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Guadalcanal

From December of 1941 to March of 1942, Japan was in control of the Pacific Ocean. Their superior navy and air force conquered every target they set a goal for. Things started going wrong when they tried to take control of Port Moresby off Australia. The Allies stopped their attempt. The battle at Midway came next. The American fleet gave as much as it took from the enemy. Some say that the battle at Midway Island was the turning point of the war. Others say it was only a show of strength over the Japanese navy. No matter who is right, the war continued. If you play chess, you know what a stalemate is. In a stalemate, neither side wins. In July of 1942, the war in the Pacific seemed to be at a stalemate.



The Japanese decided to break the stalemate by building a new airstrip for their planes. This airstrip was to be built on the island of Guadalcanal. Look on a world map. Find Australia. If you look north and east of Australia, you will find a group of islands called the Solomon Islands. One of these islands is Guadalcanal. The Japanese believed that they could cut off any shipping of supplies between the United States and their Allies by controlling the air and sea around Guadalcanal. The United States decided to stop this plan.

Most of the supplies at this time were being diverted to General Douglas MacArthur and his men. They were moving through New Guinea in an attempt to hand the area over to the Allies. This mission was deemed more important than taking an air strip that would probably be used only temporarily.

One escort carrier, the USS Long Island, and one Marine division, the 1st, were given the task of taking Guadalcanal. More than 12,000 Marines landed on the shore of Guadalcanal on August, 7, 1942. What had been planned as a small mission turned into six months of intense fighting. In one four month period, both the Japanese and the Allies each lost 23 ships. Thousands of lives were lost on these ships. The Japanese lost 25,000 men trying to capture Guadalcanal. Almost 10,000 of the Japanese died of malaria. The jungles of Guadalcanal took their toll.

American troops took control of the airfield they found on Guadalcanal. They named this airfield Henderson Field. Marine Major Lofton Henderson had been killed at Midway. This field would be a tribute to his bravery. The Marines fought intensely to keep control of the airfield. The Japanese launched an attack against the Marines on August 20. The Marines wiped out the entire Japanese detachment.

In September, the Japanese launched another attack on the Guadalcanal. They came from the south in another attempt to take the airfield. It took three days, but the Marines were again able to hold off the attack.

In October, the Japanese decided to bomb the airfield and destroy its usefulness to the Americans. The airfield was damaged, but the Marines were able to clear up the debris quickly. In late October, the Japanese tried again. The

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Marine division had been reinforced by an American infantry battalion by this time. They were again able to push back the Japanese attack.

A November attack came from the sea. American ships and planes were able to damage the Japanese transports and weaken their attempt. The Americans used this weakness to push the Japanese line of defense farther away.

The Marine 1st Division finally got a reprieve in December. They were withdrawn from Guadalcanal and replaced by Marines from the 2nd Division and foot soldiers from the 25th Army Infantry Division. The Japanese were short on supplies and unable to replace troops who were dying of malaria.

In February, the last of the Japanese soldiers in the area were evacuated. On February 9, 1942, American forces declared the island of Guadalcanal to be secure and in the hands of the Allies. To many, this was the turning point of the war. The Imperial Japanese Army had been met, matched, and sent on their way. The battle had been costly in both lives and equipment. But this victory for the Allies had opened a door that had been securely closed. It opened a path to Japan and its Asian holdings.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Guadalcanal is a province of Australia.
- A. False
 - B. True
- _____ 2. What was the most important reason for controlling Guadalcanal?
- A. It had a resort for vacationing.
 - B. It had a good supply of minerals needed for war.
 - C. It was halfway between Australia and America.
 - D. It had an airstrip that could be used to control the whole area.
- _____ 3. Who received most of the available supplies and equipment during the beginning of this campaign?
- A. The troops in the Philippines
 - B. The USS Enterprise
 - C. The Marines on Guadalcanal
 - D. General MacArthur in New Guinea
4. Why do some people consider the battle at Midway Island to be the turning point of the war?

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_____ 5. How long did the battle at Guadalcanal last?

- A. A year
- B. A month
- C. Six months
- D. A few days

6. Why do some people believe that Guadalcanal was the turning point of the war instead of Midway?

_____ 7. Many Japanese soldiers died from wounds they received in battle. How else did they die?

- A. Suicide
- B. Typhoid
- C. Pneumonia
- D. Malaria

_____ 8. American Marines named the captured airfield Anderson Field after one of their fallen comrades.

- A. False
- B. True

☐ What is a turning point? How would you describe a turning point in war?

☐ If you were in the military, would you rather fly a plane or sail a ship?

[illegible]