

## This Day in History... August 7, 1942

# The Guadalcanal Campaign

On August 7, 1942, Allied troops landed on Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida in the southern Solomon Islands. The Guadalcanal Campaign, also known as Operation Watchtower, was the Allies' first major offensive against the Japanese Empire.

The landings, consisting largely of US forces, were intended to keep the Japanese from using the islands to disturb supply and communication chains between the US, Australia, and New Zealand. A total of 3,000 US Marines landed Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo, while 11,000 landed on Guadalcanal.

Upon their landing, the Allies successfully overwhelmed the Japanese defenders, who'd occupied the islands since May, and captured Tulagi, Florida, and Henderson Field (an airfield). Between August and September 1942, the Japanese made several attempts (three land and seven naval battles) to retake Henderson Field.

One of the first attacks took place during the night of August 9. The Japanese Navy had trained in night fighting, giving them an advantage. Allied aircraft couldn't fly effectively at night so the planes offered no support during the attack.

The Japanese ships positioned themselves around Savo Island, where the Allied fleet was patrolling. Though a couple US ships spotted them during the approach and sent warnings, the threats were not taken seriously by the Allied commanders.



*Chesty Puller earned his third Navy Cross at Guadalcanal.*

At about 1:30 a.m. on the 9th, the Japanese commander gave the order, "Every ship attack." The fleet had been divided into two forces, one moving to the north of the island, the other to the south. Over the next hour, the Japanese fired on American and Australian warships, destroying some and severely damaging others. The Japanese then moved out of range of the remaining Allied vessels to discuss whether or not to continue the battle. Faced with low ammunition and a limited knowledge of the strength of the opponent's fleet, the commander decided to withdraw.

However, the Japanese returned to attack almost daily. Much of the fighting was centered around the airfield. Though the Japanese continued to bomb the runway, Allied planes were still able to take off and hold back the Japanese ground forces. While the Allies had the advantage on land and in the air, the two battles at sea damaged American aircraft carriers.



*Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone fought at the Battle of Bloody Ridge on Guadalcanal.*

Following the decisive Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the Japanese abandoned their attempts to retake Henderson Field, though fighting would continue for a few more months. In all, the campaign lasted a total of six months and two days. During the course of the campaign there were a total of 17 battles, which included Tulagi, Tenaru, Edson's Ridge, Matanikau, Henderson Field, Mt. Austen, Eastern Solomons, Cape Esperance, and Santa Cruz Island, among others.

The Japanese made their last evacuations in early February, and when the Allied commanders realized this, they declared the Guadalcanal Campaign to be over on February 9, 1943. The Guadalcanal Campaign marked a shift in the war's dynamic. The Allies transitioned from defensive operations to creating a strategic offensive, leading to the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and Central Pacific Campaigns. Additionally, the Japanese suffered over 19,000 dead and were unable to replace lost aircraft and ships, placing them at a disadvantage for the remainder of the war.



*From the World War II 1942: Into the Battle sheet.*



*Hersey was commended by the secretary of the Navy for helping to evacuate wounded soldiers from Guadalcanal.*

# This Day in History... August 7, 1942

## The Guadalcanal Campaign

On August 7, 1942, Allied troops landed on Guadalcanal, Tulagi, and Florida in the southern Solomon Islands. The Guadalcanal Campaign, also known as Operation Watchtower, was the Allies' first major offensive against the Japanese Empire.

The landings, consisting largely of US forces, were intended to keep the Japanese from using the islands to disturb supply and communication chains between the US, Australia, and New Zealand. A total of 3,000 US Marines landed Tulagi, Gavutu and Tanambogo, while 11,000 landed on Guadalcanal.

Upon their landing, the Allies successfully overwhelmed the Japanese defenders, who'd occupied the islands since May, and captured Tulagi, Florida, and Henderson Field (an airfield). Between August and September 1942, the Japanese made several attempts (three land and seven naval battles) to retake Henderson Field.



*Chesty Puller earned his third Navy Cross at Guadalcanal.*

At about 1:30 a.m. on the 9th, the Japanese commander gave the order, "Every ship attack." The fleet had been divided into two forces, one moving to the north of the island, the other to the south. Over the next hour, the Japanese fired on American and Australian warships, destroying some and severely damaging others. The Japanese then moved out of range of the remaining Allied vessels to discuss whether or not to continue the battle. Faced with low ammunition and a limited knowledge of the strength of the opponent's fleet, the commander decided to withdraw.

However, the Japanese returned to attack almost daily. Much of the fighting was centered around the airfield. Though the Japanese continued to bomb the runway, Allied planes were still able to take off and hold back the Japanese ground forces. While the Allies had the advantage on land and in the air, the two battles at sea damaged American aircraft carriers.



*Gunnery Sergeant John Basilone fought at the Battle of Bloody Ridge on Guadalcanal.*

Following the decisive Naval Battle of Guadalcanal, the Japanese abandoned their attempts to retake Henderson Field, though fighting would continue for a few more months. In all, the campaign lasted a total of six months and two days. During the course of the campaign there were a total of 17 battles, which included Tulagi, Tenaru, Edson's Ridge, Matanikau, Henderson Field, Mt. Austen, Eastern Solomons, Cape Esperance, and Santa Cruz Island, among others.

The Japanese made their last evacuations in early February, and when the Allied commanders realized this, they declared the Guadalcanal Campaign to be over on February 9, 1943. The Guadalcanal Campaign marked a shift in the war's dynamic. The Allies transitioned from defensive operations to creating a strategic offensive, leading to the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and Central Pacific Campaigns. Additionally, the Japanese suffered over 19,000 dead and were unable to replace lost aircraft and ships, placing them at a disadvantage for the remainder of the war.



*From the World War II 1942: Into the Battle sheet.*



*Hersey was commended by the secretary of the Navy for helping to evacuate wounded soldiers from Guadalcanal.*