

## THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

25 October 1944: Off the Central Philippines

(Lt. Robb White, USNR, Public Relations, CinCPac)

0900 - Shells from Japanese Battleships have been falling closer and closer. The three destroyers of Taffy Two are drawn up in battle line astern of the six baby flattops. They look lonely and small with the geysers of the Japanese shells around them.

The situation is very simple. Three groups of escort carriers, the baby flattops, are being attacked by a Japanese force of four battleships, eight heavy cruisers and about 10 destroyers. The carriers have no protection other than their aircraft and destroyer screen. The Japanese force is overhauling the center group of carriers at the rate of 7 miles an hour.

The three groups of carriers are arranged roughly on a north-south line parallel to the Philippine Islands and are steaming southward, the Jap pursuing from the north. Taffy Three (Kaiser-built carriers Midway (St. Lo), Gambier Bay, Kitkun Bay, Fanshaw Bay, and White Plains) are to the north and are in range of the Jap force. Taffy Two, commanded by Rear Admiral Felix B. Stump (Kaiser carriers Natoma Bay, Manila Bay, Savo Island, Marcus Island, Ommaney Bay, and Kadashan Bay) are next in line and about 30 miles ahead of the Jap. Farthest away is Taffy One (converted oilers Sangamon, Suwanee, and Santee and the Kaiser carrier Petrof Bay).

0915 - The morning is clear, bright, with very little haze, scattered soft cumulus clouds and a calm sea. There is no possibility of escape or even concealment in rain clouds.

The northernmost group (Three) is being heavily shelled by the Japanese force from a distance of about 6 miles. The cruisers and battleships are firing broadsides at the six carriers and preventing them from launching an air attack in their own defense. The situation looks almost hopeless and the group has requested air and surface aid from Admiral Stump. There is nothing more he can do. All of his available aircraft, 24 Avenger torpedo planes with Wildcat fighter protection, have been launched against the Japanese.

Leyte Gulf 1

The destroyer screen of the besieged carriers has been sent against the Jap force. This is a brave and desperate effort to turn, stop, or slow down the battleships and relieve the carriers from the merciless shelling.

The Kaiser carrier Midway (St. Lo) has been sunk. the number of survivors is unknown.

The destroyer screen of the group has been sent to attack. A lone destroyer, the USS Heermann has sent this message: "I am engaging enemy force consisting of two battleships, eight cruisers, twelve destroyers. Action continues."

The Heermann has been hit and is dead in the water.

The destroyers' gallant attack was in vain and all but two have been sunk or crippled.

0920 - The most remote of the carriers, Taffy One, is under air attack and cannot come to the aid of the other groups.

The Japanese force has flanked Taffy Three and is shelling the five carriers remaining who are now without either protection or ability to launch offensive aircraft. The Japanese force is, at the same time, rapidly overtaking Taffy Two whose flagship Natoma Bay is astern of the other carriers. From the ships of this group the salvos of the battleships can be clearly seen as geysers in the water.

This battle is without the usual confusion of battle. Every seaman in the ships of Taffy Two can estimate that within 20 minutes, the shells of the Jap will be falling on the flight decks of this one unhurt but defenseless group of ships. The six little carriers, the three destroyers and three destroyer escorts can hardly dent the heavy ships pursuing them. If the handful of planes does not stop the Japanese force no one expects that any ship will be afloat when night falls.

The men on these ships are watching the salvos coming closer and are wishing that aid would come and knowing that it will not. The old U.S. battleships are fighting other Japanese forces in and around Leyte Gulf; the great and famous Task Force 38 is far to the north. No help is coming.

0935 - Taffy Three is now under air attack as well as under the shelling of the battleships.

Three of the carriers of Taffy Three, the Kalinin Bay, Gambier Bay, and Kitkun Bay have been hit by Jap

suicide dive bombers who flew their planes into the flight deck.

The destroyers of Taffy Two have been bracketed by shell fire and are moving in closer to the carriers.

No word has been received from our planes sent out to hit the Jap.

0939 - A salvo of four shells has fallen inside the destroyer screen and astern of the Natoma Bay. The Japanese are using a green dye to mark hits for spotting. The plumes of water made by the shells are rising from the dark blue of the sea, the green dye making the geysers lovely and iridescent in the clear sunlight.

The foremost Jap ship is now 14 miles astern of Taffy Two.

The time for the most desperate measure has come. With the destruction of the destroyer screen earlier in the morning heavy on him, Admiral Stump is preparing to send his three destroyers against the battleships. It will be suicidal for those sleek, thin-skinned ships but there is a slim chance that they will get a hit with a torpedo and slow the Japs down. That will save for the time being, six carriers, thousands of men.

The admiral withholds his decision for the creeping salvoes have have stopped falling. For 5 minutes there have been no pale green plumes in the sea.

Astern there is now visible four columns of black smoke rising against a background of a clean white cloud.

0940 - The Japanese force is splitting, turning away.

0945 - The torpedo planes of Taffy Two have stopped the Japanese. At least one Jap cruiser has been torpedoed and sunk by Ensign George W. Gaiennie and Ensign Robert F. Voltz. Other cruisers and battleships have been hit.

Lt.(jg) Leon S. Conner, now missing in action has made a bombing run on a battleship but did not drop as the ship turned away sharply. The flak from the Japanese force is heavy. Conner makes a second run and hits a cruiser. Clear of the flak Lieut. Conner discovers an Avenger circling behind a cloud. The unknown pilot of this plane calls him on the radio, saying he has a torpedo and asks Conner to go in ahead

of him and strafe, Conner agrees. The two young pilots turn back, Conner making his third run into the flak. With his two machine guns pitted against the anti-aircraft batteries of the Jap he leads the young and unknown pilot with his precious torpedo in to attack. The torpedo goes home in the belly of a cruiser. Conner looks back when he clears the hail of anti-aircraft. The other plane has been hit and is falling. It flames for a few seconds on the sea and disappears. no one gets out.

1045 - The Japanese have taken up the chase again intent now on destroying Taffy Two which, alone of the three original groups, is still uninjured, still able to maul the Jap again.

On the six ships of the group the men are working under terrible pressure and yet the precision has not been broken. The planes are taken aboard with the minimum interval and as soon as they are out of the arresting gear the plane crews swarm over them. Only bombs are being loaded. There are no more torpedoes for the escort carriers were sent to the Philippines primarily to bomb and strafe the enemy on shore. It was not intended that they should fight Japanese battleships unaided.

1115 - A striking force has been launched again. As though in a drill off the California coast the men in the ships have armed the planes, gassed them, got them ready to go; the pilots have been briefed, and given a sandwich and the launch has been made with planes leaving the ship at intervals of 15 seconds. Throughout the day this disciplined work has continued with no man wavering in his job.

The ships flee on, the men in them wondering if the pilots - the great majority of them in their first real combat - can do it again, can stop the march of the battleships. Wondering if six baby flattops, built to ferry aircraft, slung together in the Kaiser yards in a matter of months, can stop the weight of Japanese warships so close astern, so close to the fine taste of murdering the helpless carriers.

1200 - The Japanese force has been whipped by planes. Japanese ships lie crippled in their pools of oil dirty on the blue sea. The surviving ships are running

for their lives leaving the wounded behind.

The battle has turned and we are no longer the pursued but are the pursuers. A Jap battleship, a cruiser, and a destroyer are ignored by our pursuing planes as they lie crippled in the sea. We are harrying them in their retreat.

1630 - The day is ending and the desperate Jap is taking a last crack at the six little ships he could not outfight. Forty odd planes are attacking them as the sun sets.

The air attack has been stopped. Sixteen of the bombers have been shot down and none of our ships have been hit.

1930 - In the first engagement between carriers and surface ships within gun range in the Pacific since CVE's six little jeep carriers, whipped four battleships, eight cruisers, and 10 destroyers. Taffy Two, the Natoma Bay, Manila Bay, Ommaney Bay, Savo Island, Kadashan Bay, and Marcus Island, under the command of Admiral Stump, who although a pilot and experienced aviator, is also a seaman and a fighter, stopped the Japanese fleet; turned it away from the stricken ships of Taffy Three as it tried to utterly destroy them. Its own ships have been saved. This band of little ships threw the Japs back, mauled his ships and defeated him.

There is no finer passage in the Navy's history than this, written by a handful of pilots, the little group of small ships, during the beautiful and ghastly day of Wednesday, 25 October 1944 in the seas washing the shores of the Philippine Islands.

10 November 1944

NEWS LETTER (May be enclosed in letters sent home)

Some of the details of our phase of the battle between U.S. forces and the Jap fleet may now be told to the folks at home. In order that the fullest possible picture, consistent with security regulations, may be given, this News Letter has been prepared.

This ship participated in the Leyte Operation, the curtain raiser of the invasion of the Philippines. We went to Leyte to give air support to the amphibious lands of MacArthur's troops, and we were doing a good job. The landings went off as scheduled, and the ground troops were making excellent progress. Then the Japs decided that they wouldn't take it lying down, and their fleet, which had been playing hide and seek (mostly "hide" since Midway, came steaming along to join the big battle. The first inkling that we had that there was going to be anything out of the ordinary was an urgent radio dispatch that some of our small ships were being shelled by a strong Japanese surface force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. This wasn't the type of engagement we had been scheduled to play, and we weren't particularly equipped for such a battle, but we did have some hole cards (the Navy does plan ahead, you know). So our ordancemen went to work, readying our planes for this new assignment, and soon we had a strike ready. The enemy was uncomfortably close, and no one aboard was ignorant of the seriousness of the situation. Shells were falling within our screen, and the Japs were closing us. We could see their masts and smoke, and we knew their big stuff would soon be within close range. Our only real defense was our squadron, and they were fully aware of the extent of their responsibility. We launched everything we had, to join up with planes from others of our outfit to throw our Sunday punch. The pilots really delivered the goods, and as a result of their attacks the Nipponese admirals decided they had bitten off more than they could chew. They turned and started a run for cover, and when they turned so did we. From pursued we became the pursuers, and defense became attack. Our ships launched strike after strike, and they got in some telling blows. It was David again, chopping down Goliath, but we were there, and we

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saw it ourselves. And we can take real pride in the fact that the little fellows took care of themselves, turning the capital ships of the Jap fleet and sending them barreling home. The air attack that we had that afternoon was just an anti-climax, but our planes again covered themselves with glory, turning back the enemy with heavy loss before they could get close enough to even see what we looked like.

It was a good show, and exciting show, and for a while there was no doubt about it, we were uncomfortable about our future. But one thing particularly stands out about this unique battle between the CVE's and the best the Jap fleet could offer. The whole ship worked as a real team. The long hours of drills and training paid off. Every department of the ship functioned as smoothly as ever, in lots of cases even more so. The flight deck handling crews outdid themselves in smooth, rapid handling of the heaviest schedule they had ever undertaken. The ordnancemen loaded their "eggs" without a bobble, the engineering force gave us all the speed they had in their engines, the gun crews manned their guns as efficiently and as calmly as if they were going through a drill off the California coast. The chips were down, this was the payoff, and the ship, from skipper to shaft-alley oiler, delivered. It was a team action, and team play turned the trick.

At the end of the day we got the reward every Navy man prizes so highly, the "well done" from those in command. The admiral's words were "I am proud to be in the same Navy with you." No real Navy man needs more praise than that.

True to good Navy form, when the fleet action was over, we went right back to our assigned mission, supporting the Leyte Operation, the job we had started out to do. That's about the whole story, as we saw it, and every man aboard may feel a just pride in the part he played in one of the outstanding actions of the war. Who said we weren't on the First Team?

The following are extracts from an Associated Press article which appeared in the Honolulu papers:

#### GALLANT FIGHT OF EXCORT CARRIERS WON SAN BERNARDINO STRAIT BATTLE

Pacific Fleet Headquarters, Pearl Harbor, Nov. 20 (AP) - The battle of San Bernardino Strait 25 October in which a Japanese force of four battleships, eight heavy cruisers and at least 10 destroyers trapped 16 American escort carriers protected only by their own planes and an unreported number of destroyers was one of the strangest in naval history.

The American victors fled before the vanquished Japanese, who had heavy odds in their favor, far superior range, very heavy armor, far greater speed and the assistance of land-based airplanes.

The Japanese were fast overtaking the little CVE's (escort carriers) - but just when the American vessels seemed doomed the enemy turned and fled under attack by U.S. carrier planes.

The Gambier Bay took a shell that knocked out one engine. The resultant sudden slowing, plus the enemy's speed, allowed the Gambier Bay to be overtaken by the entire Japanese force.

The enemy deliberately riddled her at point blank range and sent the ship to the bottom, but a great number of her crew were saved.

The story was related today by a naval observer who witnessed much of the action from the escort carrier Natoma Bay, but whose name was withheld by censorship.

Another CVE, the St. Lo, was hit heavily, set afire and sunk a few miles away. The crew went overside when "abandon ship" was ordered and an escorting destroyer dared Japanese fire to pick up survivors.

At this time, about 9 am., the naval officer reported, the CVE's were fleeing the scene as fast as possible in a line extending many miles over the Philippine sea even while their own planes were bombing and torpedoing the enemy attackers. The little carriers, capable of only about 20 knots, were being overhauled rapidly by the Japanese ships, all believed capable of more than 30 knots.



The CVE's were "being heavily shelled by Jap cruisers and battleships • • • the situation looks almost hopeless," the naval officer wrote in his diary.

He saw shells from the foremost Japanese ship falling over the screening American destroyers and astern of his fleeing Natoma Bay. The enemy used red, green, yellow and purple dyes in shells from the various ships better to determine their accuracy. Green shells fell around the Natoma Bay and "spouted plumes of water a beautiful iridescent green in the clear sunlight against the dark blue sea."

The 16 escort carriers "had no protection other than our aircraft, our maneuverability and the gallant destroyer screen."

Their captains were:

Gambier Bay	Capt. W. V. R. Vieweg
Kalinin Bay	Capt. T. B. Wilkinson
Kitkun Bay	Capt. J. P. Whitney
Fanshaw Bay	Capt. D. P. Johnson
White Plains	Capt. D. J. Sullivan
Natoma Bay	Capt. A. K. Morehouse
Manila Bay	Capt. Fitzhugh Lee
Ommaney Bay	Capt. H. L. Young
Kadashan Bay	Capt. R. N. Hunter
Marcus Island	Capt. C. F. Greber
Savo Island	Capt. C. E. Ekstrom
Sangamon	Capt. M. E. Browder
Suwanee	Capt. W. D. Johnson
Santee	Capt. R. E. Blick
Petrof Bay	Capt. J. L. Kane

Real Admiral T. L. Sprague was in overall command, with Rear Admirals C. A. F. Sprague and Felix B. Stump cooperating.

Some of the other CVE's were damaged, but they were not identified.

The force expected no outside aid (although it did get some in midafternoon). Vice Admiral Jesse B. Oldendorf's battle force still was in the Leyte Gulf after sinking an entire Japanese force of two battleships, two cruisers and four destroyers before dawn.

Admiral William F. Halsey's Third Fleet was engaging the imperial carrier task force northeast of Luzon Island.

However, shortly after the naval observers noted that the situation was ominous, grim, these things happened in quick sequence:

"The Japanese forces split and turned away. . .

"Our torpedo planes stopped the Japanese. At least one Japanese cruiser has been torpedoed and sunk. . . Other cruisers and battleships had been hit."

All morning, the CVE pilots bombed and torpedoed the Japanese, returned to their carriers, armed, gassed, gulped sandwiches and were launched again and again for further attacks on the Japanese. Many of the pilots were engaging in their first combat.

The naval observer's final entry in his diary: "The Japanese forces have been whipped by our planes. Japanese ships lie crippled in their pools of oil . . . Surviving ships are running for their lives, leaving the wounded behind. The battle has turned and we no longer are pursued but are now the pursuers . . . A Jap battleship, a cruiser and a destroyer are ignored by our pursuing planes as they lie crippled in the sea. We are harrying them (the moving enemy ships) in their retreat."

At 4:30 in the afternoon, the Japanese sent more than 40 land-based planes against the CVE's, but they were turned back after 16 had been destroyed. Meantime, carriers Admiral Halsey had detached from his Third Fleet had come south and joined in sinking or damaging every one of the fleeing Japanese ships.

Today, Admiral T. L. Sprague sent this message to all ships which had participated in the CVE action:

"These ships not only met and defeated enemy attacks in the air but they have turned back a large enemy fleet composed of his most modern ships. . . . Never have fighting men performed their duty with greater determination and distinction. . . . Against such teamwork the enemy could not prevail. . . .

"To the mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, wives and the sons and daughters of those who were lost, I say: Do not be sad. Be comforted and inspired in the thought that victory for which these men so freely and courageously gave their lives has contributed immeasurably to the final defeat of the enemy."

#### HISTORIAN'S NOTE

Going into the invasion of Leyte, the Natoma Bay carried a total of six aircraft torpedoes. There is a strong possibility that during the running battle with Admiral Kurita's Japanese Central Force, each one of those torpedoes found its mark. There is no one eye witness to the whole battle that October day in 1944. The definite sinking of a heavy cruiser took two of those torpedoes. VC 81 also has to its credit the sinking of a destroyer plus damage to two other destroyers, six cruisers and a battleship. The battle ranged over several hours and many miles, and it must be assumed that there will never be a 100% accurate description of the entire battle because it was too immense and involved over 50 warships.

The Natoma Bay never carried any more torpedoes after the Battle for Leyte Gulf. It seems that the menace in the Pacific to the U.S. Navy was no longer the Japanese Navy - but the Japanese suicide plane. Therefore torpedoes would only have been a hazard to the ship as they had to be stored on the hangar deck bulkheads. Incidentally it was decided by all those involved that morning of 25 October to set all torpedoes to run at a depth of 12 feet.

## THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

From the Naval Academy ILLUSTRATED HISTORY of the UNITED STATES NAVY, by E. B. Potter, published by The Crowell Co., Inc. Copyrighted in 1971 by the author. This excerpt is published here for the exclusive use of the Natoma Bay Association for its LOGBOOK. (Pages 232-245).

### The Invasion of Leyte

The formerly starveling U.S. Seventh Fleet, by temporarily absorbing a large part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, had suddenly become the largest in the world, with 738 ships in the attack forces. From Manus and from Hollandia and other New Guinea bases, the main elements of this armada sortied between October 10 and 15, 1944, for the invasion of Leyte.

The minesweepers, leading the way, arrived at the entrance to Leyte Gulf early on the 17th and swept passages to flanking islands, on which an attack group landed Rangers. These commando-type troops were to seize or destroy Japanese radar and radio installations that could detect and report the approach of the invasion forces. The Rangers succeeded, but not before the island lookouts had reported to Admiral Toyoda, who guessed the meaning of these early arrivals and set in motion an elaborate counterattack.

In the afternoon of the 18th, Admiral Oldendorf's gunfire-support ships entered Leyte Gulf and began bombarding the beaches, initially to cover the explorations of underwater demolition teams, which found no mines or underwater obstacles. Three escort carrier groups under Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague patrolled outside the gulf, supporting the assault by keeping local airfields pounded down. Throughout the 19th the gunnery vessels fired almost continuously at the shore. One destroyer was hit by coast-defense guns.

On the morning of the 20th, Admiral Wilkinson's Southern Attack Force led the way into the gulf and anchored off Dulag, followed by Admiral Barbey's Northern Attack Force, which anchored 17 miles to the

north, off Tacloban, capital of Leyte Province. One regimental combat team was lifted down to Panoan Island to set up a base whence motor torpedo boats could patrol the southern entrance to Surigao Strait. At 1000, supported by close-in fire-support groups, the troops began going ashore in a variety of landing craft, including amtracs originally destined for use at Yap. Though there was some fire from shore, mostly mortar, this was one of the easiest assaults of the war, carried out in calm seas and perfect weather.

In the early afternoon, General MacArthur, who had watched the landings from the light cruiser Nashville, climbed down into a barge with Sergio Osmena, President of the Philippines, and other officials and headed for the beach. "Well," said the general, "believe it or not, we're here."

When the coxswain dropped the ramp 50 yards from shore, MacArthur stepped into the knee-deep water and with long strides led the way in - "one of the most meaningful walks I ever took." Stepping to a mobile radio unit, set up for his use on the beach, the general broadcast his speech of liberation. "This is the Voice of Freedom, General MacArthur speaking. People of the Philippines! I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God our forces stand again on Philippine soil - soil consecrated in the blood of our two peoples. . . . Rally to me. Let the indomitable spirit of Bataan and Corregidor lead on. As the lines of battle roll forward to bring you within the zone of operations, rise and strike. Strike at every favorable opportunity. For your homes and hearths, strike! For the future generations of your sons and daughters, strike! In the name of your sacred dead, strike!"

#### The Battle of Leyte Gulf

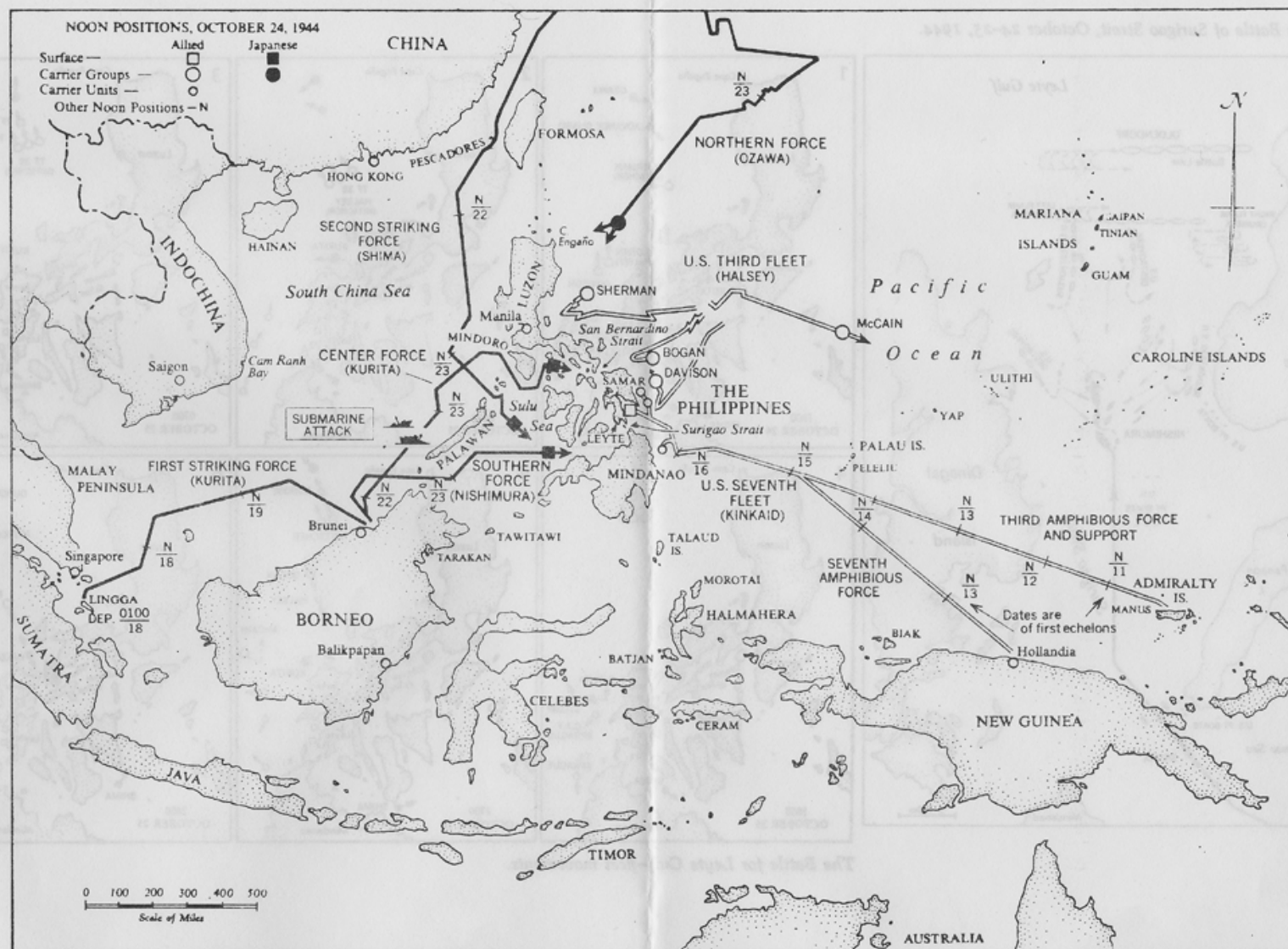
The Imperial High Command, assuming that the next Allied blow would come against the Philippines, Formosa, or Japan, had worked out a defense plan (Sho) in several variations, depending on the point of attack. The chief flaw in all of the alternatives was that each required land-based aircraft to strike a first, crippling blow against the attacking fleet.

But the September and October raids by Task Force 38 had destroyed most of Japan's trained land-based aviators, just as, under the designation Task Force 58, it had wiped out Japan's carrier-based aviators the preceding June in the Battle of the Philippine Sea.

When Toyoda on October 17 learned that Rangers had landed in Leyte Gulf, he promptly activated Sho-1 - for the defense of the Philippines. Despite Japan's weakness in the air, he scarcely had a choice, for Americans in possession of the Philippines could permanently divide the Combined Fleet. Because of the difficulty in getting fuel to Japan, a force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers under Vice Admiral Kurita was based on Lingga Roads, near Singapore, handy to oil wells and refineries. Admiral Ozawa's carriers and their escorts were in Japan's Inland Sea undergoing repairs, and training yet another complement of carrier aviators. Lastly, there was Admiral Shima's cruiser-destroyer force that had sallied forth to mop up Halsey's "remnant" and then retreated hastily to Amami.

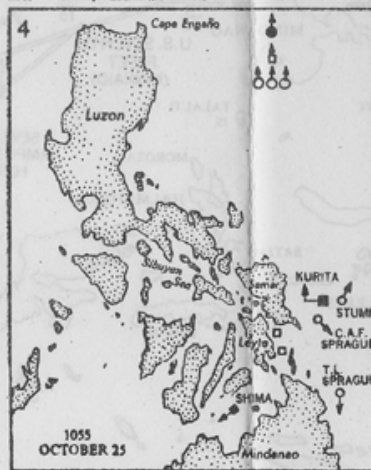
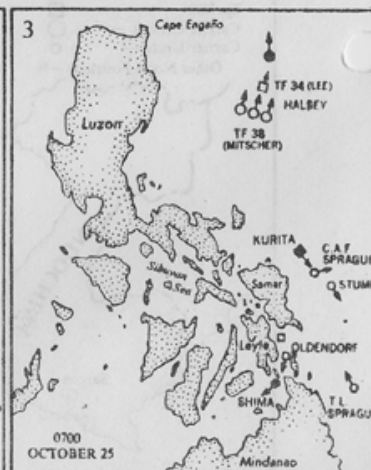
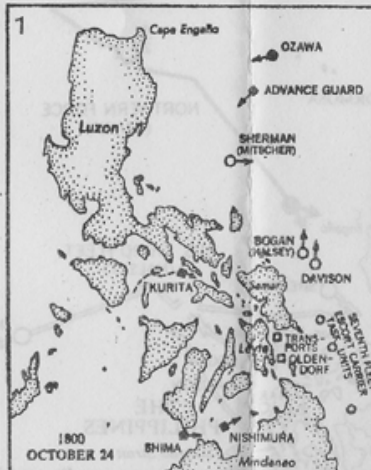
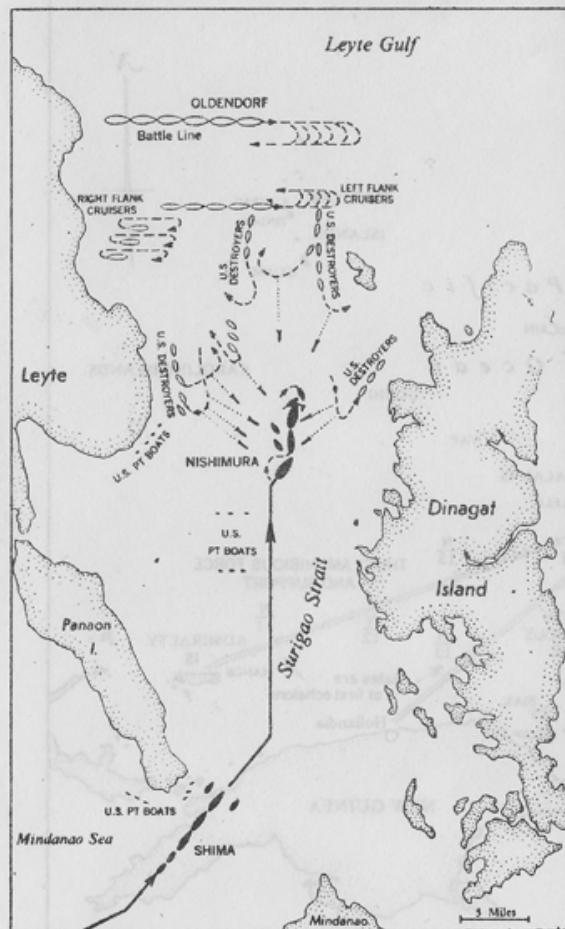
By activating Sho-1, Toyoda set in motion the various elements which led to the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea on October 24, and the Battle of Surigao Strait, the Battle off Cape Engaño, and the Battle off Samar on the 25th. These, together with subsidiary actions, comprised the Battle for Leyte Gulf, the greatest naval action, in terms of tonnages involved, in all history. Actual participants numbered nearly 200,000 men. When it was over the Imperial Japanese Navy was shattered, no longer a fighting fleet.

Kurita's force departed Lingga early on October 18, entered the harbor of Brunei two days later, there refueled, and on the 22d sortied in two segments. Kurita himself with 5 battleships (including the giant Yamato and Musashi) and 12 cruisers headed for Leyte Gulf via the South China Sea, the Sibuyan Sea, and San Bernardino Strait. His second-in-command, Vice Admiral Nishimura, with two battleships and a cruiser advanced to penetrate Leyte Gulf via the Sulu Sea, the Mindanao Sea, and Surigao Strait. His and Kurita's forces would thus close the pincers on the amphibious shipping in the gulf. To bring the two pincer jaws more nearly into balance, Toyoda ordered Shima to join Nishimura.



Approach of the fleets to Leyte Gulf.

*The Battle of Surigao Strait, October 24-25, 1944.*



*The Battle for Leyte Gulf—fleet movements.*

FOLD OUT



What about Halsey and TF 38? The Japanese had an answer, based upon their estimate of Halsey as bold, not to say rash. Just as they correctly judged that Spruance could not be induced to uncover the Saipan beachhead prematurely, they concluded that Halsey, tempted with a suitable bait, could be drawn away from Leyte, leaving the gulf to the Kurita-Nishimura pincer. For bait Ozawa selected the most expendable of his 10 carriers: the veteran Zuikaku and the light carriers Zuiho, Chitose, and Chiyoda. With these, accompanied by the Hyuga and the Ise—converted battleships with flight decks aft — and a screen of cruisers and destroyers, he headed south from Japan on what he believed to be a suicide mission. The Americans, as they made contact with them, called Ozawa's decoy fleet the Northern Force; Kurita's ships the Center Force; and the Nishimura-Shima combination, the Southern Force.

Kurita's Center Force was the first to run into trouble. Off Palawan Island early on October 23, it encountered the picket submarines Darter and Dace. The Darter alerted the Allied forces, then sank Kurita's flagship, the heavy cruiser Atago, with four torpedoes, and with two more put the heavy cruiser Takao out of action. The Dace fired four torpedoes into the heavy cruiser Maya, which blew up and completely disappeared in a cloud of smoke and spray. Kurita, badly shaken, transferred to the Yamato.

Halsey, having concluded that the Japanese fleet was not going to attack, had sent Admiral McCain's carrier group for rest, rearming, and refueling to Ulithi, whither the other groups were to proceed in their turn. On receiving the Darter's report, he refueled his three remaining groups from oilers and early on the 24th stationed them east of the Philippines — Rear Admiral Gerald Bogan's group off San Bernardino Strait, Rear Admiral Frederick Sherman's off Luzon, and Rear Admiral Ralph Davison's off Leyte Gulf. Halsey in the New Jersey was with Bogan's group; Mitscher in the Lexington was with Sherman's. Since the Third Fleet and TF 38 were now identical, Halsey exercised tactical command, bypassing Mitscher.

A little past 0800, TF 38 search planes sighted Kurita's Center Force entering the Sibuyan Sea. Against these ships, which had no air cover, Halsey's three carrier groups in the course of the day hurled five powerful air strikes. In this air-waged Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, four of Kurita's battleships were damaged and his heavy cruiser Myoko was put out of action. The super-battleship Musashi, hit by bombs and torpedoes, began trailing astern of the formation. In the last attack of the day, planes from all three U.S. carrier groups concentrated on this monster, which after absorbing 19 torpedo and 17 bomb hits rolled over and sank, carrying down more than 1,000 men. Shortly afterward at about 1530, Kurita reversed course and headed back west.

The Japanese air command on Luzon could not provide Kurita with a combat air patrol because they were attacking Sherman's carrier group with every plane they had - on the assumption that this was the whole U.S. Third Fleet. Sherman's fighters met the attackers at a distance and shot them down in great numbers. One Japanese bomber got through, however, and put a bomb into the light carrier Princeton, which blazed with uncontrollable fires. These at last set off her torpedo stowage. The explosion blew off her stern and after flight deck and swept the decks of the cruiser Birmingham, then alongside, with metallic chunks and other debris that killed more than 200 of her crew. Ozawa's Northern Force, maneuvering off Cape Engaño, launched against Sherman's group 76 planes, which took heavy losses without achieving anything. Most of the surviving pilots, unskilled in carrier landings, proceeded to Luzon airfields.

Thus far the fact of divided command in the Allied naval forces had produced no problems, even though Commander Seventh Fleet Admiral Kinkaid and Commander Third Fleet Admiral Halsey acted with almost complete independence. General MacArthur in the cruiser Nashville was almost within hailing distance of Kinkaid in the amphibious command ship Wasatch, but the general consciously avoided interfering in naval operations. Nimitz's hands-off policy kept him at his Pearl Harbor headquarters, lest his mere presence at an operation inhibit the tactical commander in exercising his own judgment. Nimitz's participation was limited to issuing

an operational plan, and since this directed Halsey to "cover and support forces of the Southwest Pacific," Kinkaid had no anxieties about the safety of his ships.

A misunderstanding between Halsey and Kinkaid began in midafternoon of October 24, when Halsey radioed a battle plan whereby 4 battleships, 6 cruisers and 14 destroyers from Bogan's and Davison's task groups would be assembled as Task Group 34 under Vice Admiral Lee to "engage decisively at long ranges." Admirals Nimitz and Kinkaid read this message with satisfaction; though their communicators did not pick up an execute message, they assumed that TF 34 had been formed and was watching San Bernardino Strait.

Meanwhile, Ozawa was trying his best to attract Halsey's attention - making smoke, breaking radio silence, even fruitlessly sending an advance guard of surface vessels to locate and attack the Americans. His Northern Force was in Sherman's search sector, but Sherman was too busy launching and warding off air attacks and covering the burning Princeton to give much attention to search. Hence it was late afternoon when his scout bombers at last discovered Ozawa 190 miles NNE of Sherman's position. Mitscher flashed the word to Halsey, and Sherman ordered a cruiser to sink the wrecked and abandoned Princeton with torpedoes.

Mitscher's report had long been awaited by Halsey and his staff. American aircraft had sighted and attacked the Japanese Southern Forces as well as Kurita's Center Force. It was inconceivable that a counter-attack on such a scale would be made without carriers; but where were they? Now Halsey knew - and it appeared that the Northern Force was headed for a rendezvous in Leyte Gulf with the other Japanese forces.

In the light of this new report, Halsey did not execute his plan for forming TF 34. When his carriers had recovered all of their planes, he went into flag plot, put his finger on the Northern Force's charted position 300 miles away, and said to Rear Admiral Robert ("Mick") Carney, his chief of staff: "Here's where we're going. Mick, start them north." Carney then sent out a series of messages: to McCain,

ordering him to make best speed to join the other three groups; to Davison and Bogan, ordering them to head north; to Sherman, to join them as they dashed past at midnight; to Mitscher, to assume tactical command at that time and to attack the Northern Force early on the 25th; and to Kinkaid - "Am proceeding north with three groups to attack enemy carrier force at dawn." Kinkaid, supposing that TF 34 had been formed and was guarding San Bernardino Strait, took the message to mean that Halsey was sending three carrier groups north.

Even before Halsey ordered his advance to the north, search planes from the light carrier Independence reported that the Center Force was again heading for San Bernardino Strait and that navigation lights in the strait, long blacked out, were now lighted. Many officers in TF 38 thought Halsey should have left the battle line behind with one of the carrier groups for air support. Lee sent Halsey a message that in his opinion the Northern Force was a mere decoy with little or no striking power. Shrugging off all suggestions, Halsey with 65 ships continued north after Ozawa's 17. When Mitscher's staff urged him to protest to Halsey, Mitscher replied, "If he wants my advice, he'll ask for it."

Halsey chose to accept at face value reports of his pilots that the Center Force was so battered as to be no longer a serious menace to the Seventh Fleet. If he needed further justification, he found it in a curiously worded sentence in Nimitz's operation order. This sentence, unnumbered, stuck in between two numbered paragraphs, appeared to be an interpolation: "In case opportunity for destruction of major portion of the enemy fleet offers or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task."

Even without this mandate, Halsey could scarcely have been restrained. In common with most contemporary naval officers, he believed the quickest way to win a naval war was to sink enemy carriers, the vessels with the longest reach and the hardest punch. He had missed his chance in the Battle of Midway. Spruance, so it seemed to him, had muffed his opportunity in the Battle of the Philippine Sea. Now Halsey was going to show how to fight a carrier battle.

He was in some degree a victim of his own publicity. The press, seeking heroes in the grim early days of the war, had latched onto genial, salty-tongued Bill Halsey and created "Bull Halsey," colorful, hell-for-leather warrior, nemesis of the Japanese. Halsey had apparently begun to identify himself with his public image. It would have been out of character for Bull Halsey to remain off San Bernardino Strait waiting for the enemy to come to him.

As TF 38 sped north, the Japanese Center Force steamed steadily eastward. Kurita had never intended his reversal of course to be anything but a temporary withdrawal beyond the range of Halsey's planes so that he could make the approach to the strait through the narrowing seas under cover of darkness. When he notified Admiral Toyoda in Tokyo of his action, however, the commander-in-chief fired back a peremptory order to the fleet: "Trusting in Divine Assistance, all forces will advance to the attack." Each commander knew that this meant "No retreat." The attack was to be pushed to a conclusion regardless of sacrifice in ships and men.

When Toyoda's order reached Kurita, the Center Force had already resumed its advance. Its strength was now reduced to 4 battleships, 6 heavy cruisers, 2 light cruisers, and 11 destroyers. Battle damage had decreased its speed as a whole to 22 knots, but contrary to Halsey's estimate, the fighting ability of the heavies was in no way impaired. Their guns and fire control apparatus were undamaged.

Toward midnight, as the force neared San Bernardino Strait, all ships went to battle stations. The men were tense as they passed through the opening between Samar and the southern tip of Luzon into the open waters of the Pacific. In the clear night they strained to make out the American ships that must surely be nearby. Then gradually they relaxed as they realized that, incredibly enough, the strait had been left unguarded.

## The Battle of Surigao Strait

When search planes on the morning of October 24 reported Nishimura's and Shima's Southern Forces east-bound in the Sulu Sea, Admiral Kinkaid concluded that they were heading for an attack on the shipping in Leyte Gulf. Satisfied that Halsey was guarding San Bernardino Strait, he ordered Admiral Oldendorf to block Surigao Strait with most of the Seventh Fleet gunfire-support ships - 6 old battleships and 4 heavy and 4 light cruisers, plus 21 destroyers and 39 motor torpedo boats. Oldendorf, who was determined to prevent another Savo Island and to annihilate rather than merely repulse the enemy, set up the perfect ambush - a series of disagreeable surprises stretching from PT boats far out in the Mindanao Sea to battleships at the northern end of the strait.

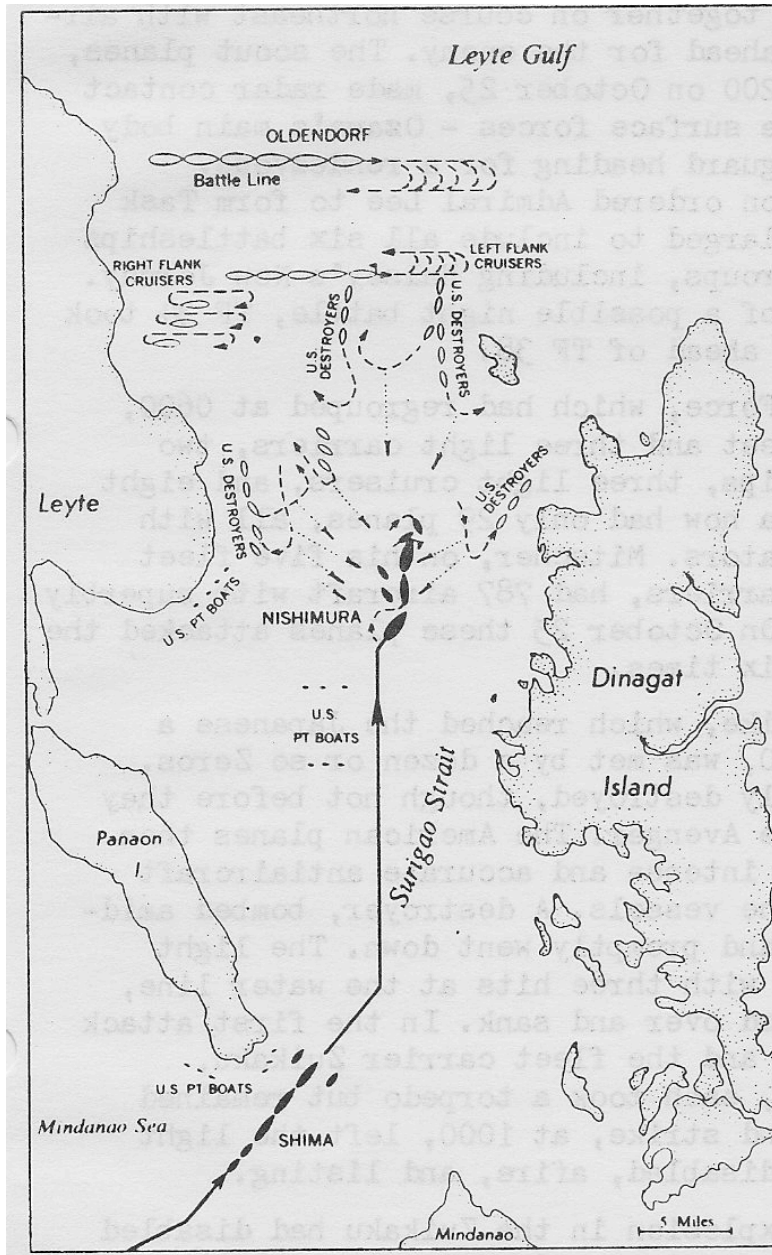
Nishimura had been apprised by radio of Kurita's delay in the Sibuyan Sea and was speeding ahead without waiting for Shima. Evidently he believed that his only remaining chance to smash Allied shipping lay in penetrating the gulf before dawn. Beginning at 2300, he ran the gantlet of the torpedo boats, first outside and then inside Surigao Strait. None of their torpedoes hit, and the boats received considerable damage from Japanese shellfire, but they performed a valuable service in keeping Oldendorf posted on Nishimura's progress.

At about 0230 on the 25th, the torpedo boats stood aside, and the second phase of the battle began. Divisions of destroyers raced down the strait, firing torpedoes and shells at the Japanese from right, left, and dead ahead, then turned away making smoke. Both of Nishimura's battleships were torpedoed and two of his destroyers were sunk. A third, the Asagumo, her bow blown off, wobbled away to the south. The battleship Fuso sheered out of line and then blew apart into two blazing sections.

While this attack was in progress, Nishimura's remaining vessels - the battleship Yamashiro, his flagship; the heavy cruiser Mogami; and the destroyer Shigure - came under T-capping fire from Oldendorf's battleships and cruisers, which had been steaming back

and forth across the northern end of the strait awaiting this moment. Battered by a hail of 6- to 16-inch shells and struck by a fourth torpedo, the Yamashiro began to sink. The badly wrecked Mogami and the Shigure turned back. At about this time, Oldendorf, informed that his ships were firing at each other, ordered all shelling stopped. In fact, the only Allied vessel damaged was the U.S. destroyer Albert W. Grant, which had been hit 19

*The Battle of Surigao Strait, October 24-25, 1944*



times by friend and foe with a loss of 34 of her crew.

As Shima's force entered the far end of the strait, a PT boat torpedoed his light cruiser Abukuma, which dropped out of formation. His two heavy cruisers and four destroyers pushed on to the scene of Nishimura's disaster. Here the cruisers fired fruitlessly at radar targets, and the flagship Nachi, in turning, accidentally rammed the Magomi. Shima, adding the Mogami and the Shigure to his force, wisely retired back down the strait.

Some of Oldendorf's cruisers, hunting for cripples, sank the bowless Asagumo and put more shells into the retreating Mogami, which was finished off later that morning by Seventh Fleet carrier planes. Army aircraft sank the Abukuma the following day.

#### THE BATTLE OFF CAPE ENGAÑO

Toward midnight of October 24 Sherman's carrier group had joined Bogan's and Davison's off central Luzon. Mitscher then assumed tactical command, and the three groups proceeded together on course northeast with aircraft searching ahead for the enemy. The scout planes, a little after 0200 on October 25, made radar contact with two separate surface forces - Ozawa's main body and his advance guard heading for a rendezvous. Mitscher thereupon ordered Admiral Lee to form Task Force 34, now enlarged to include all six battleships in the carrier groups, including Halsey's New Jersey. In anticipation of a possible night battle, TF 34 took station 10 miles ahead of TF 38.

The Northern Force, which had regrouped at 0600, comprised one fleet and three light carriers, two carrier-battleships, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers. Ozawa now had only 29 planes, all with experienced aviators. Mitscher, on his five fleet and five light carriers, had 787 aircraft with superbly trained flyers. On October 25 these planes attacked the Northern Force six times.

The first strike, which reached the Japanese a little after 0800, was met by a dozen or so Zeros. These were quickly destroyed, though not before they had shot down one Avenger. The American planes then bored in through intense and accurate antiaircraft fire to get at the vessels. A destroyer, bombed amid-ships, exploded and promptly went down. The light cruiser Chitose, with three hits at the water line, very slowly rolled over and sank. In the first attack the cruiser Tama and the fleet carrier Zuikaku, Ozawa's flagship, each took a torpedo but remained afloat. The second strike, at 1000, left the light carrier Chiyoda disabled, afire, and listing.

The torpedo explosion in the Zuikaku had disabled both her steering engines and her radio transmitter.



Though the first resulted in a wildly erratic course, the second had far more serious consequences, particularly since it went long undetected. Ozawa's message reporting the success of the decoy scheme failed to reach Kurita, who thus had no way of knowing that Halsey was a full day's steaming away from Leyte Gulf and hence no immediate threat to himself.

Ozawa, having accomplished his mission, expected total destruction of his Northern Force. He, at first saw no point in shifting from the damaged Zuikaku, and in fact intended to go down with his ship. The obvious impossibility of commanding from the damaged carrier, however, finally persuaded him late in the morning to transfer to the cruiser Oyodo.

Halsey likewise anticipated total destruction of the Northern Force and intended to have a hand in its extermination. With TF 34 he remained out ahead of the carrier groups and stepped up speed to 25 knots. At a minimum, TF 34 would finish off cripples left by the planes. It might even fight an old-fashioned surface battle, once the enemy carriers were disposed of. "I rubbed my hands at the prospect," said Halsey.

The admiral's attention, however, was becoming distracted by news from the south. At 0648 he had received from Kinkaid a long-delayed dispatch informing him that Seventh Fleet surface forces were engaging enemy surface forces in Surigao Strait. To this piece of news Kinkaid appended a question: "Is TF 34 guarding San Bernardino Strait?" Halsey, puzzled, radioed back: "Negative. TF 34 is with carrier groups now engaging enemy carrier force" - a reply which appalled Kinkaid.

Next Kinkaid announced that the enemy was retiring from Surigao Strait pursued by Seventh Fleet light forces. That relieved Halsey's mind, for now, he assumed, the Seventh Fleet was free to deal with Kurita if need be. Twenty minutes later came another message, stating that an enemy battleship-cruiser force was firing on one of the Seventh Fleet escort carrier groups outside Leyte Gulf. A few minutes after that came a plain language message from Kinkaid giving the composition of

the enemy force and adding: "Request Lee proceed top speed cover Leyte Gulf. Request immediate strike by fast carriers."

"That surprised me," said Halsey. "It was not my job to protect the Seventh Fleet. My job was offensive, to strike with the Third Fleet, and we were even then rushing to intercept a force which gravely threatened not only Kinkaid and myself, but the whole Pacific strategy."

From Kinkaid came more cries for help, with the additional information that his old battleships were low in ammunition. Halsey, exasperated, ordered McCain, coming up from the southeast with his carrier group, to turn back and attack the enemy force near Leyte Gulf. Then, notifying Kinkaid that McCain was coming, Halsey pressed on to the north with TF 34 and TF 38.

At CINCPAC headquarters at Pearl Harbor, Admiral Nimitz was reading the Halsey-Kinkaid messages with increasing dismay. His staff urged him to order Halsey to take or send TF 34 back south. Nimitz declined, not wishing to interfere with the commander at the scene. Besides, Halsey might already have sent TF 34 back, though no such action was mentioned in the dispatches intercepted at Pearl Harbor.

At last Nimitz authorized his assistant chief of staff, Commodore B. L. Austin, to ask Halsey where TF 34 was - intending the question both as an inquiry and as a gentle prod to take action, if he had not already done so. When the message reached Halsey a little after 1000, it had become less a prod than a bludgeon. As placed in his hands, the dispatch read: FROM CINCPAC ACTION COM THIRD FLEET INFO COMINCH CTF SEVENTY-SEVEN X WHERE IS RPT WHERE IS TASK FORCE THIRTY-FOUR RR THE WORLD WONDERS.

Austin had added Admiral King and Admiral Kinkaid (CTF 77) as information addresses and stuck in RPT (repeat) for emphasis. The Pearl Harbor communicator had routinely inserted padding, random phrases, at the beginning and end of the message: TURKEY TOOTS TO WATER GG . . . RR THE WORLD WONDERS, to increase difficulty of cryptanalysis. The communicator aboard the New Jersey removed the opening padding, but that at the end read so much like a part of the message

that he left it on despite the double-letter divider - trusting that someone in flag country would point out to Halsey that the closing phrase was marked as padding.

Nobody did. To Halsey the message looked like heavy-handed sarcasm, with King and Kinkaid called in to witness his humiliation. He snatched off his cap, threw it on the deck, and gave vent to his feelings in opprobrious language. The pressure on him had become too great to resist. Though his heart was not in it, a little before 1100 he ordered TF 34 to reverse course, from due north to due south. As it passed TF 38, Halsey picked up Bogan's carrier task group to provide air cover and detached four cruisers and nine destroyers under Rear Admiral Laurence DuBose to furnish Mitscher additional surface support. "For me," Halsey later wrote, "one of the biggest battles of the war was off, and what has been called 'the Battle of Bull's Run' was on."

The third strike, launched by Mitscher a little before noon, comprised more than 200 planes. These chased off several vessels that were trying to take the disabled Chiyoda in tow, and torpedoed the carriers Zuiho and Zuikaku. The Zuiho got her fires under control and made off at high speed, but the Zuikaku, last of the Pearl Harbor raiders, capsized and sank. The fourth strike, in midafternoon, finished off the Zuiho. The last two strikes concentrated on the converted battleships Ise and Hyuga, but achieved only near misses, apparently because the aviators were tired and the ships expertly maneuvered.

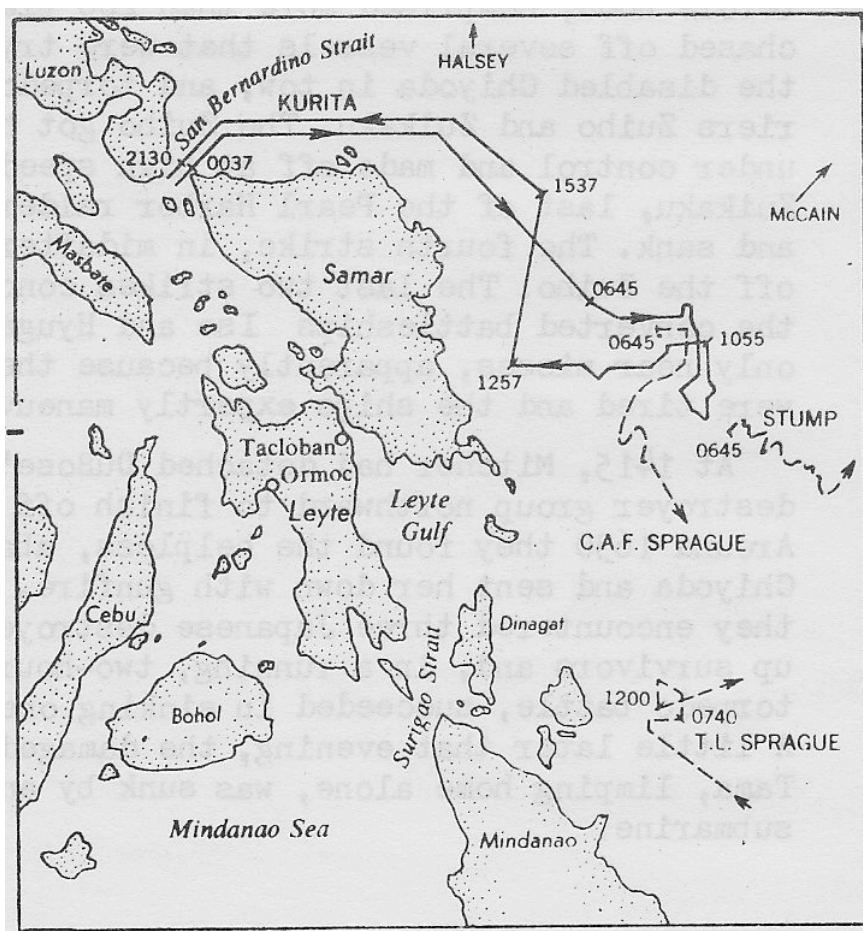
At 1415, Mitscher had detached DuBose's cruiser-destroyer group northward to finish off the cripples. Around 1630 they found the helpless, abandoned Chiyoda and sent her down with gunfire. After dark they encountered three Japanese destroyers picking up survivors and, in a running, two-hour gunfire-torpedo battle, succeeded in sinking one destroyer. A little later that evening, the damaged cruiser Tama, limping home alone, was sunk by an American submarine.

Though Ozawa had lost his bait carriers, he achieved the greatest success of any Japanese commander in the Battle for Leyte Gulf. He lured Halsey away from San Bernardino Strait, thereby saving Kurita's CenterForce from almost certain destruction, and he brought 10 vessels of his suicide force back home.

### THE BATTLE OFF SAMAR

At sunrise on October 25, Rear Admiral Clifton A. F. Sprague's little escort carrier task unit, code-named Taffy 3, was on antisubmarine and antiaircraft duty off Samar Island. It had just launched combat air patrol to cover ships in nearby Leyte Gulf. The deck crews were having breakfast, when lookouts reported antiaircraft fire to the north. Immediately afterward a pilot on antisubmarine patrol reported by radio that he was being fired on by a force of battleships, cruisers, and destroyers. Turning to flag plot, Admiral Sprague shouted, "Check identification!" It was unnecessary. Confirmation came almost at once, and more directly, as lookouts spotted the pagoda masts of obviously Japanese vessels rising over the northwestern horizon. At 0648 these vessels opened fire, and colored shell splashes rose around Taffy 3.

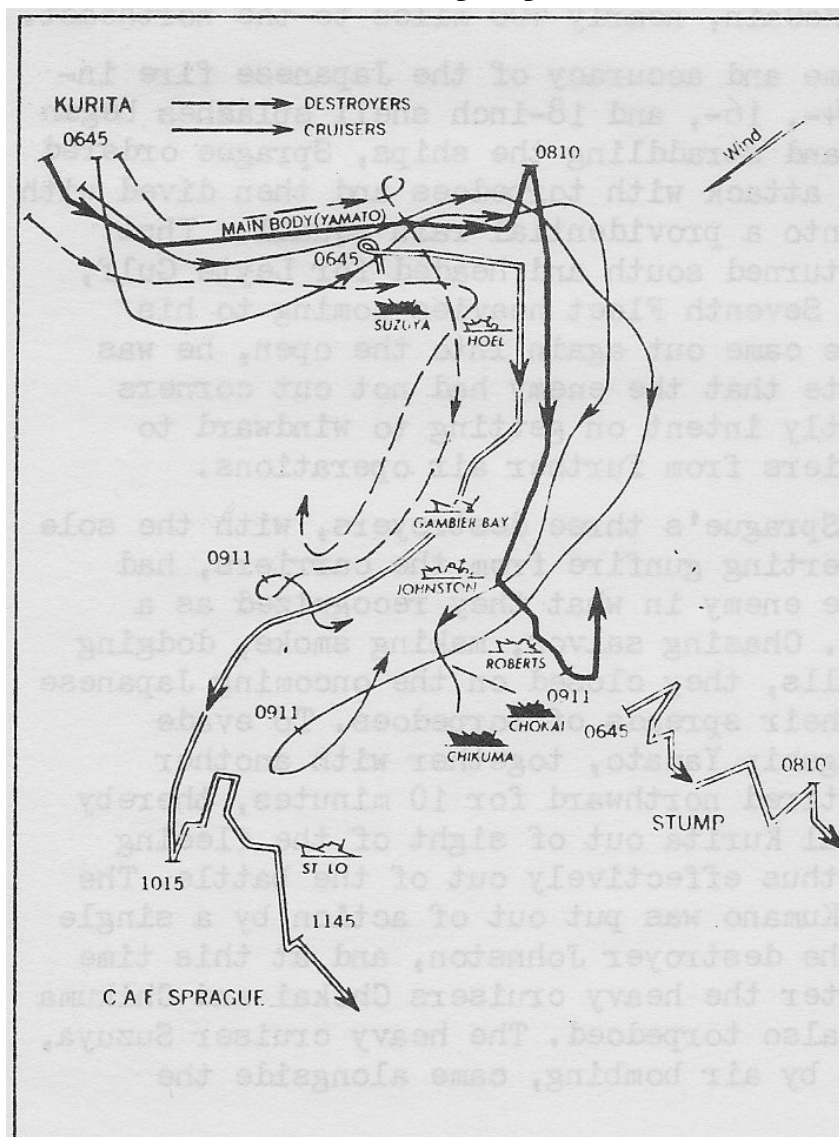
The attacking ships were Admiral Kurita's Center Force, and surprise was mutual. Since transiting San Bernardino Strait shortly after midnight, Kurita's lookouts until a few minutes before had



not sighted so much as a lone picket destroyer or a single scouting aircraft. At 0300 the Center Force, in night search disposition of several columns, had turned southeast and swept down the coast of Samar toward Leyte Gulf. At first light, Kurita began to deploy his force from columns into circular anti-aircraft formation, a slow process that was far from completed when carrier aircraft appeared overhead and masts were sighted on the southeastern skyline. As the superstructures and then the hulls of carriers and escorting vessels appeared over the misty horizon, the consensus in the flagship Yamato was that this was Mitscher's TF 38, or at least one of the TF 38 carrier groups. Rattled, Kurita made a serious blunder. In the midst of changing formations, he gave the order

"general attack." As a result, each division turned individually toward Taffy 3, and the Japanese force lost cohesion.

Taffy 3 consisted of six 18-knot escort carriers, known as "baby flattops," accompanied by three destroyers and four destroyer escorts. Since no doctrine existed for such a force fighting a battle fleet, Sprague had to rely on common sense, and it must be said that he did superbly well. First, with all ships making smoke, he ran



The Battle off Samar.

due east, a compromise course that opened the range but was close enough into the northeast wind to permit him to launch planes, all of which he ordered to take to the air and attack the enemy with whatever ammunition they had on board. He also called loudly for help in plain English. Rear Admiral Felix B. Stump's Taffy, of similar composition, was just over the horizon to the southwest. Stump responded promptly with aircraft, and also by reassurance and good advice over voice radio. Taffy 1, under the group commander, Rear Admiral Thomas L. Sprague, was 130 miles to the south, too far away to lend immediate help; besides, most of its planes were over the Mindanao Sea looking for the remnant of the Southern Forces. Six bombers and 20 fighters came over from the Leyte area to help. Halsey was nearly 400 miles to the north; McCain, nearly 400 miles to the northeast.

As the volume and accuracy of the Japanese fire increased, and 14-, 16-, and 18-inch shell splashes began walking up on and straddling the ships, Sprague ordered his escorts to attack with torpedoes and then dived with his carriers into a providential rain squall. Thus concealed, he turned south and headed for Leyte Gulf, hoping to meet Seventh Fleet heavies coming to his rescue. When he came out again into the open, he was relieved to note that the enemy had not cut corners but was evidently intent on getting to windward to block the carriers from further air operations.

Meanwhile, Sprague's three destroyers, with the sole purpose of diverting gunfire from the carriers, had sped toward the enemy in what they recognized as a suicide attack. Chasing salvos, making smoke, dodging into rain squalls, they closed on the oncoming Japanese and launched their spreads of torpedoes. To evade these, the flagship Yamato, together with another battleship, retired northward for 10 minutes, thereby carrying Admiral Kurita out of sight of the fleeing carriers, and thus effectively out of the battle. The heavy cruiser Kumano was put out of action by a single torpedo from the destroyer Johnston, and at this time or a little later the heavy cruisers Chokai and Chikuma were probably also torpedoed. The heavy cruiser Suzuya, already slowed by air bombing, came alongside the

Kumano to take off the division commander, and both cruisers fell behind out of the battle.

As the destroyers expended their torpedoes, they fired on battleships and cruisers at close range, and all three were struck repeatedly. After more than 40 hits, the destroyer Hoel rolled over and sank. Three of the destroyer escorts charged at the enemy. All three were severely damaged by gunfire, and the Samuel B. Roberts, a 40-foot-long hole ripped in her hull by 14-inch shells, settled by the stern and went down. Four enemy destroyers led by a cruiser came charging in to attack the carriers, but the Johnston interposed herself and fired so furiously at short range that they launched their torpedoes prematurely and harmlessly. They then circled the Johnston and fired into her until she sank. Thus ended one of the most gallant and one-sided counterattacks in the history of naval warfare.

Almost from the beginning of the battle, the Taffy 3 bombers, torpedo planes, and bomb-carrying fighters kept pounding away at the enemy. Reinforcements then joined them from Taffy 2, from Leyte, and, finally, from Taffy 1. As planes exhausted their ammunition, they made dry runs to distract the enemy, or rearmed on the Taffy 2 carriers or at the Tacloban airstrip. They finished off the wounded Suzuya and repeatedly attacked a column of heavy cruisers that threatened the Taffy 3 carriers. Of this group they sank the Chokai and the Chikuma, which may also have been torpedoed by the escort vessels. Under the unrelenting attack from the air, the Japanese ships fell into increasing confusion and, despite their great speed advantage, failed to gain appreciably on the carriers.

The heavy cruisers, working upon the carriers' port quarter, at length found the range. The flagship Fanshaw Bay took four 8-inch hits. The Kalinin Bay took thirteen and also a 16-inch shell from one of a pair of battleships that were plowing the cruisers' wake. These carriers were saved by expert damage control and also by the fact that the armor-piercing shells passed through their thin skins without exploding. The Gambier Bay, on the exposed flank of the formation, was hit so often that she lost count.

At last she had taken more punishment than her damage control parties and engineers could handle. She lost power, dropped astern, began to list, and at 0907 capsized and went down.

A few minutes later lookouts on the remaining carriers reported in amazement that all enemy vessels in sight were turning away. Sprague, mystified by the retreat of the fleet that appeared to him on the brink of victory, shaped course southwest, ultimately for the Admiralties.

#### THE KAMIKAZES STRIKE

The October 25 trial of the Taffies was not limited to surface attack. A little before 0800, six Zeros armed with bombs dived out of a cloud almost vertically on the four escort carriers of Admiral Thomas Sprague's Taffy 1, just as the carriers were launching aircraft to go to the aid of Taffy 3. Four of the attacking planes were shot down by antiaircraft fire, but the other two crashed into the Santee and the Suwannee, and their exploding bombs blasted gaping holes in the carriers' flight and hangar decks. In the midst of all the confusion, the Japanese submarine I-56 approached undetected and fired a torpedo into the Santee. The two damaged carriers, tough converted tankers, completed emergency repairs and resumed flight operations before noon.

Taffy 1 had had the distinction of being the first target of the new "suicide club" recently organized by Vice Admiral Onishi on Luzon. Its members, aviators manifestly unable to hit much of anything with bombs or torpedoes, would make up in guts what they lacked in skill by crashing their bomb-armed aircraft - and themselves - into enemy vessels. Officially named Special Attack Corps, the participants and their planes were generally known as "Kamikaze" (divine wind), the name applied to the typhoon that in 1274 saved Japan from invasion by scattering Kublai Khan's fleet.

A couple of hours after Kurita had broken off action, Taffy 3 also had a visit from the Kamikazes. One struck the carrier Kitkun Bay a glancing blow and bounced off, but its exploding bomb caused widespread damage. Two crashed into the Kalinin Bay, setting



fires and inflicting further damage on that victim of 14 shells. Another kamikaze rammed through the flight deck of the St. Lo and bursting into flames, set off bombs and torpedoes on her hangar deck. Seven explosions in quick succession hurled her elevator and sections of her flight deck hundreds of feet into the air. Blazing from stem to stern, the St. Lo went down under a cloud of smoke.

#### KURITA RETIRES

The Center Force's mystifying turnaway that saved Taffy 3 carriers was in response to a 0911 radio order from Admiral Kurita. Left behind, uninformed, he still believed he was chasing swift fleet carriers. All he could see, however, was a few of his own ships, widely scattered, from which he concluded that the prey had escaped. So he turned away northward, summoning all his divisions to the Yamato, in order to restore order to his fleet and make a fresh start for Leyte Gulf.

Headed back toward the gulf, Kurita began to have doubts about the wisdom of continuing. He knew now that Nishimura's attack had met with disaster. The Seventh Fleet ships that had smashed the Southern Forces must now be preparing for a hot reception for his Center Force. Even if he should succeed in fighting his way to the gulf, the transports would probably long since have departed for safer waters. Radio intercepts, particularly Kinkaid's plain-language request to Halsey for battleships and a carrier strike, gave him the impression that powerful enemy forces were converging on him.

Kurita had changed course and was steaming westward in indecision when at 1230 a final air attack from Taffies 2 and 3 bombed the battleship Nagato and the heavy cruiser Tone. At the appearance of these planes, Kurita radioed Toyoda that he had abandoned the penetration of Leyte Gulf and was heading for San Bernardino Strait. A little later came two successive strikes from Admiral McCain's carrier group. Launched from as far as 335 miles away, these planes could carry no torpedoes or heavy bombs and so achieved no important damage, but they did confirm Kurita in his decision to retire. At dusk the Center Force rounded the corner

of Samar and headed westward for the strait, which it entered at 2130. The destroyer Nowaki, left behind to pick up survivors, was still outside, racing to join Kurita.

The force which on October 24 Halsey had determined to keep concentrated was now divided four ways. Up north, DuBose's cruiser-destroyer group was advancing ahead of Mitscher's carrier groups. From the southbound groups, Halsey had detached his fastest battleships, the Iowa and New Jersey, with three cruisers and eight destroyers in a futile race to outspeed Kurita to the strait. They were too late by more than three hours. In a final division, cruisers and destroyers advanced and at 0110 October 26 sank the Nowaki, the only ship of the Center Force left afloat outside. The six fast new battleships of the Third Fleet raced 300 miles north and 300 miles back south without making contact with the enemy.

After dawn on the 26th, planes from Bogan's and McCain's carrier groups winged out across the Sibuyan Sea for a final crack at Kurita. They sank the light cruiser Noshiro and further damaged the straggling Kumano, thus ending four days of attacks on the battered Center Force.

#### LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

The Battle for Leyte Gulf brought the purely naval war to an end. With Japan's fleets shattered, there could be no more stand-up fights at sea. This happy conclusion resulted partly from speeding up the Philippines timetable. Had the Leyte invasion taken place on December 20, as originally scheduled, Ozawa would have had time to train his aviators enough to give the Americans a real fight. Since Admiral Halsey was responsible for the speed-up, his strategic insight more than offset his tactical lapse of October 24.

Now that the Navy had attained its main objective, its function was to continue to assist the Army and the Army Air Forces to attain theirs. It was Halsey's cherished design to join the B-29's in a raid on Tokyo, providing the fighter cover that could not reach Japan from the Marianas. The plan had to be abandoned, however, because TF 38 could not be spared from the Philippines. Monsoon rains turned Leyte into

a quagmire, so that engineers could not extend or complement the Tacloban airstrip to enable Army aircraft to take over the support of Lieutenant General Walter Krueger's Sixth Army.

With Admiral McCain replacing Admiral Mitscher but with Halsey still in overall command, TF 38 intermittently supported the Philippine invasions until mid-January 1945. During the Leyte campaign, the chief targets of the carrier planes were the all-weather airfields of Luzon and a new "Tokyo Express" that was landing a steady stream of reinforcements on the west coast of Leyte. The carriers' greatest success was on November 11, when their aircraft sent to the bottom a complete convoy, including six destroyers and five transports, thereby drowning 10,000 Japanese troops.

For both TF 38 and elements of the Seventh Fleet in Leyte Gulf, this was a grim period, for the organization of the Kamikaze Corps had enormously increased the effectiveness of Japanese air power. In Halsey's fleet during November 1944, Kamikazes crashed onto seven carriers, killing nearly 300 Americans and wounding hundreds more. In Kinkaid's fleet during the same period they hit two battleships, two cruisers, two attack transports, and seven destroyers, one of which sank. Following three suicide crashes on his ships on November 25, Halsey withdrew TF 38 temporarily to Ulithi to make repairs and to give his exhausted aviators a chance to rest.

In order to intercept the Tokyo Express, Admiral Kinkaid now sent destroyers around for night sweeps off Ormoc on the Leyte west coast. The sweeps achieved only moderate success and cost the Navy a destroyer. By early December there were 183,000 American troops on Leyte. Still slogging through mud, these were converging on Ormoc from north and south against heavy resistance. To wind up the campaign, General Krueger got the Seventh Fleet to convoy two regiments around for an amphibious landing on Ormoc Bay, an operation in which kamikazes sank the destroyers Ward and Mahan. This landing behind the backs of the Japanese defending forces proved decisive. On Christmas Day General MacArthur declared Leyte secured.

Before invading Luzon, the Americans prepared to capture and build airfields on Mindoro to provide close air support. The expeditionary force, advancing via Surigao Strait and the Sulu Sea, came under vicious attack by kamikazes from the central Philippines. Despite air cover from Leyte and from escort carriers, these heavily damaged the flagship Nashville and a destroyer, obliging both to turn back. The landing, on December 15, was unopposed, but kamikazes struck repeatedly at the supply convoys, sinking five LST's, three liberty ships, and a tanker. A Japanese cruiser-destroyer force on the night of December 26 briefly bombarded one of the new Mindoro airfields but was driven off by air attack.

From December 14 to 16, TF 38 had kept fighters over Luzon airfields around the clock, preventing all but a few planes from taking off and destroying nearly 200 on the ground. On the 18th the force was hit by a typhoon that sank 3 destroyers, damaged 7 other ships, destroyed 186 planes, and killed nearly 800 officers and men. On December 30, after Service Squadron 10 had patched up the storm-battered ships, TF 38 left Ulithi and headed for a strike on Formosa to support the impending invasion of Luzon.

The new invasion would be in Lingayen Gulf, where the Japanese had come ashore three years before. The forces were almost identical with those that had participated in the Leyte assault. The chief resistance to the new invasion came not from ships but from suicide planes, more numerous and deadly than ever. As the 164 ships of Admiral Oldendorf's support force approached the gulf, kamikazes crashed into the escort carriers Manila Bay and Ommaney Bay, the cruisers Louisville and Australia, a destroyer escort, and an LCI. The Ommaney Bay had to be abandoned and scuttled. On January 6, 1945, when the force began operations inside the gulf, suicide planes struck the battleships New Mexico and California, the cruiser Columbia, the cruisers Louisville and Australia a second time, three destroyers and several other vessels - including a minesweeper, which went down after being hit twice.

In the approaching amphibious forces, kamikazes crashed into an LST, into a troop-filled transport, and into the escort carriers Kadashan Bay and

Kitkun Bay, damaging both extensively. Before the landings on the 9th, the battleship Mississippi had been hit, the Columbia had been struck again, and HMAS Australia had been crashed three more times.

The troops went ashore against no opposition except from a few batteries in the hills, but that evening the Japanese unleashed a new weapon against the ships - explosive-carrying suicide boats. These sank 2 LCI's and damaged 4 LST's and a transport before they were wiped out by gunfire. In the Philippines the kamikazes struck for the last time on the 13th. By then they had damaged 43 vessels and sunk 4, killed 738 men, and wounded nearly 1,400.

The kamikaze attacks petered out because the Japanese were withdrawing their planes from the Philippines to escape the destructive raids from TF 38. As the air attacks declined, Halsey took his force into the South China Sea to seek out the cruisers and destroyers that had bombarded Mindoro and now threatened the Lingayen supply convoys. Finding no sign of the warships, McCain's flyers raided merchant shipping in enemy ports and sank 44 vessels. As the task force was reentering the Pacific, kamikazes from Formosa struck back, damaging the carriers Langley and Ticonderoga and a destroyer.

On January 25, TF 38, battered and behind schedule, arrived at Ulithi, where Halsey turned it over to Spruance. The period of close collaboration between the Central Pacific and Southwest Pacific forces had now ended. Most of the ships that Nimitz had loaned to MacArthur returned to the Pacific Fleet. These, with the Fast Carrier Task Force, now called Task Force 58, again became the U.S. Fifth Fleet and prepared for operations against Iwo Jima and Okinawa.

MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Area forces meanwhile moved southward. Troops landed by the Seventh Amphibious Force west and south of Manila added to the punch of the VI Army Corps coming down from the Lingayen beaches. In the city, the 20,000 Japanese defenders fought house by house, week after week, until March 4, when all had been killed or captured and Manila was a shambles.

By that time the Americans had also captured Bataan and Corregidor.

By then also the liberation of the central and southern Philippines was under way. The first landings, on Palawan Island and at the tip of Mindanao's western peninsula, were to secure bases from which planes could intercept enemy naval units approaching the central Philippines from the west. The Seventh Amphibious Force then staged invasions of Panay, Negros, Cebu, and Bohol. The Japanese never seriously contested the landings. They held the cities as long as they could, blew them up when forced out, and then withdrew to the mountains. Finally, on April 17, the Americans invaded the Mindanao mainland to finish the work of a 25,000-man guerrilla army that already controlled the countryside.

(This excerpt from the Naval Academy Illustrated History of the United States Navy is printed here for the Logbook of the Natoma Bay Association by permission of the author and publisher.)

(Much has been written about the liberation of the Philippines and particularly the Battle for Leyte Gulf. We set forth here one such account, believing that will be of special interest to those of us who were so close to it.)

#### FOREWORD

Upon my return to civilian status in 1946, I joined an Organized Reserve Unit in Atlanta, CVEG-66. Shortly thereafter I was invited to address the Rotary Club in Atlanta on the Battle for Leyte Gulf, which was then quite a timely topic. One talk led to another and finally this talk evolved, which the Navy asked me to give at various meetings throughout the Southeast. The Navy flew me to these meetings. One day Admiral Stump, who was then stationed in Memphis as Chief of Naval Air Technical Training, called me on long distance to say he had been asked to talk to the Memphis Rotary Club on the Battle for Leyte Gulf and he heard that I was making a talk on that subject. He asked me to send him a copy of my talk. I told him that I had never reduced it to writing but I would do so. This was the result. I sent it to Admiral Stump who called back to say he like it, but obviously he, as a "trade school" man (He called himself an "Academy Graduate"), could not use much of what I had said. He did send a copy to a professor of history at the Academy and when I was at Norfolk a few months later for an ACI meeting I met the professor, who told me that my talk was pretty accurate as far as he could check it out from the Navy's records, but obviously there was nothing to substantiate such things as my estimate of the Executive Officer, etc.

I suppose I gave this talk more than 50 times before it became too dated by time to be of sufficient interest to civic club audiences. It was just as well - I was getting pretty tired of the green peas and boiled potatoes menu myself. By request I gave the talk to our reunion in Chicago in 1964. It was thought that some of the wives of those present

might like to compare my text with that their husbands had been telling them about our "biggest day".

Las Vegas, Nevada, 21 September 1968.

Hamilton Lokey  
Commander, USNR (Retired)  
USS Natoma Bay Air Combat  
Intelligence Officer

#### THE BATTLE FOR LEYTE GULF

I am honored to have been asked to talk to you today about the Navy and its training program. They say that every sermon must have a text, and I have chosen for mine, an old naval maxim - "The Navy does the best it can with what it has in hand". The Navy needs your support in its program, and the more support we can get the better job we can do for you in maintaining the defensive forces of the country, and maintaining a force ready to go should the need arise again. To illustrate my text, I'd like to tell you a story, the story of the CVE's at Leyte Gulf and their battle against the main body of the Jap fleet. It was my privilege to have a grandstand seat for the show, my battle station being on the open bridge of the Natoma Bay, the flagship of Admiral Felix B. Stump. My job was that of Air Combat Intelligence Officer. It was my duty to keep the captain and the embarked squadron briefed on the operation, the nature of the mission of each flight, and then to interrogate the pilots on their return. From these reports I wrote the ship's action report.

During ship action my battle station was the open bridge, where I could see what was going on. So I had an excellent opportunity to witness the battle. I will try to give you the impressions of a civilian turned sailor for the duration as I saw it, from what you might call the "feather merchant's viewpoint". And to keep the record straight, I think I should state that the views of your speaker do not necessarily reflect the views of the Navy Department.

I do not want to give the impression that I had a tough assignment during the war. Nor do I want to give the impression that I think we had a tougher time of it than the Army or Marine Corps. The foot-slogger who hit the beach had it a whole lot tougher than we



did. I had the experience of going onto Guadalcanal toward the end of the campaign, and what they said about that place is absolutely true. It was the only place in the world where a man could stand up to his shirt-tail in mud and muck and have dust blown in his face. Yes, the Navy fought a gentleman's war. You lived rather comfortably until you died.

Perhaps I should say something about the kind of ship to which I was assigned, a CVE, affectionately known as a Kaiser coffin. These ships were turned out by Henry Kaiser in his doughnut-making machine in Oregon, and they made one every five days. To any regular Navy man they were a nightmare of jerry-built construction, put together by lady welders. They had practically no water-tight construction, and we called them "two-torpedo" ships, one in the side, the second over the flight deck. So far as I know there is no record of a CVE surviving one torpedo hit during the recent unpleasantness. But to us feather merchants, the Natoma Bay was a thing of beauty and a joy forever. We carried a complement of 20 fighters and 12 torpedo planes as our offensive power. Defensively we were rationed to a "punt and a prayer". Aside from some 20 and 40 millimeter anti-aircraft weapons, our entire defensive armament consisted of one 5-inch gun on the fantail, and as far as I could see the only useful purpose it served was to keep the rudder in the water. But we had a great ship's company, and to my mind that is the most important factor in the effectiveness of any ship.

We reached Leyte Gulf on October 18th. It was our assignment, along with 17 other jeep carriers, to lie off shore and send in our planes to cover the pre-invasion bombardment ships, then cover the foot-sloggers when they hit the beach, October 20th. Our planes provided the fire power ahead of the troops until they could take enough land behind the beaches to set up their artillery and provide their own fire power. That was our job and we were doing it the days following the landings. During this period our jeeps were operating in three groups of six carriers each, with a magnificent screen composed of three destroyers and four DE's for each group.

Fortunately for us, we were in the middle group. The group to our north was caught at dawn by the enemy and had no time to launch a properly armed defensive force of planes. The group to our south was too far away to enjoy the doubtful pleasure of getting shot at by the Jap battleships and cruisers. We were in just the right spot, far enough away at dawn to organize a striking force of planes, yet near enough to get shot at.

We could tell by the evening of October 23d that a fleet engagement was in the making, that the Jap navy was not going to take the invasion of the Philippines lying down. Dispatches indicated that the Japs were sending a powerful force, which they called the Southern Diversionary Attack Force up from Singapore, by way of Jesselton and Brunei Bay. This outfit was the one that tried to force an entrance into Leyte Gulf from the south, by way of Surigao Strait. A second force, coming from Camrahn Bay and Cape St. Jagues, by way of Manila, was heading toward San Bernardino Strait. This one the Japs called the main body. The third prong of the enemy thrust was the Imperial Carrier Task Force, coming down from the home islands. Apparently they were all to converge on the Leyte area about October 25th. According to the Jap's plan, the Carrier Force was to serve as bait, to lure away the fast carrier task forces of the United States, so as to give the main body a clear run and a green light into Leyte Gulf. So much for grand strategy.

On the afternoon of October 24th Halsey's planes gave the main body a good going over in the Visayan Sea. They beat up one of the Jap's two super-battleships, the Musashi, so badly that she headed back for Manila and sank on the way. They did a lot of other damage too, but apparently Halsey's air observer overestimated the damage for we got a message saying that when last seen the enemy was milling around aimlessly on course 270. It did not occur to us until later that it is pretty difficult to mill around aimlessly on a course due west. Halsey must have thought that the main body was through for the present, a premise that I can personally testify as being in some degree of error. At any rate, Halsey sent a message that he was

going north to get the Jap carriers. Now, anyone knowing Admiral Halsey knows that a Jap carrier was to him like a red flag was to a bull, and away he went. Admiral Kinkaid, in charge of the fleet at Leyte, and our boss, sent a message to Halsey suggesting that he change his plans, so as to protect the flank of the Leyte operation. Halsey's reply was that he was going for the carriers. Kinkaid sent another message suggesting that Halsey's action was jeopardizing the entire Leyte operation. Halsey said he was still going north after those carriers. Then came that famous message about "Who is guarding San Bernardino Strait?" with the padding "All the world wants to know". It is already a matter of public record that when Halsey saw the message with the padding still in it, he read them together as one and blew a gasket. At any rate, the straits were left unguarded, and the Japs came through that night.

Going back to the Japs in Surigao Strait, they planned to break into Leyte Gulf from the south in the pre-dawn darkness, and this gave Admiral Oldendorf in the old bombardment battleships the opportunity to execute the classic text-book maneuver that all Navy men dream about, the crossing the enemy T. The strait was narrow, and the Japs had to come in Indian fashion, in single file. Oldendorf laid his ships across the entrance at right angles to the approach, and you can readily see the tremendous advantage he had in fire power. While the enemy's batteries were masked, except for the forward turrets on the lead ship, Oldendorf could fire both forward and aft batteries of all ships at the same time. So, Oldendorf let 'em all come into point blank range, then firing by radar control he blew them out of the water, and literally lined the bottom of the strait with Jap scrap metal.

Now there is another old naval tradition that played an important, and so far, unheralded part in the victory of our forces that day. That is the naval tradition of "forehandedness". Admiral Stump, in charge of our six carriers, reasoned that Oldendorf could turn the Japs, but he didn't expect they would be annihilated. He figured that there would be some Jap cripples in the Mindanao Sea the next day that would be "cold meat" for our torpedo planes, so he ordered all

torpedoes on our six carriers broken out and put in readiness. This takes some time, getting the delicate mechanisms properly set and adjusted, so Stump had this done during the night.

I remember very well getting out of the sack about 4 o'clock and going to my ACI office to read the night's dispatches, work up my daily dope sheet and get ready for my pre-dawn briefing of the pilots. Then I went out onto the catwalk and walked back to the pilots' ready room. It was raining at the time, and I got good and wet. I remember telling the fighter pilots that they would be launched before dawn to patrol over the beachhead at Leyte, but that the torpedo pilots could settle down to acey deucey until about 10 o'clock, when I figured the Admiral would send them out for the cripples left by Oldendorf.

After briefing the pilots I then went to the open bridge to make my morning report to the captain. It was dark and raining, and I ducked under the canvas near the conn, where my roommate, the navigator, had the deck. Before I could ask where the skipper was on the bridge, the navigator said "The Jap fleet's out here." My emotions were conflicting. My professional feelings were conflicting. My professional feelings, as the man who was supposed to have all the hot word, were hurt that this guy should be telling me such news. I ought to have been telling him. As the ACI officer I tried to reason what Japs they were. All I could think of was that Oldendorf had been run over and the Japs had come from Surigao Strait. I was still laboring under the pleasant delusion that Halsey had destroyed the main body. Just then a radio communication came in on the TBS, which means "Talk between ships", from Admiral C. A. F. Sprague, who was in charge of the northern group of jeeps. He said "Some body is shelling me - heavy ships." Then he added, "Their gunnery is very poor. We haven't been hit yet." Dawn was just breaking on what is now called the greatest naval battle of all time.

In order to give his jeeps a little time, Admiral Sprague ordered his destroyers to make torpedo runs, individually, against the Japs. This was obviously a desperate move, practically suicidal, as far as the destroyers were concerned. As the destroyer Heerman

started in on its run it sent out what we thought was the greatest message of the war, coming from one lone can. It was sent to Admiral Kinkaid, information to Admiral Nimitz at Pearl and Admiral King in Washington. It read "Am engaging enemy task force consisting of four battleships, eight heavy cruisers and thirteen destroyers . . . The action continues." That was the last we heard from the Heerman for 3 days, and we all were saying what a gallant way to die. Then we intercepted a message she sent to the port director at Ulithi which said, in substance - "Am down by the head; have 250 survivors of the St. Lo sitting on my stern. They eat a lot. Request food upon arrival. Heerman."

And now Admiral Stump's forehandedness paid off. We had torpedo planes on all six of our carriers, ready to go, and they were immediately ordered to attack the Jap main body. So we prepared for launching. We had been trained to be as speedy as possible in our launchings, consistent with safety, and this paid off too. In order to launch we had to turn into the wind, and it was coming down from the north. So was the Jap. We could make a fancy 18 knots going downstream in a millrace, and the Japs could do about 23 knots. It doesn't take an Einstein to figure that we were closing the gap at better than 40 knots. And we could use proximity to the enemy like a moose could use a hatrack. Now, when carriers are launching planes they fly the "F" or Fox flag. As each ship finishes, she hauls down the flag to indicate that she is through and free to maneuver. While these launchings were going on I was back on the Admiral's portion of the bridge. Ben Grosscup, the old Yale football star, was the admiral's ACI officer, and he had the duty. As we steamed north to launch we had a few minutes of waiting, and the admiral said to Ben, "You know, when I was at the Academy as a midshipman we used to talk a lot about the deathless statements of our old naval heroes, and I've often wondered just what sort of a deathless statement I would make at the appropriate time. The one that sticks in my mind is that of John Paul Jones, who said 'No naval commander makes a tactical error in laying his ship alongside that of the enemy.' That

was in the days of the grappling hook and side-by-side fighting." Grosscup, who had been watching all six of the carriers, finally said "Fox is down on all ships, Admiral". This meant that launchings had been completed, and we were free to maneuver. Then came the admiral's deathless statement - "Greasecup, John Paul Jones to the contrary notwithstanding, the time has come to get the hell out of here; order flank speed in the opposite direction."

I went forward on the bridge and the captain called to me "Judge, what is the situation?" Why he called me "Judge" I do not know, since I had never been even a justice of the peace. In my best professional manner, I replied "Captain, we're as safe as a church. We have three types of assistance in addition to our own planes. There is a large covey of B-24's coming up from Morotai to bombard the Japs on Leyte. Just as soon as we pick them up on the radar we'll vector them to the Jap ships. Then there is Oldendorf and his bombardment battleships. Just as soon as we lure the Japs a little farther south, Oldendorf can sail in behind them and we'll mousetrap them just like Alabama use to do Georgia Tech. And then, of course, we have Halsey and Task Force 38". I had no sooner finished than the communicator showed up with a dispatch board, and right on top was the message: "Cancel Morotai flight; bad weather." And right under that was one from Oldendorf - "Do not have sufficient fuel or armor piercing ammunition to risk major engagement; will not sortie Leyte Gulf." Well, at least we still had Halsey. And then it came - "Am still heading north; gonna get those carriers. Halsey." And there we were.

By this time the Japs had showed over the horizon, and Admiral Stump ordered our three destroyers to take station between us and the enemy, preparatory to making the kind of torpedo attacks that the Heerman had made. Large geysers of water began to go up behind one of the destroyers and I remarked to the Exec., who was on the bridge beside me: "Sir, we sure are getting good protection from those cans. Here the Jap fleet is in sight and they've located a submarine and are depth charging it." The exec. withered me with a glance and said, "Lokey, dont you recognize the splash of a 16-inch shell when you see one?" All I could think of to say

was - "Commander, I ain't ever seen a 16-inch shell, much less see one splash." And he replied, "Well, you just watch them, that's what they are." And I did. The Japs were using irridescient dye in the nose of the shells to aid them in spotting their hits, and as those splashes came over the water, creeping closer, they made beautiful tall plumes of green and yellow color but I admit that I didn't think of their beauty then.

Incidentally, our exec was the only perfect man I've ever known - God cut him out for a son of a bitch and there wasnt a flaw in him.

Things were quiet about that time and the captain told me - "Judge, if you have anything in particular that you want to take over the side with you when we abandon ship, you might step down to your cabin and get it." I thanked him and ran below, got an extra life jacket, a picture of my wife, a bottle of malted milk tablets, a whistle, a waterproof flashlight and an aviator's helmet to wear in the water to keep the sun off my bald head. As I waddled back onto the bridge the captain said something about having to catapult me to get me off the ship with all that gear. Then he turned to my friend, Howard Burr, the assistant communications officer and offered him the same privilege. Burr returned shortly, but looked no different. Curious, I asked him what he had gotten to take over the side. All he said was - "My original orders." "What in the world do you want with those?", I asked. Burr answered, "I don't know. They just told me in indoctrination school that if I was ever separated from my ship it was a good thing to have my original orders with me."

By this time our first torpedo strike was returning and we took them aboard as fast as we could. All of our ships looked alike, and we were steaming in a circular formation, and one of the torpedo plane pilots from our sister ship, the Manila Bay, got confused and landed aboard our ship. He had just completed an uncoordinated torpedo attack on a capital ship, and even a fully coordinated attack with a torpedo plane is strictly a Navy Cross offense. So it was understandable that he might get confused. As he taxied forward of the barriers he recognized that

he was in a strange place, so he reported to the air officer on the bridge. "Sir, my name is Bowman, from the Manila Bay. I've just made a torpedo drop on a heavy cruiser and I guess I got a bit excited and landed here by mistake. As soon as you can catapult me off, I'll go back to the Manila Bay." The air officer patted him on the shoulder and said "Don't let it worry you, Mr. Bowman. Go on down to the wardroom and get a cup of coffee and a slice of pie. We have one extra torpedo and no torpedo plane. While you're eating we'll just load you up and send you out again." And they did. From then on that fellow was known as "Two-Torp Bowman." I saw him in San Diego after our cruise. The Navy had a policy of letting a pilot choose his type of plane for his second war cruise, and I asked Two-Torp - "Are you going out again in torpeckers?" "Hell, no," he replied. "I'm in something safe now; I'm a carrier night-fighter."

During the battle the flight decks of some of the northern carriers had been badly shot up, and a couple of jeeps were sunk, so Admiral Sprague asked for permission, and of course received it, to land some of his planes on our ships. As the first one came in the captain told me to go down and find out who the pilot was and what he had been doing. Naturally, everybody wanted all the information he could get. So I went down to the flight deck just as the pilot was coming off the wing of his plane. I was just about to ask him his name when he said to me: "Aren't you Ham Lokey, of Atlanta?" I said I was and he said - "You swore me in as an aviation cadet at the selection board in Atlanta in 1942 . . . but, damn your soul, you never told me it was going to be like this out here." All I could reply was - "Listen, if I had known it was going to be like this out here, I never would have left Atlanta myself. "

The Japs were faster than we were, and even though we were running south as fast as we could, they were slowly overtaking us. Finally, Admiral Stump got on the radio himself and said - "To any pilots in the air . . . expedite attack on battleships closing this formation." At that time we had two torpedo planes left in the air, flown by two ensigns named Gaienne and Voltz. One of them was not yet old enough to vote.



They were flying near the lead battleship, looking for somebody to join up with for an attack. When they got the word from the admiral they nodded to each other and started in on the port bow of the battleship. It was the Yamato, the largest battleship afloat in the world. They made a textbook attack, going in low and slow to make their drops, then pulled out. By the grace of God they got through the AA. Voltz got a hole in his wing you could put a chair through, but he could still fly. As they pulled out they circled to watch their torpedo runs. To their dismay the battleship turned sharply to port to "comb the torpedoes, and one went down either side, without touching the ship. Back on the ship we were waiting for the word, and all we heard was one of the pilots call to the other on his radio and say - "How in the name of God did we both miss that big S.O.B." Well, those were our last torpedoes and we knew that church was out. And then some pilot in the air called out - "Banjo's got a cruiser; Banjo's got a cruiser." Banjo was our code name. What had happened was this: The battleship combed the torpedoes all right, but following on its starboard quarter was the cruiser, Suzuya, fat, dumb and happy, and it didn't turn. You know the old saying that "there is always somebody who doesn't get the word." This was that case. One of the torpedoes struck broad on the beam, the other in the port quarter. The powder magazines went off, and our ship got credit for sinking a cruiser that our pilots had not even seen, much less shot at.

That was the turning point of the battle. When the battleship turned to comb the torpedoes, at 0926, it continued to turn until it was on a reciprocal course, and it took the rest of the Jap ships with it. From that moment on, every radar range continued to open. Forehandedness and golden guts had paid off. The Monday morning quarterbacks of history have advanced various theories as to why the Japs turned when victory seemed to be in their grasp. Some would say that the Jap decision was the result of a sudden fear of Halsey's ships, the fleet that wasn't there. But when the final definitive story of the battle is written, the historian will have to give at least an "assist"

to the forehandedness of Felix B. Stump and the courage of a couple of ensigns named Gaienne and Voltz.

When the Japs turned and ran north, we continued to run south until we had opened a comfortable 50 miles between us. Then we turned and followed them, attacking with whatever we had left. Our sixth strike of the day was made by 12 fighter planes, each armed with a 250-lb. bomb slung under the wing. They were instructed to attack only destroyers, as the bombs they carried could hardly damage anything bigger. When I interrogated them on their return the flight leader sheepishly admitted that the battleships had looked so big and inviting that they had attacked them instead. Their damage to the enemy was slight but it shows the type of courage these men had. No odds were too great for them.

To finish off the day we had an air attack. About 40 Jap planes came out from the islands to knock us off. Our fighters met them and turned them back, shooting down 26. None got through to the ships.

That night we received a couple of messages that did us all good. Admiral Stump, over the public address system gave us a "well done," and, then said "I am proud to be in the same Navy with you." The other message was from Admiral Kinkaid, Commander of the Seventh Fleet. Paraphrased, it read, "You have turned in the finest air support performance on Leyte that could be desired. Your record from the first strike on the beachhead until this morning has won my high respect and admiration. However, for your magnificent performance in the face of the enemy fleet my admiration is boundless. You have accomplished a task that only larger carrier task forces should be expected to undertake. Well done - Kinkaid."

In one day we had done about three days flying. We had used up all our torpedoes and heavy bombs. But we still had personnel bombs and 50-calibre ammunition, and the next day we returned to our assigned task, meeting our commitments, supporting the troops on the beach. And we kept it up until relieved on station about a week later.

I have often speculated as to what havoc would have been wrought in Leyte Gulf if the Jap fleet had steamed in and started shooting. We had all our logistic support there in soft ships, no match for men-of-war. We would certainly have been set back considerably. We might have been pushed off the beachhead entirely, and the war would have been prolonged by many months. But they didn't steam in, and it will ever be my conviction that the CVE's saved the day.

When the battle was over the captain gave me the flag that had flown at our masthead throughout the engagement. It is my most prized possession. It is a little faded from sun and rain, it is frayed in places from snapping in the wind, but it is a glorious battle flag. Today we opened this meeting by pledging allegiance to the Flag. It is the symbol of our unity, of our way of life, of our dedication to liberty, freedom and democracy. We should think of these things when we see our Flag. But when I see the American Flag my thoughts go even farther, and I think of a handful of flyers who fought against overwhelming odds, who did not count the cost, who had golden guts, and the know-how that comes from proper training, and who were backed up by that old naval tradition - "The Navy does the best it can with what it has in hand."

Thank you.

(The flag referred to above was turned over to the Navy in 1966 for display in the Naval Aviation Museum at Pensacola.)

## APPENDIX

**T**HE appended list consists of the ships in the United States fleets engaged in the Second Battle of the Philippine Sea so far identified. For reasons of security, the identity of scores of other United States warships which cleared the area of enemy vessels must be kept secret for the time being. In proper time, when the information can no longer be of any use to the enemy, all the ships participating in the notable victory will receive public credit.

### THIRD FLEET

USS LEXINGTON (CV 16)  
 USS ENTERPRISE (CV 6)  
 USS ESSEX (CV 9)  
 USS HORNET (CV 12)  
 USS WASP (CV 18)  
 USS BUNKER HILL (CV 17)

} With Fast  
Carrier Task  
Force

USS BIRMINGHAM (CL 62)  
 USS RENO (CL 96)  
 USS CASSIN YOUNG (DD 793)  
 USS MORRISON (DD 560)  
 USS GATLING (DD 671)  
 USS IRWIN (DD 794)

} Helped  
Remove Ship's  
Company from  
the *USS  
Princeton*

USS THE SULLIVANS (DD 537)

} With Fast Car-  
rier Task Force

USS NASHVILLE (CL 43)

} Carried  
MacArthur to  
Leyte

USS KITKUN BAY (CVE 71)  
 USS WHITE PLAINS (CVE 66)  
 USS FANSHAW BAY (CVE 70)  
 USS KALININ BAY (CVE 68)  
 USS HEERMANN (DD 532)  
 USS DENNIS (DE 405)  
 USS JOHN C. BUTLER (DE 339)  
 USS RAYMOND (DE 341)

} In Action off  
Leyte Samar  
with Jap Central  
Force

USS MANILA BAY (CVE 61)  
 USS MARCUS ISLAND (CVE 77)  
 USS SAVO ISLAND (CVE 78)  
 USS PETROF BAY (CVE 80)  
 USS OMMANEY BAY (CVE 79)  
 USS NATOMA BAY (CVE 62)  
 USS KADASHAN BAY (CVE 76)  
 USS SANGAMON (CVE 26)  
 USS SUWANEE (CVE 27)  
 USS SANTEE (CVE 29)

} In Action off  
Leyte-Samar with  
Jap Central  
Force, Though  
Not Under Fire of  
Jap Ships\*

USS MERCY (AH-8)

} Evacuated First  
Wounded from  
Leyte

### SEVENTH FLEET

USS CALIFORNIA (BB 44)  
 USS MISSISSIPPI (BB 41)  
 USS MARYLAND (BB 46)  
 USS PENNSYLVANIA (BB 38)  
 USS TENNESSEE (BB 43)  
 USS WEST VIRGINIA (BB 48)

} In Surigao  
Strait Action

\* The men on these ships might provide a different assessment about whether or not they were "under fire".

[NOTE: Page 54 is blank]

USS NATOMA BAY (CVE 62)  
c/o Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco, Calif.

Subject: War Diary

25 October 1944

T.U. 77.4.2

C.T.U.77.4.2 Rear Admiral Felix B. Stump, USN, in USS NATOMA BAY, Flagship

1. Operating in the northeast of the entrance to Leyte Island, in the Philippine Islands.
2. In the light of dispatches received during the night of 24-25 October, to the effect that strong Japanese surface forces were headed for Surigao Strait to force an entrance into Leyte Gulf from the south, this ship was directed to make preparations for a torpedo attack on enemy naval units which might be sighted after daylight on 25 October. During pre-dawn flight quarters this ship passed through rain squalls but the weather cleared later in the day, and did not interfere with flight operations. At 0658 (Item) a message was received from C.T.U. 77.4.3 (northern carrier attack unit) that he was under attack from strong enemy surface forces coming down from the north. This report was later amplified to identify the enemy force as 2 BB, 8 CA, and 12 DD. At 0724 a pilot from USS OMMANEY BAY reported sighting an enemy task force (apparently the same one reported by C.T.G. 77.4.3) as bearing 330° (T). distance 15 miles from this unit on Course 090° (T), speed 25 knots. A plot of this position indicated the enemy to be at that time at latitude 11° 44' N, longitude 126° 24' E. At 0740 in compliance with instructions from C.T.U. 77.4.2 this ship launched 4 VT, each loaded with one Mark XIII aerial torpedo (steaming course 150° T, Launching course 025° T). These planes were directed to rendezvous with similar planes from other carriers in this unit, to form a strike group, but due to weather conditions at the time (ceiling 2000 feet, cloud cover .6) and the very limited time allowed for briefing, difficulty was experienced in joining up, and this flight proceeded to attack the enemy alone. At 0802 USS FRANKS, in the screen of this

Leyte Gulf 55

unit on the starboard quarter, (unit course 165° T) reported it was being challenged by an unidentified ship which was firing on it. At 0807 the ship was directed to launch 8 VF for Target CAP over the beach area on Leyte Island, and 4 VF for local CAP over our own forces (steaming course 165° T, launching course 025° T). At 0811 an enemy plane was sighted bearing 330° T, distance 12 miles from this ship. About this time CTU 77.4.2 had ordered the three destroyers in the screen to take position astern the formation, between our ships and the enemy. The five DE's were stationed forward in the screen. At 0817 enemy shellfire was observed falling near the destroyers astern. As the shells struck the water large puffs of yellowish green smoke arose. At 0828 more shellfire was observed falling astern, the enemy being then reported as bearing 339° T, distance 19 miles. This unit continued on a southeasterly course except when turning into the wind to launch planes. Winds were generally from about 025° T. At 0830 a pilot report was received that an enemy battleship was astern, distance 30 to 40 miles, on course 180° T, closing the formation. He further reported our VF and VT planes were orbiting the enemy formation approximately 20 miles astern. At this time T.U. 77.4.3 (FANSHAW BAY, GAMBIER BAY, SAINT LO (ex-MIDWAY), KALININ BAY, KITKUN BAY and WHITE PLAINS) was reported to bear 300° to 310° T, distance about 12-15-miles, and was under shellfire from enemy forces off its port beam and quarter. At 0835 C.T.U. 77.4.3 requested and received permission to land its aircraft upon carriers of this unit. At 0836 this ship launched 2 VT, armed with the remaining two torpedoes aboard, for a strike against the enemy fleet (steaming course 140° T, Launching course 020° T). At 0843 explosions were observed on the horizon, bearing 305° T, distance about 20 miles. At 0845 and 0853 destroyers in the screen, off the port quarter, bearing 300° T, approximately 4 miles, received near misses from enemy shell-fire, shells falling between the destroyers. At 0850 the first VT strike of 4 planes, led by Lt. W. B. Morton, USN, made a torpedo attack against an enemy cruiser formation of 2 CA, 1 CL. This group formed the enemy van, and is reported to have been to starboard of the track of the enemy main body.

At that time it had T.U. 77.4.3 under fire. A successful attack was pressed home in the face of heavy, accurate AA fire, without benefit of fighter support, and two hits were seen to register, one on a CA of the ATAGO class, another on a CA of the TONE class. In this attack two planes were damaged. Lt. Morton's plane sustained hits which caused complete hydraulic failure. He also sustained a shrapnel wound in the right knee. Because of the condition of his plane, Lt. Morton requested and received permission to "ditch" his plane, which was successfully accomplished in the vicinity of the formation. The entire crew was rescued from the water by USS LERAY WILSON (DE 414) and subsequently returned to the ship. The second plane, piloted by Lt. W. F. Hiser, USNR, was struck in the fuselage, aft, by a shell which exploded within the radioman's compartment, Cole, M. C., 655 11 99, ARM2c, USNR, was seriously wounded, receiving a broken arm, a large wound in the left chest, beneath the arm pit, and a severely lacerated leg. Prompt action on the part of Bosze, J., 710 89 57, ARM2c, USNR, in applying a tourniquet and other first aid, undoubtedly saved Cole's life. In order to obtain immediate treatment for his wounded radioman Lt. Hiser elected to proceed to Tacloban Air Field on Leyte Island, where he made a successful emergency landing. After seeing the wounded man safely to a hospital, Lt. Hiser returned to the ship. The remaining two planes, piloted by Lt.(jg) J. Cady, USNR, and Lt. R. A. Lindstrom, USNR, returned to the ship without further incident. By 0910 the enemy had closed to within 14 miles, and masts and smoke were visible on the horizon astern. At 0916 radar reported the main enemy force as bearing 296° T, distance 18.5 miles. At 0918 received order from C.T.U. 77.4.2 to arm all available VT in this unit and be prepared to launch on present course of 120° T (wind from 049° T, force 7 knots) to attack enemy force consisting of 2 BB and 1 CA, closing this formation. At the same time an order from C. T. U. 77.4.2 was relayed by VHF to airborne planes to expedite torpedo attack on the battleships closing this formation. At the time of the receipt of this order, the second VT strike from this ship, 2 planes, piloted by Ens. R. F. Voltz, USNR, and Ens. G. W. Gainnie, USNR, were orbiting in the



vicinity of the enemy, waiting to join up with other VT from this unit. Without waiting further, these two planes joined 3 other VT from another carrier of this unit and pressed home an attack against the leading battleships, believed to be of the FUSO and ISE classes. As the planes approached and made their drops, the battleship attacked by Gainnie and Voltz maneuvered sharply to port and combed both torpedoes. The wakes of the torpedoes were seen to pass close along either side of the BB, passing beyond to score direct hits on a heavy cruiser believed to be of the ATAGO class, one broad on the port beam, the other on the port quarter. This cruiser was later observed to sink by pilots of subsequent strikes. The effect of the other torpedo drops was not noted, but it is fairly well established that when the battleships turned to avoid this attack they continued to turn until they were on a reciprocal course, for all subsequent radar reports indicated the range was opening. At 0926 a third strike by 4 VT was launched from this ship, the launching being made downwind by catapult, without altering the course of the unit. Each plane carried 4 500-pound SAP bombs, there being no more torpedoes aboard. Just prior to this launching the commanding officer called the pilots to the island and said "I don't think I have to tell you men what to do. Lay your bombs on the target, or you may not have a home to come back to. Good luck." At 0932 gunfire was observed on the horizon, followed by salvo splashes close to the screening DD. bearing 310° T. At 0935 Radar reported enemy bearing 320° T, distance 20 miles. At 0941 Radar reported 2 battleships now on course 000° T, with 1 BB and 2 CA on course 270° T, and range opened to 21 miles. This report confirmed shortly by visual sighting report of pilot from USS KITKUN BAY. At 0953 the two VT planes from the second torpedo attack were landed. Ens. Voltz's plane was damaged by heavy AA fire, there being a hole, almost a foot across, through his right wing. He landed fast, bounced hard and broke the tail wheel; no injuries to personnel. Shortly thereafter, at 1002 a enemy aircraft, identified as a Betty, was sighted about 4 miles off the port bow. As the ship swung to starboard a screening destroyer brought the plane under fire, driving it away from the formation. At 1018 a possible submarine periscope was reported bearing 270° relative to the ship's course. Right full rudder was ordered, soon after

which the ship resumed its previous course. From 1020 to 1040 the third attack was delivered on the enemy force, now in full retirement to the northwest. The planes, each carrying 4 500-pound SAP bombs made a glide-bombing attack, scoring 1 hit among the turrets of a FUSO class BB, one glancing hit near the stern of the same BB, and one hit on a heavy cruiser amidships, near the bridge. Two near misses were noted, one on an ISE class BB, the other on a heavy cruiser. A particularly noteworthy performance was given by Lt (jg) L. S. Conner, USNR, during this attack. He had completed two bombing runs through intense AA fire to drop his bombs when he saw a torpedo plane from USS KADASHAN BAY in position to make a torpedo run without benefit of strafing "interference". When the pilot called for assistance Lt. (jg) Conner preceded him in his run, strafing with two .50 caliber machine guns of his TBM-1C. The KADASHAN pilot's drop was good, scoring a hit almost amidships in a crippled heavy cruiser, but his plane was hit by intense AA fire and was destroyed. In this same attack Ens. J. T. Goodwin, USNR, had difficulty in releasing his bombs. They did not drop on the run made with the rest of the strike group, so Ens. Goodwin made two additional runs on a FUSO BB, alone, getting his bombs away on the third try. He regrettably reports that the bombs missed. On his way back to the ship Ens. Goodwin dropped his life raft to a fighter pilot seen in the water. At 1118 a fourth strike was launched against the retreating enemy force. By now there were no torpedoes and insufficient armor-piercing bombs aboard to arm this strike with anything but general-purpose bombs, so three VT were loaded with 4 500-pounders each and dispatched to the enemy position. These planes glide-bombed the disposition, but reported no direct hits. A near miss was scored on a BB, another near miss on a MOGAMI class CA. Ens. C. H. Boldt, USNR, failed to return from this flight. The results of his attack are not known. At noon the 12 fighters launched for CAP were landed. Ens. R. L. Walker, USNR, reported having intercepted an enemy VT (identified as Jill) carrying a torpedo, enroute to this force, and approximately 15 miles away. When sighted the Japanese pilot jettisoned his load and sought to escape, but was shot down in flames by Ens. Walker.

At 1256 this ship launched its fifth strike against the Japanese task force, 4 VT planes each loaded with 4 500-pound GP bombs. One plane developed a gasoline leak and returned without making an attack, making an emergency landing on USS MANILA BAY. The other three planes pressed home an attack at about 1355, scoring 2 hits on a light cruiser of the NATORI class and 2 near misses on the same ship. This attack was made just prior to an attack by a group of planes from the USS WASP. The Wasp planes were picked up on this ship's radar at about 1300, bearing 015°, distance 85 miles, on course 240°. The planes continued on this course until about 1315 when at a distance of 60 miles from this ship they were given a vector of 310°, 50 miles to intercept the enemy force, retreating up the coast of Samar Island, toward San Bernardino Strait. VHF contact was maintained with this flight until they had sighted the enemy. They then moved into position to attack, following closely after our fifth strike. At 1508 our sixth and last strike of the day was launched, using 4 VT and 12 VF, the latter loaded with one 250-pound GP bomb each, slung under the left wing. The VT were loaded as follow: 1 plane with 4 500-pound SAP bombs, 3 planes with 2 500-pound GP bombs, and 8 HE 5" rockets. The use of fighter planes as bombers to attack the fleeing enemy was permitted upon the urgent recommendation of Lt. Comdr. R. C. Barnes USN, Squadron Commander of VC 81, that the planes could take off under prevailing wind conditions, and could inflict damage at least on cruisers and destroyers, and that his fighter pilots were entitled to a "crack at the Jap fleet". On the way to attack the enemy forces in retreat this strike passed over an enemy cruiser and destroyer dead in the water from earlier attacks, and made for the vessels underway. One hit was scored on a destroyer, 2 near misses were noted on a KUMA class light cruiser, and 2 near misses causing visible damage were scored on a NATORI class light cruiser. On this strike Lieut. (jg) L. S. Conner dropped his bombs on the first run, then made a second run to fire his rockets. He was not seen again. At about the time this sixth strike was launched, radar on this ship picked up a strike group from USS HANCOCK, coming in on course 240°, distance 60 miles. Vectors to the retreating enemy forces were given and receipted for.

At 1655 this ship was alerted for a large enemy air raid reported enroute to this unit. At 1704 4 VF were launched to join VF from other ships of this unit as interceptors. At 1732 the radar screen was reported clear, all enemy planes having been shot down or turned back beyond visual range of the ship. No contact with enemy was made by planes of this ship on this mission. At 1853 received report that Lieut. K. E. Wavell, USNR, returning from strike six after dark, had landed on USS MANILA BAY. No further reports received concerning Ens. Boldt and Lt. (jg) Conner.

3. At the end of the days operation T.U. 77.4.2 had either singly or assisted by other units of T.G. 77.4 turned back a heavy force of the Japanese fleet, with this ship claiming the following damage to the enemy:

Sunk	Hits made on	Shot down
1 CA	1 BB	1 VT
	3 CA	
	2 CL	
	1 DD	

No damage was sustained by this ship.

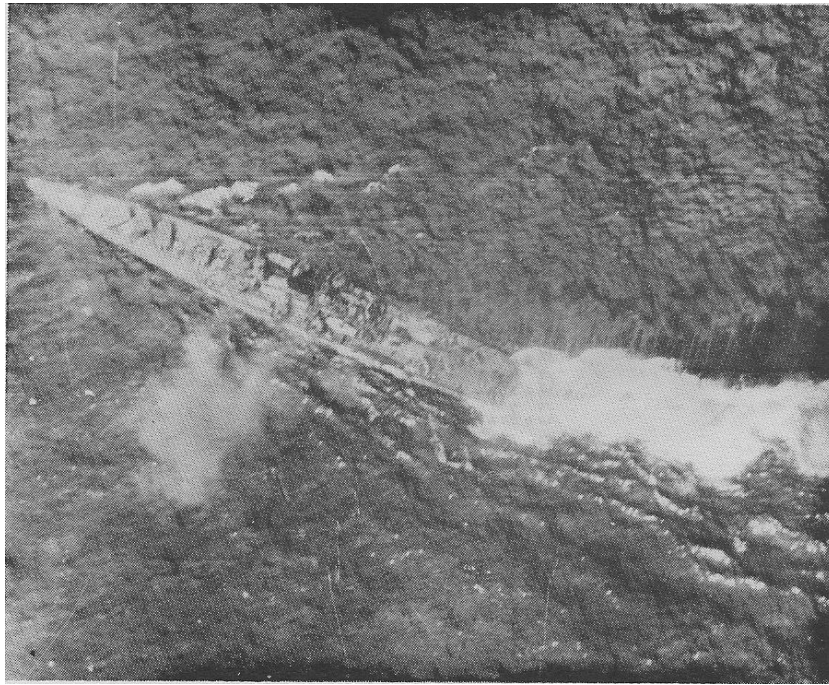
4. Expended: 6 torpedoes, 19 500-pound SAP bombs, 26 500-pound GP bombs, 24 HE 5" rockets, and 15,000 rounds of .50 caliber ammunition in combat.
5. At the close of this eventful day's operations CTU 77.4.2 (RAdm. Felix B. Stump, USN) sent the following message to all hands: "I am proud to be in the same Navy with you."
6. Later the same evening the following dispatch was received from Commander, 7th Fleet, addressed to T.U. 77.4 (Escort Carrier Group) "You have turned in the finest air support performance that could be desired. Your record from the first strike until this morning has won my high respect and admiration. However, for your magnificent performance today in the face of the enemy fleet my admiration is boundless. You have accomplished a task that only large carrier task forces should be expected to undertake. Well done. Kinkaid."

7.Position:

0800 Lat.  $11^{\circ}13.9'$  N., Long.  $126^{\circ}48.7'$  E.

1200 Lat.  $11^{\circ}16.3'$  N., Long.  $126^{\circ}58.9'$  E.

2000 Lat.  $11^{\circ}22.5'$  N., Long.  $128^{\circ}03.0'$  E.



#### JAPANESE HEAVY CRUISER ATAGO

Sunk by planes from the U.S.S. Natoma Bay CVE-62 on October 25, 1944 at the battle of Leyte Gulf. Planes piloted by Ens. George W. Gaiennie and Ens. R.F. Voltz of VC-81 were credited with the sinking. On this same day planes flown by VC-81 also damaged the Battleship "Kongo" the heavy cruiser "Tone " and "Mogami" plus damage to the Destroyers "Shirguri " and "Terutsuki". The following day a follow up strike by VC-81 sank the destroyer "Shiguri" and again damaged the cruiser "Natori".

Pilots taking part in these actions in addition to  
Gaiennie and Voltz were

K.E. Wavell  
L.S. Connor  
W.B. Morton  
W.F. Hiser  
J.N. Cady  
R.A. Lindstrom  
W.E. Skill  
R.S. Reeves  
G.W. Kesterke  
C.L. Spiers  
R.C. Barnes  
W.L. Mathson  
M.J. Roebuck  
S.L. Gingrich  
R.L. Walker  
R.A. Murie  
B.R. Peeler  
W.J. Devlin  
R.H. Mount

and their fine TBM crews.