

This Day in History... August 18, 1978

War in the Pacific National Historical Park

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On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on the United States' naval base at Pearl Harbor. Just a few hours later, Guam was attacked and captured by Japanese forces. These devastating blows left the US with no choice but to declare war with Japan and its allies. Guam was held by Japan for two-and-a-half years until the US recaptured the island July 21, 1944 – a day that became known as Liberation Day by the people of Guam.



Guam's flag has a red border, representing the blood shed by the people of Guam while under Spanish rule and during World War II. Within the border is a blue field, symbolic of the Pacific Ocean which surrounds the island.

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With military leaders like Douglas MacArthur and Chester Nimitz at the helm, the Allies were winning more and more battles as the War in the Pacific went on. US forces recaptured Guam, the Northern Marianas Islands, and many others strategically located near the Japanese home islands. These islands quickly became important bases of operation for B-29 Superfortress bombers to attack Japan directly.



As Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas during WWII, Nimitz's headquarters was in Guam.

Japan refused to give up the fight against the Allies, and after the capture of Saipan and Tinian, the mainland became the Allies' prime target for bombing. The US won the Battle of the Philippine Sea and cut off supply lines to the Japanese home islands. Despite dwindling supplies for both armed forces and its civilians, Japan still wouldn't give up. On July 26, 1945, President Truman, Chiang Kai-shek, and Winston Churchill issued the Potsdam Declaration demanding Japan's unconditional surrender or face "prompt and utter destruction." Japan again refused, and on August 6, President Truman made the decision to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima. This time, Truman declared if Japan still refused to surrender, they could "...expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth." Then on August 9, while Japan's Supreme Council was meeting to discuss a diplomatic proposal for surrender which would guarantee emperor's continued position, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The next day, Japan sent a response to the Allies stating that they would accept the Potsdam Declaration, but not any conditions which would potentially eliminate the position of emperor. On the 12th, the Allies refused, replying, "The ultimate form of government of Japan shall, in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration, be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people." Finally, on August 15, Japanese Emperor Hirohito agreed to unconditional surrender, ending World War II.

World War II was one of the most wide-ranging conflicts in history, affecting countries across the globe. The role Guam played in the war began to be considered for a memorial around 1952 when the National Park Service was tasked with studying the island for potential recreational purposes. In 1964, Governor of Guam Manuel M. L. Guerrero asked the NPS to investigate again. They "recommended that two parks be established in Guam: A National Seashore Park, and an historical park commemorating and interpreting the war in the Pacific." A formal proposal was drafted the following year and the bill was introduced to Congress in January 1967. War in the Pacific National Historical Park was finally established in Apra Harbor, Guam, on August 18, 1978, for soldiers from all countries involved in the Pacific Theater. The park features historical sites at former battlefields, gun emplacements, trenches, caves, and other structures.



Dubbed the "Silent Service," the Navy's submarines played a key role in eliminating the Japanese Navy.

When Japan attacked the United States, they began a conflict that affected nearly every island in the Pacific from Hawaii to the Japanese home islands. While Japan was officially allied with Germany and Italy, the two European countries had very little involvement in the Pacific. In addition to attacking Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, Japan simultaneously launched surprise attacks on Malaya, the Kingdom of Sarawak, Guam, Wake Island, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Southern and eastern Thailand were also attacked and eventually defeated by Japan, which later forced the country to join operations against the Allies in the Pacific.

The first battles of the Pacific Theater were difficult for the Allies, and many ended in losses. In Spring 1942, US President Roosevelt chose General Douglas MacArthur as the supreme commander of the Southwest Pacific. With Australia's help, the Pacific War Council was formed, and the Allies began organizing themselves to strike back at Japan.



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