole, poorly trained and equipped and could not hope to stand up against the experience, numbers, and equipment of the Japanese.

(8) #1, p. 4

(9) #1, p. 4

(10) #1, p. 6

THE PLAN OF ATTACK

The Imperial High Command, in its plan for Japanese conquest in the Far East, divided the war into three phases. The first phase consisted of seizing the rich southern areas together with certain strategic areas to provide security. In addition, the first phase included the neutralization of the United States Fleet at Pearl Harbor. The second phase was to consist of a consolidation of a perimeter defense and preparing for any attacks that might be attempted. The third phase would be the destruction of any enemy force making an attack and also attempting to destroy the will of the American people to fight. (11)

If Japan were to be successful in the second and third phases she must strike quickly.

It must be remembered that Japan's main drive would be to the south, for possession of the rich southern area would mean self-sufficiency for Japan and also a great loss to her enemies.

Japan at this time was able to capitalize on the situation of her enemies, as has already been mentioned. She therefore decided to strike simultaneously at widely spread targets. These targets would include Pearl Harbor, Wake, Guam, Hong-Kong, Thailand, Malaya, and the Philippine Islands. The attack on Pearl Harbor would secure her left flank in the drive south and the attacks on the Philippines and Malaya would be for the purpose of gaining air superiority in the Far East as the two largest concentrations of Allied air power were located at these two places. (12)

(11) #1, p. 9

(12) #1, p. 10-11

THE JAPANESE ATTACK

Pearl Harbor (See Map "A")

At about 0750 on the morning of 7 December 1941 the Japanese made their first attack at Pearl Harbor in the Hawaiian Islands. The Japanese completely surprised the American forces when their first planes arrived over the islands and began two hours of systematic destruction. (13) No precautions were taken to alert any of the American troops even though incidents had occurred which indicated that something was taking place of an unusual nature. More than an hour before the air attack a United States destroyer had sunk a Japanese midget submarine and even though a report was rendered on the action, no alert for the base was given. (14) In addition, shortly after seven o'clock a radar operator reported a large flight of aircraft coming towards the island of Oahu from the north-east. This warning was ignored also. (15)

The first Japanese planes came in with the mission of gaining air superiority. This they did easily by surprise as is shown by the fact that all of our planes were still on the ground. They immediately turned their attack to the airfields and the grounded aircraft which they destroyed at will. Following closely behind these planes were the torpedo bombers which undertook the destruction of the naval vessels in Pearl Harbor.

The initial attack lasted about one-half an hour and then the first planes started to return to their carriers. The Americans took advantage of this break in the attack and tried to strengthen their defenses. Around 0900 the

(13) #4, p. 137

(14) #2, p. 324

(15) #2, p. 324

second wave appeared at Pearl Harbor. This wave was unable to do as much damage as the first wave because they were equipped with light bombs to attack the aircraft carriers. Luckily for the United States the carriers were not present and the attack was directed toward the other vessels. This attack lasted a little over thirty minutes and by 0945 all of the Japanese had gone and the raid was over. (16)

During this short intense raid nineteen ships were either sunk or badly damaged; \$25,000,000 worth of aircraft was lost; 2383 persons were killed; 1842 wounded; 960 more were missing. (17)

The Japanese in this attack concentrated on aircraft, airfields and their installations, and the ships of the fleet. They almost completely ignored the supply facilities and installations of the area. It is interesting to note that within a few days all of the aircraft lost by the United States had been replaced and within a year all of the ships sunk or damaged, with the exception of one battleship, were ready for action again. (18)

Midway Island (See Map "A")

The garrison on Midway had been alerted by news of the attack on Pearl Harbor. They manned the defenses and prepared for the expected attack which did not come until after dark on 7 December. Attacked by two destroyers which shelled the island, the garrison fired their shore batteries at almost point blank range, scoring hits and driving the Japanese vessels away. This was the only

(16) #1, p. 23-25

(17) #2, p. 326

(18) #5, p. 1

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attack on Midway and it was not to appear on the Pacific scene again for six months when a Japanese fleet was defeated in that area. (19)

Wake Island (See Map "A")

Wake Island lies about 2100 miles west of Pearl Harbor and at the time of the Japanese attack provided a cable relay station and an emergency landing field. It was manned by a small Marine garrison. On 8 December (Wake Island time) an air attack was made on the island airfield where twelve out of the sixteen aircraft possessed by the garrison were destroyed. More air raids followed and on 10 December a naval bombardment was included. The defenders succeeded in shooting down several planes and damaging or sinking several ships with their anti-aircraft guns and shore batteries. Air and naval bombardment continued until practically every installation on the island was destroyed or damaged. (20) The end finally came on 23 December when Japanese troops landed and quickly took possession of the island. (21) For the amount of territory gained the Japanese suffered very heavy losses. (22)

Guam (See Map "A")

The small garrison of 400 naval personnel and 155 Marines located at Guam had no means whatsoever to ward off the Japanese attack that came on 8 December. After two days of air attack the Japanese landed and the American forces had no choice but to surrender. (23)

(19) #1, p. 29
(22) #3, p. 125

(20) #4, p. 143
(23) #1, p. 30

(21) #1, p. 30

Hong-Kong (See Map "B")

From positions that ringed the British colony at Hong-Kong Japanese troops attacked on the morning of 8 December. By means of an air attack they destroyed British aircraft in the area and [?] ground troops easily drove back the British. On the night of 11-12 December the Japanese made an attack that forced the defenders back to the island of Hong-Kong. After shelling the island for several days the Japanese made a landing on 18 December and pushing steadily forward brought about the surrender of the British on 25 December.

(24)

With the capture of Hong-Kong the Japanese had acquired still another base on the coast of China to protect the movement of supplies and troops to the south.

Thailand (See Map "B")

Prior to the invasion of Thailand the Japanese had exerted all their political and military power to gain the good will of that nation. As early as 1940 we have seen that treaties had been made to cement relations between the two nations.

When Japanese troops entered Thailand on 8 December they met only token resistance that lasted about six hours. Japanese troops immediately moved south to aid in the Malayan operation and northwest to the border of Burma.

(25)

Malaya and Singapore (See Map "B")

Another operation that took place on 8 December was that in Malaya, with Singapore at the southern end, as its final objective. Japanese troops made landings on the long thin Malayan peninsula to secure airfields for further operations that would require air support. In making these landings they almost carried out an envelopment of British forces to the north and the British were required to fall back in order to escape. The Japanese continued driving to the south without being halted until by the night of 30-31 January 1942 all of the British forces had withdrawn to the island of Singapore. (26)

It was during this drive to the south that Japanese aircraft destroyed the "Prince of Wales" and the "Repulse", British battleships, which were the only capital ships that the Allies had in the Far East. With the sinking of these two ships the Japanese had little to fear on the sea in that part of the world. (27)

On 16 December Japanese troops landed in British Borneo in order to secure the left flank of the drive on Singapore. By 1 January 1942 they had complete possession of this protectorate. (28)

Singapore, the great naval base, was the stronghold of the British in the Far East. Although prepared to defend against attack from the sea, she was not built to fend off attacks from the jungle to her rear or to ward off air attacks. (29)

Beginning on 29 December and continuing through 8

(26) #5, p. 113

(27) #1, p. 38

(28) #1, p. 33

(29) #5, p. 113

February the island was taken under siege by the Japanese air forces. Near the end of this period the Japanese artillery started concentrating on one certain area and on 8 February the first landing was made on the island. This was followed by a second landing on another part of the island. Although attempting a coordinated counter-attack, the British were driven back steadily and on the evening of 15 February they surrendered unconditionally. (30)

Burma (See Map "B")

From the recently acquired territory in Thailand the Japanese opened their offensive against Burma on 11 December. By seizing Burma and its airfields the Japanese would protect the right flank and rear of the drive down the Malayan peninsula. By 31 January 1942 Japanese ground troops had forced the British back until they assumed a defensive line along the Salween River. The Japanese crossed the river about a week later and by 8 March had driven so far that Rangoon had to be abandoned by the British. Pursuing rapidly, the Japanese drove the British into India and the Chinese troops, that had been aiding in Burma, back into China by the end of May 1942.

In addition to protecting the advance on Singapore by invading Burma the Japanese succeeded in cutting the supply routes to China other than the air route over the Himalaya Mountains. (31)

Philippine Campaign (See Map "C")

Still another attack by the Japanese on 8 December took place in the Philippine Islands when the leading elements of a naval air attack struck at Iba at 0930. The main enemy air attack was made at Clark Field where twelve B-17's were demolished, sixteen fighter planes and five B-17's severely damaged. When the day was over one-half of our bomber force and one-third of our fighter force in the Philippines had been destroyed.

It was not until 10 December that the first landings were made. These came on Luzon at Aparri and Vigan. On 12 December a landing was made at Lagaspi in south Luzon.

Singayon
The force that had landed at Vigan started moving south and on 21 December defeated our forces in a battle at San Fernando. This was followed by further landings in the area south of Bauang. This landing by the 23rd threatened to turn the flank of the American main defensive position at the head of the gulf. With further landings at Lamon ^{whose withdrawal?} it was necessary to start the planned withdrawal to Bataan. The troops were drawn up from the south and Manila was declared an open city. Opposed by superior forces the Americans were forced to take up successive defensive positions and by the 26th of January they had been forced all the way back to their reserve positions. ^{where?}

During this period the American troops were gaining experience and becoming accustomed to Japanese tactics. They were able to repulse two landing attempts and one frontal assault was halted. ^{where?} It was also during this period that ^{the American} our supplies dwindled, especially food. ^{+ ammunition} The

Japanese counted upon this to weaken the Americans and his hopes were realized when disease and malnutrition spread through the troops.

On the 3rd of April a strong attack by the Japanese, who in the meantime had received reinforcements, penetrated the American lines. Pressing forward the Japanese finally received the surrender of the Americans on 9 April 1942.

When Bataan had fallen the enemy began their attack on Corregidor. Using both artillery and aircraft for bombardment of the island, the Japanese finally attempted a landing on 5 May but a strong defense limited them to only a few yards. After the suffering of heavy losses and with no reserve forces remaining it was decided to surrender. ^{By whom?} General Wainwright, commanding the forces in the Philippines, proceeded to Bataan to make the necessary arrangements. His offer was refused when he offered to surrender only those troops on the island of Corregidor. The General returned to the island fort and at midnight on 6 May he formally surrendered all remaining forces in the Philippines because he had no other choice.

Operations of the Japanese against other islands in the Philippines were taking place at the same time but they had little effect upon the outcome of the battle for Luzon. Air attacks were made on 8 December and landings were made on Mindanao at Davao on 20 December. Our forces in this area were very weak and were limited to guerilla operations.

Activity continued in this area ^{which area} until the middle of April when couriers from General Wainwright instructed them to surrender because he feared for the safety of the troops

that had already been surrendered. (32)

Netherlands East Indies (See Map "B")

Although the Japanese schedule called for the taking of the Netherlands East Indies at a later date, the success against the United States air power in the Philippines made it possible for the Japanese to launch their first attack in this area on 11 January 1942 when they landed at Tarakan, an oil port in Dutch Borneo. Another force struck at Menado on northern Celebes. Following these two landings the Japanese struck rapidly to the south meeting little resistance. They landed at Amboina on 30 January and within a week it was taken; Balikpapan on the east coast of Dutch Borneo was captured on 23 January; on 15 February they landed at Palembang in eastern Sumatra and overcame the whole area; the 18th saw them seize the Denpasar airfield on the southeast coast of Bali; Dilli in Portuguese Timor was taken on the 19th; on 20 February they occupied the airfield at Koepang. Then came the attack on Java. Following heavy air raids the Japanese landed near Batavia and at Semarang. Pushing the weak resistance easily before them they forced the defending troops to withdraw to Australia and on 9 March accepted the surrender of the entire Netherlands East Indies.

It was during this period of action that the Allies were able to strike their first noticeable blow. This occurred in the Macassar Strait on the night of 23-24 January when a night torpedo attack was carried out

(32) #1, p. 54-84

against an enemy transport fleet. Without being harmed this Allied force was able to sink four Japanese transports and a patrol ship. (33) *what was the effect on Apur's efforts?*

South Seas (See Map "D")

In furtherance of the Japanese basic war plan we find them extending to the south and southwest in order to gain bases for the establishment of the perimeter defense which was part of phase one. As far as the South Seas were concerned the carrying out of the plan began with the occupation of the Tarawa and Makin Atolls in the latter part of December 1941.

Next came the assault on Rabaul, a strategic base in the Bismarck Archipelago, where Japan could control a large area of the South Seas. Beginning on 3 January 1942 the Japanese carried out bombing missions to prepare for the landings that were made at Rabaul and Kavieng in the Bismarcks and at Kieta on Bougainville. Meeting resistance only at Rabaul the Japanese soon were in possession of these three places.

The Japanese moved on to Gasmata in southern New Britain on 8 February and occupied it easily.

One month later on 8 March they landed at Lae and Salamaua in northeastern New Guinea and with this occupation the Japanese had reached the goal of the first phase of their basic war plan. In only a few short months Japan had conquered thousands of square miles of the Pacific area. Elated over her easy success up to this point she decided to expand further instead of going into the second phase

(33) #1, p. 93-104

of the war plan. (34)

ALLIED OPERATIONS

Before going into any additional operations on the part of the Japanese it would be well to discuss what success the Allies were having at this time. In doing so, we find that all of their ^u successes were confined to battles at sea using both aircraft and naval vessels.

The first of these victories occurred at the battle of the Coral Sea which lasted from the 4th to the 8th of May 1942. On 4 May part of the United States Fleet in the Pacific surprised a Japanese transport fleet and its escort off the island of Tulagi in the Solomon group. Heavy damage was inflicted on the Japanese fleet as their troops were making a landing on Tulagi. On 7 May the Americans attacked another transport fleet off Mismia in the Louisiades. Here again heavy damage was done, to include the destruction of a new Japanese aircraft carrier. On the 8th, the last day of the battle, all the action concerned aircraft, and surface vessels did not fire a shot at each other. Although considerable damage was done to the Japanese ships, the United States Fleet lost the aircraft carrier "Lexington". (35) With these victories the supply line to Australia was kept open and the Japanese removed their fleet from that area. (See Map "D")(36)

On the 3rd of June the naval battle off Midway Island began and the American victory here was very possibly the turning point of the war in the Pacific. When the battle was over Japan no longer ruled supreme over the Pacific

(34) #1, p. 105-108 (35) #6, p. 140 (36) #3, p. 128

Ocean. Here again aircraft showed their power against surface vessels and there was no exchange of shots between the two fleets. Because of intelligence reports the Americans were forewarned of the planned attack on the island of Midway and were able to make preparations to meet the enemy on better than even terms. (37) The battle lasted more than three days with the Japanese taking the advantage on the first day. The next was decisive when American planes succeeded in putting out of commission all four of the aircraft carriers in the Japanese fleet attacking Midway. This reduced the Japanese air activity to nothing and in the pursuit the following day the American aircraft were able to destroy two heavy cruisers. (SEE MAP "A") (38)

FURTHER JAPANESE OPERATIONS

On 3 June 1942, concurrent with the planned attack on Midway Island, North America received its first air attack when Japanese planes bombed Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands. While this attack and another on the following day were in progress, Japanese troops landed on and occupied the islands of Attu and Kiska at the western end of the Aleutians. Although this gave the Japanese a good observation post it was realized by both sides that weather conditions in that area did not make further operations to the east feasible. (See Map "A") (39)

This attack and occupation was followed on 6 July

(37) #1, p. 118

(38) #2, p. 511

(39) #2, p. 510

by a Japanese landing at Guadalcanal where airfield construction was begun to provide a base for operations against the supply route to Australia. (See Map "D") (40)

The last action in which the Japanese took the initiative to gain further territory occurred on 22 July when a Japanese force landed at Gona on northern New Guinea and started over the ground towards Port Moresby, one of the objectives they failed to reach because of the naval battles in the Coral Sea. They were able to get far enough to control the key pass over the mountains at Kokoda. It was here that an Allied force met them and checked their advance on Port Moresby. (See Map "D") (41)

It was at this point and continuing up until 6 August 1942 that the Japanese expansion in the Pacific reached its peak. (42)

ALLIES ASSUME OFFENSIVE

We have said that the Japanese reached the full extent of their expansion on 6 August 1942 because on 7 August 1942 United States forces struck with ground troops for the first time, at Guadalcanal, Tulagi, Gaoatu, and Tanamabogo, all in the same general area. The Allies at this time were still on the strategic defensive because of their lack of strength, but in order for them to preserve the vital supply route from the United States to Australia it was necessary for them to take up the tactical offensive. (43)

The landings on Guadalcanal took the Japanese by surprise and the airfield under construction was easily

(40) #1, p. 115
(43) #7, p. 1

(41) #1, p. 115

(42) #7, p. 1

captured and put to the advantage of the Americans. (44)

The landings on the other islands met bitter resistance and in some places suffered heavy casualties, but by the afternoon on the 8th the Americans had succeeded in taking all three of the islands. (See Map "D") (45)

Returning to Guadalcanal we find that the Japanese had not given up hope of retaking the airfield. They had made several attempts and each time ^{were} repulsed with heavy losses. (46)

This is the situation as of the 12th of September 1942. We find that Japan has reached the limit of her expansion; that the Allies have assumed the initiative on a very limited scale; that the tide of battle has turned and Japan has started to fall back along her long route of advance.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In their method of attack on 7 December 1941 the Japanese took a well calculated risk. Instead of concentrating their forces in one area of operations they spread them so far apart that they could not possibly have aided each other in the event of strong resistance and possible defeat. However, in deciding upon this method of attack the Japanese took the fullest advantage of the European situation in picking the time of their attack. Their excellent intelligence, combined with a detailed, excellent plan of attack almost assured them of success in the opening phase of the war.

It is possible that the whole plan of the Japanese

(44) #3, p. 169

(45) #7, p. 8

(46) #3, p. 169

drive to the south might have been changed had they not found the situation at Pearl Harbor as it was. Ample warnings to the United States force in Hawaii went unheeded. If the naval force at Pearl Harbor had been alerted for the attack on December 7 our ships might have been the deciding factor in delaying the Japanese offensive and giving us time to reinforce our garrisons in the Far East.

The attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese showed one thing to be lacking and that has been noted before. That was the failure to bomb any major supply installations and facilities in the Hawaiian Islands. The failure on the part of the Japanese to do this resulted in our being able to get our navy back in action much quicker than if they had not confined themselves to attacking only the ships that lay in the harbor.

In looking over the many different operations of the Japanese we find that they seem to follow the same general pattern. They invariably used air bombardment, together with ground artillery or naval gunfire whenever possible, preceding their main attack or landing. Once their attack or landing was made their first objectives were the airfields which they put to immediate use (to either) support further advance by the ground forces or to soften up the next area of intended operations.

The final note of criticism deals with the extension of phase one of the basic Japanese war plan. In trying to gain more territory after reaching the objectives outlined in their original plan the Japanese lost valuable time for the consolidation and strengthening of her perimeter

defense. Had she gone ahead with her original plan she might have been successful in holding off the Allies and waging a war of attrition that might possibly have destroyed the will of the Allies to fight in that area.

LESSONS

Lessons to be learned from this period of the war are as follows:

1. In operations covering such vast over-water distances as those experienced in the War in the Pacific it is necessary to maintain supremacy on the sea to keep open the routes of communication.

2. A large number of capital ships does not necessarily mean supremacy at sea. The ability of aircraft to destroy naval power was demonstrated several times during this part of the war.

3. Air supremacy is vital to the success of any operation, whether it be on the ground, on the water, or in the air.

4. Seizure of airfields should be one of the first objectives of ground operations in order to insure close air support for future ground activities.

5. Complete intelligence of the enemy aids in gaining surprise and assuring success in the attack or the defense

6. Any nation, believing war to be imminent, should be alert to recognize any incident that might indicate that hostilities ^{are} were ready to begin.

7. Any group of friendly nations fearing a common

foe should have a predetermined plan of action so that a coordinated effort may be undertaken immediately to hold off or defeat the enemy in the event of war.