**The Battle of Okinawa**

The Battle of Okinawa started in April [1945](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/1945.htm). The capture of Okinawa was part of a three-point plan the Americans had for winning the war in the [Far East](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/fareast.htm). Okinawa was to prove a bloody battle even by the standards of the war in the Far East but it was to be one of the major battles of [World War Two](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/WW2.htm).

Okinawa is the largest of the Ryukyus islands at the southern tip of Japan. Okinawa is about 60 miles long and between 2 and 18 miles wide.

The Americans estimated that there were about 65,000 Japanese troops on the island – with the bulk in the southern sector of the island. In fact, there were over 130,000 Japanese troops on the island with more than 450,000 civilians. The Japanese troops on the island were commanded by Lieutenant- General Ushijima who had been ordered to hold onto the island at all costs.

Ushijima decided on his tactics – he would concentrate his forces in the southern sector of the island and station his men in a series of secure fortifications. If the Americans wanted to take these fortifications, they would have to attack the Japanese in a series of frontal assaults. Alongside the land side Japanese defences, the Japanese high command put their faith in the [kamikazes](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/kamikazes_and_world_war_two.htm) which it was believed would inflict such serious casualties on the Americans in Okinawa that they would retreat.

[Kamikaze](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/kamikazes_and_world_war_two.htm) attacks were being experienced by the American navy anchored off of Okinawa. Out of the 193 kamikaze plane attacks launched against the American fleet, 169 were destroyed. Those planes that got through did caused a great deal of damage especially to America’s carrier fleet that did not have armoured flight decks – unlike the British carriers. However, the destruction of so many kamikaze flights did a great deal to undermine the potential for damage that the kamikazes could have inflicted.

For the actual invasion, America had gathered together 300 warships and 1,139 other ships. The first landing of Marines did take place on April 1st. They met little opposition and by the end of the day 60,000 American military personnel had landed at Hagushi Bay. By April 20th, all Japanese resistance in the north of the island had been eradicated except for some guerrilla activity.

The real battle for Okinawa was in the south of the island. On April 4th the XIV Corps (US 7th, 27th, 77th and 96th infantry divisions) ran into the Machinato line. This brought to a halt the advance of the Americans in the south of Okinawa. The Machinato line was finally breached on April 24th. However, it then had to confront the Shuri Line which further slowed the American advance. Together with the success of the kamikazes who had sunk 21 American warships and badly damaged 66 other warships, American forces experienced heavy losses.

On May 3rd, Ushijima ordered a counter-attack but this failed. By May 21st, Ushijima ordered his men to pull back from the Shuri Line. However, the resistance by the Japanese stood firm. It was only into June that it became obvious that the Japanese had lost the fight for Okinawa. On July 2nd, Okinawa was declared secure by the Americans – Ushijima had committed suicide some days before this.

The attack on Okinawa had taken a heavy toll on both sides. The Americans lost 7,373 men killed and 32,056 wounded on land. At sea, the Americans lost 5,000 killed and 4,600 wounded. The Japanese lost 107,000 killed and 7,400 men taken prisoner. It is possible that the Japanese lost another 20,000 dead as a result of American tactics whereby Japanese troops were incinerated where they fought.

The Americans also lost 36 ships. 368 ships were also damaged. 763 aircraft were destroyed. The Japanese lost 16 ships sunk and over 4,000 aircraft were lost.