

This Day in History... February 24, 1885

Birth of Admiral Chester Nimitz

Chester William Nimitz was born on February 24, 1885, in Fredericksburg, Texas.

Nimitz had early aspirations to join the Army, applying to West Point while still in high school. No spots were available, so he entered the Naval Academy instead. Excelling in mathematics and graduating with distinction (cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher) in 1905, Nimitz joined the crew of the USS *Ohio* for service in the Far East. Two years later, he was given command of the USS *Panay*, the *Dacatur*, and then the *Denver*.



Stamp issued as part of the Great Americans Series.



Nimitz helped build a submarine base at Pearl Harbor in 1920.



Using submarine and air bases on Saipan, Nimitz was eventually able to launch the assaults on Iwo Jima and Okinawa that led to the inevitable defeat of Japan.

After returning to the US, Nimitz began commanding submarines in 1909. After serving aboard the *E-1*, he was awarded the Silver Lifesaving Medal for rescuing one of his crewmen from drowning. He eventually became one of the nation's leading authorities on submarines. After helping build a submarine base in Pearl Harbor in 1920, Nimitz attended the Naval War College. There, he studied the logistics of a possible Pacific Ocean war – knowledge that would prove quite useful two decades later.

After the December 7, 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Nimitz was placed in charge of the Pacific Fleet. Nimitz was given operational control over all Allied units – air, land, and sea – in the strategic Pacific Ocean Areas. He deployed ships and men as soon as they became available, quickly putting the US on the offensive. He quickly faced critical shortages of ships, planes, and supplies, though. Nimitz rebuilt the fleet's strength and engaged in a patient strategy of "island hopping," which bypassed small Japanese bases to focus on those more crucial. The plan saved time and lives, and ultimately assured the United States of victory.

In this role, Nimitz was widely regarded for both his tactical skills and strong leadership. He's been applauded for his ability to select strong officers and mold them into able leaders, like William F. Halsey Jr. and Raymond A. Spruance. It's been said he had a "sense of inner balance and calm that steadied those around him."

In 1944, an act of Congress established the rank of fleet admiral, the highest grade in the United States Navy. The following day, President Roosevelt appointed Nimitz to the position. Under his leadership, the US defeated the Japanese in key battles including Coral Sea, Midway, and the Solomon Islands. Decisive victories included the Battles of the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf, along with the capture of Saipan, Guam, and Tinian. Successful assaults on Iwo Jima and Okinawa helped bring the war to an end. Nimitz represented the US and signed the official documents when Japan formally surrendered.

The Japanese surrender was signed aboard the USS Missouri.



After the war was over, Nimitz oversaw the Navy's downsizing, helping to find the organization's place in peacetime. He also worked to restore goodwill with Japan by fundraising to help rebuild the Japanese battleship, *Mikasa*. He went on to serve as regent of the University of California before his death on February 20, 1966. In 1972, his daughter Catherine Nimitz christened the USS *Nimitz*, an aircraft carrier and the lead ship of its class.



Admiral Nimitz ordered every available US flight deck to make its way to Midway. By June 3, 1942, he had three carriers and a total of 124 aircraft ready and waiting for battle.



Nimitz helped plan the successful Battle of Leyte Gulf.

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