

## **The Allied Conquest of Japan**

What Happens Next – 10.01.2022

Larry Bernstein:

Welcome to What Happens Next. My name is Larry Bernstein.

What Happens Next is a podcast which covers economics, finance, history, politics, religion and current events. Today's session will be on the Allied Conquest of Japan. Our speaker will be Yale historian Paul Kennedy who is well known for his classic book *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers*. This will be the final podcast of his four-part podcast series on the history of World War 2. Today's podcast will focus on the battles beginning in 1944 and ending with Japan's unconditional surrender.

Buckle up.

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Let's begin with Paul Kennedy.

Paul, on our previous podcast on WW2 we ended the discussion in 1943. You argued that 1943 was the most important year of the war because the allies won the Battle of the Atlantic, Italy surrendered, and the Americans produced sufficient naval forces to crush the Japanese in the Pacific. Today, let's discuss the battles of 1944 and what actions led to the ultimate Allied victories. Please set the stage for what the war looked like at the beginning of 1944.

Paul Kennedy:

1944 was when the three great allied movements against the axis all took place. On the Eastern front, there was the largest ever Red Army offensive called Operation Bagration, which buckled the Nazi held front in Eastern Europe. In 1944, the allied navies had chiefly pulled out of the Mediterranean, apart from bombarding around the Anglo landings, because they were preparing to put all of their amphibious assets into the D-Day operation in Normandy in June 1944. In the Pacific under Nimitz, moving towards a big showdown with the Japanese Navy at the great Battle of the Philippines Sea, which we sometimes call the great Mariana's Turkey shoot because of the losses there.

Larry Bernstein:

in your book, *Victory at Sea*, you highlight that the Americans had just shot down and killed Admiral Yamamoto and afterwards the Japanese Navy seemed leaderless. What was the Japanese military strategy after Pearl Harbor?

Paul Kennedy:

Larry, the Imperial headquarters overall strategy is not a maritime one at all. Generals have the upper hand. The great campaigns in China involving well over a million Japanese troops are the core. What those Japanese generals wanted was to have some solid defensive line established by the Navy so that you could keep the Americans out. But the Pacific contest was secondary to the large Asian China contest. The Japanese Navy might have been better able to articulate its own core strategy had the United States not shot down Yamamoto, and had the Japanese carrier forces not suffered the loss of so many of their pilots both at the Midway in June 1942 but also in shootouts around the great island base of Rabaul in late 43. So, the loss of pilots, the loss of dynamic Naval leadership, the twisted landward strategy rather than the seaward strategy meant that this Imperial Japanese Navy seemed unable to do very much just as the Americans were consolidating this enormous new fleet of new fast carriers, new fast battleships, hundreds and hundreds of destroyers, landing craft, and about to launch these bigger assaults from the beginning of 1944 onwards.

Larry Bernstein:

At Pearl Harbor, Japan had a massive air power advantage. The Americans had few planes and trained pilots. But by 1944, the US had air supremacy. How did that happen?

Paul Kennedy:

Aviation develops in all of the armed services of the advanced countries from the 1920s to 1930s. The defense ministries have to decide whether they're going to have an independent air force as the British have in the Royal Air Force, or they're going to have separate army air forces and separate Navy air forces. The Japanese Navy carrier air force of the late 1930s has a remarkably well-trained cadre of pilots including high level bomber pilots, dive bomber pilots, torpedo bomber pilots.

The numbers are comparatively limited, and they're not going to recruit much from elsewhere as the war gets underway, so the pilots they lose are really, valuable assets. They're losing gold dust. They don't lose many at first, because of the decisive victory they have at Pearl Harbor, where their casualties are minimal. They're still in a very strong position as they come to exchange blows with the US Navy at the Battle of the Coral Sea, but one carrier down here, one carrier down, there equal blows, equal black eye.

Most of the aircraft are sunk on the four carriers, which are destroyed at the Battle of Midway. There's still a significant bunch of carrier pilots in the Japanese Naval Air Force, but over time as 1943 grinds on, they start losing steadily the number of trained pilots. And by the end of 1943, the US both in this training operation, caught up and then overtaken in the number of trained aviators who are getting many more hours of experience before they even go to fight in the Western Pacific. From that time onwards, not only does the US begin to have better aircraft, but it has better pilots. And that's really turning the battle by 1944.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned that the Japanese had over a million men fighting in China after Pearl Harbor. What was the Japanese strategy on the Asian mainland?

Paul Kennedy:

So, the Japanese army officer culture was very, very much Asia centered. They defeat China 1894-95, their staggering defeat of Russia in the Russo-Japanese war, their takeover of Manchuria in 1931 to 33. And their whole culture was to be a land army. And this is the key charge against them. Surely, Larry, you might say that it's okay to do that immediately after Pearl Harbor, because you think you've knocked those Americans on the head and you've pushed the British out, but by 1943 to 44, the danger is you are concentrating most of your military resources on a land war in Asia, it doesn't make any sense at all. When Japan surrenders in August 1945, there is a very, very large Japanese army still over there, marooned on the continent of Asia because the US submarines are not allowing it to get back in troop ships back to the home islands. It is being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Larry Bernstein:

The greatest naval battle in history occurs at Leyte Gulf in October 1944. Over 200,000 naval personnel are involved in the fighting in the waters near the Philippines Islands of Leyte, Samar and Luzon between the American-led allied forces and the Japanese. Many of our listeners are unfamiliar with this great naval battle, what happened?

Paul Kennedy:

The Battle of Leyte Gulf between the Japanese Navy and the advancing American invasion forces were going to have an amphibious landing on the Eastern shores of the Philippine islands around a place called Leyte Gulf.

Larry Bernstein:

The Japanese decide to split their fleet instead of concentrating their forces. They also used part of their fleet as a decoy to hide the main thrust of their attack against the American invading amphibious forces. Why did the Japanese scatter their naval forces?

Paul Kennedy:

The Japanese Navy had specialized in, we sent part of a fleet here while another part of a fleet will be there, while the main fleet will be coming up in this direction. And a decoy fleet there. And they did not understand, US decryption intelligence was sophisticated and that this wasn't a good way in which to fight the larger American forces, which are driving in a more central way. So Leyte Gulf itself is where Japanese send a force from the North to try to decoy American carriers away with them while they push a battleship fleet through the inward islands of the Philippines to come out and give the amphibious landing forces a surprise, while down at the South, they try to bring the giant Japanese battleships to meet with the American battleships.

Every part of the Japanese four-part strategy goes astray. A battleship fleet finds itself blocked at the exit by a long array of American battleships, including older battleships from Pearl Harbor, which blow them to pieces.

The decoy doesn't work very well apart from taking Admiral Halsey away to the North. It leads to the destruction by US carrier aircraft of the remaining Japanese carriers and the drive in the South is also blunted. So, at the end of the day, when you count the overall losses for the Battle

of Leyte Gulf of the US Navy, they are not very large at all. In the case of a Japanese Navy, it is carriers. It is a giant battleship Musashi, which is torn apart by carrier air attacks in the middle of the conflict. Heavy cruisers destroyed by US submarines. There's not much left of a Japanese Navy after Leyte Gulf. It's pretty much over.

Larry Bernstein:

Why was the battle there? Why did it come to pass that this was the spot?

Paul Kennedy:

As the US's driving its twin drives across the Central Pacific coming westwards from Hawaii, the Southwest Pacific drive coming from Australia around the great hump of Papua New Guinea towards the Philippines. This arouses a very significant debate by the American planners, where the heck are we going here on route to invading Japan itself? Cause we're down there, South of the Philippines, we are 2000 miles away from Japan. There was quite a large strategic lobby, which said that you should first go as far west to take a chunk of the Chinese coast, not only to help our Chinese allies and deal a blow at the Japanese military operations, but from that part of the Chinese coast, you could put a very, very large strategic bombing force there to attack and hurt the Japanese home islands.

There was another group, especially around MacArthur who said, no, no, no, no, no. I told the people of the Philippines when I left there in 1942 that I shall return. So, we have to return to the Philippines first. There were other strategists who said, look guys, we are now in the era of long range, amphibious warfare. Amphibious fleets can be covered by these fast-moving carrier forces. We should just strike across, knock out as many of the Japanese ships as possible, and then turn around and go via the small islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa directly to take the home islands, not even bother with China, which eventually is dropped, not even bother with the Philippines. But MacArthur and the army were insistent that you had to go to the Philippines first. And since you were coming from the Pearl Harbor direction, you were going to come in and land on the Eastern shores of the Philippines.

And Leyte Gulf was as about as good a landing area as possible. It was a fair distance from the capital Manila further east. But if you established beachheads there and aerial bases, you could defend yourself and you could move on steadily to do what MacArthur wanted. The total reconquest of the Philippines. Boy, there were a lot of powerful egos in this Pacific history story, Larry. There were great contested battles there between army and navy.

Larry Bernstein:

What I don't understand is why does MacArthur's personal strategic plan is given so much weight?

Paul Kennedy:

MacArthur is a bruising arrogant person. William Manchester's biography of him is called American Caesar, right? He's a four-star general and was one of the few to become a five-star general. Since he'd been pushed out the Philippines rather ignominiously in 1942, he was determined that the US strategy was to get back there. Think of it like this, the alternative theater of war large enough for a four-star general, other than fighting in the Southwest Pacific could

only be in the Mediterranean with the British, with Montgomery or it could be in Western France in the Normandy landings, and nobody wanted MacArthur meddling around in the Normandy landings.

He would want to be in control of everything. He would want to be the premier American general. Eisenhower would be inferior to him, Bradley, Patton. And if you fast forwarded to the difficulties, which MacArthur gave Truman in the operation of a Korean war until Harry Truman had the strength of character to dismiss him, you would understand why this was happening. Leave him in the Pacific.

Larry Bernstein:

In retrospect, was the recapture of the Philippines a smart strategic move or was it a waste of time, money and lives?

Paul Kennedy:

It's a hard call. The US gains more amphibious landing experiences. They encounter the Japanese Kamikaze for the first time. You get another half year of development of the recruiting of your own armed forces. Remember the ultimate plan is the largest ever amphibious operation, which would be the invasion of Japan proper in and around November 1945. This would be so large. It would make D-Day seem small by comparison. So, it wasn't a bad idea to get as many American armed forces control of beaches experience, because my word, when you wanted to move for Operation Typhoon on the Japanese mainland. It was a good exercise.

And it was good publicity to say, we have come back and recovered the Philippines, and MacArthur had a very, very significant political support based back home already among many Republican parts of the country. There was a drumbeat for MacArthur to be president. So, you don't want him nearby.

Larry Bernstein:

Can you explain MacArthur's strategy for winning the war in the Pacific?

Paul Kennedy:

The million plus Japanese soldiers are in China, that's the core of the Japanese military. MacArthur, he believes that his Southwest Pacific army command needs to move from New Guinea across the Philippines, and then the Navy supporting the army all the way to the invasion of Japan.

What you can see by looking at a map of the Western Pacific is that going to the Philippines or going to the Chinese mainland are a long, long diversion to get at Japan proper. Now you cannot come across 3000 miles of ocean from Pearl Harbor without some individual bases, hence Okinawa hence Iwo Jima, but you didn't need much more than that. And the Navy planners felt confident that given the sufficient amphibious landing forces, they had by this stage, 16 aircraft carriers with about 1,500 Navy aircraft, they felt they were an independent transoceanic amphibious force with carrier protection and punch. So why bother unless you had a political reason just to keep MacArthur down there by 1944. It was judged that there were sufficient resources to send a large amount of army divisions to be under MacArthur, while all of the

Marine divisions, we're going to be ready for the invasion of Japan proper. Nobody, at that time, knew anything about the atomic bomb.

Nobody thinks that the invasion of Japan, when it comes in late 45 or 1946 is going to be anything other than gigantic. And you're going to need all the resources possible, including the vast numbers of American GIs, who are just finishing the war in Europe and are going to be turned around after May 1945 to be sent on to the Pacific.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is Iwo Jima. Here is a tiny 8 square mile volcanic island that is 750 miles away from Tokyo. The Japanese knew we were going to invade it, so the island was heavily fortified with soldiers hiding in tunnels and bunkers. Virtually all the 21,000 Japanese soldiers stationed there are killed. Some chose suicide instead of becoming a prisoner of war. This fight to the death mentality was a Japanese concept that seemed to have been out of control. In ancient times, I can understand fighting to the death if the alternative is certain death, rape of the women, and enslavement of the children. But here, we have an uninhabited island with soldiers. Why did the Japanese fight to the death?

Paul Kennedy:

The idea of surrender is a contemptible act of cowardice, which is one reason why the Japanese armies treat the captured British, American, Dutch and Australian soldiers so harshly when they have surrendered to them in 1942. This cult of the Bushido, the cult of the Japanese samurai warrior that is better to commit suicide than to have any form of humiliation, that to fight to the end is a glorious thing. This isn't shared by the average Japanese family, and it isn't shared by their moms or their grandmoms. It is very much a masculine ethos. And in the officer corps, it is drummed into them that if something goes wrong, you are going to fall on your sword.

They're going to fight to the very end and they're going to fight hiding in their bunkers. So, the Americans have got to come and find them. Why? Because if they go on to the surface, they get blown to pieces by superior American firepower. If you can cause so many casualties among the American military that Roosevelt and the others are going to say, let's see if we can get a compromise peace, maybe even a peace with honor. So, keep fighting on and don't try to scuttle away because that would be a disgrace.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is the use of the Kamikaze air attacks. I am baffled that using a plane as a human missile in a suicide attack would be a logical and important part of a major power during wartime. Why did the Japanese consider using their young pilots as suicide bombers? The American military creed is to leave no man left behind, and here the Japanese are saying that nothing is more noble than committing suicide to kill more enemy soldiers?

Paul Kennedy:

It's the idea of this disproportionate cost to the enemy, which is maybe the most logical part of the Kamikaze strategy, right?

By this time when the Americans take the Philippines and advance on Iwo Jima, Okinawa, this is an awful word to use, but we get more bang for the buck. If these aircraft are only flying in one direction, they have doubled the range of the possibility of attacking, finding, and attacking American carrier groups. If range is sufficient, they arrive over the landing areas of Iwo Jima and then dive bomb the amphibious American infantryman in the landing craft coming ashore. Again, you might have disproportionate losses supposing you kill 10 Americans for every one of the Kamikaze pilots who's gone to his death.

Let the Americans know you have to negotiate to come to a compromise peace because you can see, we are willing to fight to the end. And it really worried American planners that the Japanese were going to fight to the end, including all of the women and children on the Japanese islands. Now we know that those fanatical early flyers of the Kamikaze units did not represent the spirit of so many of the relatively young teenage boys who were trained to fly minimally and then were recruited for Kamikaze operations. There have been interviews done by some of these reluctantly trained Kamikaze pilots. They talk about their horror at this. They're not feeling like heroes at all.

Larry Bernstein:

Next topic is the strategic importance of taking the Japanese atolls. These volcanic islands provided bases for the US bombing of mainland Japan. What did the bombers target and was it successful in destroying the Japanese industrial base?

Paul Kennedy:

So the long range, high level, strategic bombing campaign of the enemy's resources, his factories, his infrastructure, his power stations was a central part of US Army air force doctrine from the 1920s all through the 1930s, and as carried out in a parallel campaign against Nazi Germany and Italy in the European theater. This meant that there was a completely independent strategic force.

By 1944, they were expensive, something which only the richest nations who have enormous productive resources can do it. Even Hitler's Germany does not have a strategic bombing command. The Japanese have nothing like that. This philosophy of long range, independent strategic bombing, could bring this huge enemy to its knees.

We could make it buckle because we are the only force which could reach out from the captured Mariana islands from those giant bases on the islands of Tinian and send long range forces for 1700 miles to drop bombs on industrial infrastructure targets. And then later on, when it seemed the bombing from high level, wasn't actually as effectual as the advocates of strategic bombing suggested, and there was no home defense air force left over Japan. Why not take all of the armor equipment away from those heavy bombers, even take away some of their defensive guns and use all of that weight gained space to do low level bombing of the Japanese cities and industries, but instead of having large high explosive bombs, drop incendiary bombs on what were essentially wooden frame structures, wasn't this going to turn the Japanese war machine to ashes.

Larry Bernstein:

The firebombing of Tokyo and the other industrial cities of Japan was a major decision. These bombings will kill hundreds of thousands of civilians along with their industrial capacity. How did the Americans make these moral and ethical decision?

Paul Kennedy:

First, keep the atomic bomb to the side for the moment. Nobody knew that was happening. You started it because you were scared stiff that Hitler's Germany would get the atomic bomb. This was a driver from 1942 onwards. And what's more your manufacturing capacity, you'll only have two of them ready by August 1945.

The firebombing of the Japanese cities was the consequence of that decision to do low level incendiary bomb attacks upon Japanese small industry. That is true that industry and the workers who are employed in those factories are so intensely interconnected. It'll be hard to see how bombing could be pinpoint bombing. It hadn't worked out in practice, almost always cloud cover. If you were going in low level with incendiary bombs, and even if your intention was to try to destroy ancillary production of military uniforms, of small arms factories, of steel sheet works, that itself could not be done without severe destruction of the workers' residential row houses next to the small factories themselves.

But there was another evil argument behind this strategic bombing. And it is employed both on the German and the allied side in Europe, you want to inflict sufficient destruction that the population will cause their own governments to surrender. This never had a chance in the democratic governments. The bombing of London made people more, not less determined. And what German Democrats were allowed to argue the case for a negotiated peace? The biggest bombing rate of all of is in March 1945 on the central districts of Tokyo and it became a super fire.

It arose to a very, very great height. They could smell burned flesh coming up into the sky. Many of the bombing crews could see what they were doing. Many of them had doubts about what they were doing. Curtis LeMay continues bombing Japanese medium sized cities after the two atomic bombs have been dropped. The atomic bomb program is not so much to inflict ghastly civilian casualties.

It's a shock effect. You are going to lose hundreds of thousands of your civilians. To persuade people to go to the Japanese emperor and tell him to stop the war. And if there is a justification for the dropping of the atomic bombs, Larry, and I know it's a hugely controversial issue and it brings the fighting in the Pacific to an end within another couple of days of a dropping of a second bomb.

What were you going to do? Not drop the A-bombs? Just have a continued starvation policies of the Japanese of a US submarine blockade of a Japanese Homeland. So, no convoys with food or supplies could get through. Were you going to continue with the aerial bombing of Curtis LeMay?

Larry Bernstein:

Kenneth Pyle who is a professor of history at the University of Washington spoke previously on this podcast *What Happens Next* that it was a tragic error on our part to demand unconditional surrender of the Japanese, do you agree?

Paul Kennedy:

The idea of having a policy of unconditional surrender was particular to Roosevelt and it was not shared by Churchill. It was part of the propaganda for the total defeat of your enemy when Roosevelt announces it at the Casablanca conference in North Africa in late 42, the British are taken by surprise because they are trying to persuade the Italians to surrender, cut a secret deal diplomatically with the Italian military and the Italian Monarch and get them out of a war. Wouldn't that be a nifty thing, undercut what Hitler's planning to do in the Mediterranean. Don't be so stupid as to ask for unconditional surrender. And if you are trying to persuade the Japanese, if there's any Japanese around who want to have a negotiated peace provided that the position of the emperor is not destroyed. I agree that it was good propaganda. There may have been very good practical politics.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned earlier that the Kamikaze strategy and the purpose of the mantra to fight to the last man at Iwo Jima was to force the Americans to the negotiating table, yet the Japanese do not attempt peace talks until after the atomic bombs are dropped and it is too late. And they choose Stalin as an intermediary who will attack them the next day. How do you explain the Japanese lack of preparation in working on a negotiated peace process during 1944 and 1945?

Paul Kennedy:

When you use the word the Japanese, there's a whole variety of factions, army factions, young army factions, more conservative members of the diplomatic core, members of a Royal household, very senior *Genro* or senior aristocrats, the Navy with its own agenda. And that for many of them, getting to Tokyo and seeing the ferocity of the Japanese army demands, Tojo's position there made them worry that they would be either put in prison or something even more serious. They tended to believe the military saying that they were going to win. It's only late in the war that you begin negotiations, asking Uncle Joe Stalin, which is neutral in the Far East war, if they can begin to be the intermediiator for negotiated peace.

If only there can be certain pre-conditions, we insist upon preservation of the special role of the emperor and Japanese society in politics. And if the Americans are saying unconditional surrender that means you are forcing us to fight on. We cannot surrender if that means giving over the emperor and maybe having the emperor's position abolished by the victorious allies. We have no choice. Hence the negotiations don't really get very far because each side is different. The Americans are saying, first, surrender, and then we will consider what to do. And the Japanese saying, we're not going to surrender unless you guarantee the position of the emperor.

Larry Bernstein:

I would like to thank you for joining us for this final episode and fourth podcast in a series on your new book *Victory at Sea*. I would like to encourage our listeners to read your book, tell us about it.

Paul Kennedy:

It's a Paul Kennedy, historian at Yale, one volume account of the naval battles from 1939 to 1945.

At the beginning of the story, the United States is one of merely six great navies in the world. After the war, the US Navy has come out supreme right across the globe. The sheer output of American production, like a new aircraft carrier once a month entering the Pacific fleet by 1943, which quite staggers the mind. So please think of this book as about how at that time, the world order of power shifts from being a multipolar to a single polar world, at least in naval terms, from 1945 onwards.

Larry Bernstein:

Thanks to Paul Kennedy for joining us today. That ends this session.

This episode is the last in a four-part series on World War 2 with Paul Kennedy. If you missed the previous episodes, you can find them on our website [whathappensnextin6minutes.com](http://whathappensnextin6minutes.com) or alternatively on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.

Here are the titles for the various episodes in the series:

Part 1: From Pearl Harbor to the Battle of Midway

Part 2: The Battle of the Atlantic and the War in the Mediterranean

Part 3: 1943: The Year the Decided the Outcome of the War

Paul is fantastic so please take a listen.

If you missed last week's podcast, check it out. The topic was secular intolerance of religious Jews. Our speaker was Jason Bedrick who is a Research Fellow at the Center for Education Policy at the Heritage Foundation. Jason is also the author of the book *Religious Liberty and Education*.

The New York Times had a recent 5-page story about the inadequacies of NYC Yeshiva Schools. This two-year investigation concluded that the students in the most religious schools had inadequate English skills because their classes are taught in Hebrew, Yiddish, and Aramaic. The New York Times concluded that these Yeshivas do not serve the public interest because the kids graduate with few job prospects and little earnings power which is unfair and unjust. New York State provides funding for the schools and therefore, they argue that the Yeshivas should be coerced into a state mandated curriculum.

Jason rebuts the New York Times accusations and explains the vitriolic animosity by Jewish secular progressive leaders with the most religious Jewish Hasidic sects. Jason believes that parents should decide how their children are educated and that we should be tolerant of those that choose a religious life.

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I would like to thank our audience for your continued engagement with these important issues, good-bye.