

# PEARL HARBOR DEFENDED

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## A FLEXIBLE RESPONSE TO AN IDEAL JAPANESE STRATEGY

*VICTORY IN THE PACIFIC* is one of the better releases put out by Avalon Hill in terms of playability and balance. It combines broad strategic considerations and some interesting and enjoyable tactical components. It provides an opportunity for many varying approaches by individual players in efforts to defeat a particular opponent by attempting to take advantage of perceived weaknesses or a fondness for specific types of action. For face-to-face play it is relatively fast-moving, even if a somewhat too long game. It has in effect captured much of the flavor of the war in the Pacific. It can be argued that it is a balanced game once the fundamentals have been learned. It has been suggested, however, that there is an ideal strategy, with variations depending upon the proponent, that will ensure victory for the Japanese player. The conclusion drawn from the various subscribers to this general strategy is that the game is unbalanced and even in need of modification. In actuality, the strategy put forward in its various versions is flawed. It is flawed in that some of the assumptions that are made are either overly optimistic or result from slight misreadings of the rules. These points, while important, do not really negate the strategy. More importantly, as is the case with most other games, there are effective countermeasures that the American player can take to counter the ideal Japanese strategy. As a result, the question is not one of a need for rebalancing an already balanced game or introducing new rules, but rather formulating an American response that will, if not invalidate the ideal strategy, at least make it much more hazardous for the Japanese player to pursue. Whether the Japanese strategy even remains the best alternative may vary depending on opponents, but it is hardly likely to be an optimum strategy in all circumstances, and may even be a very weak course to pursue on certain occasions.

### The Ideal Strategy—A Quick Knockout Punch

The strategy that has been put forth as an answer to the Japanese player's prayers has a number of variations, but in essence follows one of the following two patterns. In Turn 1, the American fleet at Pearl Harbor is destroyed. During Turns 2 and 3, the land based air hold the perimeter and the bulk of the Japanese fleet patrols in the Hawaiian Islands. Any American opposition is destroyed, Pearl Harbor converts to a Japanese base, and the American forces trying to defend their major port are destroyed or badly damaged in an unequal action. The gains to the Japanese include a shortened perimeter (Indonesia-South Pacific-Marshalls-Hawaiian Islands versus Indonesia-South Pacific-Marshalls-Central Pacific-North Pacific or Aleutians), the forcing of American fleet reinforcements to Samoa where raids cannot penetrate to the Home Islands, and the denial of the repair facilities at Pearl Harbor to the Americans for at least two turns and probably longer. One adjunct that has been suggested for this strategy requires the Yokosuka Marines to move to Truk on Turn 1, permitting the Japanese commander to invade Johnson Island on Turn 2. Some of the Japanese land-based air units can then participate in any battles for the Hawaiian Islands on Turn 3.

The second version of this strategy is somewhat more risky for the Japanese player, but appropriately carries much greater rewards if successful. On Turns 2 and 3, the Japanese player tries to control both the Hawaiian Islands and the US Mandate. If he succeeds in controlling both areas, Pearl Harbor and Samoa become Japanese bases.

More importantly, the major American reinforcements arriving on later turns are held off the board until either Samoa or Pearl Harbor is recaptured. The Japanese perimeter will be strong and the POC lead will be so large that the American player cannot win, even if land based air units manage to recapture Samoa by basing in the New Hebrides (provided that port remains American). The American fleet will be forced to contest at least one of the areas, and it will be badly damaged. If this scenario holds up, the Japanese will in effect have won the game by the end of Turn 3. The strategy is more risky for the Japanese player in this version since the American fleet might emerge victorious if it concentrates in one of the two areas. Such a concentration might permit the American player to approach parity in terms of air power in a given area. (If the Japanese keep their carriers as raiders, the American placement of all land based air in Samoa to be joined by the American fleet carriers can be countered by sending all the carriers to the US Mandate). The inevitable carrier exchange that results would destroy the striking power of the American fleet, particularly since the fewer American carriers are at a distinct disadvantage facing a larger number of Japanese CVs and CVLs with the same number of shots, given the need for a carrier's airstrikes to attack only one ship. American surface craft might possibly outnumber the Japanese surface units, but the attack bonus of the Japanese cruisers offsets this advantage if it should exist.

The above two strategies are very compelling ones for the Japanese commander. A cautious commander will go for the Hawaiian Islands counting on the loss of Pearl Harbor with its POCs and repair facilities to give him the needed edge to win the game. A more aggressive Japanese commander will try for both the Hawaiian Islands and the Mandate. Both of these strategies have some minor problems in some cases as presented, but most importantly, they are based on the American player responding in a predictable fashion. The American commander, however, has more options than these strategies would seem to permit.

### Turn 1 Possibilities or the Chance Factor

One minor flaw in one of the versions of the strategy as it has been presented is that it assumes that all the American forces at Pearl Harbor are destroyed in four air raids. Even a maximum Japanese effort is unlikely to bottom all the ships and destroy the 7th Air Force in the first two air raids. Any surviving craft and the land-based air can, of course, retreat before the final two rounds finish off the bottomed ships. Their escape will increase the forces that the American commander has available to use in Turns 2 and/or 3. A good raid will manage to sink five or six of the battleships and one or both of the cruisers. Bad luck could net fewer ships, leaving even larger American forces available for deployment.

Occurrences in the Central Pacific on Turn 1 can also be important. If sufficient Location Uncertain groups appear there in strength and hold the area, the Japanese player has to be aware of the possibility of American ships at Pearl Harbor and/or Midway raiding into the Japanese Islands or the Marianas. If the Marianas are not held by the Japanese, the Philippines must be taken by Marine assault or else control of Indonesia is threatened. Thus, the results in the Central Pacific can be important. If the Japanese commander attempts to be

sure of controlling the Central Pacific, he must weaken the raiding force on Pearl Harbor. The Japanese player could also trust to luck (hardly a preferred strategy) and simply send weak forces to the Central Pacific. Most of the presentations of the ideal strategy recognize the importance of the Central Pacific and argue for holding it in sufficient force, but lucky (for the American) die rolls could negate the ideal strategy on Turn 1.

### The American Response

Neither of the above two points are critical in the sense that they negate the ideal strategy for the Japanese commander, although they might make the Hawaiian Islands-Mandate double option a little riskier. But even if the Japanese player holds the Central Pacific through luck or power on Turn 1 and does extensive damage in the Pearl Harbor raid, the American player retains some very real options to counter the proposed strategy. These options fall into two categories—first, judicious allocation of the Location Uncertain groups combined with the mounting of serious threats to the Japanese home areas, and second, the delayed defense of the Hawaiian Islands and the US Mandate. The two options are related and can go a long way to disrupt the ideal strategy. At the very least, they should prevent any Japanese attempt to control both the Mandate and the Hawaiian Islands except at a high probability of failure.

The first key decision regards the placement of the Location Uncertain carriers and requisite supporting ships when they return to port at the end of Turn 1. If these craft are misplaced, the ideal strategy may in fact become that for the Japanese player. When retreating from the Hawaiian Islands in the face of the Pearl Harbor raiding force, some of the carriers, two or three if possible, should retire to Australia with the remainder either appearing in Pearl Harbor at the beginning of Turn 2 or being sent to Samoa in the return phase of Turn 1. From Australia the American carriers in conjunction with the British fleet can pose a serious raiding threat to Indonesia. They can also combine with forces from Samoa or Pearl Harbor to threaten the South Pacific or the Marshalls (usually a poor third choice). If the Japanese commander pursues his ideal strategy, he may lose control of Indonesia. If so, Lae, Singapore, and the Philippines cannot be converted to Japanese use until Turn 4 at the earliest except by marine assault in the case of Lae and the Philippines. The British fleet based at Singapore, becomes more useful and a much more potent threat than one based at Ceylon. Raids by the Allies into the Japanese Home Islands and the Marianas will be possible. Obviously, the Japanese player may beef up defenses in Indonesia, but this move can only come at the expense of attempts to control the Hawaiian Islands and the US Mandate. Negation of control in the South Pacific has similar advantages. Access to Indonesia and the Marianas is again enhanced for raiders. Lae remains an Allied base, and a fleet negating control of the South Pacific could retire to Lae or Guadalcanal and be even more threatening than at Australia. If the Japanese player opted to send the Yokosuka Marines to Johnson Islands, he will not have marines available to assault these bases until Turn 2 for Lae (the Sasebo Marines out of Japan moving into Indonesia) and Turn 4 for Guadalcanal (Kure staging from Japan and Yokosuka and Sasebo reappearing at Truk). Again, the forces to defend the South Pacific must come from the forces designated to control the other two areas.

The ships based in Australia, Lae, or Guadalcanal will remain available for the defense of the Hawaiian Islands and the Mandate on Turn 3. Of course, if the Japanese player is moving on both areas, they will probably be unable to give aid in the Hawaiian Islands unless Japanese control in the Marshalls has also been negated by raiders on Turn 2. Some of the older battleships might fail their speed rolls if the decisive action is to take place in the Hawaiian Islands. Their numbers will be limited in any event since most available American ships will be cruisers and carriers which do not have any speed roll disabilities. If the Japanese forego attempts to control the Mandate, the battleships can always be returned to Samoa so as to be available for Hawaiian Island action.

If the dangers of key raids by the American and British fleets in the southern areas is not enough, ships appearing at Pearl Harbor on Turn 2 can pose yet another threat. These ships, including some carriers can move as raiders on the northern flank. A raid to the Aleutians saves Attu as an American port and as a base for land-based air for future turns. By returning to Dutch Harbor, the American ships are available to come to the defense of the Hawaiian Islands in Turn 3 or to move on the Japanese Islands, alone or in conjunction with a move from the direction of Indonesia. Their ultimate use will depend on Japanese dispositions in Turn 3, but their options cannot help but create problems for the Japanese player. The raiding threats to both flanks might be utilized to destroy isolated Japanese units, thus weakening the forces available for the climactic battles the Japanese commander is seeking to force. If the Japanese player is serious about controlling the Hawaiian Islands and perhaps the Mandate, the lost POCs in various other areas may offset the disabilities that the American player will suffer from the lack of his major repair facilities.

The Japanese player who is committed to one of the variations of the ideal strategy may ignore the raiding possibilities presented by the above dispositions of the existing American forces. He may decide that if he controls both Samoa and Pearl Harbor and prevents the major American fleet reinforcements from arriving, he can deal with the fleet forces and the few American land-based air units that will keep reappearing, even if these land-based air units have a multitude of areas that they can contest. The arrival of limited reinforcements for the American late in the game (if Samoa is reconverted) may give the Japanese player time to gain enough POCs in the other areas and whittle down the Allied forces.

Depending on ship losses in the battles for the Hawaiian Islands and the Mandate, a relatively small Japanese POC lead may not prove to be enough to win the game, particularly if the Americans have a raiding lane open to key Japanese held areas. With the American player always moving second, it is not clear that a decimated Imperial Japanese Navy will be able to hold off weak Allied units. The key battle may become the contest for the US Mandate in Turns 5 and 6 by the American land based air units that will have reappeared. Thus, Turns 5 and 6 can be critical, as much so as Turns 2 and 3, at least if the New Hebrides is not lost to invading Japanese marines. The appearance of American reinforcements as late as Turn 7 could still turn the tide against the Japanese player who has only a relatively small lead. If a mutually destructive battle has occurred, the American reinforcements will tip the balance even more than if they join a largely unhurt fleet.

The net effect of the dispositions outlined above is that the Japanese player may still try to follow the ideal strategy and it might still work, but if it fails, the game is likely to be lost on the spot. Failure to negate the arrival of American reinforcements

would mean that a decimated Japanese fleet would have to face the remnants of the American forces plus the substantial reinforcements due to arrive. With a diminished POC lead due to Allied raids, the possibilities of a Japanese victory will all but disappear. Thus, the ideal strategy may turn out pitting the outcome of the game on major battles in the Hawaiian Islands and the Mandate in which the advantages to the Japanese player are much fewer than supposed. If the Japanese player simply opts to try to control the Hawaiian Islands, the American reinforcements will arrive, and the POC gains that the Japanese expect will be fewer than specified in the ideal strategy, permitting the American player to compensate for the loss of Pearl Harbor repair facilities and the Hawaiian Island POCs.

#### Delayed Defense

The second measure to utilize in facing the Japanese ideal strategy is designed to enhance the prospects of the American player winning the critical battle by choosing the time in which to participate. This tactic requires the delayed defense of the Hawaiian Islands and the US Mandate. Rather than defending the threatened area on Turn 2, the American player concedes them to the Japanese, saving strength for the crucial battle on Turn 3. The American fleet forces and land-based air will probably be insufficient on Turn 2, thus simply being defeated in detail by the Japanese. Rather, the ship units threaten the Japanese perimeter areas and the land-based air units are placed out of harm's way. Since the Japanese effort calls for a maximum concentration in the key areas, any fleet moves to knock out land-based air in the Coral Sea or elsewhere will be at odds more advantageous to the American player and will permit favorable attrition. It should be noted that too wide a dispersion of the Japanese carrier forces to damage land-based air might even permit a Turn 2 challenge in a key area. Of course, this situation would only result from a major deviation by the Japanese player from the ideal strategy, so in effect the countermoves by the American commander will already have defeated the ideal strategy as presented.

On Turn 3, the Japanese challenge can be met in earnest with all available American forces. Six land-based air units should be available, a formidable force versus carriers subject to disabled results. At least three and maybe four of the five American carriers also will be available. The Japanese will have, assuming no losses, 11 carriers with 32 bonus air factors plus one additional carrier with 3 strikes if a speed roll is passed. The Americans will have the six air factors with 12 shots and 12 to 16 bonus shots from their three or four carriers. Thus, the lineup is 9-10 American units versus 11-12 Japanese ones. It is by no means clear that the edge in this case is with the Japanese given the greater staying power of the American land-based air. The American surface fleet will be roughly equal to the Japanese total, although again the attack bonus of the Japanese cruisers gives the Japanese player an edge in a surface action. By comparison, on Turn 2 the American player would have only two or three air forces and four or five carriers with a maximum of six regular and 16 to 20 bonus shots. The Japanese would have nine carriers for sure with 27 airstrikes and possibly two more with five strikes if speed rolls are passed. More importantly, there would be up to eight American units versus up to 11 Japanese ones. Given the number of land-based air available, the American chances are better on Turn 3. The Americans gain ten armor factors (three land-based air and assuming one 0-2-7 carrier sunk on Turn 2) while the Japanese gain only three armor factors.

There are a number of possible situations that can occur on Turn 3. If the Japanese commander opts simply to capture Pearl Harbor, the American

player will have to decide whether or not to defend the Hawaiian Islands. If his raids elsewhere have been successful, the POC situation might lead him to continue his assaults in other areas and concede the loss of Pearl Harbor. He might decide to use his land-based air in Hawaii to attrition the Japanese carrier force, trading the replaceable land-based air for irreplaceable (in many senses of the word) Japanese carriers. He may also accept the challenge in the Hawaiian Islands if circumstances so dictate, but his fleet units at Samoa, Guadalcanal, Australia, Midway, and/or Dutch Harbor will be available if needed.

If the Japanese player attempts to land the Yokosuka Marines at Johnson Island on Turn 2, a different response may be appropriate. The addition of up to six Japanese Air flotillas to the battle on Turn 3 changes the battle odds significantly in favor of the Japanese. On Turn 2 the American player might consider placing one land-based air unit in the Hawaiian Islands in the hope of disabling or sinking the marine unit. A lucky shot could in effect negate this portion of the Japanese strategy. If the Japanese player opts for a night action and succeeds, the air unit can simply retreat saving itself for Turn 3 action. Even if Johnson Island falls, however, the American still has some options available. The 1st and 2nd Marines appear at Pearl Harbor on Turn 3. Lacking any other course of action if the Hawaiian Islands were controlled by the Japanese on Turn 2, they can put to sea in an effort to recapture Johnson Island. Even if they fail, in the first round of combat the Japanese will be forced to expend airstrikes against them in order to preserve the port as an airbase. The American player will also have three battleships at sea in the Hawaiian Islands, so the Japanese player will have to counter at least these units as well. If the Japanese player is concentrating solely on controlling the Hawaiian Islands, the presence of the air flotillas will probably assure victory for him, but he must at least be careful to guard against the possibility of American raiders reinforcing the Hawaiian Islands. Reinforcements combined with a successful American invasion could doom the whole strategy of controlling the Hawaiian Islands and capturing Pearl Harbor.

If the Japanese player is trying to control both the Hawaiian Islands and the Mandate, the situation is much different. If Johnson Island is still American, the land based air can defend Hawaii, and the fleet units could contest the US Mandate, forcing two battles, only one of which the American player needs to win. The fleet units will in most cases be forced to fight in the Mandate area since Japanese control on Turn 2 would prevent supporting Hawaii from Australia. American raiders out of Pearl Harbor on Turn 2 that succeed in holding the Central Pacific could also return to Midway. If the forces from the southern areas negate Japanese control of the Marshalls, then these forces as raiders could threaten to intervene in either the Hawaiian Islands or the US Mandate. A Japanese player forced to deal with both possibilities could disperse his forces too widely. Since the American player would move second, he would know whether or not the Japanese player were committed to the dual strategy on Turn 2 and use his raiding forces in an appropriate fashion. Alternately, particularly if the Japanese control Johnson Island, the American can throw his land-based air units into the battle for Samoa. The Japanese player, if he holds his carriers back as raiders, will know that the American has chosen to defend only the Mandate, but at least some of his other surface craft will already have been committed to the Hawaiian Islands unless he trusts to luck to prevent an American invasion of Johnson Island. The combined American fleets and air forces will have a slight superiority on the surface in numbers if not quality and a slight inferiority in airstrikes, although again the land-

Table 1

### Hypothetical Decisive Action in US Mandate

Forces with air capability available:

**Japanese:** 11 CVs and CVLs with 32 airstrikes

**American:** 3 CVs with 12 airstrikes  
6 air forces with 12 airstrikes

#### ROUND 1

3 CVs sink or disable 3 American CVs  
8 CVs and CVLs attack air forces with 3.3  
expected hits and 11.5 expected damage  
(2 AFs sunk)

3 CVs sink or disable 3 Japanese four strike CVs  
6 AFs attack six CVs and CVLs with 2 disables  
and two hits with 7.0 expected damage (2 sunk)

#### ROUND 2

4 CVs with 11 strikes attack the 4 AFs with 1.8  
expected hits and 6.3 expected damage (2 AF  
sunk, including previously damaged one)

4 AFs attack 4CVs and CVLs with 1.3 expected  
disables and 1.3 expected hits with 4.5 damage  
(1 sunk and 1 disabled)

#### ROUND 3

2 CVs and CVLs attack 2 AFs with 1 expected  
hit for 3.5 damage (1 AF sunk at best)

2 AFs attack 2 CVs and CVLs with .67 disabled  
and .67 hits for 2.4 damage (1 sunk and  
1 disabled)

#### ROUND 4

Total expected Japanese damage versus  
American AFs 21.3

1 AF remaining ensuring American control  
Total expected disables by American AF 4.0  
Total expected damage by American AFs 13.9

based air have superior staying power. The Japanese will have at best 11 carriers since the twelfth cannot speed roll from the Japanese Islands. The American could have four carriers and six air forces, hardly an inadequate force. In effect, the delayed defense of the key areas will permit the American player to challenge the Japanese thrust from a position of much greater strength than would have been the case during Turn 2. The chances of the knockout punch succeeding are greatly reduced.

Of course, the simplest but most effective counter to any Japanese designs on the Hawaiian Islands is to duck the heavy Japanese patrols on turn two and threaten to control the Marshall Islands yourself. If the Japanese have over committed their offensive-minded patrols they may have trouble knocking out a strong American patrol in the Marshalls which would deny Truk based patrollers access to the Hawaiian Islands on Turn 3. Some players won't recognize this until it's too late; others will be forced into spreading their carriers more sparsely than they would like to cover

this new eventuality or lessen their land based air defenses in Indonesia. Aggressive patrols on turn 2 with expendable ships can cause a lot of problems for a Japanese player unwilling to change his goals and determined to take Pearl Harbor.

Table 1 includes an example as to how the action in the Mandate might occur. The table assumes that only air action occurs since the number of surface craft available in a given game is variable and hard to predict. Similarly, expected losses from a surface action involving many ships has too many possibilities. The table also assumes that only three of the American carriers are left to participate as well as the six air forces. The Japanese have 11 carriers with 32 airstrikes. On the first round of action, the three American carriers are disabled, sunk, or receive maximum damage, as do three of the Japanese 4 strike carriers (a typical occurrence in a straight carrier fight with bonus shots). The remaining carriers assault the land-based air with an expected 3.3 hits and 11.5 damage. Thus, with average luck and no lost hits or overkill on a particular air unit, two of the American units will be

"sunk". The American without overlap or overkill can expect to disable two ships and score two hits. The expected 7 damage points should sink or inflict maximum damage on two Japanese carriers. Thus, in the exchange, four Japanese carriers are removed from the next round of action. The surviving four carriers will have approximately nine shots versus the remaining land-based air units with eight. At this stage, the advantage shifts to the land-based air. The ultimate outcome is likely to be at least one land based air unit surviving to control the area and a significant number of the Japanese carriers sunk or damaged. Thus, while the American carrier forces are virtually gone, the Japanese fleet will be virtually impotent from Turn 6 onward to deal with the threat of the American carriers that begin appearing in large numbers. Of course, if the opening air round goes poorly, the Japanese player can withdraw from the area, accepting the failure of the strategy but preserving his carriers for later action.

#### Conclusions

From the above comments, it is obvious that the Japanese player can force a key battle as early as Turn 3 in the game if he so desires by following the Hawaiian Island-US Mandate variation of the strategy. The gamble involved, however, is noticeably larger than assumed. The delayed defense approach combined with the losses of valuable POCs to American and British raiders elsewhere may well prove that a double assault on the Mandate and the Hawaiian Islands will succeed less often than it fails. Even the Japanese concentration on the Hawaiian Islands combined with a dispersal of the forces slated for the US Mandate to perimeter defense is less likely to achieve ultimate victory. The American could very well survive the loss of Pearl Harbor if he has had successful raids elsewhere.

The counterstrategy of an American flexible response to the variations of the ideal Japanese attempt to win an early victory are summarized in Table 2. Forces available to both sides will vary, depending on previous actions and speed rolls, but the outline is the same, with the key action probably occurring in Turn 3, perhaps in the Hawaiian Islands and perhaps as a result of raids elsewhere. The chances of victory are at worst equal from the American point of view. If the game is decided in Turn 3 under these circumstances, then so be it. All the ideal Japanese strategy will have accomplished is to bring the game to a major decision early rather than late. Balance is still present, given the fact that a few rolls of the dice may determine victory or defeat. If a veteran Japanese player has determined that the later phase of *VITP* favors the Americans or that his particular opponent will win if the game is not decided early, then he would quite logically force an early conclusion to the game. He could not, however, expect to emerge victorious more than half the time, and perhaps less. He will also deny himself the opportunity of taking advantage of potential mistakes by his opponent later in the game.

The foregoing discussion of the ideal Japanese strategy would indicate that it fails to take into account all facets of *VITP*. It rests on a totally predictable response for the American commander. Allied raiders threaten no vital area, and, in fact, the American player will obligingly commit his forces piecemeal on Turns 2 and 3. It must be admitted that if the American player does act so predictably, then the strategy will work. Few gamers, however, are willing to assume that their opponents will be so kind. A more thoughtful American response provides a greater element of chance and largely destroys the advantages gained by the Japanese capture of Pearl Harbor and makes the Hawaiian Island-Mandate strategy a risky one.

Table 2

### Japanese Strategy Variation and the American Flexible Response

#### Japanese Variation

- I** Control Hawaiian Islands on Turns 2 and 3 with major portion of fleet
- Ia** Yokosuka Marines assault Johnson Island on Turn 2
- II** Control Hawaiian Islands and US Mandate on Turns 2 and 3 by dividing Japanese fleet on both Turns
- IIa** Yokosuka Marines assault Johnson Island on Turn 2

#### American Counter

- Raid north from Pearl Harbor
- Threaten Indonesia and South Pacific from Australia
- Continue raids on Turn 3
- Possibly contest Hawaiian Islands with land-based air on Turn 3
- Threaten Control of the Marshal Islands
- Raid as above on Turn 2
- Land-based air unit to attempt to sink or disable marines on Turn 2
- Continue raids on Turn 3
- Possible counterassault on Johnson Island with 1st and 2nd Marines on Turn 3 combined with land-based air defense of Hawaiian Islands
- Raids as above on Turn 2
- Land-based air defend Hawaiian Islands on Turn 3 with fleet in Mandate, or combined fleet and land-based air defense of Mandate
- Raids as above on Turn 2
- One land-based air attempts to sink or disable marines on Turn 2
- Maximum effort in Mandate in Turn 3 if Johnson Island has fallen with marine counterassault in Hawaiian Islands

