

# The Central Pacific: The Use of Operational Art, 1943-44

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

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In 1943, the United States began its drive across the central Pacific against the armed forces of Imperial Japan. Admiral Nimitz used operational art in order to plan and execute this campaign. Identifying and attacking, isolating, or disrupting the decisive points within the enemy system enabled the United States to secure bases for its land, air, and maritime capabilities ultimately bringing the Japanese home islands into range of US effects and capabilities.

# Contents

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Abstract .....              | iii |
| Contents.....               | iv  |
| Acknowledgements .....      | v   |
| Abbreviations .....         | vi  |
| Introduction .....          | 1   |
| Review of Literature.....   | 5   |
| Methodology .....           | 12  |
| Case Study.....             | 15  |
| Findings and Analysis ..... | 28  |
| Conclusion.....             | 32  |
| Bibliography.....           | 35  |

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## Abbreviations

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| CinCPAC | Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Fleet    |
| CinCPOA | Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas |
| COMINCH | Commander in Chief United States Fleet        |
| DoD     | Department of Defense                         |
| LSCO    | Large Scale Combat Operations                 |
| MDO     | Multi-Domain Operations                       |
| POA     | Pacific Ocean Areas                           |

## Introduction

If one had asked Chester Nimitz in the opening days of 1944 where the direct offensive against the Axis powers lay, he would have said through the Central Pacific – from the Marshalls, past the Marianas, and on to Japan itself.

-Walter R. Borneman, *The Admirals*

By November 1943, the United States was ready to go on the offensive in the Pacific.

After two years of war, the United States finally had enough combat power in the Pacific to seize the initiative from Japan permanently. The war was far from over however, and the task of defeating Japan and forcing an unconditional surrender rested on the shoulders of Admiral Chester Nimitz. This was an enormous task given the size of the area of operations – the Pacific Ocean encompassing some 63 million square miles. Locating the enemy in such an enormous arena was a task in itself. To keep their forces operating, the Japanese had occupied the many islands and atolls across the central Pacific. This network enabled Japanese combat power projection throughout the theater. Nimitz had to apply operational art to a geographically and conceptually vast problem. How did he do this?

The primary purpose of this study is to answer the following question: what were the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art that enabled Nimitz to arrange operations in time and space throughout the Pacific Ocean Areas (POA) in order to meet American stated political objectives? Nimitz had to develop an operational approach through operational art in order to create simultaneous dilemmas for the enemy and create a position of relative advantage for the United States. Formulating an approach to gain an advantage is a concept relevant to contemporary and future commanders as well.

Today, the US Army must be prepared to conduct Large Scale Combat Operations (LSCO) against near-peer and peer adversaries. US Army doctrine must provide theater level commanders with the conceptual and analytical framework necessary to solve the complex problems inherent in LSCO. Historical case study provides a methodology – through causality –

by which one can determine how theater level commanders successfully accomplished this in the past. This research is an examination of Nimitz' command of the POA during World War Two. I propose that Nimitz created novel solutions to the operational problems he faced by employing the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art in order to link American strategic and political objectives to tactical actions. Nimitz used operational art to arrange and sequence tactical activities to obtain a position of relative advantage given the means he had available. By examining the enemy system holistically, he was able to isolate and disintegrate individual components within the enemy system through synchronizing and converging effects from multiple domains, enabled through operational reach. Acknowledging the non-linearity of the enemy system while still predicting enemy actions and outcomes was key.

Given the potential future problem set of isolating and disintegrating dynamic enemy systems in LSCO, doctrine must reflect the approaches necessary to do so. Therefore, theory derived from historical case study should be viewed within a contemporary framework. To that end, the causal linkages between successful operations and Nimitz' use operational art should be defined in a contemporary context. Specifically, as they would apply to the use of defeat mechanisms against future near-peer and peer adversaries. Because commanders must be informed by doctrinal concepts of operational art in order to arrange tactical activities during campaign planning the audiences for this study are doctrine writers as well as current and future field army and theater commanders.

This historical case study and the events that occurred therein, will be analyzed within the framework of operational art. In order to do this, two different concepts of this framework will be used. The first is the Department of Defense (DoD) joint definition which states that "Operational art is the cognitive approach by commanders and staffs – supported by their skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, and judgement – to develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to

organize and employ military forces by integrating, ends, ways and means.”<sup>1</sup> This definition provides a starting point for understanding Nimitz’ task in the Pacific and the cognitive approach he took to accomplish the United States’ desired end state. Army doctrine provides another definition for operational art by defining it as, “the pursuit of strategic objectives, in whole or in part, through the arrangement of tactical actions in time, space, and purpose.”<sup>2</sup> By incorporating the concepts of time and space, this definition provides a framework with which to analyze how Nimitz created multiple simultaneous dilemmas for the Japanese by accomplishing the defeat mechanisms. Finally, this study will examine American and Japanese forces and capabilities through the lens of systems thinking in order to further analyze how Nimitz approached problem solving within his theater of operations.

In order to define operational art, it is first necessary to define the important terms associated with this concept. Army doctrine lists 12 elements that comprise operational art. These are, end state and conditions, center of gravity, decisive points, lines of operations and lines of effort, tempo, phasing and transitions, culmination, operational reach, basing, and risk.<sup>3</sup> Campaign is defined by joint doctrine as, “a series of related operations aimed at achieving strategic and operational objectives within a given time and space.”<sup>4</sup> Systems thinking is defined by Army doctrine as, “a process of understanding how parts of a system work and influence each other as part of a great whole.”<sup>5</sup> This definition allows a theater commander to conceptualize the relationships between interconnect components of an enemy system to enable targeting against

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<sup>1</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, *Joint Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), xii.

<sup>2</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2019), 2-1.

<sup>3</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 2-6.

<sup>4</sup> US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2017), GL-6.

<sup>5</sup> US Department of the Army, Army Techniques Publication (ATP) 5-0.1, *Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Publishing Office, 2015), 1-7.

areas where friendly forces enjoy a position of relative advantage or where the opportunity benefit outweighs the risk. And finally, according to US Army doctrine, “A defeat mechanism is the method through which friendly forces accomplish their mission against enemy opposition.”<sup>6</sup> The Army identifies the four defeat mechanisms that should be applied in concert as, destroy, dislocate, disintegrate, and isolate.<sup>7</sup>

This research will test four hypotheses. The first is that if Nimitz understood Japan’s political objectives in addition to his own then he could better arrange operations to achieve a position of relative advantage. The second hypothesis states that if Nimitz arranged and sequenced operations across multiple domains, then he could create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate and exploit adversary operations. The third hypothesis states that if Nimitz understood the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then he could dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and preempting enemy decisions. The final hypothesis posits that if Nimitz had a synchronized and flexible command and control structure, then commanders can effectively integrate multiple efforts for a common purpose.

The sources used in this research came from only English language sources. In order to provide valuable analysis on this case study, the scope and scale will be limited. The study of Nimitz’ usage of operational art in the Pacific will focus on the time period between the Gilbert and Marshall Islands invasion (November 1943) and the capture of the Mariana Islands (August 1944). This period highlights the usage of operational art in offensive campaign planning.

This study relies on four assumptions. The first is that Nimitz had the political freedom of action to campaign plan as he saw fit. The second is that Nimitz had to balance opportunity with force preservation given the Germany first policy. Third, Nimitz’ background as a submariner

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<sup>6</sup> US Army, ATP 5-0.1, 5-4.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

influenced his concepts of operational art. And finally, that Nimitz had enough intel to conceptualize the enemy capacity and capabilities within the POA during the period covered.

Following this introduction, section II will be the literature review and will focus on the works already written on operational art in order to provide context. Section III will show the methodology used for this case study. Section IV will be the case study itself and will demonstrate the research conducted in support of the thesis. Section V will provide findings and analysis based on the research conducted. Section VI will be the conclusion and provide summary of research and methodology conducted.

## Review of Literature

As Nimitz arranged operations across the Pacific against the Japanese, he was exercising operational art. Nimitz used operational art in order to achieve a position of relative advantage by making decisions founded in his personal experience, knowledge, and creativity. The modern historian can study his actions through the lens of multiple operational art theorists to extrapolate the commonalities and identify the characteristics, attributes, and elements of the operational art that made Nimitz successful.

The theory of operational art can be used to explain why commanders took certain actions within a historical case study. A number of theorists provide ideas about operational art and will provide the framework for this study. These include Naveh, Schneider, and Isserson.

Naveh's concept of operational art exists within the framework of systems theory. As Senge said, "Today, systems thinking is needed more than ever because we are becoming overwhelmed by complexity."<sup>8</sup> No human endeavor is more complex than warfare, therefore systems thinking is the most appropriate framework. Naveh uses systems thinking to bridge the

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<sup>8</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 69.

gap between strategic policy goals and tactical actions by categorizing actors as components of the system and their interactions within a framework of time and space.<sup>9</sup> Regarding accomplishment of the political goal (aim), Naveh says, “The division of this aim into operational objectives and tactical missions creates the cognitive tension that moves the system towards its final objective.”<sup>10</sup> According to Senge, feedback is “...any reciprocal flow of influence. In systems thinking it is an axiom that every influence is both *cause* and *effect*.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, what Naveh refers to as cognitive tension must be a result of constant feedback from actions trying to create balance between strategic and tactical ends. Additionally, viewing the enemy as a system allows for component-centric planning with a goal to isolate individual components from the whole. Advancements in technology and the ability to project effects farther than ever before have increased the size of the modern battlefield to encompass the entire theater of operations. One way to overcome the geographical limitations of achieving effects across space is to achieve them in time. Regarding characteristics of operational commanders, Naveh notes, “...*tvorchestvo* (creativity), as the quality required from operational commanders.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore, finding creative ways to affect components of the enemy’s system (that are separated by space) simultaneously can overwhelm the system and create enough multiple dilemmas to overload his feedback loop.

Finally, Naveh separates the tactical from the operational by stating that “whereas at the tactical level and in the technological context the mechanism of destruction is prevalent, an operation should aim towards the disruption of its opponent’s system.”<sup>13</sup> Disruption occurs in time and space simultaneously to achieve maximum affect as Naveh notes by stating, “The

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<sup>9</sup> Shimon Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence: The Evolution of Operational Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 74-75.

<sup>12</sup> Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 186.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

simultaneous operation disrupts the essential interaction between the system's components and creates the possibility of defeating them separately."<sup>14</sup> Distributing the friendly system through time and space may serve as mitigation from disruption. This leads to the concept of distributed operations as discussed by Schneider.

Schneider focuses on the concept of space when he writes that "operational art is characterized by the employment of forces in deep distributed operations."<sup>15</sup> This concept emphasizes the idea of the non-linear battlefield and supports the idea that the battlefield encompasses the entire theater of operations. However, Schneider still supports the idea that the enemy system should be affected throughout space and time by stating, "...continuous mobilization, could provide continuous logistical support to armies conducting a continuous series of simultaneous and sequential deep operations."<sup>16</sup> Given the linear constraints of space and time, this concept directly calls for utilizing effects and capabilities across multiple domains. Furthermore, the idea of achieving effects through deep operations reinforces the concept of multiple simultaneous dilemmas. If the enemy only has to deal with problems along a linear front line, then lines of communication, reinforcements and command and control would not pose a dilemma. Adding depth in space to operational art, however, implies that these system components behind the front line should be affected to achieve disruption – disintegration – of the enemy system. Finally, Schneider posits that "...the expansion of the concentrated forces in a theater, in breadth and in depth, meant that the campaign could no longer be decided by one decisive action."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 18.

<sup>15</sup> James J. Schneider, School of Advanced Military Studies Theoretical Paper No. Four. "Vulcan's Anvil: The American Civil War and the Foundations of Operational Art" (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army CGSC, 1992), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Schneider, "Vulcan's Anvil," 34.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

Similarly, Isserson posits that the concept of depth is key when he says, “It is evident that the entire operational depth must be overcome and transversed with an uninterrupted series of *combat efforts*.”<sup>18</sup> But unlike Naveh, Isserson states that the goal of operational art is the destruction of the enemy when he states, “...at the next stage of development, our future war can be grounded only on the principles of *an offensive strategy of annihilation*.”<sup>19</sup> Regarding how Operations in depth are achieved, Isserson says, “The character of operations will also be determined by modern technological means, which are speedy, mobile, and highly efficient in their combat application.”<sup>20</sup> This mobility is important on the modern battlefield because it allows a combatant to control the tempo of operations as well as seize and retain the initiative. This is done through continuous operations in depth which gives the enemy no choice but to react, therefore giving up the initiative. These concepts wholly support the idea of linking tactical actions to the strategic goals within the framework of the operational environment.

According to Svechin, “We call an operation an act of war if the efforts of troops are directed toward the achievement of a certain intermediate goal in a certain theater of military operations without any interruptions.”<sup>21</sup> The reference to intermediate goals is in line with the cognitive requirements of the theater commander as he arranges actions to link military objectives to strategic goals. The concept of operations occurring continuously within the theater of operations reinforces the idea that the modern battlefield encompasses the entire theater and synergy is obtained by creatively applying effects throughout the theater holistically.

The ultimate goal of operational art is to achieve a position of relative advantage. Achieving advantage means that friendly forces are positioned and postured to achieve success

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<sup>18</sup> Georgii Samoilovich Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, trans. Bruce W. Menning (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2013), 47.

<sup>19</sup> Isserson, *The Evolution of Operational Art*, 42.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy* (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1999), 69.

over the enemy by accomplishing their military objectives. The US Army says that “A position of relative advantage is...a favorable condition within the area of operations that provides the commander with temporary freedom of action to enhance combat power over an enemy or influence the enemy to accept risk and move to a position of disadvantage.”<sup>22</sup> This definition is in line with the systems concept of operational art as it states that freedom of action is the primary output. Freedom of action is what enables system components to interact in the way designated by the commander. Additionally, this definition provides for the concept of preventing the enemy from arranging his system components to interact in accordance with his aims by influencing the enemy into a position of disadvantage. This idea is similar to the chess concept of *zugzwang* whereby the player compels his opponent to make a move that disadvantages his own position.

The army defines a number of defeat mechanisms as methods by which the friendly force achieves desired effects against the enemy.<sup>23</sup> The defeat mechanism of disintegrate achieves the effect of separating components of the enemy system from one another. According to the US Army, “Disintegrate means to disrupt the enemy’s command and control system, degrading the ability to conduct operations while leading to a rapid collapse of the enemy’s capabilities or will to fight.”<sup>24</sup> This concept is in line with Naveh’s discussion of disruption being preferable to destruction in defeating an enemy system and therefore should be the goal of operational art.<sup>25</sup>

According to the US Army, “Dislocate means to employ forces to obtain significant positional advantage, rendering the enemy’s disposition less valuable, perhaps even irrelevant.”<sup>26</sup> This concept is key to Nimitz’ use of operational art in the Pacific. The island-hopping campaign was an example of dislocating enemy forces by bypassing them, thereby making their positions

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<sup>22</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> US Army, ATP 5-0.1, 5-4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Naveh, *In Pursuit of Military Excellence*, 12.

<sup>26</sup> US Army, ATP 5-0.1, 5-4.

operationally irrelevant within the bigger picture of the operational environment and the system as a whole.

One of the most important and defining elements of operational art within the Pacific theater was basing. Acquiring American bases while denying bases to the Japanese informed operational decision making. Adams supports this by arguing that "...minimizing the number of opposed amphibious landings to those necessary to secure the minimum required number of air and naval bases was an absolute imperative."<sup>27</sup> The bases required to refit the fleet and the landing strips necessary to project land-based airpower ever closer to Japan was what mattered and not each and every fortified island. These fortresses could then of course be bypassed, and combat power preserved. In that respect the system that was the Japanese defensive line could be affected by isolating the strongest nodes. Adams describes the concept of dislocating and disintegrating components within the Japanese system when he says, "A well-established American base in the Marshalls would split enemy sea lanes north and south and become the springboard for further advances that would close them off altogether."<sup>28</sup> By gaining American bases, the Japanese were also losing theirs, and with it the capability and capacity to project combat power as well as defend against attack.

Potter, in his biography of Nimitz discusses how the Admiral linked the strategic and political objectives represented by Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations and Nimitz' tactical subordinates in Halsey, Turner, and Smith.<sup>29</sup> Clearly, Nimitz was in charge of the operational conduct of the war in the Pacific. According to Potter, King discussed speeding up the

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<sup>27</sup> John A. Adams. *If Mahan Ran the Great Pacific War: An Analysis of World War II Naval Strategy* (Indiana University Press, 2008), 220, accessed 10 October 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/carl-ebooks/detail.action?docID=362715>.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>29</sup> E. B. Potter, *Nimitz* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1977), 1.

war with Nimitz in 1943 by disrupting Japanese lines of communication.<sup>30</sup> Nimitz, showing his understanding of his system holistically within the operational environment cautioned King that more land-based aircraft needed to be in position first.<sup>31</sup> Here then, we see the cognitive reasoning of sequencing by requiring airbases be in range to cover successive operations.

Borneman discusses the problem faced by Nimitz of returning the US Navy back to a position of relative advantage after Pearl Harbor.<sup>32</sup> The Operational art element of operational reach would be key in solving this problem. Nimitz looked to the submarine fleet as the only domain available to attempt to disrupt the Japanese.<sup>33</sup> Borneman points out Nimitz' use of operational art during the Marshall Islands invasion by describing how Nimitz disrupted the Japanese airfields there with carrier-based aircraft and directly assaulting the Japanese command and control component on Kwajalein instead of going through the outer fortified islands one at a time.<sup>34</sup> This last point offers proof of Nimitz' cognitive recognition of the importance of isolating the command and control component of the Japanese system to disrupt the ability of the other components to interact. Suppression of the Japanese air capabilities in the area would provide a simultaneous dilemma to ensure the enemy system was overwhelmed.

The theoretical concepts of Naveh, Schneider, and Isserson provide a cognitive framework with which Nimitz' use of operational art can be analyzed. The characteristics and concepts presented by these theorists, when combined with the elements of operational art as defined by the US Army will provide a theory for the employment of operational art at the theater level that can carry forward to future operational environments under similar circumstances. The

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 237.

<sup>31</sup> Potter, *Nimitz*, 237.

<sup>32</sup> Walter R. Borneman, *The Admirals* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2012), 370.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 350.

common thread between these theories is that success in modern warfare cannot be achieved through a single, decisive battle.

## Methodology

The goal of this research is to isolate those characteristics, concepts, and elements of operational art utilized by Admiral Nimitz in the Pacific during World War Two. Given that this topic is so broad and covers so much space and time, focused research is required to locate useful information. Therefore, a specific methodology provides the framework that guides the research by answering specific, focused questions.

The methodology used in this case study will be the structured, focused comparison. As explained by George and Bennett, “The method is ‘structured’ in that the researcher writes general questions that reflect the research objective and that these questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making systematic comparison...”<sup>35</sup> This means that specific research questions will be used to guide the research of this case study with the ultimate goal being to prove the four hypotheses. However, this research focuses on only one case study. This allows the outcome to be specific to the situations found in this case study and therefore focus the future applicability to similar situations.

The case study selected for this research is Admiral Nimitz’ command of CinCPAC and CinCPOA during World War Two. Specifically, this study focuses on the period from November 1943 with the onset of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands campaign through October 1944 and the battle of Leyte Gulf. This range covers the period during which Nimitz was able to seize the initiative and utilize operational art through offensive action.

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<sup>35</sup> Alexander L. George, and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 67.

The fact that Nimitz commanded a joint force across an entire theater of operation makes the study of his use of operational art relevant to potential future operations. The system that Nimitz commanded contained multiple components requiring careful coordination in order to successfully interact and achieve the desired effects on the enemy system. Future commanders will undoubtedly face similar problems and the characteristics, concepts and elements utilized by Nimitz to achieve success are worthy of study.

This case study posits four hypotheses for validation. The first is that if Nimitz understood Japan's political objectives in addition to his own then he could better arrange operations to achieve a position of relative advantage. It is first necessary to define what the American and Japanese political objectives were. This will define their strategic objectives and allow for determination whether Nimitz' arrangement of tactical actions was linked either to accomplishing American strategy, defeating Japanese strategy or both. This will be measured by examining how Nimitz made decisions when faced with multiple courses of action. The reasoning behind his decisions will be examined within the framework of American and Japanese strategic goals to determine understanding and causality.

The second hypothesis states that if Nimitz arranged and sequenced operations across multiple domains, then he could create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate and exploit adversary operations. The measurement of this hypothesis will focus on Nimitz' arrangement of operations in time and space. Examples of simultaneity utilizing the various capabilities present within Nimitz' command will be examined by determining what the Japanese reactions were as well as opportunities that presented themselves to American forces as a result. American joint operations will be measured by their effectiveness in disrupting the Japanese system.

The third hypothesis states that if Nimitz understood the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then he could dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and preempting enemy decisions. This hypothesis

will be measured by examining how Nimitz arranged operations throughout the entire theater of operations, specifically in depth, and what the stated goals of those operations were. Operations directed specifically at Japanese lines of communication in support of campaign planning will be examined by their effect on Japanese ability or decision to commit reserves and whether their hindrance was a stated American objective.

The final hypothesis posits that if Nimitz had a synchronized and flexible command and control structure, then commanders can effectively integrate multiple efforts for a common purpose. This hypothesis will be measured through an examination of Nimitz' orders to subordinate commanders and the level of mission command exercised by subordinate commanders. These four hypotheses will be tested by the following research questions.

The primary research question for this study seeks to define the characteristics, concepts, and elements of operational art that made Nimitz successful. To support this question and answer the hypotheses, six sub-questions will be utilized. In order to answer the first hypothesis, the following question will be answered. What was Nimitz' understanding of the political objective (and strategy) of all belligerents and how did the military objectives support? I believe that as the theater commander, Nimitz had a perfect understanding of American political objectives. I believe that he understood the Japanese political and strategic goals through their actions up to November 1943.

The second hypothesis will be answered by the following sub-questions. How did Nimitz understand the operational environment? How did Nimitz use the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework to defeat the enemy? I believe that Nimitz understood the operational environment and how to converge the capabilities within his command to penetrate and disintegrate the enemy system, allowing for exploitation to achieve a position of relative advantage.

The third hypothesis will be answered by the following sub-questions. How did Nimitz understand the logic of how the enemy would fight? How were operations arranged and

sequenced to create multiple dilemmas and gain positions of relative advantage to disrupt the enemy's decision making? I expect to find that by 1943, Nimitz understood how the enemy would fight given American experiences in the Pacific up to that point. I expect that Nimitz' operations in the Pacific directly affected Japanese decision-making, especially after 1943 and the Marshall Islands campaign because the United States held the initiative after this point, forcing the Japanese to react.

Finally, the fourth hypothesis will be answered by the following question. How did Nimitz visualize command and control of a joint force? I expect that Nimitz had to find a balance between the land component, maritime component, and air component commanders in order to ensure unity of effort during this campaign.

In order to understand Nimitz' use of operational art it is necessary to understand his planning and decision-making process. Nimitz' daily war log provides some insight into this as a primary source. Secondary sources used in this study must focus on planning and decision making as well in order to be useful in determining the characteristics, concepts, and elements of operational art that Nimitz employed and that ultimately led to his success. Biographical works can also offer insight into Nimitz' thinking.

This Nimitz case study will be analyzed within a framework of precise questions which will serve to isolate and verify the characteristics, concepts, and elements of operational art that led to success in the Pacific. These will be identified by proving the four stated hypotheses that show direct logic and causality and to prove that it was Nimitz specific arrangement of operations that ultimately achieved the political end state.

## Case Study

In order to determine the characteristics, concepts and elements employed by Admiral Nimitz in the Pacific during World War II, this research will study his operations from November 1943 to August 1944. November 1943 saw the Gilbert and Marshalls campaign which represents

the point at which the United States has seized the initiative and begins offensive operations westward towards Japan. This case study will end with the Marianas campaign in August 1944 which set the stage for the invasions of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. What follows is a brief overview of the major actions, battles, and events occurring within the Central Pacific Area.

This case study focuses on Admiral Chester Nimitz. During the time period studied, Nimitz held dual commands as the Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Fleet (CinCPAC) as well as Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas (CinCPOA). Nimitz assumed command of the Pacific Fleet on December 10, 1941 aboard the submarine *Grayling* at Pearl Harbor.<sup>36</sup> This would not be a tactical command but operational. As Borneman points out, “The numbers of men and ships flung across the sprawling Pacific demanded that Nimitz maintain his headquarters at Pearl Harbor, where some measure of central command and control afforded him half a chance of keeping the big picture in mind.”<sup>37</sup> Admiral Nimitz’ direct superior was Admiral Ernest King who was the Chief of Naval Operations as well as Commander in Chief, United States Fleet (COMINCH).

As Commander in Chief of the Pacific Ocean Areas, Nimitz subdivided his area of operations into three separate commands, the North Pacific Area, the Central Pacific Area, and the South Pacific Area. During the time period of this case study, the North Pacific Area was commanded by Vice Admiral Frank Fletcher. The South Pacific Area was commanded by Admiral William Halsey until June 1944, followed by Vice Admiral John Newton. The Central Pacific Area, where the majority of the actions within this case study took place was retained under Admiral Nimitz’ direct command.

By November 1943, the United States was in a position to conduct offensive operations against Japan. The Empire of Japan had culminated in its expansion into the Pacific and already

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<sup>36</sup> Borneman, *The Admirals*, 221.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

suffered a setback in its loss of Guadalcanal at the beginning of the year. American representatives at the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 wanted to keep the pressure on Japan as noted by Crowl when he writes that “The position taken by the American representatives was that, having seized the initiative from Japan the previous August at Guadalcanal, it would be unwise to relinquish it and allow the Japanese to dig in too strongly or to mount a counteroffensive.”<sup>38</sup>

With this strategic guidance, the Combined Chiefs of Staff decided that the Central Pacific Area objectives should be the seizure of the Marshalls and Caroline Islands.<sup>39</sup> During the period of Japanese expansion into the Pacific, Australia’s geographic position was precarious. Therefore, it was vital to keep lines of communication to Australia from the United States open. According to Crowl, “Seizure of the Marshalls, it was agreed, was essential to an extension of the line of communications to the Celebes Sea, and would also shorten and secure the routes to Australia.”<sup>40</sup> With allied lines of communication secure, the United States could then focus on enemy lines of communication. Regarding the Caroline Islands as an objective, Crowl goes on to say, “Possession of this enormous string of atolls would help give the Allies control of the Central Pacific, provide them with a major fleet base at Truk, and put them in position to push on to the southwest or to threaten the Japanese archipelago directly.”<sup>41</sup> The first step towards the Marshalls then would be the tiny atolls of Makin and Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands chain.

The Japanese had occupied the Gilbert Islands since the beginning of their war with the United States. The task of liberating it fell to the 2d Marine Division and the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry

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<sup>38</sup> Philip A. Crowl, and Edmund G. Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*. (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1993), 8, accessed 14 October 2020, [https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-6-1/CMH\\_Pub\\_5-6-1.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-6-1/CMH_Pub_5-6-1.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

Division on November 20, 1943. The plan called for creating simultaneous dilemmas for the Japanese as Crowl points out by stating, “The general plan for the operation...contemplated the simultaneous capture of Makin by the 165<sup>th</sup> Regimental Combat Team of the 27<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and of Tarawa by the 2d Marine Division, reinforced.”<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately for these forces, a US Marine raid on the Gilberts in 1942 had led the Japanese to strengthen the garrisons.<sup>43</sup> Despite this fact, American forces succeeded in securing the Gilbert Islands by 26 November.<sup>44</sup> Capturing the Gilberts opened the way to the more important island chain, the Marshall Islands and also taught the United States valuable lessons on amphibious operations.<sup>45</sup>

American forces followed up their success in the Gilberts by invading the Marshall Islands on 31 January, 1944.<sup>46</sup> Instead of attacking every Japanese position, Nimitz devised an operational approach that concentrated his forces on the Japanese center of gravity on Kwajalein atoll.<sup>47</sup> Here, American forces showed their aptitude for building on lessons learned by devising ways to decrease the frictions that had hampered the synchronization of effects on the Gilberts.<sup>48</sup> According to Crowl, “These all added up to one factor: a greater increase in both the quantity and accuracy of fire power to be delivered before the invasion.”<sup>49</sup> Fighting would last until 23 February with the capture of Eniwetok atoll.<sup>50</sup>

After the Marshall Islands were secure, the United States had the bases it needed from which to isolate the Caroline Islands. In March 1944, the Joint Chiefs ordered Nimitz to do this

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<sup>42</sup> Crowl and Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 172-173

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

through, “Establishment of control of the Marianas-Carolines-Palau are by Nimitz’ forces by neutralizing Truk...”<sup>51</sup> Neutralization of Truk was total as Crowl points out, “By the time of the invasion of the southern Marianas, the island of Truk, once the leading Japanese bastion in the Central Pacific, had been rendered virtually useless. ...it was clear the invaders of Guam need have no fear of serious Japanese threats from the air.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Marianas were isolated from the rest of the Japanese system.

The Japanese had occupied Guam and all of the Marianas since December 10, 1941.<sup>53</sup> The islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Guam became the next operational objectives in the central Pacific due to their proximity to the Japanese home islands.<sup>54</sup> According to Crowl, “The islands were, as the wartime phrase-makers put it, “anchored aircraft carriers” from which the aerial war against Japan could be pressed with hitherto unequaled intensity.”<sup>55</sup> In the event of an amphibious invasion of Japan, these ground based aircraft would ensure vital naval and air superiority for the landings. So it was that US Marines landed on Saipan on June 15, 1944. The Japanese must have felt the threat of American invasion creeping ever closer to their homeland and had stiffened their resolve since the Marshalls. Regarding American losses, Crowl points out that “The toll of American killed and wounded was high. ...it is estimated that 3,674 Army and 10,437 Marine Corps personnel were killed, wounded, or missing in action.”<sup>56</sup> Crowl emphasizes the Japanese resolve at this point of the war and the significance of Saipan when he writes, “...almost the entire Japanese garrison of about 30,000 men was wiped out. Far more important,

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<sup>51</sup> Philip A. Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1993), 19, accessed 12 October 2020, [https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-7-1/CMH\\_Pub\\_5-7-1.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-7-1/CMH_Pub_5-7-1.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 323.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 441.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 265.

the inner defense line of the Japanese Empire had been cracked, and American forces were at last within bombing range of the enemy homeland.”<sup>57</sup>

After the fall of Saipan, American forces wasted no time in landing on Guam and Tinian in quick succession on 19 and 24 July, respectively. Tinian was taken quickly and with much fewer American casualties than on Saipan.<sup>58</sup> The success on Tinian was largely due to synchronizing joint effects and capabilities. Crowl points out that “Army artillery played a decisive part in...supporting the marines. ...Army P-47’s flew continuous close support missions in front of the Marine infantry.”<sup>59</sup> Guam fell shortly after with heavy casualties when, according to Crowl, “...American casualties as of 10 August 1944 came to 7,800, of whom 2,124 were killed in action or died of wounds.”<sup>60</sup> The losses were not in vain however, as the United States finally had the bases it needed. The background provided by this case study allow for analysis through focused questions.

The first question this research will answer is: what was the Commander’s understanding of the political objective (and strategy) of all belligerents and how did the military objectives support? Admiral Nimitz completely understood American political objectives and strategy as well as that of the Japanese. This is reflecting in Admiral Nimitz’ planning considerations depending on an overall allied strategy of defeating Germany first and the necessity of avoiding decisive battle before adequate forces could be allocated to the Pacific. Additionally, Nimitz needed to have a good understanding of strategic goals in order to make recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as Matheny points out by saying, “For the Pacific Theater, the Joint Chiefs of Staff balanced the needs of the global war and reserved the right to make not only theater

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 265-266.

<sup>58</sup> Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 303.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 437.

strategic decisions but even major operational decisions.”<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, he understood that the Japanese sought to create an empire in Asia the defense of which relied on created a defensive belt of islands in the eastern Pacific as well as decisive battle to destroy the threat of American maritime capability to operate against them.

Immediately after the United States entered the war in 1941, the Allies decided Germany should be defeated before Japan. This gave each nation a strategic priority on which to focus their efforts and materiel. Additionally, defeating Germany first increased the likely hood of the Soviet Union surviving the war. The fact that London was within German bomber range provided good motivation for this strategy as well. This political reality manifested itself in the fact that the Joint Chiefs of Staff had the ultimate say in campaign planning in the Pacific in order to ensure global strategic goals were synchronized. According to Matheny, “Strategic and operational direction of the Pacific war was a collective enterprise, as MacArthur and Nimitz put forward recommendations and the JCS deliberated and decided after considering their own operational concepts.”<sup>62</sup> Given that the JCS was required to focus its resources on defeating Germany first, Nimitz would have had to have had a great understanding of the overall political and strategic situation if he wanted his recommendations to be adopted. This fact is particularly poignant with regards to resourcing given the fact that his operational planning was for all components – land, sea, and air – within the Pacific Ocean Areas. This is made clear in Nimitz’ log entry from November 8, 1943 which states, “The Plans Division of CinCPOA Staff is considering a plan to defeat JAPAN twelve months after GERMANY falls. The assumption is that GERMANY will

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<sup>61</sup> Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 207.

<sup>62</sup> Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 207.

fall in October 1944.”<sup>63</sup> This shows Nimitz considered the overall situation and is aware of American strategic estimates that are then feeding his campaign planning considerations.

Admiral Nimitz also understood the Japanese strategic objectives and directed his operations to disrupt them. According to Paine, “Japan’s Southern Advance strategy required a heavily defended outer perimeter of airfields on far-flung islands to parry the expected Allied counterattack.”<sup>64</sup> This defensive network must have seemed to Japanese planners to provide security for the Japanese homelands against American maritime forces attempting to maneuver past them. However, this system required open lines of communication from Japan for upkeep and resupply. Admiral Nimitz understood this and immediately upon assuming command in the Pacific set about disrupting this system with the only tool available to him at the time – submarines.<sup>65</sup>

In fact, when Admiral Halsey, Nimitz’ South Pacific Area commander, listed the equipment responsible for American victory in the Pacific he said, “I would rank them in this order: submarines, first, radar second, planes third, bulldozers fourth.”<sup>66</sup> Borneman quantifies the effect American submarines had on the Japan system by stating that “Seventeen percent of army supplies shipped from Japan were sunk during 1943; 30 percent during 1944; and 50 percent in 1945.”<sup>67</sup> Clearly, Nimitz understood the Japanese strategy in the Pacific and directed submarine operations to disrupt their system.

The second question this research will answer is: how did Nimitz understand the operational environment? In 1943, Nimitz had a complete understanding of his operational

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<sup>63</sup> *Command Summary of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, USN.* (United States Naval War College, New Port, RI, 2013), 1682, accessed 14 October 2020, <https://www.ibiblio.org/anrs/graybook.html>.

<sup>64</sup> S.C.M. Paine, *The Japanese Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 160.

<sup>65</sup> Borneman, *The Admirals*, 370.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

environment and how the environment affected the employment of his capabilities. In order to understand why, it is first necessary to define the term operational environment. ADP 3-0 says that “An operational environment is a composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander...”<sup>68</sup> This definition provides a framework in which to analyze Nimitz’ understanding of his operational environment, namely the Central Pacific Area, by focusing on the conditions. According to ADP 3-0, “Army planners describe conditions of an operational environment in terms of operational variables.”<sup>69</sup> There are eight operational variables, but the most relevant variable to this case study is infrastructure.

The distance between Pearl Harbor and Tokyo is 6,195 km. Therefore, in order to prosecute a war between those two points, intermediate bases (infrastructure) are necessary. Bases act as logistics hubs, port facilities, airfields, and everything that military forces require to sustain themselves and continue operations. As Schneider points out, “In order for a modern industrial army in a theater of operations to maintain a militarily effective presence, its logistics system must be continuous.”<sup>70</sup> A cursory glance at a map of the central Pacific shows that the Marshall Islands, Caroline Islands, and Mariana Islands provide a logical chain of steppingstones to cover the vast expanse of ocean from Hawaii to Japan.

The third question that this research will answer is: how did Nimitz understand logic of how the enemy would fight? Nimitz understood how the Japanese would oppose him during this campaign and this understanding directly influenced his decisions. By late 1943, Nimitz had the benefit of having fought the Japanese for almost two years. Specifically, the Japanese defense of Guadalcanal provided lessons to help inform future decisions. The Guadalcanal campaign provided two important lessons. First, how the Japanese would conduct maritime-based

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<sup>68</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 1-1.

<sup>69</sup> US Army, ADP 3-0, 1-3.

<sup>70</sup> Schneider, “Vulcan’s Anvil,” 42.

operations in defense of an island. And second, how the Japanese would conduct land-based operations when defending an island.

During the Guadalcanal campaign, the United States had to learn how to gain localized maritime superiority when fighting for an island. Particularly, the important role that land-based aircraft played in Pacific operations. Japanese attempts to relieve Guadalcanal in November 1943, showed how affective American land-based aircraft could be against the Japanese surface fleet and the transports that provided the lifeline to their far-flung imperial outposts. Judge points out that during the battle around Guadalcanal, "...aircraft from Henderson Field. ...attacked the large Japanese transport force headed to Guadalcanal. ...sinking one cruiser and six transports and damaging three cruisers and two destroyers...forced one transport to abort the run..."<sup>71</sup>

Finally, during the fighting on Guadalcanal itself, the United States learned many lessons that would be instrumental in future operations on Pacific islands. For example, how American forces should train to fight in the jungle. According to Miller, "Training for jungle combat would need to be realistic and rigorous...employ difficult, extended maneuvers over long and arduous distances...close infantry-artillery teamwork, and wide envelopments..."<sup>72</sup> Another valuable lesson was to teach American soldiers and marines that the Japanese were not an invincible enemy and some of their fears about their tactics were unfounded. Miller goes on to state that "The exaggerated reputation which the Japanese fighting man enjoyed during the early part of 1942 had by now been deflated..."<sup>73</sup> The fact that after Guadalcanal, American commanders could view the Japanese as a mortal foe, must have opened up the playbook with regard to operational planning. And regarding Japanese jungle tactics, Miller goes on to say, "One of the

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<sup>71</sup> Sean M. Judge, *The Turn of the Tide in the Pacific War*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2018), 186.

<sup>72</sup> John Miller, Jr, *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1995), 318, accessed 8 November 2020, [https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-3/CMH\\_Pub\\_5-3.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/005/5-3/CMH_Pub_5-3.pdf).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

great bugaboos of the Guadalcanal campaign which slowed nearly all advances by the infantry was the belief... that Japanese ‘snipers’ operated from treetops.”<sup>74</sup> Future planners could console their men against this myth as Miller points out that “The Japanese rifleman was not especially equipped for sniping, nor did he usually climb into trees to shoot.”<sup>75</sup> The Japanese infantry could be defeated when dug in on harsh, defensible terrain.

The next question this research will answer is: how were operations arranged and sequenced to create multiple dilemmas and gain positions of relative advantage to disrupt the enemy’s decision-making? Admiral Nimitz arranged operations in time and space while converging his capabilities simultaneously across all domains to gain superiority at the decisive point, particularly through isolating parts of the Japanese system. According to Crowl, “...the invasion of Tarawa demonstrated that naval task forces could seize control of the air and sea long enough to support a successful landing...”<sup>76</sup> Therefore, the decisive point, the objective of the amphibious assault was isolated from Japanese maritime and air capabilities that could contest it, allowing American land, maritime, and air capabilities to converge against Japanese land forces. Isolation in time was also key.

During the Mariana Islands campaign, the United States was also able to create simultaneous dilemmas for the Japanese across time. The Japanese had intended to create a defense in-depth of the Marianas, but American forces landed before this could be implemented. Crowl notes, “The 31<sup>st</sup> Army program for defense had made provisions for falling back upon prepared ‘strategic inland positions’ in the event that an enemy landing force was not thrust back into the sea.”<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, American submarine operations disrupted this part of the Japanese

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 318.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Crowl and Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*, 159.

<sup>77</sup> Crowl, *Campaign in the Marianas*, 63-64.

system by isolating the Marshalls from the materiel needed to create a defense in depth. Crowl notes, “The speed-up of the US invasion plans, couple with the loss of valuable building materials to the US submarines, made the fulfillment of...this plan impossible.”<sup>78</sup>

The next question this research will answer is: how did Nimitz visualize command and control of a joint force? Nimitz understood the importance of the principle of unity of command. The fact that the joint service commanders answered to Nimitz has the CinCPOA ensured that efforts were synchronized across the force. Given the operational requirements of amphibious operations this makes sense. Specifically, however, a differentiation was made in time and space between when operational control would shift between the maritime component and the land component. Crowl notes, “As always in the Central Pacific, the highest operational command for the Marshalls invasion went to Admiral Spruance...Commander, Fifth Fleet.”<sup>79</sup> Under Spruance, Admiral Turner commanded the Joint Expeditionary Force with General Smith commanding the expeditionary troops themselves. To ensure unity of effort however, the Navy was in charge when it came to operational decision making. Crowl points out that “Since it was recognized that ‘the employment of troops...in the seizure of objectives, is subject to the capabilities of the surface units to land and support them,’ any directives issued by General Smith as to...changes in tactical plans had to have the approval of Admiral Turner before they could be issued.”<sup>80</sup> Therefore, operational control would rest with the domain that could affect the decisive point in time, transitioning as the decisive point did. This unity of command and unity of effort ensured that effects were converged across all domains.

The final question this research will answer is: how did Nimitz use the penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit framework to defeat the enemy? Nimitz’ operations against the Gilbert, Marshall, and Mariana Islands were an example of penetrating, disintegrating, and exploiting the

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>79</sup> Crowl and Love, *Seizure of the Gilberts and Marshalls*, 170.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

Japanese system that defended the Pacific and more importantly the Japanese home islands. Today, the US Army's Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) concept defines this framework as the methodology it would use to defeat layered standoff through "rapid and continuous integration of all domains of warfare..."<sup>81</sup> The concept of layered standoff was similar to the problem set that Nimitz faced in 1943.

One of the overall American goals in the Pacific was to acquire bases from which ground-based aircraft could operate in support of an eventual invasion of Japan. The tiny islands necessary for this made up the Japanese defensive perimeter in 1943. From these fortress islands the Japanese operated their own ground-based aircraft as well as maintained ports for their navy. These ground-based aircraft essentially created stand-off against American forces. Any consolidation towards Japan required that this perimeter be first penetrated. As we have seen above, one of Japan's most important bases within this system was Truk. Penetrating the stand-off created by Japanese air and maritime forces there was essential to enabling American freedom of maneuver in the Central Pacific. As we have seen, Nimitz chose to disintegrate Truk from the Japanese system through convergence of air and maritime domain capabilities versus conducting a likely costly amphibious assault. Once this was accomplished, Nimitz had the freedom of maneuver necessary to invade Guam, a vital steppingstone towards Okinawa and Japan.

The Gilbert, Marshall, and Mariana Islands campaigns as well as the isolation and disintegration of Japanese capability on the Caroline Islands gave Nimitz the basing, operational reach, and lines of communication necessary to move operations in the Pacific into the next phase: the invasion of the Japanese home islands. American forces would accomplish this in February and April 1945 with landings on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, respectively. The war would

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<sup>81</sup> US Department of the Army, TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Training and Doctrine Command, 2018), iii.

end before an invasion of Japan itself however as Japan surrendered shortly after the world's first use of the atomic bomb.

## Findings and Analysis

In late 1943 and 1944, Admiral Nimitz successfully developed a novel operational approach to obtain a position of advantage for American forces in the central Pacific. He did this by synchronizing effects in time and space at decisive points thereby disrupting the Japanese system and securing basing from which to further American operational reach towards Japan. Ultimately, achieving the military end state that was the ability to project effects onto the Japanese home islands would achieve the United States' political end state that was the unconditional surrender of Japan.

In order to understand how Nimitz prosecuted operations in the central Pacific, this research has examined six questions related to his operational approach. The first three examined the strategic context in which Nimitz had to create an operational approach, the environment in which he would have to operate, and the enemy he would have to operate against. As shown above, Nimitz understood the United States' political objectives for the war when he was chosen to command in the central Pacific. Given that this objective was the unconditional surrender of Japan, he understood that American forces would have to close the physical distance to Japan by defeating Japanese forces in order to acquire their bases throughout the area of operations. Given the Germany first policy mandated by the Allies, Nimitz had to use forces economically as we have seen by choosing to bypass certain decisive points instead of attacking head on. Next, this research has shown how Nimitz framed the environment in order to frame the problem and ultimately determine an operational approach. He understood that operating across the vastness of the Pacific required bases on the various islands and atolls leading towards Japan from which to project combat power as well as sustain his forces. Finally, this research has shown how the Japanese intended to create stand-off between American forces and Japan through the

employment of air and maritime capabilities based on the same islands that would prove vital to American plans. Japan accomplished this initially by creating a defensive network across the central Pacific from which they could prevent American freedom of maneuver.

The next three questions examined Nimitz' operational approach itself. These examined how Nimitz planned to sequence and arrange tactical actions within his campaign planning to gain advantage and initiative that to this point had eluded American forces in the Pacific. Here we have seen that Nimitz arranged tactical actions in a way that would give his forces a position of relative advantage over the Japanese. This was done through deliberately planning tactical actions to synchronize capabilities at the identified decisive point to isolate the individual parts of the enemy system. Isolating these parts in a way that they could not support each other created simultaneous dilemmas. This was achieved on Tarawa for example by preventing the Japanese Air Force from supporting its ground forces by achieving localized air and maritime superiority.

Next, given the requirement to operate as a joint force in the Pacific in order to synchronize effects across all domains, this research has examined how Nimitz defined the joint command structure. Here we have seen that Nimitz structured the joint chain of command in such a way as to achieve unity of effort and ensure that effects and capabilities were commanded effectively in time and space. Finally, this research has examined how Nimitz was able to use the framework of penetrate, disintegrate, and exploit to defeat the enemy. This was accomplished by disrupting and isolating the various components that made up the Japanese system in the Pacific in order to deny them basing and acquire the basing needed to achieve the military end state.

The first hypothesis asserts that if Nimitz understood Japan's political objectives in addition to his own then he could better arrange operations to achieve a position of relative advantage. The empirical evidence suggests that this hypothesis is supported. Japan desired to create standoff between American forces and its home islands in order to maintain its empire. In order to achieve the United States' political goal – the unconditional surrender of Japan – Nimitz had to position American capabilities close enough to Japan to force a decision. The fact that

Nimitz had a clearly defined political end state from which a military end state could be derived provided a clear geographic line of operations. Knowing what he needed to achieve enabled him to use critical and creative thinking to devise an operational approach focused in time and space against decisive points within his operating environment as we have seen. Had there not been a clearly defined end state or an ambiguous one such as preventing further Japanese expansion in the Pacific, it would have been difficult for Nimitz to concentrate his capabilities with specific purpose. Therefore, a clearly defined end state is key to campaign planning and the arrangement and sequencing of the actions therein.

The second hypothesis asserts that if Nimitz arranged and sequenced operations across multiple domains, then he could create dilemmas and opportunities to penetrate, disintegrate and exploit adversary operations. The empirical evidence suggests that this hypothesis is supported. During the campaigns examined in this research, Nimitz successfully converged the effects and capabilities available to him to gain a position of relative advantage at successive decisive points. After identifying the decisive points necessary to penetrate and exploit the Japanese system – the Japanese bases – these were isolated in time and space. If an enemy base was identified as requiring amphibious assault, the United States successfully prevented Japanese air and maritime forces from supporting their ground forces through achieving localized superiority. For those decisive points that could be bypassed, Nimitz ensured that the Japanese could not project effects from them by disintegrating them from the system, for example by destroying enemy air and maritime capabilities on Truk. Determining where the decisive points were and then determining how to disrupt them, shows the importance of critical and creative thinking necessary for a theater commander. An iterative approach was then employed to refine the operational approach from battle to battle in order to incorporate lessons learned.

The third hypothesis asserts that if Nimitz understood the logic underpinning the disposition, planning priorities, and commitment criteria of enemy reserves, then he could dislocate those forces in depth by interdicting and preempting enemy decisions. The empirical

evidence suggests that this hypothesis is supported. In order for the Japanese to maintain a network of defended island outposts, control of the air and sea around them was necessary for resupply and reinforcement. Therefore, an operational approach that removes the enemy's ability to control the air and maritime domains around these outposts effectively cuts them off from their lines of communication. Friendly capabilities across all domains can then be converged to achieve advantage. Complimentary disruption activities successfully created simultaneous dilemmas for the Japanese in the Pacific through the use of submarine warfare against Japanese maritime capabilities. The necessity of converging capabilities across all domains demonstrates the importance of holding the initiative and forcing the enemy to attempt to defend everywhere. An understanding of enemy operational reach as well as analysis of friendly operational reach should drive the operations process in an environment as vast and open as the Pacific.

The fourth hypothesis asserts that if Nimitz had a synchronized and flexible command and control structure, then commanders can effectively integrate multiple efforts for a common purpose. The empirical evidence suggests that this hypothesis is supported. In the Pacific, modern military operations are inherently joint. As has been shown, land maritime and air capabilities are simultaneously required to penetrate an enemy system covering numerous islands and atolls across the vastness of the ocean. In order to converge effects and simultaneously isolate the enemy's capabilities requires the synchronization of the commanders responsible for each domain. Creating a dynamic command and control structure that can change based on changes to the operational environment are key. For example, in order to transport land and air capabilities to the decisive point, the commander requires they be loaded aboard maritime capabilities. During this phase, the environment consists primarily of water and the maritime commander, expert in maritime operations should be in overall command. Once fighting transitions to the land, the land component commander should then assume command of the other two, as air and maritime support to the land forces is then critical to achieving the overall objective.

In summary, Admiral Nimitz successfully employed operational art to achieve the military end state in the Pacific, thus enabling the achievement of the political end state. He accomplished this by identifying a series of successive decisive points within his operating environment that would provide basing from which to project capabilities as well as deny the enemy the ability to hinder American operations. In order to determine an operational approach to capture these bases and defeat the Japanese, he utilized a systems approach. This allowed him to view the environment and the enemy as a series of interconnected and supporting capabilities. He then used critical and creative thinking to determine how each capability could be isolated and disintegrated from each other thus putting American forces in a position of localized relative advantage at each successive decisive point.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine what the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art were that allowed Admiral Nimitz to develop his campaign in order to achieve American political objectives in the Pacific. In order to find this, this study examined the single case study of the central Pacific campaign from 1943 to 1944.

I proposed that Nimitz was able to create novel solutions to the operational problems he faced by employing the characteristics, concepts, attributes, and elements of operational art in order to link the strategic and political objectives to tactical actions. Nimitz used operational art to arrange and sequence tactical activities to obtain a position of relative advantage given the means he had available. By examining the enemy system holistically, he was able to isolate and disintegrate individual components within domains where the United States did not enjoy a relative advantage by utilizing friendly capabilities from domains of advantage.

This study found that Nimitz' campaign across the central Pacific in 1943-44 effectively isolated and disintegrated Japanese forces garrisoning the Gilberts, Marshalls, and Marianas. This was achieved by defining the decisive points that could be attacked in order to converge effects

against the enemy and achieve a position of advantage while at the same time preserving his own forces. By disrupting the components of the Japanese military system, Nimitz ensured the enemy could not do the same or regain the initiative. Ultimately, Nimitz' use of operational art enabled the acquisition of bases from which combat power could be projected further towards Japan and further towards achievement of the political end state – the unconditional surrender of Japan.

The findings presented in this case study provide an historical perspective against which to way future decision making and campaign planning. Future theater commanders will face similar problems to those that Nimitz faced during World War II. The scope and size of modern theaters of operation require commanders to plan operations in both time and space.

Understanding enemy capabilities as a system will allow the commander to recognize the key nodes and decisive points that once disrupted will put the enemy at a disadvantage. Equally important, recognizing how to leverage friendly capabilities as a system will ensure that combined effects are greater than the sum of their individual parts and ultimately and put friendly forces in a position of advantage.

This study briefly examined the command-and-control relationships within the joint force operating in the central Pacific. Further research into the specifics of command and control, integration and interoperability between the US Army, US Navy, and the United States Marine Corps would provide more insight into the overall campaign from both a planning and execution perspective. Specifically, research into the capabilities and limitations that may have increased effectiveness of the total force or created friction would add to the overall understanding of the campaign.

Operational art will play a key role in planning future campaigns. The commander and their staff will need to examine the enemy system holistically in order to determine how to leverage their own forces in both time and space to achieve a position of advantage. Recognizing when a direct approach, indirect approach, or some combination of the two should be used to achieve the desired end state will ensure that maximum effect is leveraged from available

capabilities while preserving forces. Critical thinking plays a key role in ensuring that the commander understands the operational environment and that campaign objectives are supporting the overall strategic and political end state. Combining this with creative thinking will ensure the commander finds the novel ways to achieve this.

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