

# SECTION 2 The Early Battles

## Guide to Reading

### Main Idea

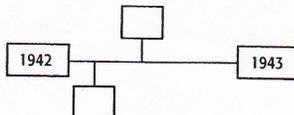
By late 1942, the Allies had stopped the German and Japanese advance.

### Key Terms and Names

Chester Nimitz, Douglas MacArthur, James Doolittle, periphery, George Patton, convoy system

### Reading Strategy

**Sequencing** As you read about the military campaigns of 1942, complete a time line similar to the one below to record the major battles discussed and the victor in each.



### Reading Objectives

- **Analyze** how the Allies were able to fight a war on two fronts and turn the war against the Axis in the Pacific, Russia, and the North Atlantic.
- **Explain** why Stalingrad is considered a major turning point of the war.

### Section Theme

**Individual Action** Many American soldiers made heroic sacrifices in order to turn the tide against the Axis Powers.

### Preview of Events

◆ 1942

**May 1942**  
Fall of the Philippines;  
Battle of the Coral Sea

◆ 1943

**June 1942**  
Battle of Midway

**February 1943**  
Germans defeated  
at Stalingrad

◆ 1944

**May 1943**  
Germans driven out  
of North Africa

## ★ An American Story ★



James S. Thach

On June 4, 1942, Lieutenant Commander James Thach climbed into his F4F Wildcat fighter plane. Thach knew that the Japanese Zero fighter planes were better than his Wildcat. To improve his chances against them, he had developed a new tactic he called the “Thach weave.” At the Battle of Midway, he had his first chance to try it:

“So we boarded our planes. All of us were highly excited and admittedly nervous. . . . A very short time after, Zero fighters came down on us—I figured there were twenty. . . . The air was just like a beehive, and I wasn’t sure that anything would work. And then my weave began to work! I got a good shot at two Zeros and burned them . . . then Ram, my wingman, radioed: ‘There’s a Zero on my tail.’ . . . I was really angry then. I was mad because my poor little wingman had never been in combat before [and] this Zero was about to chew him to pieces. I probably should have ducked under the Zero, but I lost my temper and decided to keep my fire going into him so he’d pull out. He did, and I just missed him by a few feet. I saw flames coming out of his airplane. This was like playing chicken on the highway with two automobiles headed for each other, except we were shooting at each other as well.”

—quoted in *The Pacific War Remembered*

## Holding the Line Against Japan

While officers like James Thach developed new tactics to fight the Japanese, the commander of the United States Navy in the Pacific, Admiral **Chester Nimitz**, began planning operations against the Japanese navy. Although the Japanese had badly damaged the American fleet at Pearl Harbor, they had missed the American aircraft carriers,

which were at sea on a mission. The United States had several carriers in the Pacific, and Nimitz was determined to use them. In the days just after Pearl Harbor, however, he could do little to stop Japan's advance into Southeast Asia.

**The Fall of the Philippines** A few hours after they bombed Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attacked American airfields in the Philippines. Two days later, Japanese troops landed in the islands. The American and Filipino forces defending the Philippines were badly outnumbered. Their commander, General **Douglas MacArthur**, decided to retreat to the Bataan Peninsula. Using the peninsula's rugged terrain, MacArthur's troops held out for more than three months. Gradually, the lack of supplies along with diseases such as malaria, scurvy, and dysentery took their toll. Realizing MacArthur's capture would demoralize the American people, President Roosevelt ordered the general to evacuate to Australia. In Australia MacArthur made a promise: "I came through, and I shall return."

On April 9, 1942, the weary defenders of Bataan finally surrendered. Nearly 78,000 prisoners of war were forced to march—sick, exhausted, and starving—65 miles (105 km) to a Japanese prison camp. Thousands died on this march, which came to be known as the **Bataan Death March**. Here one captured American, Leon Beck, recalls the nightmare:

☹☹ They'd halt us in front of these big artesian wells . . . so we could see the water and they wouldn't let us have any. Anyone who would make a

break for water would be shot or bayoneted. Then they were left there. Finally, it got so bad further along the road that you never got away from the stench of death. There were bodies laying all along the road in various degrees of decomposition—swollen, burst open, maggots crawling by the thousands. . . ☹☹

—quoted in *Death March: The Survivors of Bataan*

Although the troops in the Bataan Peninsula surrendered, a small force held out on the island of **Corregidor** in Manila Bay. Finally, in May 1942, Corregidor surrendered. The Philippines had fallen.

**The Doolittle Raid** Even before the fall of the Philippines, President Roosevelt was searching for a way to raise the morale of the American people. He wanted to bomb Tokyo, but American planes could reach Tokyo only if an aircraft carrier brought them close enough. Unfortunately, Japanese ships in the North Pacific prevented carriers from getting close enough to Japan to launch their short-range bombers.

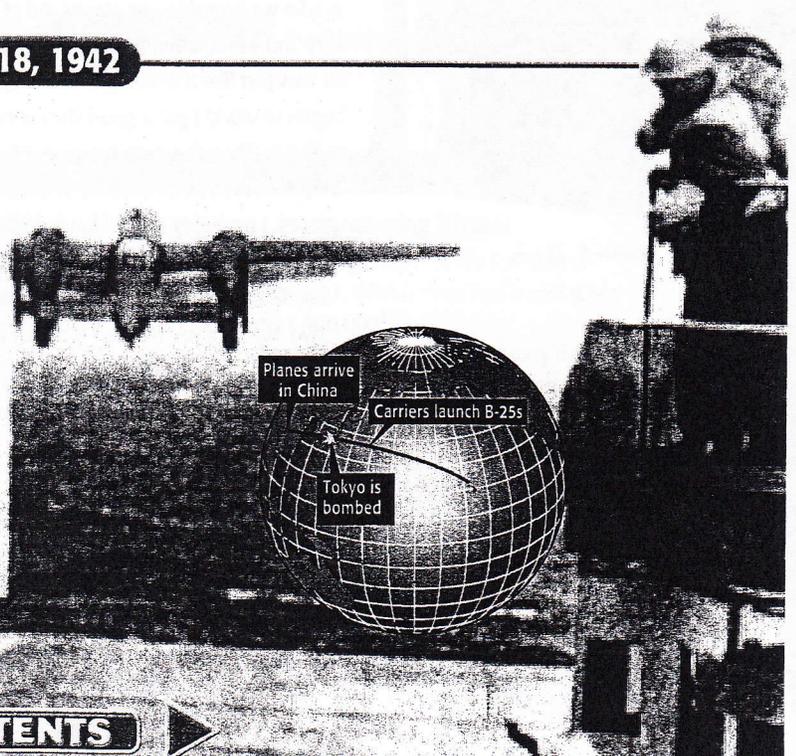
In early 1942, a military planner suggested replacing the carrier's usual short-range bombers with long-range B-25 bombers that could attack from farther away. Although B-25s could take off from a carrier, they could not land on its short deck. After attacking Japan, they would have to land in China.

President Roosevelt put Lieutenant Colonel **James Doolittle** in command of the mission. At the end of March, a crane loaded sixteen B-25s onto the aircraft carrier *Hornet*. The next day the *Hornet* headed west across the Pacific. On April 18, American bombs fell on Japan for the first time.

## Striking Back: The Doolittle Raid, April 18, 1942

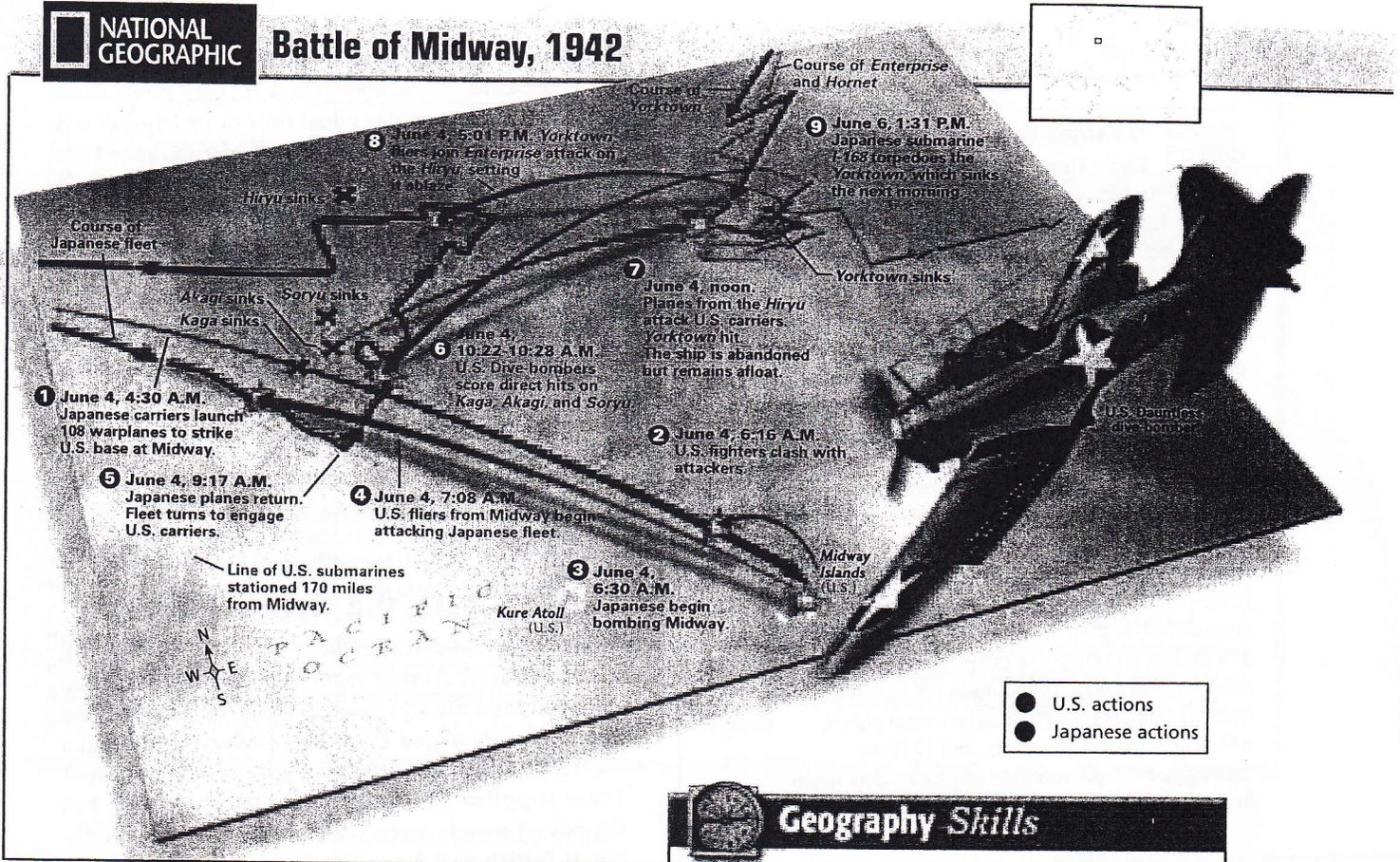
The plan for the Doolittle raid was to launch B-25 bombers from aircraft carriers between 450 and 650 miles from Japan. The planes would bomb selected targets, and fly another 1,200 miles to airfields in China.

All went well until the Japanese discovered the carriers more than 150 miles from the proposed launch site. Instead of canceling the mission, the bombers took off early. The planes reached Japan and dropped their bombs, but they did not have enough fuel to reach the friendly airfields in China. The crews were forced to bail out or crash-land, and only 71 of the 80 crew members survived. Nevertheless, the raid provided an instant boost to sagging American morale.



CONTENTS

# Battle of Midway, 1942



## Geography Skills

1. Interpreting Maps When did Japan launch the attack on Midway?
2. Applying Geography Skills Why were aircraft carriers so vital to the war in the Pacific?

**A Change in Japanese Strategy** While Americans were overjoyed that the air force had finally struck back, Japanese leaders were aghast. Doolittle's bombs could have killed the emperor. The Doolittle raid convinced Japanese leaders to change their strategy.

Before the raid, the Japanese Navy had been arguing about what to do next. The officers in charge of the navy's planning wanted to cut American supply lines to Australia by capturing the south coast of New Guinea. The commander of the fleet, Admiral Yamamoto, wanted to attack Midway Island—the last American base in the North Pacific west of Hawaii. Yamamoto believed that attacking Midway would lure the American fleet into battle and enable his fleet to destroy it.

After Doolittle's raid, the planners dropped their opposition to Yamamoto's plan. The American fleet had to be destroyed in order to protect Tokyo from bombing. The attack on New Guinea would still go ahead, but only three aircraft carriers were assigned to the mission. All of the other carriers were ordered to prepare for an assault on Midway.

**The Battle of the Coral Sea** The Japanese believed that they could proceed with two different attacks. They thought the United States was unaware of Japan's activity and would not be able to respond in time. Japan did not know that an American team of code breakers, based in Hawaii, had already broken the Japanese Navy's secret code for conducting operations.

In March 1942, decoded Japanese messages alerted the United States to the Japanese attack on New Guinea. In response, Admiral Nimitz sent two carriers, the *Yorktown* and the *Lexington*, to intercept the Japanese in the Coral Sea. There, in early May, carriers from both sides launched all-out airstrikes against each other. Although the Japanese sank the *Lexington* and badly damaged the *Yorktown*, the American attacks forced the Japanese to call off their landing on the south coast of New Guinea. The American supply lines to Australia stayed open.



**JAPANESE FORCES** To destroy the U.S. Pacific Fleet, crippled by the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan plots an occupation of two Aleutian islands and an invasion of Midway. Strategists believe that the twin actions will lure U.S. carriers to their doom. Two Japanese carriers and 58 other ships sail for the Aleutians. For Midway, Japan commits 4 large carriers, 2 light carriers, 280 planes, 7 battleships, 14 cruisers, 15 submarines, 42 destroyers, and more than 30 supporting ships. These include transports carrying 5,000 troops to take Midway.



**U.S. FORCES** No battleships guard U.S. carriers sent to Midway to engage the enemy fleet. Into combat go 3 carriers, including battle-damaged Yorktown. Protecting them are 8 cruisers and 16 destroyers. The U.S. has a total of 360 aircraft, including 234 carrier-based fighters and small bombers. Based on Midway are 28 fighters, 46 small bombers, 31 PBV Catalina scout planes, 4 Marauder medium bombers, and 17 Flying Fortresses. Most pilots on Midway have never flown in combat.

### **TURNING POINT**

**The Battle of Midway** Back at Pearl Harbor, the code-breaking team that had alerted Nimitz to the attack on New Guinea now learned of the plan to attack Midway. With so many ships at sea, Admiral Yamamoto transmitted the plans for the Midway attack by radio, using the same code the Americans had already cracked.

Admiral Nimitz had been waiting for the opportunity to ambush the Japanese fleet. He immediately ordered carriers to take up positions near Midway. Unaware they were heading into an ambush, the Japanese launched their aircraft against Midway on June 4, 1942. The island was ready. The Japanese planes ran into a blizzard of anti-aircraft fire, and 38 of them were shot down.

As the Japanese prepared a second wave to attack Midway, aircraft from the American carriers *Hornet*, *Yorktown*, and *Enterprise* launched a counterattack. The American planes caught the Japanese carriers with fuel, bombs, and aircraft exposed on their flight decks. Within minutes three Japanese carriers were reduced to burning wrecks. A fourth was sunk a few hours later. By nightfall it was apparent that the Americans had

dealt the Japanese navy a deadly blow. Admiral Yamamoto ordered his remaining ships to retreat.

The Battle of Midway was a turning point in the war. The Japanese Navy lost four of its largest carriers—the heart of its fleet. Just six months after Pearl Harbor, the United States had stopped the Japanese advance in the Pacific. As Admiral Ernest King, the commander in chief of the U.S. Navy, later observed, Midway “put an end to the long period of Japanese offensive action.” The victory was not without cost, however. The battle killed 362 Americans and 3,057 Japanese. Afterward, one naval officer wrote to his wife: “Let no one tell you or let you believe that this war is anything other than a grim, terrible business.”

### **Reading Check**

**Explaining** Why was the Battle of Midway considered a turning point?

## **Turning Back the German Army**

In 1942 Allied forces began to win victories in Europe as well. Almost from the moment the United States entered the war, Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, urged President Roosevelt to open a second front in Europe. Stalin appreciated the Lend-Lease supplies that the United States had sent, but the Soviet people were still doing most of the fighting. If British and American troops opened a second front by attacking Germany from the west, it would take pressure off the Soviet Union.

Roosevelt wanted to get American troops into battle in Europe, but Prime Minister Churchill urged caution. He did not believe the United States and Great Britain were ready to launch a full-scale invasion of Europe. Instead Churchill wanted to attack the periphery, or edges, of the German empire. Roosevelt agreed, and in July 1942 he ordered the invasion of Morocco and Algeria—two French territories indirectly under German control.

### **The Struggle for North Africa**

Roosevelt decided to invade Morocco and Algeria for two reasons. First, the invasion would give the army some experience without requiring a lot of troops. More importantly, once American troops were in North Africa, they would be able to help British troops fighting the Germans in Egypt.

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## Profiles IN HISTORY

### Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz 1885–1966

Taking command of the Pacific Fleet after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Admiral Chester Nimitz did not view the Japanese attack as a complete disaster. The United States still had its aircraft carriers, and base facilities were in good repair. Even though the battle fleet was at the bottom of the harbor, most of the ships could be retrieved and repaired. If the Japanese had attacked the fleet at sea, nothing would have been salvageable.

Nimitz believed that the only way to win the war was to keep constant pressure on the Japanese. He ordered attacks in early 1942 and firmly backed the Doolittle raid. Nimitz planned the American campaigns that turned the tide of war at Midway and Guadalcanal. Nimitz kept the pressure on the Japanese throughout the war, and he signed the Japanese surrender document as the official representative of the United States government in 1945. In less than four years, he had taken a badly damaged fleet and made it victorious throughout the Pacific.



### Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto 1884–1943

The son of a schoolmaster, Isoroku Yamamoto spent his entire adult life in the military. In the 1930s he was one of the few Japanese leaders who opposed war with the United States. Yamamoto did so not because he was a pacifist, but because he feared Japan would lose.

When he realized that Japan's leaders were intent on war, Yamamoto became convinced that Japan's only hope lay in launching a surprise attack that would destroy the American Pacific Fleet. Although some officers opposed his plan, Yamamoto won out, and he planned and implemented the attack on Pearl Harbor. During the first years of the war, he enjoyed tremendous prestige because of Japanese victories he helped engineer.

In April 1943 the admiral took an inspection flight of several islands. Having already broken the Japanese codes, the Americans knew of the flight. On April 18, American fighters shot down Yamamoto's plane in the South Pacific, and the admiral was killed in the attack.



Egypt was very important to Britain because of the Suez Canal. Most of Britain's empire, including India, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaya, and Australia, used the canal to send supplies to Britain. The German forces in the area, known as the "Afrika Korps," were commanded by General Erwin Rommel—a brilliant leader whose success earned him the nickname "Desert Fox."

The British forced Rommel to retreat at the battle of El Alamein, but his forces remained a serious threat. On November 8, 1942, the American invasion of North Africa began under the command of General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The American forces in Morocco, led by General **George Patton**, quickly captured the city of Casablanca, while those in Algeria seized the cities of Oran and Algiers. The Americans then headed east into Tunisia, while British forces headed west into Libya. The plan was to trap Rommel between the two Allied forces.

When the American troops advanced into the mountains of western Tunisia, they had to fight the German army for the first time. They did not do well. At the **Battle of Kasserine Pass**, the Americans were outmaneuvered and outfought. They suffered roughly 7,000 casualties and lost nearly 200 tanks. Eisenhower fired the general who led the attack and put Patton in

command. Together, the American and British forces finally pushed the Germans back. On May 13, 1943, the last German forces in North Africa surrendered.

**The Battle of the Atlantic** As American and British troops fought the German army in North Africa, the war against German submarines in the Atlantic Ocean continued to intensify. After Germany declared war on the United States, German submarines entered American coastal waters. They found American cargo ships to be easy targets, especially at night when the glow from the cities in the night sky silhouetted the vessels. To protect the ships, cities on the East Coast dimmed their lights every evening. People also put up special "blackout curtains" and drove with their headlights off.

By August 1942, German submarines had sunk about 360 American ships along the American coast. So many oil tankers were sunk that gasoline and fuel oil had to be rationed. To keep oil flowing, the government built the first long-distance oil pipeline, stretching some 1,250 miles (2,010 km) from the Texas oil fields to Pennsylvania.

The loss of so many ships convinced the U.S. Navy to set up a **convoy system**. Under this system, cargo ships traveled in groups and were escorted by navy warships. The convoy system improved the

situation dramatically. It made it much harder for a submarine to torpedo a cargo ship and escape without being attacked.

The spring of 1942 marked the high point of the German submarine campaign. In May and June alone, over 1.2 million tons of shipping were sunk. Yet in those same two months, American and British shipyards built over 1.1 million tons of new shipping. From July 1942 onward, American shipyards produced more ships than German submarines managed to sink. At the same time, American airplanes and warships began to use new technology, including radar, sonar, and depth charges, to locate and attack submarines. As the new technology began to take its toll on German submarines, the Battle of the Atlantic slowly turned in favor of the Allies.

### TURNING POINT

**Stalingrad** In the spring of 1942, before the Battle of the Atlantic turned against Germany, Adolf Hitler was very confident he would win the war. Rommel's troops were pushing the British back in Egypt. German submarines were sinking American ships rapidly, and the German army was ready to launch a new offensive to knock the Soviets out of the war.

Hitler was convinced that the only way to defeat the Soviet Union was to destroy its economy. In May 1942, he ordered his army to capture strategic oil fields, industries, and farmlands in southern Russia and Ukraine. The key to the attack was the city of Stalingrad. The city controlled the Volga River and was a major railroad junction. If the German army captured Stalingrad, the Soviets would be cut off from the resources they needed to stay in the war.

When German troops entered Stalingrad in mid-September, Stalin ordered his troops to hold the city



### Picturing History

**Halting the German Advance** Soviet troops assault German positions in Stalingrad in November 1942. Why did the Soviet army need to hold on to the city of Stalingrad?

at all cost. Retreat was forbidden. The Germans were forced to fight from house to house, losing thousands of soldiers in the process.

On November 23, Soviet reinforcements arrived and surrounded Stalingrad, trapping almost 250,000 German troops. When the battle ended in February 1943, 91,000 Germans had surrendered, although only 5,000 of them survived the Soviet prison camps and returned home after the war. The Battle of Stalingrad was a major turning point in the war. Just as the Battle of Midway put the Japanese on the defensive for the rest of the war, the Battle of Stalingrad put the Germans on the defensive as well.

**Reading Check** **Evaluating** What did the Allies do to win the Battle of the Atlantic?

## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

### Checking for Understanding

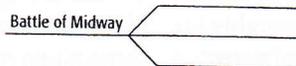
- Define:** periphery, convoy system.
- Identify:** Chester Nimitz, Douglas MacArthur, James Doolittle, George Patton.
- Explain** the American strategy in North Africa.

### Reviewing Themes

- Individual Action** How did the Doolittle raid help boost American morale?

### Critical Thinking

- Analyzing** How did code breakers help stop Japanese advances?
- Evaluating** How were the Americans able to win the Battle of the Atlantic?
- Organizing** Use a graphic organizer like the one below to list the reasons the Battle of Midway was a major turning point in the war.



### Analyzing Visuals

- Examining Maps** Study the map of Midway on page 620. Why do you think the Japanese forces attacked when they did?

### Writing About History

- Descriptive Writing** Take on the role of an American soldier fighting in the Pacific in World War II. Write a letter to your family explaining what conditions are like for you and what you hope to accomplish during the war.