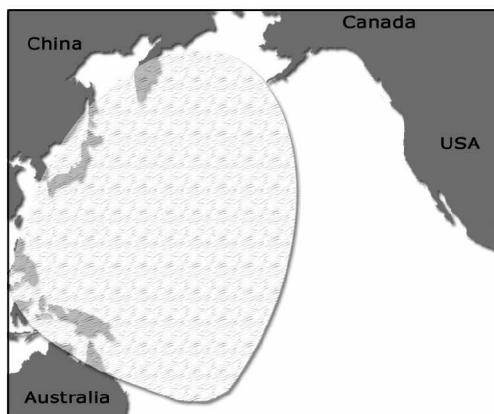


Naval War in the Pacific Ocean (1942-1945)

On December 8th 1941, The New York Times reported: Yesterday morning Japan attacked the United States at several points in the Pacific, with a major attack on Pearl Harbour. President Roosevelt ordered United States forces into action and a declaration of war was expected soon. Seven hostile actions from a naval ship off the coasts of San Francisco to Malaysia were reported (NYT, 08 December 1941). This was going to continue for four years. Allied forces, namely USA, Britain and the Netherlands, had a total strength of about 220 big naval vessels, including 70 submarines. Japanese had 230 naval vessels and 64 submarines in December 1941. Several aircraft carriers were available on both sides, able to deploy many thousands of airplanes.

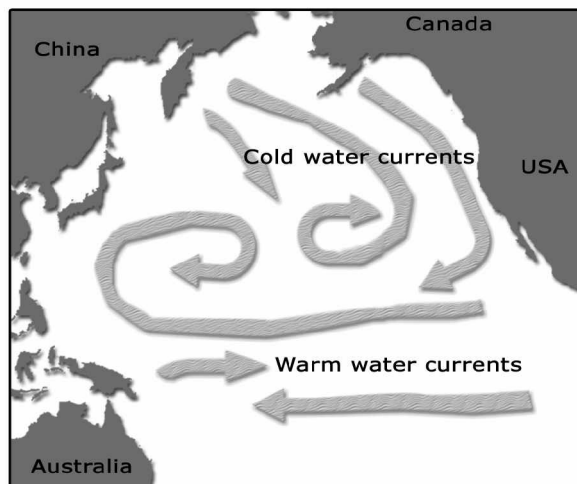
Main Naval Activity Area
1942-1945



Recording four years of naval warfare and putting them in connection with the modification of the ocean water at its surface level (1,000 metre depth) is an almost impossible task for a small study. It could only attempt to arouse the readers' imagination concerning the consequences of the war and the ocean temperature and salinity structure. Oceanic matters have been discussed in the corresponding chapter: 'Ocean system affected', with the mention that sea surface temperatures were low between 1945 and 1977¹

The clash of the naval forces in the Pacific had no other precedent. The opponents made use of every means and military options. Heavy battles were fought. In May 1942, the combatants met in the Coral Sea, each with three-dozen ships and several hundreds of airplanes. In a first attack on May 05th, the US Navy destroyed

North Pacific surface currents



one Japanese destroyer, three minesweepers, and 4 smaller vessels with 22 torpedoes and 76 bombs (each weighing 450 kg). Other attacks followed during next days. On May 8th, each side had lost about 35 aircrafts. A mighty explosion sank the aircraft carrier Lexington. Even more naval vessels and airplanes were destroyed in June 1942, during the Battle of Midway. The Japanese alone deployed more than 200 big naval vessels under five separate commands. The USA and Japan lost a significant number of naval vessels (more than 120,000 tons) and 400 airplanes.

Aircrafts played a significant role in the Pacific war. The strength of Japan's front line was in its air power which consisted in about 4,000 planes; the USA had 4,000 in January 1941 and 22,000 in July 1945. After taking over Okinawa, the US Third fleet had deployed 26 aircraft carriers, 64 escort carriers and 14,000 combat aircraft for a final attack on Japan. The Japan's loss was of 37,000 combat aircrafts (army and navy); the USA lost 8,700 aircrafts in the battle.

Material loss in the battle was of enormous proportions. Japan lost more than 500 warships (including 150 submarines) with a total tonnage of about 2,000,000, the figure in merchant tonnage was of about 8,000,000 of which 5 Mio (1,150 ships) have been sunk by US-submarines and 1.5 Mio by airplanes. During the war years, Japan had about 700,000 tank ship tonnages permanently afloat and lost, during the war period, 1,500,000 tanker tonnages. The US lost 52 submarines. Many of them fell pray to depth charges. Standard Japanese depth charge contained about 230lb of explosives. Anti-submarine bombs carried by aircrafts were 131lb and 550lb each, the latter being preferred when available. The Japanese had no means to determine the depth and position of an enemy submarine, so the pattern of their attacks usually consisted in dropping depth charges in a variety of settings according to the fuse time. The Japanese lost 150 submarines, many of them destroyed by depth charges. Only by studying special literatures, available in great number and detail, one is able to imagine what happened in the Pacific war theatre. One cannot escape the impression that WWII left its imprint on Pacific seawater.