

# Yanks Land on Okinawa Island

## 'Greatest Pacific Landing' Is 325 Mi. From Japan Proper

Successfully completing what was officially termed the greatest amphibious operation of the Pacific war, American infantrymen and Marines comprising a new U.S. Army, the 10th, swarmed ashore on Okinawa Island, 325 miles south of Japan proper, at 8.30 AM yesterday (Tokyo time), Adm. Chester W. Nimitz announced in a communique which he himself broadcast.

The landing was supported by the Pacific's largest task force, involving more than 1,400 ships, including strong units of the British Pacific Fleet, under command of Adm. Raymond A. Spruance, 5th Fleet commander.

Proceeding "according to plan," the assault forces landed on the west coast of Okinawa, large island in the center of the long Ryukyu chain stretching southwestward from Japan, "advanced inland rapidly and by 11 AM had captured the Yontan and Kadena airports with light losses," Nimitz said.

The landing made on Easter morn, and following ten days of devastating bombardment by naval guns and carrier planes, was achieved without a shot being fired, cabled a Reuter correspondent aboard Adm. Turner's flagship. He said that the only noticeable enemy movements the morning of the invasion were to the rear and that gains were made all along the line after seizure of the two airfields named in Adm. Nimitz' communique.

Nimitz read his communique personally for the first time, lending added significance to the new invasion which would give the U.S. air bases practically in Japan's back yard.

### Operations Follow Landings

The operation followed landings which began last Monday and resulted in the capture of islands in the Kerama group just off Okinawa's southern tip. Artillery emplacements on these islands joined battleships, cruisers and lighter naval units in pouring shells into Jap positions on Okinawa.



March Record  
Month for 8th

New York

London Edition

Paris

## THE STARS AND STRIPES

Daily Newspaper of U.S. Armed Forces

Vol. 5 No. 127—1d.

in the European Theater of Operations  
MONDAY, APRIL 2, 1945

## Link-Up Seals Ruhr As Foe Seeks Escape

An Armored Posse Goes Coyote Hunting

## Armor Meets Resistance First Time

Tanks of the 2nd Armored Division of the U.S. 9th Army linked up yesterday afternoon with elements of the U.S. 1st Army in the first union of units sealing off the Ruhr, creating a tremendous pocket from which three enemy divisions already have been reported attempting to flee. The juncture came near Lippstadt, west of Paderborn, where 1st Army forces were engaged in hard fighting with dug-in Nazi tanks.

Other signs of German attempts at a possible stand against the American spearheads thrusting into the Reich, in addition to that at Paderborn, were reported from the U.S. 3rd Army sector, where armored units ran up against opposition gathering along the east bank of the Fulda River.

Accounts of great havoc wrought by tactical air forces against enemy transport



The Stars and Stripes headline announcing the U.S. military landing on Okinawa, Japan. (U.S. Army photo)

## Joint Planning and the Battle of Okinawa

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**T**he Battle of Okinawa was a pivotal conflict in the Pacific during World War II, profoundly influencing the principles and execution of modern joint operations. As the largest and final major amphibious assault in the Pacific theater, it demanded extraordinary coordination among joint forces (Sarantakes, 2016).

Foundational concepts such as unity of effort, integrated command, and operational synchronization were instrumental to success, and their continued relevance underscores the importance of joint planning in contemporary operations.

### The Battle of Okinawa: A Historical Overview

Spanning 82 days from April to June 1945, the Battle of Okinawa was the largest amphibious assault of the Pacific War (Alexander, 1995). It involved a coalition of U.S. and Allied forces — including the Navy, Army, Marine Corps, and Commonwealth navies — against the Imperial Japanese Thirty-Second Army (Appleman et al., 1948).

The Pacific island-hopping strategy required commanders to accept significant risks, often leading to heavy sacrifices during planning and execution. Okinawa became one of the war's most brutal engagements,



with U.S. forces suffering more than 49,000 casualties, including more than 26,000 non-battle injuries. Japanese losses exceeded 110,000, many of whom were conscripted Okinawans, and civilian casualties were catastrophic (Appleman et al., 1948).

The battle lasted far longer than anticipated, prolonged by fierce Japanese resistance, fortified defenses, and challenging terrain. Despite these obstacles, joint forces secured a decisive victory, demonstrating the futility of further resistance and signaling the inevitability of Allied success in the Pacific (Appleman et al., 1948).

## Joint Planning Defined and Its Importance

Joint planning enables commanders to align strategic objectives with operational execution through deliberate coordination across all services. It fosters shared understanding and efficient resource use, ensuring that national goals are met through unified military action (Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], 2020).

The joint strategy during the Battle of Okinawa aimed to achieve four primary objectives, each essential to the campaign's success. First, the forces sought to seize the Kadena and Yontan airfields to establish logistical hubs for increased troop and equipment movement. Second, they aimed to cut the island of Okinawa in half, limiting the enemy's mobility and reducing their ability to reinforce or regroup. The third

objective was to secure the island's northern region, ensuring a stable base of operations. Finally, the joint forces would advance southward to capture Shuri Castle and the city of Naha, effectively sealing the victory and breaking the enemy's resistance (Hanson, 2000).

## Joint Planning Tenet Examples

Joint planning incorporates several key tenets for understanding and shaping the operational environment. Understanding the center of gravity (COG) and the physical environment is pivotal in guiding operational decisions and enabling joint forces to maintain a strategic advantage (JCS, 2020). Properly identifying and applying these elements can decisively influence an operation's outcome.

When accurately identified and effectively targeted, the COG represents a focal point that can shift an operation's momentum toward achieving the desired end state. Similarly, a comprehensive understanding of the physical environment allows joint forces to adapt to terrain and environmental challenges, leveraging them to gain battlefield dominance (JCS, 2020).

## Center of Gravity (COG) Analysis

In the Battle of Okinawa, the primary COG was capturing and using Kadena Air Base. This objective provided the joint forces with a critical launching point for subsequent operations — particularly Operation Downfall, the planned invasion of the Japanese home



A formidable task force carves out a beachhead, about 350 miles from the Japanese mainland. Landing craft of all kinds blacken the sea out to the horizon, where stand the battlewagons, cruisers, and destroyers. Okinawa, Japan, April 13, 1945. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

islands. Because of its proximity to Japan, Kadena Air Base offered strategic value for future operations (Appleman et al., 1948).

### Physical Terrain Shaping the Operational Environment

Understanding the physical terrain is a critical element of joint planning that directly informs battlefield strategy (JCS, 2020). In the Battle of Okinawa, planners leveraged the island's varied terrain to coordinate Army, Navy, and Marine Corps operations across land, sea, and air. This integration enhanced effectiveness.

One key example was the preemptive capture of the Kerama Islands on March 26, 1945. Securing these islands provided a vital staging area for resupply and naval support, giving joint forces a tactical advantage before the main assault. This demonstrated how terrain analysis and early preparation contributed to the campaign's success (Appleman et al., 1948).

### Joint Operational Tactics to Ensure Success

Thoroughly understanding joint operational tactics is critical for enriching and executing successful operations, as it requires comprehensively analyzing all battlefield aspects. Achieving a clear visualization of the operational environment depends on fostering a shared understanding among all joint force members.

Ways to achieve such understanding include identifying key physical areas and recognizing critical factors influencing the mission. A systems perspective incorporates political, military, economic, social, informational, and infrastructure (PMESII) elements and is invaluable in understanding how aspects of the operational environment interconnect. This perspective not only highlights potential COGs but also helps joint force commanders recognize the interplay of these elements to guide mission execution effectively (JCS, 2022).

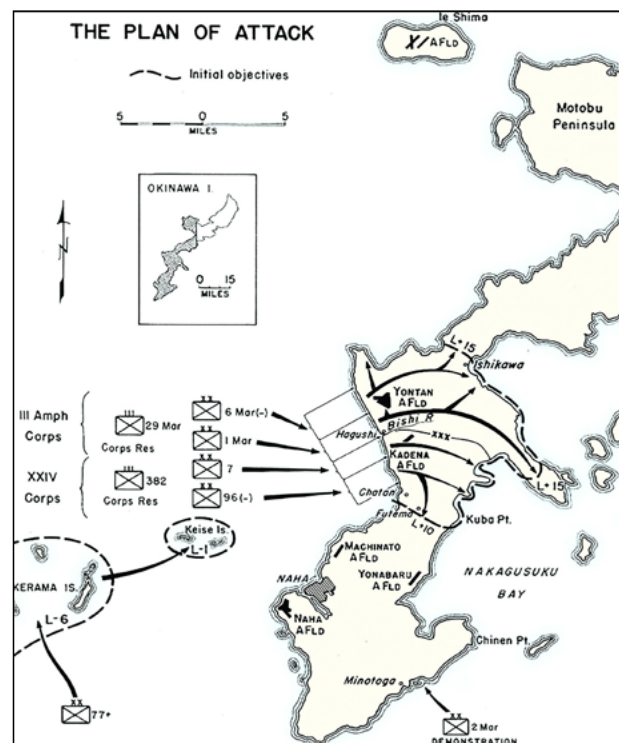
The systems approach proved essential during the Battle of Okinawa, where understanding the interconnected nature of the operational environment informed strategic and tactical decisions.

By analyzing the political implications of securing Okinawa, the military advantages of key terrain features, and the logistical requirements of sustaining forces in such a challenging environment, joint planners created a cohesive framework for achieving success.

### Amphibious Assault Tactics

Lessons from earlier Pacific battles like Iwo Jima and Saipan highlighted the need for overwhelming air and naval superiority, especially to counter kamikaze threats. These experiences emphasized the importance of coordinated maritime and air operations to secure the battlespace for ground forces.

At Okinawa, joint forces applied this lesson by



Okinawa plan for the initial attack. (U.S. Army photo)

establishing air and naval dominance before launching amphibious assaults. Sustained aerial bombardments and naval gunfire weakened Japanese defenses, while air patrols reduced kamikaze attacks. This integrated approach minimized risk and increased operational efficiency, playing a crucial role in the campaign's success (Appleman et al., 1948).

### Logistics and Support

Effective logistics and support were equally critical to the success of the Battle of Okinawa. Sustaining the joint force required meticulous planning and coordination to ensure reinforcements, equipment, ammunition, and medical evacuation capabilities were continuously resupplied. The Navy's control of sea lanes played a pivotal role in protecting supply convoys and facilitating the flow of resources to the front lines.

This logistical superiority allowed the joint forces to maintain their operational tempo despite the campaign's high casualties and prolonged nature (Appleman et al., 1948).

The ability to sustain operations over the 82-day battle was a testament to the effectiveness of joint planning. Commanders anticipated the operation's logistical demands and leveraged the Navy's dominance in the Pacific to secure a steady supply chain. This ensured that the force remained well-equipped and capable of adapting to the battlefield's evolving challenges, demonstrating the importance of integrated logistical support in joint operations.



Soldiers of the 96th Infantry Division attack a Japanese position on Big Apple Ridge, Okinawa, Japan, June 9, 1945. (U.S. Army photo)

## Joint Command Structure

A clear and effective joint command structure is essential for enabling combatant commanders to fully leverage joint capabilities and maintain unity of command across all participants in an operation. This structure extends beyond military forces to include government agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other key stakeholders, ensuring cohesive coordination across all levels (JCS, 2020).

The joint command structure employed during the Battle of Okinawa exemplifies how properly implementing joint planning and unified command can shape a major operation's success. It underscores the importance of coordination and collaboration in achieving battlefield dominance.

Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz served as the primary planner for the Battle of Okinawa at the operational level, coordinating efforts with Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Allied Commander for the Pacific (Appleman et al., 1948). This unified command structure seamlessly integrated joint force components, ensuring strategic objectives aligned with operational execution.

By fostering a unity of effort, the joint command structure allowed coordinated action across all participating forces, from naval and air support to ground operations. This shared understanding was

pivotal in maintaining operational cohesion and adapting to the challenges presented by the battle.

## Ends, Ways, and Means

Joint Publication 5-0 states, "Joint planning frames the problem; aligns ends, ways, and means; develops operational approaches; accounts for risk; and gives leaders decision space with proposed military options" (JCS, 2020, p. 33). Joint planning aligns ends (objectives), ways (methods), and means (resources) to guide operational strategy while managing risk (JCS, 2020).

In Okinawa, the end state was to establish a strategic base for the invasion of Japan. Joint forces applied overwhelming firepower and amphibious tactics to achieve this, relying on unified command and logistical support as critical means.

## Battle of Okinawa Ends, Ways, and Means

In the Battle of Okinawa context, the ultimate end state was to capture the island as a strategic base for launching a future invasion of Japan. This objective aligned with broader strategic goals to pressure the Japanese homeland and bring the war to an end.

The ways involved deploying overwhelming joint forces to achieve battlefield dominance. This required a coordinated effort to neutralize



Japanese defenses through amphibious assaults, air superiority, and naval bombardments, ensuring the objectives were systematically achieved.

The means to accomplish this operation were vast and complex, involving careful coordination between all joint force components. Unity of command was critical, ensuring Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Allied operations were seamlessly integrated.

From the Japanese perspective, the defense of Okinawa was critical to delaying Allied advances. They fortified the island extensively, understanding that its loss would provide a base for Allied bombardments of Japan.

However, employing poorly trained and underprepared Okinawan conscripts created vulnerabilities. This disparity in training and preparedness ultimately benefited the joint forces, who exploited these weaknesses to achieve victory (Appleman et al., 1948).

### Modern Real-World Applicability

The Battle of Okinawa provides valuable lessons directly applicable to modern military operations, particularly as the U.S. prepares for potential conflicts in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM).

While the world has seen dramatic technological advancements since World War II, the principles of joint planning and operational integration remain critical. Leveraging these capabilities is essential for understanding and countering a modern adversary's strengths (Department of the Army [DA], 2025).

The terrain complexities and operational challenges encountered during the Battle of Okinawa are strikingly similar to those leaders might face in the



About to be hit by a Japanese A6M Zero Kamikaze, while operating off Okinawa on April 11, 1945. The plane hit the ship's side below the main deck, causing minor damage and no casualties on board the battleship. A 40mm quad gun mount's crew is in action in the lower foreground. (U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command Photograph)

USINDOPACOM region today. Amphibious assaults and island-hopping strategies, key components of the Okinawa campaign, are approaches that commanders must carefully consider if future conflicts arise.

Modern adversaries, like the Japanese forces during World War II, will likely adopt fortified defensive postures to exploit the terrain and delay or disrupt joint force advances. The lessons of Okinawa highlight the importance of anticipating these measures and integrating multidomain capabilities — land, sea, air, space, and cyber — to maintain operational superiority.

Furthermore, commanders must prepare for adversaries who may not have the same vulnerabilities seen in the Battle of Okinawa, such as poorly trained conscripts or resource deficiencies.

The modern battlefield increasingly involves near-peer competitors capable of employing sophisticated strategies and advanced technologies. Multidomain operations will play a central role in ensuring battlefield dominance, requiring joint forces to adapt their planning and execution to account for a more evenly matched opponent (DA, 2025).

### Call to Action

The Battle of Okinawa is a critical joint planning case study that underscores the importance of strategic coordination, adaptability, and unified command in large-scale combat operations. Leaders must apply these lessons by focusing on more integrated joint force operations, leveraging shared technology, and anticipating adversary actions.

As the global security environment continues to evolve, the principles demonstrated at Okinawa — cross-domain coordination, effective risk management, and operational agility — remain essential for mission success. Today's military leaders must continue to refine joint planning methodologies to win future conflicts and maintain battlefield dominance.

### Conclusion

The examples above illustrate modern joint doctrinal terms, and they highlight the pivotal role effective joint planning played in the success of the Battle of Okinawa. Analyzing key aspects of the battle through the lens of joint planning reveals parallels to contemporary real-world military operations, demonstrating the enduring relevance of these principles.

The Battle of Okinawa exemplifies how leaders during World War II shaped joint military doctrine and laid the foundation for the strategies and practices that continue to guide joint operations. The lessons learned from this historic campaign remain critical in understanding the integration of joint forces, managing complex operational environments, and achieving strategic objectives in modern and future conflicts. ■



The battleship USS Idaho shells Okinawa, Japan, April 1, 1945. (U.S. Navy photo)

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