Why WWII?
Walking Across the Pacific
The Doolittle Raiders
The Battle of Peleliu
The South Pacific battle for the Palau Islands during WWII

THE BATTLE OF PELELIU

Darrel VanDyke
Killed:

- 12,000 Americans
- 77,000 Japanese
- 150,000 civilians
By the summer of 1944, Japan’s outposts were falling one by bloody one

The U.S. and allies had 4 more strategic and tactical goals

1. Palau Island group
2. Okinawa
3. Iwo Jima
4. Landing on and occupying mainland Japan
Palau Campaign

Consisted of Anguar Island, Peleliu Island, Ngedbus Island, and Kongauru Island
Fall of 1945 – war with Japan has been going on since December 7, 1941

- The U.S. Marines had hit every island to date
- MacArthur is planning ahead for Japan; needs more troops
- U.S. Army 81\textsuperscript{st} Division was deactivated after WWI, but in 1944 reactivated (remember, MacArthur is an Army guy!)
- 81\textsuperscript{st} was made up of new enlistments AND borrowing from other divisions; approximately 21,000 men in total
Approximately 14,000 made up the Army 81st Division
ALL of the islands that Japan had conquered had fallen one by one; the U.S. ruled most of the Pacific Ocean now.

NO one crosses this line!
Before Peleliu:

- Battle of Saipan, June 15, 1944 – July 9, 1944
- Army 27th Division deployed with Marines
- It was a disaster militarily; Army general in charge was fired WHILE IN BATTLE!
- MacArthur and Nimitz had major “words” over this*
- 16,000 Americans dead
- 24,000 Japanese dead, 3,000 missing

Peleliu

September 15, 1944

* Nimitz once said that the hardest part of fighting the Japanese was putting up with Douglas MacArthur

(For a wonderful read about MacArthur, see “An American Caesar”)
Where is Peleliu (and Anguar)?

• 1,700 miles from Japan

• One of the last bastions of Japanese air support
• Peleliu had an airport
• Range of a Japanese plane was about 250 miles out and back
• Peleliu was strategic for protecting Japanese shipping lanes
Operation Stalemate (II)

- Nimitz did not want to engage any Marines, Navy, or Army against well fortified Babelthuap Island
- Take Anguar and Peleiu, use their runways as staging to attack Babelthuap Island
- Battlegroup called III Phibs Corps was formed = 1st Marine and 81st Army divisions
- **Marine Major General Roy S. Geiger** in charge of III Phibs Corps

1. 1st Marines to establish “toehold” on Peleliu – led by Marine General Rupertus
2. 81st Army to standby, then attack Anguar
3. Army General Paul Mueller would control 81st and only be sent to Peleliu for mopping up after Anguar secured
4. If any 81st Army were needed as support for 1st Marine on Peleliu, they would move over to Geiger’s control
5. Interservice “issues” arose – Marines (especially Geiger) did not trust Army as being worthy to support them

6. **Rupertus confident that Marines could take Peleliu in 3 days**
What happened?

What do you pack for a 3 day trip?

30+ days later, the islands were secured. Why?
The Japanese had other plans

• Japanese commanders, Colonel Nakagawa at Peleliu and Major Goto at Angaur
• Had strict orders to never use a “banzai” charge – too wasteful of Japanese lives
• Months leading up to attack, miles of horizontal, vertical, and lateral tunnels dug on both islands
• Designed using fukkaku; multiple overlapping fields of fire linked by the openings to which were all cleverly camouflaged; barely visible ten inch slits
• Marines would “clear out an area”, move forward, only to be attacked from the rear by Japanese flooding back in the tunnels behind them; these were death traps to the Marines
Colonel Kunio Nagakawa, commander of all Palau Japanese troops, headquartered on Peleliu
From Texas A&M archives,
Tom Lea assigned artist for landing and battle of Peleliu
Texas A&M archives, Tom Lea, Artist assigned to cover Peleliu
Peleliu Timeline

- September 5, 1944 – Bombardment starts on Peleliu
- September 12 – Navy pounds Anguar and Peleliu some more
- September 13 – Marines 1st Division lands on Peleliu
- September 16 – Army 81st Division on ships awaiting orders; “As we waited offshore, looking out we could see bodies floating – bodies of dead Marines.” PFC, Ed Frazer, 317th Artillery
- September 17 – Pre-dawn bombardment starts on Anguar
- September 17 – Army lands on Anguar
- September 23 – Army reinforces Marines on Peleliu who underestimated the Japanese force
Anguar Island
81st Division soldiers land on Anguar, September 17, 1944 - U.S. Army Photo
Approximately 3 miles long

Anguar Bowl
• Major Ushio Goto controlled Imperial Japanese Army on Anguar
  1. 59th Infantry Regiment
  2. 16th Infantry Division
  3. 1,400-1,600 well disciplined soldiers from China Manchurian campaigns
• Phosphate mining had created a small lake and vertical sides in middle; dubbed Anguar Bowl
• Goto could not disperse his troops to every beach, so he held them back and moved them out into caves as he saw the 81st troops coming into view
• Now Japanese troops were intermingled with 81st Army troops; therefore no heavy artillery support could be called in
• No banzai attacks occurred (expected by 81st based upon previous battles in Pacific), but rather small bands of Japanese would infiltrate 81st lines at night and fierce hand-to-hand combat would occur
• 0500 on Sept 18, 200 Japanese attacked with mortars and machine guns
• On Sept 19, Geiger told Mueller to “hurry up; his Marines were “getting decimated” on Peleliu; 2 of the 3 1st Marine regiments were gone
• At 1034, on Sept 20, Mueller declared Anguar secure; he was wrong
• Morning of Sept 21s, Navy bombarded and Navy and Marine aircraft bombed Anguar Bowl area where last Japanese thought to be holding out
• Battle for Anguar ended officially on October 22, thirty-two days after “mopping up” actions began
~Six miles long, two miles wide; 12,000 - 15,000 Japanese
To give you a perspective of what the size of Peleliu is, DFW measures bigger than the island.
A solider had to learn quickly of Dangers/Risks

- Snipers
- They fought for 30 days – through a full moon and utter darkness
- Coral
- Heat
- Monsoon rains
- Hidden bunkers
- Suicide* runs
- Nighttime
- Flies
- **Sounds**
- Death of buddies
- Prisoners?
U.S. grenade

Japanese grenade
Meanwhile, back to Peleliu …

- Situation critical; Marine 1st Division was taking a beating
- Japanese tactics and snipers were taking their toll; fukkaku was working
- After only 3 days, Marines had to call up reserves from back lines
- Marine Colonel Harold Harris, 5th Marine Regiment commander, did an aerial reconnaissance and was appalled by terrain Marines were up against
- Harris told Marine General Rupertus frontal assaults were suicidal for Marines, and gave alternative plans to attack from behind on flanks.
- Rupertus said the only way to take the hills were by front attack only!
- Orders given to 1st Marine Regiment Commander “Chesty” Puller to press forward, and his regiment was cut to pieces under him
- By September 21, the 1st Marines had sustained 52% casualties
- On the 21st, General Geiger paid a visit to Rupertus and was told everything going great; Rupertus was vehemently against in bringing in Army to help him
- Geiger gave a direct order for Rupertus to bring in Army; 81st was moved immediately from Anguar to Peleliu
- Sept 22, Army 81st relieved 1st Marines on west side of island
- 321st regiment of 81st was reduced to 50% within 3 days
• Geiger (the big guy Marine general) was hearing of mass casualties of Marine 1st, but Rupertus (Marine tactical general) refused any help from Army; kept telling Geiger “Trust the Marines and me, and I will get this done.”
• Marines being wiped off the earth from frontal assaults that failed one after another (think of Picket’s charge at Gettysburg); Rupertus had had enough but didn’t want to replace the general he had placed in control
• Rupertus went to Nimitz who was just offshore monitoring the situation; Nimitz gave direct order to relieve Geiger and put Army in charge
• Army brought in engineers to make roads and clear mountain sides (plow the bunkers under)
• Army engineers ran a pipeline the into Japanese area, and Army used gasoline to fire-bomb tunnels
• Within days Army had taken control of the Japanese resistance
• After 45 days, on November 27, the last cave was secured by American forces
“I was leading a group trying to get down inside the bowl. James Cooley was right behind me and had his helmet lying against me. There was another shot, it went by my head and hit him in the forehead just under the helmet. He only groaned and leaned over on me.” Brooks Nicklas, Company C, Infantry, 81st Division
Capturing Hill 100 in Central Peleliu, 24 September 1944. Map by John Gilkes.
“We kept quiet and waited. They were sweating us out. Nobody fired a shot. All of a sudden it got darker than dark. I opened up my machine gun. Somebody fell at my feet. I’m still firing. I didn’t stop until the whole belt was gone. Everything became silent after that. It was very hot and very sticky. We waited. We sweated. Morning never seemed to come.”

Sgt. Joe Abreu, Company C, 81st Division
Wildcats struggling up a steep slope while attacking the Japanese. Courtesy U.S. Army Military History Institute.
“Some Japanese would crawl up close to our lines and holler ‘corpsman.’ Wounded Marines would call ‘corpsman’, we called ‘medic’ when we were wounded, so we knew it was Japanese. [the Japanese didn’t know that the Army had replaced the Marines] We answered, and waited for them to get closer, and then we threw grenades in their direction.”

Pvt. James Ijames, 81st, 323rd.
Major Dallas Pilliod, Private Andrew J. Forte, and Staff Sergeant Louis Solmosky, 321st RCT, seek cover behind a smoking knocked-out tank on Dead Man's Curve. Courtesy National Archives (111-SC-282140).
• Palau campaign
  ❑ Marines 1,252 killed, 5,274 casualties
  ❑ Army 546 killed, 5,649 casualties
  ❑ ~13,000 Japanese killed
  ❑ Unknown number of civilians/laborers
A Peleliu Cinema Palace

These Men Built Angaur Chapel

ANGAUR ISLAND

Upon Bitter Reality There Shall Be Built A Peace

Old Glory Waves Over Fallen Sons
Dates of importance

- October 13, 1944 - Battle of Anguar considered over
- **MacArthur steps ashore on Leyte - Oct 20, 1944**
- November 27, 1944 - Battle of Peleliu considered over
- Marines 1st Division sent to Philippines
- Army 81st Division sent to Leyte on May 3, 1945 to clean up last resistance
- Both divisions given R&R, and then landing briefings on what to expect on Japan main island
- **Landing in Japan scheduled for September 1945**

* July 1944, Saipan fell; from here American B-29’s rained bombing raid after bombing raid on Tokyo and mainland Japan
Okinawa Island

- Japanese Island
- Last stronghold before mainland Japan
- April 1 – June 22, 1945
- Estimated 110,000+ Japanese soldiers died
- 7,000+ Japanese and 3,000+ Okinawans surrendered
- ~12,000 American’s killed in combat, plus another ~5,000 died overall
- Marine 1st Division (from Peleliu)
- Army 7th, 27th, 77th, and 96th
Operation Downfall

- Estimated up to 2 million U.S. military might be needed
- Estimated might take to end of 1947 to finish war

32 Army Divisions (81st was to be first, followed by other divisions sailing from Europe)
Marine 1st Division and other Marine Divisions

Phase 1
6 Marine Divisions

Phase 2
Key Dates

July 16, 1945 – first successful test of Atomic bomb
August 6, 1945 - Hiroshima
August 9, 1945 - Nagasaki

Kokura was primary target but cloud cover and smoke made plane detour to Nagasaki
“I shall never forget the night of 10th of August. We had spent the night preparing our packs and equipment and were to leave at 3:00 A.M. to embark on boats heading for outlying areas where we would once again face the Japanese. We would be at sea for 10 days. We began to hear shouting. When the news reached us, we learned that the war had, in fact, ended. There was no place to go to celebrate in the dark jungles.”
• Over the span of a 2-3 months of occupation, most of 81st Army were headed home
• 1st Marines sent home at start of occupation
Japanese three-man Mitsubishi tank from WWII on the Pacific island of Peleliu in Palau, July 31, 2014. (AFP Photo/Richard W. Brooks)
The entrance to the "1,000 Man Cave" on Peleliu island, where the Japanese dug systems of low-ceiling caves, July 31, 2014 (AFP Photo/Richard W. Brooks)

200mm Japanese gun from World War II on Peleliu island where tens of thousands of US and Japanese soldiers died, July 31, 2014. (AFP Photo/Richard W. Brooks)
A crashed Japanese Zero fighter from World War II resting on the island of Peleliu in Palau, July 31, 2014 (AFP Photo/Richard W. Brooks)
Further reading:

• “The Pacific War 1941-1945”, John Costello
• “Victory at Peleliu”, Blair and DeCioccio
• declassified Army report
• https://www.archives.gov/
• https://archive.org/details/gov.archives.arc.35883 (battle of Anguar, 28 minutes)
Approximately 70 pages
We owe these heroes a debt of gratitude that we can never fully repay. The courage it took to fight in a battle like Peleliu is incredible...the enemy, the terrain, and the heat made this truly hell on earth.

https://m.youtube.com/watch...
Questions and discussion
Thank you

Please go OLLI online and leave comments
https://olli.unt.edu/evaluations