

BATTLE DIGEST™

Lessons for Today's Leaders

Volume 2 ★ Issue 8

World War II: *Okinawa*

DATE:

April 1–June 22, 1945

LOCATION:

Okinawa Island (Ryukyu Archipelago)

OPPOSING FORCES

United States: 183,000 troops of 10th Army, commanded by Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr. His two corps commanders were Marine Maj. Gen. Roy S. Geiger (III Marine Amphibious Corps) and Maj. Gen. John R. Hodge (Army XXIV Corps). They were supported by the Fifth Fleet, commanded by Adm. Raymond A. Spruance. Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in-Chief Pacific Ocean Areas, was in overall command of the operation.

Imperial Japan: 100,000 army and navy troops of the 32nd Army Group, commanded by Lt. Gen. Mitsuru Ushijima. His subordinate units were two infantry divisions (24th and 62nd), along with the 44th Independent Mixed Brigade (understrength due to the loss of 5,600 men when their transport was torpedoed by an American submarine on its way to Okinawa). An estimated 4,500 kamikaze suicide pilots also participated in the battle.

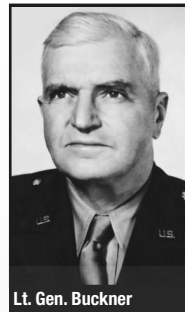
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

By early 1945, American forces had been fighting their way across the Pacific for over two and a half years. General Douglas MacArthur's drive in the Southwest Pacific had reached the Philippines, while Admiral Chester Nimitz's drive across the Central Pacific had advanced to the island of Iwo Jima. The next objective was Okinawa. With the capture of this key island, only 340 miles from the Japanese mainland, the Allies would secure their final staging base for the invasion of Japan. In the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific War, soldiers and Marines would grind through 82 days of grueling combat. At the same time, U.S. and Allied ships would suffer their worst losses of the war from waves of Japanese kamikazes. But with this important victory, the Allies' path to Japan was finally open.

STRATEGY & MANEUVER

Actions by the United States: After the stunning American victory at Midway, U.S. forces went on the offensive. Beginning in August 1942 with the attack on Guadalcanal, U.S. forces began reversing Japanese gains while cutting their lines of communication and supply in the Southwest Pacific. As the hard drive up the island chains continued, the Joint Chiefs designated two mutually supporting lines of advance. The first, led by MacArthur, would continue from the south, moving up through New Guinea, into the Philippines, and ultimately into Luzon. The second drive, led by Nimitz, would move across the Central Pacific from the east, through

For two and a half years, both MacArthur and Nimitz pushed on against a determined enemy. Eventually, with MacArthur's forces firmly in the Philippines and Nimitz's victory on Iwo Jima, the stage was set for Operation Iceberg, the seizure of Okinawa.



Lt. Gen. Buckner

The 1 April, 1945, assault would be the largest invasion of the Pacific War, with 1,300 warships and transports carrying nearly 183,000 troops. Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner Jr.'s 10th Army would lead the operation, while Adm. Raymond A. Spruance's Fifth Fleet would provide direct support offshore. Buckner's plan was straightforward. Prior to the invasion, the Army's 77th Division would seize the nearby Kerama Islands for naval seaplane and fleet bases, followed by securing Keisa Shima Island for

XXIV Corp 155 mm artillery to provide support for the landings. On invasion day, he would fix the Japanese with a demonstration at the Minatoga beaches in the southeast, while executing his main effort with two corps landing abreast on the western Hagushi beaches. Once ashore, they would drive east, capture two vital airfields (Yontan and Kadena), then split the island in two. Maj. Gen. John Hodge's XXIV Corps would then clear southern Okinawa while Maj. Gen. Roy Geiger's III Amphibious Corps held the center of the island. Once reunited, both corps would drive into what was expected to be the more heavily defended north.

On 22 March, U.S. minesweepers cleared the approaches to the Kerama Islands and Okinawa. The following day, the 77th Division landed in the Keramas and found over 300 suicide boats packed with explosives. On the 31st, XXIV Corps artillery landed and emplaced their guns. All the while, carrier-based aircraft and naval guns provided fire support.

Actions by Japan: In the months preceding Okinawa, Japan's strategy was primarily defensive. As her forces worked desperately to blunt U.S. advances toward the home islands, the Japanese hoped to exact a heavy toll on the Americans and negotiate a favorable peace. By the time the Allies captured Iwo Jima in March 1945, Japanese intelligence had a clear picture of follow-on Allied objectives. Still, the Japanese remained confident that attrition might deter a final American invasion of their homeland.



Photo courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration