

The Japanese “Rice Offensive” in China

In China the Japanese Army began a series of offensives around the city of **Changde** aimed to draw out the Chinese Army and destroy it.

By December 6 the city had fallen into Japanese hands. Fresh

Chinese reinforcements arrived, allowing the Chinese army to encircle the city. By December 13, the Japanese were forced to withdraw from the city.

By January 5, 1944, the Japanese had been forced back to their starting position from prior to the opening of the “rice offensive.”

Island Hopping: Tarawa

In December 1943, American planners made it clear that American forces driving through the Central Pacific would win the war against Japan rather than a land-based coalition army operating from China.

Chester Nimitz’s first action would be to seize the **Tarawa** atoll in the northern Gilbert Islands.



Operation Galvanic, the landing at Tarawa, would be undertaken by the 2nd Marine Division and complemented by another landing at nearby Makin to be carried out by the 27th Infantry Division.

The landings at Tarawa and Makin revealed the deep flaws in American amphibious operations doctrine.

1944

Island Hopping: Saipan and Tinian



Operation Forager would be to seize three islands (Saipan, Tinian, Guam), for use as airfields from which the new **B-29 Superfortress** bombers, with their extended range, could reach the Japanese home islands.

On June 15, the first American forces came ashore at Saipan.

The Marines came under fire from Japanese positions in the nearby hills overlooking the landing beaches. The Marines had to move inland under intense fire.

At sea, the arrival of the First Mobile Fleet initiated what became known as the **Battle of the Philippines Sea** but was more popularly known among American pilots as the **Marianas Turkey Shoot**. Japanese pilots flew 328 sorties and lost 243 aircraft.

The most tragic scene occurred at **Marpi Point**. The Japanese began shooting, beheading, drowning, and blowing each other up.

The assault on Tinian began on July 24. Eight thousand Japanese were surprised by the Marines landing. The Marines destroyed practically the entirety of the Japanese garrison.

The airfields at Tinian and Saipan quickly became the principal bases for the B-29 bomber offensive against Japan.

The Liberation of the Philippines

An attack on the Philippines, a smaller landing on the island of Mindanao, was authorized for November 1944.

The Third Fleet of William Halsey launched a series of raids against Japanese airfields at Mindanao, Yap, the Palau islands, and Formosa and urged MacArthur to bypass Mindanao in favor of a landing on the island of Leyte.

On October 20, the U.S. Sixth Army landed on the eastern shore of Leyte and faced only light resistance.

The most serious fighting of the first phase of the liberation of the Philippines took place at sea, where the greatest naval battle of the war unfolded through a series of naval engagements known collectively as the **Battle of Leyte Gulf**.

The Japanese introduced a new weapon at Leyte, the **kamikaze**: suicide pilots who utilized their planes as weapons by flying them directly into American naval vessels.²⁹

In early December, Japanese forces launched a daring commando raid behind American lines aimed at disrupting American airfields.